A Failed Elite: The Committee on the Present Danger and the Great Debate of 1951

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This thesis titled
A Failed Elite: The Committee on the Present Danger and the Great Debate of 1951

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines the activity of the Committee on the Present Danger (CPD), a citizens committee founded in December, 1950, by James B. Conant and Tracy S. Voorhees. The CPD believed that neither the government nor the people of the United States paid sufficient regard to the military threat posed by the Soviet Union. To remedy this situation, the CPD favored a strong American response to a trend of aggressive actions by the Soviet Union and its allies highlighted by the Korean War. High on the CPD’s agenda was support for compulsory military service for a period of two years for all eighteen-year-old males, under a system known as universal military service. Previous studies have contended that the CPD played a major role in the political discussions on national security in the first half of 1951, known as the Great Debate. Through an examination of the evidence, including the committee’s own files, it is clear that the CPD’s role was far less significant than previously understood, that its relationship with the administration was far from harmonious, and that its political campaigning was often ineffective at a crucial time in the Cold War.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AAU: Association of American Universities
CFR: Council on Foreign Relations
CMP: Committee for the Marshall Plan to Aid European Recovery
CPD: Committee on the Present Danger
CPDC: Committee on the Present Danger Collection
ERM: Edward R. Murrow
HSTL: Harry S. Truman Library
TSV: Tracy S. Voorhees
UMS: Universal Military Service
UMT: Universal Military Training
INTRODUCTION

For Harry Truman, November 1950 proved to be a very bleak month. The New York Times weather report described the month as “unusually cold,” but the heavy snows and icy conditions were the least of the president’s concerns. For the second time in less than six months a large invading force had taken the United States by surprise on the Korean peninsula. The first in June, when North Korean forces crossed the Thirty-Eighth parallel in great numbers, threatened the destruction of the American backed Republic of Korea. The second occurred that November, when the People’s Republic of China attacked the American led United Nations forces, threatening a much wider escalation of the Korean War. General Douglas MacArthur summed up the situation succinctly when he informed the President that the United States faced “an entirely new war.”¹ As the month drew to a close the weather bureau issued its thirty day outlook and predicted a return to a mixture of “near normal” conditions and “above average” temperatures. The Truman administration could only pray for such a favorable political forecast.²

This thesis examines the activity of the Committee on the Present Danger (CPD), a citizens committee founded in December, 1950, by James B. Conant and Tracy S. Voorhees. The CPD believed that neither the government nor the people of the United States paid sufficient regard to the immediate military threat posed by the Soviet Union.

To remedy this situation, the CPD favored a strong American response to what it perceived as a growing trend of aggressive actions by the Soviet Union and its allies, highlighted by the ongoing Korean War. High on the CPD’s agenda was support for compulsory military service for a period of two years for all eighteen-year-old males, under a system known as universal military service. Previous studies have contended that the CPD played a major role in the political discussions on national security in the first half of 1951, known as the Great Debate. Through an examination of the evidence, including the committee’s own files, it is clear that the CPD’s role was far less significant than previously understood, that its relationship with the administration was far from harmonious, and that its political campaigning was often ineffective at a crucial time in the Cold War.

Aside from the weather issues, President Truman faced daunting challenges during what was a critical period of the Cold War, not least a severe decline in the his own approval ratings. Although the Democrats had retained control of Congress in the November midterms, the Republican Party had made significant gains. Although these gains by the non-incumbent party were not unusual, the coinciding of the elections and the reversals in Korea amplified the political effect of the results. Dean Acheson commented how a sense of “deepening gloom” had engulfed the administration by the end of 1950 to the point that the situation was nearing a “crash state.” A Gallup Poll taken in early December depicted the general feeling of despair within the United States as it revealed that over fifty percent of Americans believed that a third world war had

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3 Dean Acheson, Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department, (New York: Norton, 1969), 475.
begun. In this atmosphere the American outlook on the Cold War, much like the activity of its troops, was nothing less than a complete reversal from the elation following MacArthur’s daring landings at Inchon only two months before.

In the midst of all this despair, a group of distinguished and experienced citizens offered to come to the beleaguered administration’s aid. In the guise of a citizens committee, these gentlemen, led by the president of Harvard, James B. Conant and former Under Secretary of the Army, Tracy S. Voorhees, proposed to help the Truman administration foster public and congressional support for the internationalist foreign policy and military buildup outlined in NSC-68. Established as a “non partisan, non political group of private citizens,” the Committee on the Present Danger (CPD) viewed the Soviet Union as an immediate and implacable threat to the United States and its allies. Although this viewpoint did not represent a startling revelation, Conant and Voorhees’s impression that both the people and government of the United States had not grasped the urgent and grave nature of the Soviet threat fit together perfectly with the administration’s plans to dramatically alter the country’s national security posture.

The members of the CPD viewed themselves as continuing an “American tradition” whereby a group of concerned, non-partisan, citizens came together to focus on an issue of national importance. This tradition had grown in nineteenth century and became significant again towards the end of the Progressive era when many Americans,

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having grown suspicious of government bodies, developed a more pluralistic political system by turning to organizations created by, and run for the benefit of, a particular group of citizens. Often these associations tackled matters related to U.S. foreign policy. This tradition developed in the 1930s, when organizations such as the unilateralist America First Committee and the internationalist Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies, campaigned for opposing positions on the American role in the conflict engulfing the rest of the world at that time. After World War II other committees, including the highly successful Committee for the Marshall Plan to Aid European Recovery (CMP), continued this tradition by stirring up public and congressional support for reconstruction aid for Europe.7

CPD members believed they continued this “typically American phenomenon of our times.” It is clear, however, that their experience made numerous departures from the way these other organizations had typically operated. They described themselves as “citizens whose position in business, education and the professions” gave them a “better than average opportunity to gauge events.”8 Despite cosmetic efforts to create a geographic, ethnic, and professional diversity in its membership, the CPD remained an elitist organization, predominantly from the Northeast, with university presidents and former government officials prominent amongst the leading members. The committee deliberately avoided developing a grass-roots element and, as a result, limited its appeal outside of the elite class and the readership of the New York Times. Although nominally a


citizens committee, the CPD bore all the hallmarks of a lobbying organization. The relatively low level of the committee’s public relations efforts and its outright rejection of any grass-roots organizing distinguished the organization from previously successful committees, in which many of the CPD’s members had played a role.9

With a distinguished leadership, including Conant, Voorhees, former Secretary of War, Robert Patterson, and the president of the Carnegie Foundation, Vannevar Bush, the CPD hoped to raise the American people’s awareness of the serious danger to American national security posed by the Soviet Union’s ability to threaten Western Europe. In response to this danger, the CPD argued for the creation of “an allied force strong enough to furnish effective resistance to military aggression.” The CPD rejected any idea of a preventive war with the Soviet Union, or the view that hostilities were inevitable. In calling for greater investment in the military readiness of the United States, they hoped to create a strategic military balance whereby the Soviet Union could not achieve its strategic goals through all out war. They made it clear that any military buildup should be defensive in nature. Yet, the CPD warned that so long as the military position of the “free countries remains as weak as it is today” they could not achieve the goal of an “enduring peace” and the “beginnings of world disarmament.”10

With this in mind the leadership of the CPD, notably Conant and Voorhees, began a campaign to create a public and congressional consensus in support of a large military build-up. This campaign put the CPD in the midst of the major political issues of the time, including the deployment of American troops to Europe, and campaigning for the

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9 Casey, Selling the Korean War, 189.

adoption of compulsory conscription to the military for a period of two years for all
eighteen year old males, better known as universal military service (UMS).

This thesis provides an analyses of the CPD’s origins and development from a
formative idea over an after dinner drink in August 1950 to its participation in the
political debates over the future direction of American Cold War policy during the Great
Debate of 1951. In doing so, the thesis questions the importance and performance of the
CPD during this time and challenges the conclusions made by other studies. Due to the
manner in which the members chose to operate the committee and its increasingly tense
relationship with the Truman administration, the CPD’s role in the national discourse was
minor and mostly ineffectual. This challenges the position of other major studies of the
CPD’s activities, particularly those of Samuel F. Wells and Jerry W. Sanders.11

The committee’s failure goes beyond an inability to build political support for its
“first legislative objective” of altering, for better or worse, the relationship between the
American people and the military through the enactment of UMS.12 Repeatedly, the CPD
ignored administration overtures for it to play a much larger public relations role in line
with the stated goals of the committee. As a result the CPD maintained its independence
on policy questions, but limited its ability to carry its message to the American people
and to help an administration whose approach to national security policy that for the most
part they shared.

11 Sanders, Peddlers of Crisis.

12 Memorandum to the Members of the Committee on the Present Danger, July 11, 1950, Office
File # 90, Committee on the Present Danger Collection, Tracy S. Voorhees Papers, Alexander Library,
Rutgers University, New Jersey.
The question immediately arises of why study an organization if it played no significant role? As already mentioned, other previous studies have argued that the CPD’s activities directly influenced the outcome of one of the most significant national security debates of the Cold War. The evidence does not support this position and therefore the historical record requires amending. The committee’s failures raise another important question: why did this organization made up of influential elites not have more of an impact? Numerous factors, including the CPD’s prestigious membership, influential connections, and its public relations efforts, all led these other studies to conclude that the committee played an important role in the administration’s winning of both public and elite support for NSC-68. Yet, these studies all neglected several crucial issues that suggest the CPD did not use these advantages as effectively as they could have. Therefore, further study of the CPD is important to understand the role played by elite pressure groups in the development of governmental policies.

Focusing on the time of the Great Debate when the committee was at its most active, this thesis traces the origins of the organization and its activities campaigning for the internationalist agenda. This debate centered on the issue of U.S. troop deployments in Europe under the control of NATO, but had much wider implications for U.S. Cold War policy. For its part in the debate, the CPD adopted a two-pronged campaign, one firmly based on swaying political opinion in Washington through congressional lobbying, and the other an attempt to foment national consensus through a series of public relations efforts.
Though loath to describe itself as such, the Committee on the Present Danger was in every sense a lobbying group. Its members made numerous presentations in front of congressional committees and compiled reports directed at securing the support of members of Congress on issues they championed.\(^\text{13}\) This thesis will examine the CPD’s efforts to impose its agenda on the Truman administration and Congress. It will also provide an analysis of the public relations campaign undertaken by the CPD, highlighted by a series of Sunday evening radio broadcasts from March through June 1951 on the Mutual Broadcasting network. In spite of all these efforts, its impact was limited and the committee ultimately failed in securing UMS.

**Peddlers and Tocsins: Literature on the CPD**

In 1979, Samuel F. Wells’ influential article “Sounding the Tocsin” addressed the impact NSC-68 had on the development of U.S. Cold War policy. Wells connected NSC-68 and the Committee on the Present Danger by arguing that the CPD performed the same function for the American public as this classified document had for Truman. Wells claimed that the CPD provided a timely wakeup call for the American people, but failed to provide specific evidence that the CPD’s activities had the impact he described.

A similar problem occurs with the work of sociologist Jerry W. Sanders, *Peddlers of Crisis: The Committee on the Present Danger and the Politics of Containment*, the only major study of the CPD to date. Sanders’ interest in the CPD originated, like Wells’s, from a second incarnation of the committee formed in 1976 by the chief architect of NSC-68, Paul Nitze. While this later organization adopted the same elitist

structure as the CPD of the 1950s and had great influence in developing the conservative opposition to the foreign policy of the Carter administration, neither study accounts for the significant differences between the two committees and the Cold War eras within which they operated.  

Sanders argued that the original CPD began a trend that militarized the policy of containment and saw the abandonment “of the internationalist dream of minimizing conflicts between national interests and warring ideologies through the power of trade and commerce.” The CPD certainly advocated a large military build up, but the suggestion that anything other than a genuine belief that the United States faced an overwhelming military threat motivated this position is unfounded. The CPD members made clear that they urged their austere program in order to prevent an even greater calamity that might require a harsher transformation of U.S. society. It is now clear that the Soviet Union had little intention and even less capability of invading Western Europe. The trend of Communist aggression, however, that created the perception of a real threat by 1950 was undeniable. As a result the policies advocated by the CPD were not totally unreasonable. The CPD never promoted the abandonment of trade and commerce as tools of minimizing conflicts, but did argue that recipients of foreign aid from the United States should undertake a commitment not to trade with the Soviet Union. On this issue, however, the CPD demonstrated a certain flexibility by arguing that “we should avoid


15 Sanders, Peddlers of Crisis, 79.
actions which are not clearly essential for our own security and which might stand in the way of an eventual peaceful settlement.”16

Sanders claimed that the CPD had a “quasi-official status” and played a “critical role – perhaps the critical role – in this process” of undercutting the popular base of support the “isolationists in Congress desperately needed” in order to “challenge the Administration in the field of foreign policy.”17 The CPD’s relationship with the Truman administration was far more contentious than Sanders described and therefore the suggestion that they existed as a quasi-official body is both misleading and inaccurate. While the CPD certainly played a part in the administration’s political battle with the opponents of internationalism, there is no evidence that justifies the claim that the CPD provided the critical factor. Sanders’ claim that the CPD’s importance lay in combating the opposition to administration plans in Congress is, however, more tangible. Overall though, it is impossible to determine the impact the CPD’s media campaigns had on national public opinion. At best they may have helped maintain public support for the Truman administration’s foreign policy by reassuring Americans that the threat they feared was indeed genuine and that they possessed the ability to deal with it. There are many factors, including the mixed quality of the CPD’s efforts and the lack of any polling data, that prevent historians from making any definitive claim on the CPD’s impact beyond that they attempted to influence the outcome of the Great Debate and see

16 “A Study of Limitation of Trade of the Free World with the Soviet Bloc as a Condition of U.S. Foreign Aid,” Supplementing the Committee’s Statement on Foreign Aid of June 18, 1951, TAB GG, Box H, CPDC, TSV Papers, 24.

17 Sanders, Peddlers of Crisis, 68, 96.
internationalism and broad military preparedness continue to form the basis of U.S. Cold War policy.

From an examination of the CPD’s relationship with the Pentagon, particularly on the issue of UMS, it is clear that the organization followed an independent path and, although publicly supportive, privately disagreed with the administration. This thesis will focus primarily on the CPD’s relationship with the Secretary of Defense George Marshall and the Pentagon to demonstrate the committee’s fractious relationship with the administration. It is clear, however, that the CPD increasingly frustrated the White House, the Pentagon, and the State Department. The committee’s decision to function as an elite pressure group of less than one hundred members instead of a grass-roots organization in the mold of the CMP represented an outright rejection of the wishes of the State Department’s Office of Public Affairs.18

Sleeping Masses: The Need to Build a National Consensus?

After meeting Voorhees for the first time in August 1950 and hearing his appraisal of the vulnerability of Western Europe to Soviet invasion, Conant told his CPD co-founder that “I judge the country is asleep… you should wake it up.”19 Though the American public had not welcomed the turn in the Cold War created by the Korean War they had surely grasped the severity of the global situation. At the same time when Conant and Voorhees first met, Gallup Polls showed that on the issues that would matter

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18 Casey, Selling the Korean War, 189.

most to the CPD the American people were already supportive. These polls showed that fifty-seven per cent of Americans believed that World War III had begun, seventy-one percent believed the United States should help West Germany build an army to match the Soviet presence in Eastern Europe, and seventy-eight per cent thought some form of universal military training for American young men was a good idea. With this in mind, it is not clear what the CPD felt they needed to arouse in the American people.20

In December 1950, when Conant formally declared the establishment of the CPD, the Cold War political atmosphere was at its most tense since the end of World War II. A combination of Communist aggression and American foreign policy setbacks over the course of the previous two years had given Americans the sense that their country was, if not losing the Cold War, then certainly conceding significant strategic ground to the Soviet Union. That these events, including the loss of China, the Soviet detonation of an atomic device, the trial of Alger Hiss, and the signature of a Sino-Soviet agreement, had happened on the watch of a pro-internationalist president made many supporters of an internationalist foreign policy fearful that Americans might turn their back on active leadership of the Western alliance.

These setbacks provided the opportunity for opponents of American internationalism, such as the junior Senator from Wisconsin Joseph McCarthy, to build a career in demagoguery, when in February 1950 he first denounced supposed Communist infiltration of the State Department. A few months earlier, Truman had indicated his own displeasure with the status of the U.S. Cold War position as he ordered the Secretaries of Defense and State to undertake an interdepartmental review of containment and wider

Cold War policy. The result of this process was the now famous policy document NSC-68, which belied any notion that the State Department was weak on Communism. Such were the disquieting ramifications of the document that after reading it Truman simply put it away in a drawer.

Secretary of State Dean Acheson aptly described the impact the Korean War had in reviving the fortunes of NSC-68 with his admission that “Korea saved us.”21 In the aftermath of the Chinese intervention in November, 1950, the concern shown by the American public that another world war had begun spread to the White House as Truman noted in his diary on December 9, 1950, that it “sure looks like World War III is here.”22 Within this atmosphere a genuine justification existed for the CPD’s belief that a “present” danger existed. The above poll information and the private thoughts of the President, however, suggest that the CPD were not required to make the American people and leadership aware of it.

The Threat of Isolationism

While the threat of Soviet military aggression represented the present danger in the CPD’s title, another threat convinced the founding members to create their committee. The internationalists who created the CPD feared that “a return to complacency and above all a retreat to neo-isolationism” would ruinously change the


course in U.S. Cold War policy.\textsuperscript{23} With the Republican right urging the adoption of an isolationist, Fortress America posture, for the pro-European CPD the consequences of such a change represented a greater concern than the size of the Red Army in Eastern Europe.

There is no doubt that in late 1950 nationalist Republicans in Congress, led by Senator Robert Taft (Oh.), challenged the bi-partisan alliance between Democrats and moderate Republicans, which had supported Truman’s conduct of major foreign policy, by employing the rhetoric of isolationism. While this alliance was significant, in many ways the most interesting aspect of the debate taking place at this time occurred amongst the factions of the Republican Party, including supporters of Truman such as Senator Arthur Vandenberg (Mi.), neo-isolationists like Taft, and other supporters of General MacArthur who believed the focus of American Cold War policy should be in Asia, the so-called Asia-Firsters. It was in this atmosphere that the CPD experienced the most active year of its existence.\textsuperscript{24}

During this time, from late 1950 to mid 1951, the prospects of the United States returning to an isolationist posture were not strong. Americans had embraced the Truman administration’s internationalist agenda including the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, the North Atlantic Treaty, and the President’s decision to go to the aid of the Republic of Korea. In the months leading up to the CPD’s formation the country

\textsuperscript{23} Memo to the Members of the CPD, July 7, 1951, Office File # 90, CPDC, TSV Papers.

experienced a crisis of confidence over the direction of American foreign policy. During this time the defense budget increased by two-thirds, China entered the Korean War, and Truman created a firestorm with his remark that there was “active consideration” of using the atomic bomb in Korea. This insecurity, combined with Republican gains in the midterm elections that year, fomented a backlash against the administration such that the entire internationalist agenda of NSC-68 once again appeared in real jeopardy. On December 15, in an attempt to create national unity Truman declared a state of national emergency and placed the threat in stark terms – “our homes, our nation, all the things we believe in, are in great danger.” Although Truman wanted a limited war he was now preparing should a wider one come about.\(^{25}\)

The CPD membership was predominantly Republican. Their main political opponents came from within the ranks of conservatives setting up a clash between those who embraced the internationalist approach to the Cold War and the numerous other factions that held differing views on national security policy. As a result the CPD’s activities were as much about securing internationalism as the foreign policy credo of the Republican Party as they were about an imminent threat to national security. Historian Phil Williams argues that during the Great Debate “splits within the GOP itself were equally important” as any partisan battle over the administration’s plans for foreign policy. The CPD played a role in fighting within the GOP for the acceptance of policies closer to Truman’s than Taft’s. The trepidation senior members had over getting involved in the national political crisis created by Truman’s decision to relieve General Douglas

MacArthur in April 1951 demonstrated the political feebleness of an essentially Republican organization attempting to shore up the political fortunes of a Democratic president.26

The CPD chose to act in a non-partisan manner because they feared any distinctly political activity would split the Committee. These internal party struggles make the CPD’s numerous claims to non-partisanship and a desire to build a national consensus essentially hollow. It is telling that the committee chose non-partisanship over bi-partisanship. What the internationalist conservatives really needed was a substitute for Arthur Vandenberg, who before his death in April 1951 had helped hold the bi-partisan foreign policy consensus together. The refusal to get involved in partisan issues once again limited the CPD’s capability to influence policy. Moreover, the CPD’s refusal to intervene in the MacArthur controversy further alienated it from the administration who had asked for its help. Thus, the Great Debate and the political struggles over foreign policy in 1951 portrayed another battle, fought within the conservative movement, on how the United States should fight the Cold War.

Robert Taft, the leader of the political faction that most worried the CPD, had serious ambitions for the Republican Party’s presidential nomination in 1952. Like many other observers, however, the CPD mistakenly viewed Taft’s positions as purely isolationist in nature. While Taft had demonstrated such tendencies in the past, including his vote against the North Atlantic Treaty, his policies were more “revisionist” than isolationist. Revisionist was a term adopted by a group of Republicans, including Representative Owen Brewster (Me.), Senator Homer Capehart (In.), and Senator

William Knowland (Ca.), who on anti-socialist principles objected to the post-World War II loan to Great Britain and wanted to “revise rather than reject” the internationalist approach adopted by the Truman administration. As an indication of the ideological lens through which these men viewed the Cold War, they argued that the United States had to choose its allies based on political principles rather than strategic interests.\(^2^7\)

On January 5, 1951, with Arthur Vandenberg, the Republican champion of bipartisanship incapacitated through illness, and Truman’s popularity plummeting, Taft was able to set the foreign policy agenda for the coming months in a ten thousand word speech in the Senate. Professing his belief that no conclusive evidence existed that Soviet Union intended to invade Europe and that therefore the Truman administration and the CPD’s agenda was misconceived, Taft laid out his objections and set the stage for the congressional showdown known as the Great Debate. With this attack coming on the same day that the hero of the Republican internationalists, Dwight Eisenhower, left for Europe on a fact finding trip in his new role as Supreme Commander of NATO, the CPD believed that its agenda was in real jeopardy.

**The Great Debate? Was It Great? Was It Even a debate?**

In 1951 the faltering American position in the Korean War, and the wider struggle with international Communism allowed the opponents of the bi-partisan and internationalist foreign policy followed by Truman to force a national debate on the future direction and basis of national security policy. Similar national debates had

occurred in the past. Compared to previous instances, however, such as the deliberation
over membership of the League of Nations, or on neutrality after the outbreak of war in
Europe in 1939, the Great Debate of 1951 does not hold the same place in popular
historical memory. However, in terms of significance for an entire era of U.S. foreign
policy, where it defined the “emerging Cold War strategy,” the Great Debate of 1951 was
just as important. 28

Ostensibly the Great Debate was a congressional battle between January and
April 1951, over Truman’s decision to bolster the American NATO forces in Europe with
further U.S. divisions under the command of General Dwight Eisenhower. As these
troops would be assigned to NATO, and Truman did not seek congressional approval, the
debate developed into a battle over executive and congressional privileges, but the clash
between internationalism and Taft’s revisionism remained a significant component.
Historian Robert Johnson has described the Great Debate as “neither great nor a debate,”
but the timing and impact of this debate on future American policy was much more
significant than Johnson concedes. 29 While the congressional battle lacked any defining
piece of oratory and the political debates were not necessarily new, the significance of the
Great Debate did not rest in the immediate impact of specific policy proposals but in
deciding the future direction of U.S. foreign policy at a crucial moment in the Cold
War. 30 Detractors of this position can argue that internationalism as an underlying ethos

28 David R. Kepley, The Collapse of the Middle Way: The Senate Republicans and the Bi-Partisan

29 Johnson, Congress and the Cold War, 50.

30 Williams, The Senate and U.S. Troops, 51.
of U.S. policy was never in grave danger in 1951. The existence and activity of the CPD demonstrates, however, that the secure nature of internationalism was not clear to all of those involved, particularly members of the elite. This thesis will contend that, to these elites the prospect of even a watered down form of internationalism or any resurgence of isolationism represented as “present” a danger as the Soviet Union, and therefore the Great Debate mattered a great deal to them.

What the Great Debate lacked in style it made up for in significance. Indeed, if the Great Debate had any style the CPD provided it. On an oratorical or ideological level the debate offered nothing new but it shaped and reaffirmed the basic internationalist basis upon which the United States approached the Cold War. The process was as important as the result. Despite the fact that the Great Debate confirmed the end of the post-war era of bi-partisan foreign policy, it ensured the United States adopted a moderate and reasoned approach to the conflict. This included, much to the disappointment of the CPD, an abandonment of mass conscription in the form of UMS.

Outline

This first chapter of this thesis traces the development of CPD project from the frustrations of its two founding members on the state of American military preparedness. An analysis of the Cold War experiences of the CPD chairmen and their involvement with the policy processes that made NSC-68 the focus of U.S. Cold War policy establishes why these men believed the country needed such a citizens committee. The second chapter deals with the actual founding of the CPD in December, 1950, under less
than ideal circumstances. From here, an analysis of the CPD’s relationship with the Pentagon over mobilization and manpower issues demonstrates that the CPD was not the quasi-official organization portrayed in other studies. In the third chapter, the focus turns to the CPD’s activities and scrutinizes its ability to influence foreign policy developments in the first half of 1951. This final chapter examines the period of the Great Debate and specifically the issues of the European troop deployment, UMS legislation, and the MacArthur controversy.

These issues provide sufficient insights to support several claims. First, it is not possible to determine that the CPD played the critical role in turning the Great Debate in Truman’s favor. The assertion made by James Conant’s biographer, James Hershberg, that the CPD’s activities bolstered a politically weak administration’s position and “in so doing helped turn the Great Debate” is a fairer, if perhaps overstated, assessment.31 Second, the nature of the CPD’s founding and its relationship with the Pentagon demonstrate that it did not act as a quasi-official organization. The preferential access granted to its members reflected their individual stature and the Truman administration’s desperation for help, far more than the any special status granted to the CPD. A third assertion is that the “danger” the CPD fought directly was a momentary “isolationist” sentiment that emerged in late 1950 to question the internationalist approach to the Cold War pursued by President Truman.

As a result the main battle the CPD fought was on behalf of moderate conservatives who supported internationalism against those who questioned its validity. This unilateralist sentiment came from the right of the Republican Party and although the

31 Hershberg, Harvard to Hiroshima, 521.
potential that it could dominate the party and the country in the manner feared by the CPD was slim, numerous factors at the end of 1950 meant the threat appeared real and present. The potential consequences should this occur, from the committee’s perspective, including a Taft presidency, the withdrawal of U.S. forces from continental Europe, Soviet domination of the Eurasian landmass, the collapse of trans-Atlantic trade, and ultimately the establishment at home of a “garrison state,” provided sufficient motivation for the CPD’s members to act. In essence, the preparations for war suggested by their opponents would not create the peace that the CPD desired.
CHAPTER 1: JAMES B. CONANT, TRACY S. VOORHEES, AND THE INTERNATIONALIST AGENDA

In late August, 1950, when stopping in for an after dinner drink with some friends James Conant did not realize how much the evening’s events would affect the next few years of his life. There, at this small, informal, gathering he met Tracy Voorhees for the first time and forged a relationship that formed the foundation for the project that ultimately diverted him away from the Harvard campus and propelled him fully into the role of an active public figure. 32

Both men had strong anti-communist credentials and, as Republicans, had overlooked partisan issues to serve in the Roosevelt and Truman administrations in various capacities. They each viewed the Soviet Union as a major threat to U.S. national security and world peace. The Korean War had affected them both, in the words of Samuel F. Wells, as “the tocsin sounded just before the fire.” 33 They both agreed that the Truman administration had fallen behind in its preparation of the American people and the military to deal with this challenge. Moreover, they feared that Americans did not sufficiently grasp the nature of the Soviet threat or how important the defense of Western Europe was to their own national security.

Under the leadership of these two men, the Committee on the Present Danger played an active, but modest, and at times ineffective, role in the advancement of the

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33 Wells, “Sounding the Tocsin,” 139.
often overlapping policy agendas of the Truman administration and internationalist conservatives. The chairmen’s backgrounds made them ideal candidates to lead a citizens committee promoting internationalism and the enlargement of the U.S. military. Their links and relationships with the so-called “Power Elite” of American politics gave them, and the carefully selected membership of the committee, the opportunity to influence the debate on national security policy at the highest levels. Nevertheless, the Truman administration’s success in securing its agenda through the politically difficult debates of 1951 ultimately owed little to the Committee on the Present Danger and much more to a stronger American identification with internationalism than Conant and Voorhees realized.

The Chairmen

Even though the committee rarely acted without a large degree of unanimity, Conant and Voorhees, acting as Chairman and Vice-Chairman respectively, were very much the dynamic and dominant forces in the organization. Considering their experiences in the national security apparatus, both during and after World War II, it is surprising that they had not crossed paths previously. Such was the influence each man had on the other that at their very first meeting Conant suggested that Voorhees establish a “citizens committee” to communicate the urgency of the growing Soviet military threat. In accepting the challenge the former Under Secretary of the Army had only one person in mind to lead such an enterprise.34

34 Hershberg, Harvard to Hiroshima, 498.
James Bryant Conant

As president of Harvard University, Conant had a distinguished national profile unsurpassed by any other academic leader or matched by any university president in recent history. This stature combined with his previous experience with other citizens committees, such as the William Allen White Committee, made him an ideal candidate for the job. Although Conant looked back on these campaigns with pride, he balked at the idea of involving himself with another citizens committee. Indeed, Conant resisted the position and initially insisted that the role be largely ceremonial. Once on board, however, Conant played a key role in developing the committee’s policy positions and strategy. Fatefully, his single-mindedness on the issue of universal military service limited the committee’s overall appeal and effectiveness.

A highly ambitious man, Conant once remarked to his wife how he had three great aspirations; first to be a leading organic chemist, second to be the President of Harvard, and the third to be a cabinet secretary.\(^3\) Graduating from Harvard in 1916 with a doctorate in inorganic chemistry he was well on the way to the first of these goals. A year later the United States had entered World War I and the young scientist enlisted as an officer fully committed to President Woodrow Wilson’s internationalist cause. During the war the Army engaged his talents on numerous projects including the development of the poison gas lewisite. After the war, Conant returned to the place he would call home for almost the next thirty years, as the Chemistry Department at Harvard offered him an appointment as an assistant professor. By 1931, he held the department chair and could

\[^{35}\text{Ibid.}, 49.\]
claim to have achieved the first of his stated life goals as the academy recognized him as one of the country’s leading organic chemists.36

In line with the larger ambitions he held for himself, Conant did not have to wait long to complete the second of his stated aspirations. On April 24, 1933, Conant emerged as the surprise and controversial choice as the successor to the longstanding president of Harvard, Abbott Lawrence Lowell. During his presidency, a position he held for the next twenty years, Conant led the Ivy League institution through the difficult financial struggles of the Great Depression, the tumultuous years of World War II, the onset of the Cold War, and the earliest years of the military industrial complex. A champion of his own ideas of academic freedom, Conant’s presidency was not without controversy, and at times he was equally revered and reviled on the Cambridge campus.

As a staunch defender of free speech, Conant professed his belief that red baiting was not the answer to dealing with the communist threat. Speaking to the Massachusetts State Legislature in February 1948, he argued that “you can’t kill an idea by making martyrs of its disciples.”37 In June 1949, however, Conant revealed his often contradictory nature by announcing that Communists should not receive employment as teachers in the United States. This tougher position signaled his conviction that communism posed a grave threat to America; a position which dominated his activities for the rest of his career.

Often Conant’s political or policy positions appear inconsistent with a previously stated opinion or act. More often than not these contradictions can be looked on as a

36 Conant, My Several Lives, 82.
37 Ibid., 391.
result of his scientific, pragmatic approach to all areas of his life, including foreign policy and politics. Although he identified himself as a Republican, he disagreed with the big business attitude of the party during the 1920s and he refused to vote for any of its candidates in the decade’s presidential elections. His contradictory identification with, and simultaneous opposition to, the Republican Party had a lot to do with his mother’s political posture as she herself became disillusioned with the party’s support for imperialism at the turn of the century. In spite of this disappointment, she always retained her identity as a Republican. While Conant was “no boat-rocker,” his biographer James G. Hershberg described his political outlook as a mixture of “Jamesian pragmatism, Wilsonian liberalism, and Jeffersonian Idealism.”

Conant’s defense of academic freedom and dismantling of racist and anti-Semitic quota systems during his presidency at Harvard proved that he had a liberal streak. Though his was a wary liberalism, as during the 1920s when still a junior faculty member he had voted in favor of invoking the quotas in the first place. In 1940, Conant outlined his own “evolving… social and educational philosophy,” of a “classless” American society based on a theme that later influenced his opinions on military service. To an audience in California, Conant spoke of the importance of a “true democracy of opportunity” within the educational system to open all careers to the “talented.” Indeed, Hershberg described his “successful encouragement of a more meritocratic, a socially,

38 Ibid., 56-57
39 Ibid., 57.
ethnically, and geographically more diverse student body” as his “most significant legacy” at Harvard.⁴⁰

In the midst of World War II, Conant’s political philosophy evolved further as he demonstrated his continued frustration with the limitations of the two party system. In an article for the Atlantic Monthly entitled “Wanted: American Radicals,” he argued that the country needed a “third voice.” Conant looked at the diverging viewpoints of the right and left and argued that after the experiences of the Depression and World War II the reliance on terms liberal and conservative no longer sufficed. Now he hoped for the emergence of an American “radical” to lead the country in a different direction.

The fact that he chose Andrew Jackson and Thomas Jefferson as the models for this new “radical” force is indicative of Conant’s attitude toward government and radicals. In many respects, Conant’s political viewpoint had much in common with nineteenth century liberalism. On foreign affairs, however, Conant’s internationalism stood as his most consistent viewpoint. In his article he expressed his opinion that the greatest calamity for the United States would be a “recurrence of old-fashioned isolationism.” Later on, after the disappointment of his experience with the CPD, Conant replaced his hope for a third force with his faith in the leadership and centrism of Dwight D. Eisenhower.⁴¹

Back in 1940, as Europe retreated from the Nazi onslaught, Conant wrote to Alf Landon, the Republican Party’s former presidential candidate and “titular head,” urging the Party he nominally supported to find a candidate he could support. He pressed

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Landon to support an amendment of the neutrality laws that prevented the United States from sending aid to Great Britain. Conant wanted Landon to adopt a “clear headed” approach to aiding the Allies at war with Germany.\(^{42}\) Despite his admiration for the German university system, Conant held Hitler and the Nazis in contempt and feared the repercussions for the United States should Great Britain collapse.

In May 1940, Conant had his first brush with the world of citizens committees and public advocacy groups when the William Allen White Committee approached him about joining its campaign. The organization’s official title was the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies, however, the public and the media’s close identification of the committee with its chairman, renowned newspaper editor William Allen White, meant that few people used the official title. The committee offered Conant the opportunity to express his alarm at the isolationist sentiment promoted by other citizens advocacy organizations such as the America First Committee – an organization who argued that America could live with a Nazi dominated Europe.

In joining, and becoming one of the committee’s most active members, Conant made an exception to his “general rule not to serve on committees or sponsor movements not connected with education.” These experiences were to have a lasting effect on him and have an important influence during his time as chairman of the Committee on the Present Danger. Showing his inclination for a moderated, but reasonable, approach he argued that U.S. entry into the war at this time did not seem “necessary or wise.” As a result of his activities with this committee, Conant was a familiar participant in the

\(^{42}\) Hershberg, \textit{From Harvard to Hiroshima}, 117.
ongoing debate on U.S. foreign relations when ten years later he addressed the country as the head of his own committee. The debate over the role of the United States in the world was not limited to its immediate neighbors. It was not long before events overtook the William Allen White Committee’s message and Conant found his scientific expertise more in demand than his views on national security policy. As the situation in Europe deteriorated and the United States began preparations for war, President Roosevelt created numerous new government bodies including the National Defense Research Committee (NDRC). Conant’s friend and esteemed scientist, Vannevar Bush took charge of this body charged with harnessing the nation’s scientific research for the development of new methods of warfare. On June 14, 1940, Bush asked Conant to join the agency. As a result he played a crucial role in weapons development during World War II, including the momentous assignment of determining if scientists could harness the principles of nuclear fission to build a weapon. Conant’s recommendations led to the Manhattan Project and the successful development of the atomic bomb. Serving as an intermediary between the White House and the team of scientists, military men, and industrialists involved in the project, Conant had responsibility for the assessment of the new weapon’s “long-range scientific, political, diplomatic, and military implications.” As a member of the Interim Committee organized to make recommendations on atomic policy, he advocated the use of the atomic bomb against Japan, but urged that the president choose an industrial target.

After the war, Conant helped develop the State Department’s postwar position for international control of atomic power. In 1947, Truman appointed him to the General

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Advisory Committee (GAC) of the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) where he remained until 1952. This position made him privy to national security discussions at the highest official levels. Along with several other members of the AEC, he campaigned against the development of the so-called Super, or hydrogen bomb. The nature of his opposition demonstrated how Conant did not view issues in simple or straightforward terms. While he had supported the development and use of the atomic bomb, he believed that the development of more powerful nuclear weapons would only “louse up the world still more.”45 Despite his avowed anti-communism and determination that Stalin and the Soviet Union posed a significant threat, he saw no reason to proceed with the development of greater weapons of mass destruction which he believed “would be unnecessary in the strategy of promoting a nuclear standoff, yet disastrous in an actual war.”46

As a prominent Ivy League university president, the government and various lobbying organizations often sought Conant’s views on national issues. A topic which repeatedly drew Conant’s interest was the periodically reoccurring debate on military manpower. His first brush with this topic came in 1940 when Conant testified in the Senate in support of the Burke-Wadsworth Bill. Named after its sponsors, Senator Edward Burke of Nebraska and James Wadsworth of New York, this legislation initiated the first peacetime draft in the country’s history. Conant had urged the legislators to include a provision for the deferment of service for scientists and engineers. From his experiences in World War I Conant had seen how important the employment of scientific

45 Ibid., 466.

46 Ibid., 469.
knowledge and the ability to innovate new methods of warfare could be crucial in
determining the outcome of a war. At the behest of the Army, who believed that
specifying particular deferments in the legislation was unnecessary and unhelpful, the
Senate dropped the clause calling for the deferments that Conant had proposed.

Disappointed, Conant withdrew from the debate. As a member of the National Defense
Research Committee, Conant decided that he could not jeopardize his good relations with
the military by “vigorously opposing” the War Department’s position on draft issues.

After much heated debate the bill passed on September 14, and the Selective Service
system came into being.

When making plans for the post-war military, President Roosevelt supported
setting up a system of compulsory national service or universal military training of one
year for all eighteen year old boys. Amongst many others, Roosevelt sought out Conant’s
views on the issue. Due to Conant’s past support for the peacetime draft the president
probably viewed him as a likely ally. For numerous reasons, however, not least his belief
that the advent of atomic weapons would “revolutionize warfare,” Conant’s initial
response was negative. Conant, My Several Lives, 354.

He told Roosevelt that debating such a measure when the war
was not yet over was irresponsible and hasty. Once the war was over Conant’s reticence
remained as he favored a more carefully thought out and reasoned plan. He dismissed the
idea suggested by supporters of universal training that a year in the service would be a
useful educational measure.

When the issue returned in December 1946, Truman appointed a committee under

Karl T. Compton to give him recommendations. Conant hoped that the careful

47 Conant, My Several Lives, 354.
consideration of the matter that he had demanded was finally underway. That did not prevent him from telling the committee that if given a vote on the issue he would vote against it. Yet, Conant had great faith in the process and the committee’s chairman and therefore pledged that if they ultimately recommended universal military training he would support them.48

Reporting in May, 1947 the Compton Committee recommended a system of universal military training and Conant delivered on his promise to support it. In spite of strong public backing for the measure, the bill did not pass and ultimately the government left the issue of military conscription to linger. International events, in the form of the Czech coup in February 1948 and the Berlin Blockade that summer, piled pressure on the Truman administration and made decisive action on the military manpower question politically imperative. On June 24, in order to maintain force levels and wishing to avoid a long drawn out battle in Congress, Truman signed a newly re-enacted Selective Service Act.

Once again Conant felt uneasy about the haste with which the government had acted. He feared that the time frame involved had prevented the government giving due consideration to the overall worth and implications of the measure. Moreover, considering the tense international scene, Conant, along with many other college presidents, worried about colleges “becoming draft-dodging institutions.” This began Conant’s opposition to blanket deferments for college students that featured heavily in the Committee on the Present Danger’s initial plans for universal military manpower. At this time Conant viewed the likelihood of a conventional war within the next two years

48 Ibid., 358.
involving the United States as remote. He therefore rejected universal induction of all eighteen year old men as unnecessary. Instead, Conant argued for universal availability, followed by the application of random selectivity as the fairest and most sensible option. Later, due to his view of the Korean War as a Soviet proxy action, Conant revised this thinking and decided that universal military service for all young men was a fundamental requirement in meeting American national security needs.49

Conant’s preference for UMS over UMT developed partly from experiences on the Harvard campus where students viewed the deferments within the existing draft system as both unfair and undemocratic. Conant argued that this created the real danger of increasing class divisions within the United States. He sensed a “spreading malaise” on the campus as students no longer raised issues of academic concern with him, but focused their anxiety on the uncertainty created by the draft. In December 1950, he wrote to Vannevar Bush and remarked how student morale had “gone to pot.” He was convinced they had to start “mixing into this manpower problem.” Conant brought to the CPD the conviction that as war was at hand mere training was no longer sufficient, and perhaps redundant. Previous plans for UMT provided varying time frames of military training for inductees at various age ranges. Theses trainees, however, would not be available for actual service. The pace of military advancements suggested that any training received would quickly become obsolete. Moreover, UMS would provide a force in being ready to deploy. As a deterrent, Conant argued, this was far more useful than any notion of a well-trained citizenry. In spite of his conviction that the country needed a military manpower

system that spread the burden in a universal and democratic fashion, Conant did not deem it necessary to adopt similar principles in the campaign to secure its adoption.\(^{50}\)

A second issue on the CPD’s internationalist agenda that Conant had a history of supporting was foreign aid. In September 1947, Conant had once again broken his “general rule” of not joining public advocacy groups when he enthusiastically accepted Henry Stimson’s invitation to join the Committee for the Marshall Plan to Aid European Recovery (CMP). Conant had supported the Secretary of State, George Marshall and his audacious plan for financing European reconstruction from the outset. That Marshall chose to announce the plan at the Harvard commencement in June 1947 was a source of great pride for the university’s president.

Stimson established the CMP at the behest of the State Department in order to carry out a program of “intensive public education on the Marshall Plan” that the department was prohibited by law from doing itself. The CMP proved highly adept at convincing Congress that the foreign policy establishment supported the State Department’s European Recovery Program. Moreover, in the view of historian Michael Wala, the CMP, through the use of “tested techniques,” were able to “reveal a strong public consent by the American people for the Marshall Plan that did not necessarily exist.” Conant’s relatively minor involvement with this committee and lack of understanding of how it operated later hampered the CPD’s relationship with the Truman

\(^{50}\) Hershberg, *Harvard to Hiroshima*, 546.
administration, particularly the State Department, which had hoped that Conant’s committee would develop along the lines of the CMP. 51

In early 1950, Conant looked to return to academic endeavors when he received a nomination for the position of president of the National Academy of Sciences. But, this was not to be. The determined opposition of various dissenters who conspired against his election prevented him from taking a position he very much wanted. The main opposition came from disenchanted chemists who opposed his position on the hydrogen bomb project and harbored grudges against bureaucratic decisions Conant made during the war. Humiliated, Conant withdrew from consideration and turned his attention away from the academy for the remainder of his career. Even though he retained the presidency at Harvard until 1953 he had effectively turned day to day control over to the Provost Paul Buck. Serious medical issues also prevented him from taking a deeper interest in events on the Cambridge campus and the wider academy. Moreover, this debacle and his disillusionment with academics freed him to accept Voorhees’s offer in late 1950 of the chairmanship of the citizens committee that became the CPD. 52

Tracy S. Voorhees

Voorhees’s own career, while not reaching the influential heights of James Conant, was not without considerable achievements. Born in New Brunswick, New Jersey in 1890, Voorhees stayed close to home by attending Rutgers University where he


52 Hershberg, Harvard to Hiroshima, 490.
received an A.B. in 1911 and an A.M. in 1914. The following year he graduated from Columbia Law School. Afterwards Voorhees enjoyed a successful law career throughout which he maintained a busy schedule of philanthropic and public service activities. During World War I he served as assistant to the Director of the Bureau of Imports on the War Trade Board. When the next war came he received a commission as a colonel in the Army, Judge Advocate General's Department, where he went on assignment in the Surgeon General's Office.

After the war, Voorhees worked as a special assistant to the Secretary of War, Robert P. Patterson. During this time, Voorhees made numerous influential contacts and friendships in Washington and built a reputation as an effective administrator. Indeed, future Secretary of State Dean Acheson later described him as “infinitely resourceful.”

While working for Patterson he oversaw various projects including a period as the War Department's Food Administrator for Occupied Areas. Truman appointed Voorhees to the position of Assistant Secretary, and later as Under Secretary, of the Army, where he built a close working relationship with a number of senior military figures. In particular, Voorhees built a strong rapport with his direct superior at the Pentagon, the Secretary of the Army, Gordon Gray.

While Conant was the intellectual source for the CPD’s policies, Voorhees was in many ways the most significant member of the committee. His title of vice-chairman suggested that he was the junior partner in the leadership, but this was far from the case. Almost all of the day to day management of the CPD fell on Voorhees’s shoulders, and

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53 Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, 430.

54 Tracy S. Voorhees bio, Box H, CPDC, TSV Papers.
after the climactic period of the Great Debate of 1951 he was almost solely responsible for keeping the committee going.

Conant later acknowledged that the CPD “in fact was really Tracy’s,” but the importance of his own role in the CPD’s strategy was considerable. 55 Without Voorhees there would not have been a CPD, but it was Conant who set the committee’s agenda. As a result, universal military service dominated over any other issue tackled by the CPD. Furthermore, for an organization that claimed its intention was to avoid partisan politics Conant’s political ambiguity made him ideal as a leader. No one could doubt his anti-communism or his willingness to take a strong stance in the Cold War. As president of Harvard, Conant held a level of prestige and competence almost unmatched by other academic and public figures. The CPD did not adopt a domestic agenda, as to have done so would likely have shattered the remarkable level of internal consensus they achieved. As a result, Conant’s tacit support for FDR and the New Deal was not an issue for the more conservative members of the committee. Conant and the CPD failed to understand both the domestic and foreign policy implications of UMS and this played a major part in the organization’s ultimate failure to have it adopted as policy. Moreover, this fundamental lapse of judgment explains why the leading members of the CPD could not understand why they had failed. The committee never appreciated the importance of the opposition to UMS and UMT from other actors, including religious groups, various mother’s groups, and other educational organizations not aligned with the AAU and the CPD’s position. In spite of polls suggesting public support for the idea, the CPD failed to gauge how difficult a political battle the securing of UMS would be. Indeed, had the

55 Conant, My Several Lives, 510.
committee attempted to secure grass-roots support for its program this opposition would likely have manifested itself all too quickly.

**Cold War Politics in America**

At the time the CPD operated Cold War politics broke down into three different, but concurrent clashes. The first began after the end of World War II as the Truman administration demobilized the wartime military and returned the country to a peacetime posture. In light of increasing tension with the Soviet Union many Americans began to criticize this downsizing as premature. Conversely, the influence of the American atomic monopoly and domestic pressure to “bring the boys home” led others to favor a reduced defense budget. With the onset of the Korean War this debate essentially ended. The second clash pitted nationalists, often viewed as neo-isolationists or unilateralists, against internationalists, who promoted greater American involvement in international security arrangements such as NATO. The third clash centered on a disagreement over where the focus of the Cold War lay, in Europe or in Asia.

For the CPD these two latter debates were key. Central to its motivation for forming was the perception at the end of 1950 that the internationalist agenda faced an uncertain future following a resurgent spike of isolationist sentiment supported by, amongst others, Robert Taft and former president Herbert Hoover. As internationalists the CPD viewed the America’s national security as linked to the country’s collective security with its allies, primarily in Europe, but also in Asia. Conant and Voorhees argued that the rise of communist aggression in Asia need not preclude continued
American involvement in the defense of Europe. Moreover, they and other pro-European internationalists, such as George Marshall, Dean Acheson, and Harry Truman, argued that limiting the American Cold War position to one region was irrational.

The CPD drew the vast majority of its members from the moderate wing of the Republican Party. They applauded the bi-partisan efforts of figures like Senator Arthur Vandenberg who helped forge a united American response to the unfolding Cold War threat. The strongest opposition to these positions came from within the ranks of American conservatives. Divisions over foreign policy highlighted the fractious nature of American conservatism at the time and these splits hindered the Republican Party’s ability to act consistently as an effective opposition or alternative to the Democratic Party after the war. Conservatism did not yet exist as a “vigorous” movement and this was particularly clear when it came to the Cold War.56

Historian David Kepley describes the major split in conservative and Republican ranks over foreign policy issues as between internationalists and nationalists. After World War II, the internationalist wing, led by Vandenberg, Henry Cabot Lodge Jr., Leverett Saltonstall, Wayne Morse, and H. Alexander Smith, ensured broad bi-partisan support in the Senate for the Truman administration’s Cold War policies. By supporting the policies of a Democratic president these men left themselves open to attack from their more partisan Republican colleagues, who preferred to present the American people with an alternative, and therefore distinctly Republican, approach to the Cold War. As the “spiritual heirs of the isolationists of the 1930s,” these nationalists viewed the

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international commitments made by Truman as fundamentally at odds with American foreign policy traditions. They believed that political commitments, such as NATO, and expensive foreign aid programs, like the Marshall Plan, restricted the government’s freedom of action and misdirected American resources. For the most part this group followed the lead of Robert Taft, who as a consistent critic of the Truman administration stood out as the most likely Republican presidential candidate for 1952.

Within this group there was some diversity of opinion. As such the designation isolationist for some of these figures is somewhat misleading and further demonstrates the fragile nature of conservative ideology at the time. There were less extreme elements of this coterie, including Taft, who were not opposed to the United States making any international commitments, but argued that they should be of a limited nature. They viewed the strength of key strategic allies, such as Britain and Japan, along with America’s atomic, air and naval power as sufficient to provide security against the Soviet threat. Many within this group supported Hoover’s idea of hemispheric defense, whereby the United States should look to safeguard its traditional domain, defined by the Monroe Doctrine, of the Western hemisphere.

The more extreme element of the “Taftite” group willingly accepted the isolationist legacy and attempted to thwart the president’s policies at every turn by introducing numerous amendments and reservations designed to hinder the president’s control over foreign policy. The partisanship of this group, which included Senators Kenneth S. Wherry (Ne.), William E. Jenner (In.), Arthur H. Watkins (Ut.), and George
Malone (Nv.), stood in stark contrast to the patriotic appeal of the bi-partisan Republicans’ support for the president. 57

Truman’s apparent inability to reverse a continuing trend of communist aggression after the end of World War II, however, helped these Republicans challenge the Democrats’ longstanding control of Congress, and placed the era of Cold War bi-partisanship under great strain. In the midterm elections of 1950, held against the backdrop of the Korean War, Taft’s own resounding reelection and the gains for his party convinced the Ohioan that continued attacks on the Truman administration were the way forward. The entrance of the People’s Republic of China into the war in Korea, almost at the same time as Americans went to the polls, put the internationalist camp under even greater strain. 58

Two Reports: NSC-68 and the Voorhees Group Report

As we can see 1950 was a crucial year in the Cold War as a whole and in these debates in particular. For many reasons the events and decisions of this year determined much about the nature of the conflict, particularly as experienced by the United States. Although the first encounter between Conant and Voorhees occurred by chance, the overlapping of their concerns during 1950 suggested that they would have met sooner rather than later. Both men were involved at high levels in the discussions that occurred on changing America’s Cold War priorities and posture. Two reports completed in the

57 Kepley, The Collapse of the Middle Way, 1-5.

spring of that fateful year put Conant and Voorhees at the heart of the strategy shifts that occurred – these were a report commissioned by the Secretary of the Army on the defensive readiness of American forces in Europe, better known as the Voorhees Group Report, and a report commissioned by President Truman, entitled United States Objectives and Programs for National Security, better known as NSC-68.

Initial American Cold War policy had at its heart a major contradiction. In response to the growing threat posed by the Soviet Union and international communism American responsibilities increased, yet the size of the American military had significantly decreased since the end of World War II. Although President Truman had broadened the strategic responsibilities of the American defense establishment a corresponding increase in American military capacity had not occurred. The earliest American strategic response to Communist aggression came in the form of diplomat George F. Kennan’s policy of containment. In his famous X-article written in 1947, Kennan maintained that the American Cold War strategy must follow a “long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies.”59 Kennan believed that through a combination of firm and consistent economic, diplomatic, covert, and, if necessary, military pressure the United States should be able to prevent the Soviet Union from threatening Western security.

The Truman Doctrine, announced in March 1947, seemed to fall in line with this policy. Nonetheless, the doctrine’s bold commitment of the United States to the broad responsibility of supporting “free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation,” along with the formation of NATO two years later, dramatically increased the commitments

and responsibilities of the American military without a corresponding rise in conventional capability and capacity. Over the same period Truman had simultaneously overseen a reduction in the size of the American military, both in personnel and expenditure.

Although an important and timely gesture of Western unity, the creation of NATO in 1949 initially stood as little more than a “band-aid” solution. Aside from the atomic deterrent provided by the Americans, the NATO allies, still rebuilding from the destruction wrought by World War II, lacked a sufficient conventional capability to prevent any aggressive action by Stalin. For obvious reasons, the European members feared that without significant and immediate conventional military aid the alliance merely provided an agreement for another American liberation of their continent sometime in the future. While the vote in the Senate to accept the treaty had not raised significant opposition, a long and protracted battle ensued to meet the obligation with sufficient military means.

By the end of 1949, this strategic impasse required attention. The Soviet Union’s successful detonation of an atomic device that August altered the strategic balance and forced Truman reluctantly to approve the development of the hydrogen bomb. With the American atomic monopoly now in the past, Truman sensibly requested a strategic reevaluation of American Cold War objectives. Increasingly exasperated by the difficulty

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60 Address of the President of the United States: Recommendation for Assistance to Greece and Turkey, March 12, 1947.


of meeting foreign policy goals with available resources, Truman had a tough decision to make. The country needed a more coherent strategy where means and goals fell more closely in line.

As is often the case in politics, the personalities, viewpoints and positioning of particular personnel can play a decisive role in the final outcome of strategic decision making. In what on the surface appeared as a promotion, Secretary of State Dean Acheson moved the so-called father of containment, George Kennan, out of the Policy Planning Staff and gave him the open-ended title of Counselor. In Kennan’s old job, Acheson appointed the hawkish, tough talking, Wall Street lawyer, Paul Nitze. Both Nitze and Acheson shared the belief that containment required “substantial military forces” if it was to be effective. Acheson viewed Truman’s economizing as building “obstacles to a military posture commensurate with the country’s international responsibilities” and set about convincing the President that security needs should supersede any need for economic restraint.\(^{63}\)

On January 31, 1950, Truman ordered a joint State-Defense “re-examination of our objectives in peace and war” setting up a clash between Acheson and his fiscally conservative Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson.\(^{64}\) This set the stage for the battle within the administration of two opposing views on how American national security strategy should develop. By setting this process in motion Truman challenged his subordinates to remedy the contradiction in his own Cold War position. The president believed that fiscal


\(^{64}\) Letter from the President to the Secretary of State, January 31, 1950, *FRUS* 1950 Vol. 1, 141-142.
irresponsibility represented a significant danger to the economy and security of the United States. But, as the security situation deteriorated the argument that a balanced budget could not provide the country with the military capacity to meet its obligations eventually won the president over. Supporters of this viewpoint, led by Acheson and Nitze, found the favorable Keynesian attitude of Leon Keyserling particularly useful in winning the president’s approval for deficit spending as a means to improve the country’s national security capabilities in a short space of time. As the chair of the Council of Economic Advisors, Keyserling had Truman’s ear on economic matters and his support for the viability of these expenditures went some way to reassuring the fiscally conservative president. Kennan had deliberately avoided any “systematic exposition” of containment as he believed that issues of international relations were “too subtle and evanescent to be reduced to paper without oversimplification.” Nitze did not share the same hesitation and as result the Truman administration adopted a new, more systematic approach to the Cold War.65

Truman’s desire to limit the defense budget seemed to give Johnson and his supporters an advantage over Acheson’s desire to build a more aggressive military capacity for the United States. The acceptance of the Acheson-Nitze viewpoint as national security policy, however, had as much to do with fortuitous circumstances as the strength of the argument. Nitze formed an ad-hoc committee of State and Defense department officials to complete the task set by Truman. For the most part he was able to exclude the economizers from having a major say in the drafting process. Johnson’s main representative on the committee, retired Army Major General James H. Burns, fell ill and

65 Hogan, A Cross of Iron, 293; Gaddis, Strategies of Containment, 87.
only worked part time. Another member of the review group appointed by Johnson, Najeeb Halaby, the director of the Office of Military Affairs, was openly against the Secretary of Defense’s cost cutting regime and actively supported the State Department’s position.\footnote{Ernest R. May, ed. American Cold War Strategy: Interpreting NSC-68, (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin’s Press, 1993), 10.}

Further restrictions on the group’s membership meant that, for the most part, supporters of the Acheson-Nitze outlook on national security strategy wrote the final report. As the initial impetus behind Truman’s request was the debate on the development of a thermonuclear weapon membership on the ad-hoc committee was restricted only to those few officials with a “Q clearance.”\footnote{Ibid., 10-11.} Nitze established a joint State-Defense Policy Review Group to gauge reaction to a draft version of the report that largely reflected the viewpoint supported by the Secretary of State. Due to his position on the General Advisory Committee of the Atomic Energy Commission, James Conant appeared before the Review Group on March 2, 1950. In a two hour session, which developed into a back and forth between Nitze and an unimpressed Conant, the views of the future CPD chairman on the strategic situation facing the United States became clear.\footnote{Record of the Meeting of the State-Defense Policy Review Group, FRUS: 1950, Vol. I, 176-182.}

Conant identified a major weakness of the draft, which survived to its final version. He argued that the document failed to define clearly the manner in which America should reconcile the gap between its expanded responsibilities and diminishing military capacity. The failure to identify specific American interests “apart from the
threat to them” risked an exponential expansion of what the administration considered vital to national security to include what should have been peripheral. Phrases like “a defeat of free institutions anywhere, is a defeat everywhere,” bothered Conant, who contended that in the draft the “sights we set were much too high.”

Conant objected to trying to achieve foolhardy goals such as the stated aim of “restoring freedom to the victims of the Kremlin …. [as]… much too large a task.” Urging a level of restraint, Conant suggested the inclusion of a phrase such as “living with the Soviet Union on tolerable terms” as a more reasonable aim. The draft Conant reviewed, stipulated that the United States should acquire the “forces required for victory,” but did not define what that victory would be. He argued that a “20-year containment on present lines, without a war” was a more realistic objective. To a question regarding the possibility that the Soviet Union might decay from within, Conant showed a prophetic side by boldly stating that “… by 1980 their absurdities and static system would cause them to grind to a stop” and that “by that time, Russia may Balkanize or Byzantinize itself.”

Despite this prediction of internal catastrophe awaiting the Soviet Union, Conant agreed with Nitze and his team that the United States could not sit back and hope for this deterioration to happen on its own. In NSC-68 they argued that the Soviet Union had only resisted provoking all out war because they “lacked the assurance of winning it.” The espoused view that by 1954 this would change hit the right alarmist tones that the

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outbreak of the Korean War seemed to confirm.\textsuperscript{70} While he expressed skepticism at the accuracy of the intelligence on the Soviet Union’s strength, Conant agreed that a strong case existed “against continuation of present trends, against a preventive war, and against isolationism.” In what read like a wish list for American internationalists, Conant suggested some proposals that he believed would have “the objective of both holding Western Europe and avoiding a war before 1980.” Among these suggestions were policies that eventually formed a major part of the CPD’s agenda, particularly the need to send more American troops to Europe.

At this time Conant showed an optimism about the basic strength of the American Cold War strategic position lacking from the later pronouncements of the CPD. He even argued that there should be a level of negotiation with the Soviet Union “regarding conventional armaments and atomic weapons…. [but]… not on the theory that agreement will be reached, but that we would worry the other fellow and also help push the program of the United States.”\textsuperscript{71} These policies demonstrated a more flexible Cold War response than the one advocated by Nitze, NSC-68, and later the CPD, all of which focused almost explicitly on the need to militarize the policy of containment.

On the same day that Truman initiated the overview that became NSC-68, he also gave the order to the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) to “continue its work on all forms of atomic weapons, including the so-called hydrogen or super-bomb.”\textsuperscript{72} This

\textsuperscript{70} Gaddis, \textit{Strategies of Containment}, 95.


effectively ended a campaign by members of the AEC’s General Advisory Committee (GAC), including Conant, David Lilienthal, and Robert Oppenheimer, to convince Truman that he should abandon plans for the development of the next generation of atomic weaponry. Conant had pressed Truman for a public debate on the issue. Ultimately, the president’s decision to continue with the research and the imposition of a secrecy order on the GAC curtailed its influence and ended their hope that America would not build the hydrogen bomb.\textsuperscript{73}

Conant’s responses both to NSC-68 and the debate on the development of the hydrogen bomb showed that he applied a scientific rationality to his views on the development of national security policy. Like a good laboratory scientist he was flexible and open to a variety of possibilities and contingencies. While he argued that the United States had to make an effective defense of its vital interests, he was more willing than the authors of NSC-68 to engage in an open debate on what to consider vital. He also realized that in light of the danger of nuclear annihilation, that the United States must adopt realistic goals and strategies in the Cold War. The omission of any significant discussion in the NSC-68 process on exactly how they could achieve these goals disturbed Conant. For this reason he held that a preemptive or preventive strike against the Soviet Union held little value and that any belief that war was inevitable was itself irrational. This viewpoint played a significant role in his opposition to the development of more powerful nuclear weapons.\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{73} Hershberg, \textit{From Harvard to Hiroshima}, 482.

\textsuperscript{74} Conant, \textit{My Several Lives}, 506.
Conant’s position on the hydrogen bomb did not stem from an opposition to the possession of all nuclear weapons. Indeed, as a major figure in the development of the atomic bomb during World War II he had ably demonstrated his willingness to employ the principles of atomic energy in warfare. After the war he had supported the theory of internationalizing the control of atomic power, but recognized that the deteriorating relationship with the Soviet Union made this unworkable. His opposition to the hydrogen bomb came from his belief that it had no practical military application and “might become a weapon of genocide” – a view that apparently did not extend to the use of the less powerful atomic bomb. The only time Conant waivered on his support for the atomic program was after discovering that the Nazi atomic program was much further from an atomic device than had been thought. Conant’s initial support for the Manhattan project came largely from a fear that Hitler was close to obtaining such destructive weaponry. Yet, with atomic weapons an undeniable reality, Conant remained supportive of their existence. Indeed, he and the other members of the GAC opposed to the H-bomb, actively promoted programs to increase the tactical applications of atomic weaponry. Later, the CPD also adopted this position as leading member Vannevar Bush regularly spoke on the potential tactical applications of atomic weapons to counteract the larger conventional forces of the Communist enemy and overcome advances in armor technology.


Conant and Voorhees took similar approaches to policy development. Both men looked at strategy in a practical way. They preferred to deal with tangibles and practical solutions over the abstractions and generalizations such as those that dominated NSC-68. This approach later dominated the Committee on the Present Danger’s activities. Not merely satisfied with increasing awareness of the Soviet threat or beginning a debate on what the United States should do, the CPD actively promoted what it saw as practical solutions to the threat.

The Voorhees Group: American Troops Needed in Europe

Voorhees’s involvement with these dilemmas began shortly before that of James Conant, when in the winter of 1949 Secretary of the Army Gordon Gray assigned him the task of preparing a report on the “Army’s responsibilities and capabilities for defense of the U.S.”77 The Soviet detonation of an atomic device had already piqued his interest in the realistic conventional capabilities of the Army as it now stood. The real potential of atomic stalemate unexpectedly increased the pressure on the Army and other conventional military forces. Moreover, this added unneeded strain on NATO’s position in Western Europe, where Voorhees and many other prominent internationalists viewed West Berlin as the frontline against international Communism. After talks with senior generals in Germany, Austria, and in the Pentagon, he received an alarming picture of a hopelessly inadequate force incapable of preventing a Soviet invasion of Europe.

Voorhees put together a group of senior military experts and went to work on the report that Gray requested. The Voorhees Group, as it became known, was made up of Lieutenant Generals M.S. Eddy, T.B. Larkin, and Alfred M. Gruenther, Brigadier General Rex W. Beasley, Major General A.C. McAuliffe, Assistant Secretary of the Army, Archibald S. Alexander, and future CPD member Vannevar Bush. On April 19, 1950, after a little over four months of work, they presented a thorough report on “the Army’s inadequate capabilities for defense of Western Europe on the ground.” They had operated on the basis, set out in Gray’s directive, that “our basic military concept now requires the protection of Western Europe against armed Russian attack on a line as far East as possible.” They argued that the “Atlantic Pact and our military necessities” not only made the defense of Europe imperative, but without specifying how, suggested that the United States should “assume the offensive.” The report identified the threat of Russia overrunning Western Europe as the “greatest present threat to civilization” and they contended that “means to stop it do not now exist.”

While NSC-68 spoke in much wider strategic terms, the Voorhees Group Report dealt with specific tactical matters. The report had two underlying premises. To portray the need for urgency, the Group argued that action must come quickly in order to “revitalize our Allies” and avoid repetition of the “World War II pattern,” whereby appeasement and inaction allowed global war to ensue. The second premise displayed the group’s wariness of Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson’s cost-cutting agenda. Voorhees

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78 Ibid., 6.
79 Report to the Secretary of the Army, April 19, 1950, Box H, Tab A, TSV Papers.
often followed recommendations with the qualification that they would not add “unduly
to the economic burden of defense efforts.” The report concluded that “within three to
five years and without intolerable expenditures” the United States and its allies could
mount a credible defense of Western Europe. Clearly, they intended this time frame to
cause alarm in the same way those behind NSC-68 had in their identification of 1954 as a
key year by which Soviet strength would outmatch the Western alliance and make an all
out attack a favorable prospect for the enemy.80

Knowing that Johnson favored a reliance on tactical atomic superiority as a more
affordable method of meeting the country’s defensive responsibilities, the group focused
heavily on why they believed that the most urgent defensive need for the U.S. related “in
large measure to land warfare.” The report provided detailed recommendations from
Vannevar Bush on various weapons development programs that could diminish the
overwhelming advantage in tanks held by the Red Army. As a result of Bush’s
contributions, Voorhees told Dean Acheson that within three to four years the Allies had
it in their power to make the heavy tank “obsolete.”81

Overall, the report was scathing in its criticism of Johnson’s economizing
policies. It went to great lengths to highlight the lack of funding for research and
development, the failure to develop a tactical air support function for the Air Force, and
other lapses of basic initiative such as the possible rehabilitation of existing equipment.
While there was a definite alarmist tone, it also offered reasoned arguments and practical

80 Ibid.

81 The Under Secretary of the Army to the Secretary of State, April 10, 1950, FRUS: 1950, Vol.
III, 43.
solutions to make a worthwhile European defense a more viable prospect. In a similar fashion to NSC-68, the document lacked any real analysis of the actual Soviet military threat other than bold statements regarding 40,000 Russian tanks ready to attack at a moment’s notice. Nitze later claimed that in compiling reports such as these, officials, constrained by time, had no choice but to rely on the intelligence community for accurate information. While he also acknowledged that the estimates provided were flawed, he argued that considering the Soviets’ “very good reserves” it would not take them long to mobilize in the manner intimated by both NSC-68 and the Voorhees Group Report.82

Voorhees’s frustrations with Johnson’s management of the Pentagon had already come to a head even before he completed his report. Once Gordon Gray signaled his intention to retire in the spring of 1950, Voorhees informed the president of his intention to follow suit. Without Gray at the Pentagon to shield him from Johnson, Voorhees decided he could no longer remain in his position and that he could do more for the country as a private citizen. Submission of the Voorhees Group Report was his last act as Under Secretary, but his concern about the outcome of the debate on the future of American national security policy did not abate. 83

The Korean War: A New Reality

In his commencement address to the graduating class at Rutgers on June 10, 1950, on the strategic shortcomings of the armed forces, Voorhees finished on the hopeful note

82 Commentary by Paul Nitze in Ernest R. May, ed. American Cold War Strategy, 106.

83 Letter to the President of the United States, Harry S. Truman, February 14, 1950, TSV Papers; Wells, “Sounding the Tocsin,” 144.
that if the danger was sensed and action taken in time, “no atom bomb will fall anywhere.” Any hope of avoiding a more conventional conflict, however, proved short lived. Two weeks after Voorhees gave his address, in what appeared as the perfect validation of NSC-68, North Korea sent its armies over the thirty-eighth parallel into South Korea. Immediately, the speculation began over the nature of the Kremlin’s involvement. Voorhees automatically viewed the invasion as a Russian “proxy war.”

At the time of the attack Conant was in the hospital recovering from emergency surgery. He later remarked that while he never had the chance to form an unbiased opinion about Truman’s decision to go to South Korea’s aid, he hoped he would “have been among the majority who applauded.”

Acheson’s observation that the purpose of NSC-68 was “to so bludgeon the mass mind of ‘top’ government” so as to provide Truman with a simple decision and to create an atmosphere such “that the decision could be carried out” demonstrated the motives behind the document’s rhetoric. Ultimately, the Korean War was a far more effective tool in meeting those ends. For internationalists, such as Conant, who worried that NSC-68 had gone too far, and Truman who feared the financial costs, the surprise invasion of South Korea helped eradicate any lingering doubts. Acheson himself later declared that “Korea saved us” in a clear acknowledgement of the peril the internationalist supporters of NSC-68 found themselves in before the North Koreans attacked.


85 Conant, My Several Lives, 507.

With NSC-68 still in a drawer in the White House, the internationalists quickly worked to resurrect its policies. This, however, was not a simple task. As much as the Korean War provided a clear choice between immediate retaliation against the North Korean forces or a further capitulation to Communist aggression, the conflict also raised the prospect of further criticism of the administration’s policy of containment. Unilateralist critics of Truman’s performance pointed to strategic blunders made by the internationalist coterie surrounding the president, which they argued had invited such aggression in Korea. Had the establishment of NATO given the communist bloc the impression that the North Atlantic area was all the West intended to defend? If not, then Acheson’s January 12, 1950 speech in which he omitted Korea from the list of nations considered of vital strategic interest to the United States certainly may have.\footnote{Department of State Bulletin, Vol. XXII, January 23, 1950, 116 – This speech stated that the American “line of defense… starts from the Philippines and continues through the Ryukyu Archipelago, which includes its main bastion, Okinawa. Then it bends back through Japan and the Aleutian Island chain to Alaska.”}

The exclusion of the economizers from the drafting process had only put off the inevitable discussion, which the fiscally conservative Truman would demand. Could the United States afford the military buildup called for in NSC-68? The Korean War changed the framework of this discussion from if it could or should be done to how and when it would be done.\footnote{Hogan, A Cross of Iron, 302.} Although Truman implemented much of the policy outlined in NSC-68 immediately, it was not until September 30 that he signed off on the document. The main reason behind this uncharacteristic procrastination was the omission in NSC-68 of any financial data. That it would be expensive was clear. In spite of advice from Leon
Keyserling that if operated at full capacity the economy could absorb the extra burdens – that the goal should be to “expand the pie, not argue over how to divide it”\(^8\) – Truman remained hesitant as the aims set out in NSC-68 threatened “uncontrollable demands by the military services.”\(^9\)

In an article for the *New York Times Magazine*, published on July 23, Voorhees set out what he believed these demands should be. Shifting the focus away from the conflict in Asia, he argued that the real question the Korean War raised was “can we defend Europe?” Remembering what he had learned in compiling the Voorhees Group Report, he set out a framework of how “To Prevent a Korea in Western Europe.”

Voorhees saw military preparedness as a deterrent. He was not eager for a war with the USSR, but eager to avoid losing if forced to fight. In the same fashion as the Voorhees Group Report and NSC-68, Voorhees’s article used alarmist rhetoric to convey its message. Employing a similar tone of urgency, he warned “there is a probability that we have time to prepare – but there is a certainty that we have no time for delay.”\(^9\)

The impact of the Korean War on the fortunes of both NSC-68 and the supporters of a pro-European U.S. foreign policy should not be underestimated. The war influenced the position of all sides in the foreign policy debate. The neo-isolationists, including such figures as Senators Robert Taft, Kenneth S. Wherry (R. Ne),, and Joseph McCarthy ally Everett Dirksen (R. Il.), believed that it proved the folly of sending American resources

\(^8\) Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 92.


overseas. Proponents of an Asia-First foreign policy, such as General Douglas MacArthur and Senator William Knowland, saw it as confirmation that Europe was no longer the focus of the Cold War. Initially, Truman’s vigorous military response to the invasion elicited the support of every faction, including Taft, who was perhaps the president’s main political rival. The Ohioan even held back in his criticism of Truman’s decision not to seek congressional approval for his decision to press American forces into action on the peninsula, a courtesy he would not extend again.92

The Chairmen: Together at Last

As the Korean War began, Conant and Voorhees came to a similar conclusion on the new realities of the Cold War. They both believed that the Korean invasion signaled that the Kremlin intended to use military means to achieve world domination. Furthermore, they believed the country’s very existence was gravely threatened. Once recuperated, Conant was determined to find an avenue to transform his “private frustrations into practical deeds.”93 The opportunity was not far away. In mid-August Conant went with his wife to their holiday home in Randolph, New Hampshire. Little did he know that the acceptance of an invitation to an after-dinner drink would provide him with the opportunity for the involvement he sought. After their mutual friend Ammi Cutter introduced Conant and Voorhees, the former Under Secretary of the Army gave an in-depth account of the strategic situation facing the United States in Western Europe that went far beyond his feature in the New York Times Magazine. Conant remarked how

92 Patterson, Mr. Republican, 452-453.
93 Hershberg, Harvard to Hiroshima, 495.
what he heard reminded him “of the cries of alarm in Washington and New York when France fell in 1940.”

Impressed by Voorhees’s enthusiasm and energy, Conant suggested that they should form a citizens committee along the lines of the William Allen White Committee. “Get a group of citizens together, draw up a program, put it to the public, get people to write Congress and, in general, respond to the gravity of the situation. From what I have heard I judge the country is asleep. You should wake it up.” This meeting signaled the beginning of an enterprise that endured until early 1953. Over the course of the next four months, Voorhees sounded out potential members, sought the support of Pentagon officials, and essentially devoted his full time to setting up the citizens committee. Reflecting on this first meeting, Conant remarked how “without being aware of it, we had just participated in forming the Committee on the Present Danger, which was to fulfill a useful function until the Korean War was over.” In spite of Conant’s fond reminiscence, the formation and usefulness of the committee were far from secure at this time. Much work remained to be done, not least the recruiting of members, and making contact with the Truman administration.

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95 Ibid., 509.
CHAPTER 2: THE CPD AND THE PENTAGON: AN INAUSPICIOUS BEGINNING

“Dr. Conant, Mr. Cutter, and I were apparently several months in advance of either the President or the Secretary of Defense in actively realizing that the danger to Europe, and therefore the United States, was so great that prompt and firm action was imperative.”

Tracy S. Voorhees

“I am still not quite convinced that there is a full meeting of the minds.”

William Marbury on the first meeting of the CPD and Pentagon officials

The months after the first meeting of the co-founders were filled with activity and turmoil, both overseas and at home. The progress made by Voorhees and Conant, however, towards the creation of a committee was painstakingly slow. Recuperating from a serious intestinal illness that had largely incapacitated him over the summer, Conant sought to involve himself in the national security debates evolving in various forums across the country. Growing concern amongst students at Harvard and around the country regarding the military draft led Conant to resume his interest in military manpower issues. The opportunity to take this issue to the country through the CPD convinced him to play a leading role. The Korean War altered many aspects of Cold War thinking including Conant’s attitude to the organization of military manpower. Conant believed that the nature of the Cold War threat had fundamentally changed as the Soviet Union and international Communism appeared to be on the offensive. The threat of a wider war

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and Conant’s unsatisfactory opinion of the application of the draft reinforced his support for a universal system without deferments.

Voorhees took Conant’s suggestion of getting a group of likeminded people together to form a committee and began seeking support amongst his old contacts from his time at the Pentagon. While Conant helped build a coalition of support for universal military service amongst educational leaders, Voorhees verified the strategic needs and backing of various military experts and personnel. With relative success in both these endeavors, the two men turned to what they believed would be the most important meeting in determining the viability of their committee. This of course was with the Secretary of Defense, George Marshall. The repercussions of this meeting and the manner in which the CPD project evolved in the month or so after this meeting influenced the CPD’s ability to act as an effective envoy for internationalism in general, and the Truman administration in particular.

Whenever discussing how to secure support for their mobilization program outlined in NSC-68, State and Defense Department officials recognized the unstable nature of American public opinion. In order to build and sustain the requisite public support, most of the officials involved in drafting NSC-68 accepted that some form of scare tactics or overselling might be necessary. Frequently, officials raised concerns that public opinion might sway behind one of two extremes – either support for reaching an accommodation with the Soviet Union or an all out call for war that would include the use of America’s one clear advantage, its superior atomic arsenal. As one State
Department official noted, they would need help lest the “U.S. public tire of such effort… in the absence of real and continuing crises.”

It was for this reason that supporters of NSC-68 viewed the outbreak of war on the Korean peninsula and the emergence of a ready made private citizens committee, in the form of the CPD, as somewhat welcome developments in their cause. In both cases this view dissipated quickly. General Douglas MacArthur’s daring landing at Inchon raised the prospect that the war might end before the end of 1950 and thus raised doubts in the need for continued military expenditures on the level promoted in NSC-68. The Chinese intervention in the Korean War solved this problem. The CPD, however, never developed into the national, grass-roots organization envisioned during the drafting of NSC-68. Instead, the committee structured itself around a Northeastern, elite, membership. Even more disappointing to the administration was its focus on securing the support of other like minded elites and its determination to act independently. As a result the CPD had a strained relationship with the administration from the outset.

Laying the Groundwork for the CPD

Due to his ill health and the considerable commitments he had as president of Harvard, Conant required convincing to take on anything more than a peripheral role with the committee. The events of the fall and winter that saw the escalation of Cold War tension provided Voorhees with ample grounds to convince his new friend to play a leading role. While Voorhees started the ball rolling on the committee project, Conant turned his attention to the question of military manpower. On September 28, 1950,

Conant used a University President’s Conference held in New York as the initial forum to restart the debate on his preferred policy of universal military service. Conant could not attend personally, but sent Donald K. David, Dean of the Harvard School of Business, to read a memorandum covering his views. Sponsored by several university presidents, including future CPD member, Henry M. Wriston, the meeting brought together a prestigious audience including the unilateralist, former President Herbert Hoover.

As the main speaker at the conference, Dwight D. Eisenhower, the president of Columbia University, gave a stirring and candid speech on the immediate national security challenges facing the country that aligned his views with both Conant and Voorhees. He argued that the defense of Europe was essential to American national security and that the domestic component of national security policy required drastic reform. In a free flowing talk, given without the use of notes, Eisenhower laid the blame for the country’s “present position” on the American people’s demand “to bring Willie home” after World War II. He presented the Korean War in wider terms than purely military – “it is economic, moral, and spiritual.” The North Korean invasion was a Russian test of American moral strength and he predicted further tests in the future. At home there existed several ways to fight the war. The first was simple: “We must not go broke.” Such a calamity would give the Russians a “greater victory than anything they could attain by going to war.” Eisenhower’s next suggestion led perfectly into Conant’s presentation when he asserted that “eighteen months from now we should have at least

* President of Brown University and the Association of American Universities
three-million men in our armed forces.” How to achieve this? Eisenhower put it in stark terms: “This country, if it is to survive, must have universal military service.”

In the statement that Donald David read, Conant outlined his design for a system of universal military service. American youths would be “enrolled in the service of the United States for two years,” either upon reaching the age of eighteen or graduating from high school. While the able bodied would be put at the disposal of the armed forces, those who were physically unfit could “serve in other capacities.” In Conant’s view, the introduction of such a system would provide an army of between three-and-a-half to five million men, and help “bring about a global stalemate in the 1950s” so that the 1960s “might see important steps taken toward gradual disarmament and an approach to peace.” Eisenhower agreed with Conant’s views and made it clear that combining military service and formal education was incompatible. “We must stick to one rule – what is best for our country.”

Alongside this conference Conant had spent a significant amount of time building a coalition of educational organizations behind the idea of UMS. James Phinney Baxter, the Pulitzer Prize winning historian and president of Williams College, played a large role in this cause. In November, the National Defense Association of Land Grant Colleges and Universities issued a statement in support of UMS. The Association of

99 Notes taken by Harry Bullis at University President’s Conference, September 28, 1950, Box H, Tab L, TSV Papers - The conference was attended by “fifty industrialists, heads of many communication services…, financiers, educators, heads of farm organizations, life insurance and railroad presidents.” Many of the attendees later joined the CPD, including Julius Ochs Adler and Harry A. Bullis.

100 Ibid.

American Universities appointed former Secretary of the Army Gordon Gray, in his capacity as president of the University of North Carolina, to write a report on UMS.\textsuperscript{102} On December 4, the AAU’s adoption of a resolution in support of UMS convinced the founding members of the CPD to amend their own statement to include support for a minimal number of deferrals.\textsuperscript{103}

During this time, Voorhees was also busy. He embarked on a lengthy process of consultations with various groups, including senior military figures, Defense Department officials, and potential committee members with national prominence and political influence. He held meetings with senior American officials and generals in Germany. From these meetings Voorhees noted the “recognition by all of them that substantial additional U.S. ground forces should be sent to Europe.”\textsuperscript{104} Two common threads stressed in these meetings were that the aim of any potential committee should be for “peace, not for war,” and that the United States needed a “better balance of military strength to avert the danger of Russian aggression.”\textsuperscript{105}

The U.S. High Commissioner in Germany, John McCloy praised the non-partisan effort that the committee intended to pursue. Voorhees assured the senior statesman that their program would not have any element of criticism but would deal with “where we

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Letter from James B. Conant to Gordon Gray, November 1, 1950, Office File # 7, CPDC, TSV Papers.
\item Resolution Adopted by the Association of American Universities on December 4, 1950, Office File # 13, CPDC, TSV Papers.
\item TSV notes of meetings with government officials and Army Generals, September, 1950, Box H, Tab D, CPDC, TSV papers – The Generals consulted were Clarence R. Huebner, Anthony McAuliffe, William H. Draper, Jr., and Alfred Gruenther. Gruenther and McAuliffe participated in the Voorhees Group.
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are now and where we go from here.” Robert Bowie, McCoy’s general counsel, argued
that the “principal problem… is not the individuals but to determine the program.”

General Alfred Gruenther echoed Eisenhower’s address at the University Presidents’
Conference, as he warned against a “let-down” in American public support in the event
that the fighting in Korea ended. After MacArthur’s successful landing at Inchon in mid-
September, this potential weighed heavily on the supporters of internationalism.

Gruenther warned Voorhees that a loss of resolve amongst the American people for
expansive military programs could endanger their national security agenda at a crucial
time.106

It is not surprising that State Department officials and American military officers
based in Germany voiced their support for Voorhees’s plan for a citizens committee that
intended to draw attention to the defensive needs of Western Europe. The military
officers contacted by Voorhees all complained that they had insufficient resources to deal
with a Soviet invasion. Moreover, they argued that the American public required better
education regarding the threat the United States faced in Europe. They echoed the
counsel Acheson gave to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in July when he
warned that had the Communist push come in Greece, instead of Korea, there was
nothing the United States could have done.107 After meeting with generals based in
Germany the message Voorhees received was clear. While Asia was important, the real
enemy was the Red Army, and the real prize was Europe, not Asia. In what amounted to

106 Notes of conversation with John J. McCloy et al., September 11, Box H, Tab D, CPDC, TSV
Papers.

107 Gaddis, Strategies of Containment, 108.
a denunciation of the Asia-first position they urged that the country avoid distractions from this threat and ensure the focus of American Cold War policy remain in Europe.

In the course of gauging support amongst elite and influential groups Voorhees looked beyond his government and military contacts. Of particular importance to the founding members of the CPD was the activity of members of the foreign policy think-tank, the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), of which Voorhees himself was a member. The CFR had a reputation for its internationalist viewpoint and Voorhees first approached the influential organization in mid-October regarding his plans for a citizens committee. Though the Chairman of the Board and founding member, Russell C. Leffingwell, initially rebuffed his request, Voorhees successfully negotiated the CFR’s support for the committee. The real power in the CFR lay with the Council’s president, Frank Altschul, who, unlike Leffingwell, supported both UMS and the European deployment. Knowing this to be the case and believing that the idea for a citizens committee with an emphasis on increasing the nation’s military strength was essentially “sound,” Leffingwell agreed to make available the considerable research resources of the CFR. This resource proved especially useful when the CPD later compiled a series of reports on the issue of foreign aid.108

Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back: The Internationalist Cause in Trouble

In September 1950, Truman made three key decisions that demonstrated his resolve to secure and expand the internationalist agenda. First he fired Louis Johnson;

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second he announced his intention to deploy between four and six divisions to bolster NATO forces in Western Europe; and third he embraced NSC-68 as official national security policy. With these decisions Truman showed his intention of re-invigorating the policy of containment by ending his administration’s hesitancy on expanding the capabilities of the American military. Nevertheless, events at home and abroad during the month of November put the internationalist agenda in jeopardy again. The intervention of the People’s Republic of China in the Korean War not only threatened to expand the war into a much wider conflict, but also gave credence to Taft’s criticisms of Truman’s apparent incompetence on national security. Republican gains in the midterm elections dealt Truman’s chances of maintaining the bipartisan, internationalist, coalition of moderate Democrats and internationalist Republicans in Congress a serious blow.

All supporters of NSC-68 approved of Truman’s choice of the revered General George Marshall as Louis Johnson’s replacement at the Pentagon. While Truman had not given up hope of limiting the size of the military appropriation in the budget for 1951, this decision proved a major setback to the economizers in the national security establishment. Truman had numerous reasons for removing Johnson, but his preference for limiting the defense budget was not one of them. Johnson’s abrasive personality did not help his cause as he never developed a strong relationship with the Joint Chiefs or his cabinet colleagues. Michael J. Hogan argued that Johnson sealed his own fate by openly associating with other “critics” within the Democratic Party of Truman’s expansive military policies. By firing Johnson, Truman conclusively sided with Dean Acheson and
his views on an expansive and multilaterally engaged national security policy that put the United States at the heart of the fight against international Communism.\textsuperscript{109}

Marshall presented Truman with a safe, but highly qualified candidate to replace Johnson. Not only was Marshall’s credibility on military matters unquestionable, but he had impressed Truman in every job he had performed during his presidency, from Chief of Staff of the Army to Secretary of State. That Marshall had expressed concerns over the effect NSC-68 would have on “the American economy and the American way of life,” came as a great comfort to Truman as he held similar fears.\textsuperscript{110}

\textit{New York Times} columnist Arthur Krock noted how the appointment solved several problems for a White House that had lost the confidence of the country. Marshall presented a nominee who was “eminently qualified to correct past errors and prevent the commission of new ones.”\textsuperscript{111} Aside from some genuine concerns regarding the appointment of a general to the most senior civilian military position outside of the presidency, the appointment proved to be one of Truman’s most popular decisions for some time. The limited but vitriolic nature of the opposition to the appointment, led by Senator William E. Jenner (R. In.), indicated the growing hostility of Cold War politics and the increasing boldness of the right wing of the Republican Party, more than any widespread disapproval of Truman’s choice for Johnson’s replacement. \textsuperscript{112}

\begin{itemize}
    \item \textsuperscript{109} Hogan, \textit{A Cross of Iron}, 306.
    \item \textsuperscript{110} Ibid, 308.
    \item \textsuperscript{111} \textit{New York Times}, September 17, 1950, 145.
    \item \textsuperscript{112} Stoler, \textit{George C. Marshall}, 182.
\end{itemize}
As Conant and Voorhees both agreed that Johnson’s “economy program” had “severely weakened U.S. defenses,” the prospect of Marshall in the Pentagon with their friend Robert Lovett as his deputy, “greatly heartened” the prospective members of the CPD.\(^\text{113}\) Early on in his tenure at the Pentagon, Marshall identified the “lack of an adequate reservoir of manpower” to meet the country’s commitments as one of his most immediate problems, thus raising hopes of a return for universal military training or service as a legitimate topic of political debate.\(^\text{114}\)

Truman’s announcement on September 11, that he intended to bolster NATO forces in Europe, with between four and six American divisions, formed the initial basis for the Great Debate that dominated Congress for the first half of the following year. Republicans justifiably questioned Truman’s authority to do so without congressional approval. Furthermore, as these troops would be under the command of NATO, supporters of the growing unilateralist sentiment in the Republican Party argued that this deployment further reduced their authority over the use of American troops. To ensure American control and ward off criticism, the State and Defense departments advised that the commander of all NATO forces in Europe should be an American national, but “only upon the request” of the Europeans.\(^\text{115}\) The speculation began immediately over who would receive the command, with Dwight Eisenhower the automatic favorite. As a strong


\(^{114}\) Pogue, \textit{George C. Marshall}, 430.

\(^{115}\) Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense (Johnson) to the President, September 8, 1950, \textit{FRUS} 1950, III, 273-78. After Truman signed off on the recommendations, it was circulated to the National Security Council as document NSC-82, September 11, Report to the National Security Council by the Executive Secretary on United States Position Regarding Strengthening the Defense of Europe and the Nature of Germany’s Contribution Thereto.
supporter of NATO and a proponent of an active role for the United States in the defense of Europe, he was the ideal candidate. This speculation, plus Conant and Voorhees’s support for the appointment, precluded the chairmen from considering Eisenhower for a practical role in the CPD. This did not, however, prevent the CPD in Conant’s words from “wrap[ing] General Eisenhower’s mantle” around the organization.\textsuperscript{116}

On September 30, 1950, Truman directed that his administration consider NSC-68 “a statement of policy to be followed” and that it be put “into effect as rapidly as is feasible.”\textsuperscript{117} John Lewis Gaddis argues that the start of the Korean War in June made this decision a mere “formality.” Nevertheless, this order signaled the end to Truman’s hesitancy on military expansion. The Korean War had already altered Truman’s sense of frugality on defense spending. During a press conference in May, with the invasion still a month away, he announced that he did not expect the defense budget to increase from the projected $13 billion. After the invasion the situation changed considerably as between July and August, Truman requested an additional $15.6 billion from Congress for defense spending, over a billion more than the entire defense budget from the previous fiscal year. These decisions alone ensured Louis Johnson’s removal or, at the very least, his marginalization within the administration. Now, the Acheson-Nitze faction had official presidential backing to put their plans into action and they began the battle to secure congressional funding and public support for the provisions and policies of NSC-68.\textsuperscript{118}

\textsuperscript{116} Hershberg, \textit{From Harvard to Hiroshima}, 519.

\textsuperscript{117} Report to the National Security Council by the Executive Secretary, \textit{FRUS} 1950, I, 400.

\textsuperscript{118} Gaddis, \textit{Strategies of Containment}, 107-111.
With these decisions and the dramatic successes of MacArthur’s daring landings at Inchon, the internationalists appeared to have gained the upper hand in the political debate on the direction of national security policy. Midway through October, the fall of the North Korean capital, Pyongyang, put the end of the war seemingly in sight. On October 15, during their meeting on Wake Island, MacArthur told Truman that he had almost won the war and that he would be in a position to send a division to Europe from Korea in early 1951. With that, the old concern of a lull in public support for an extensive and continuous military expansion program returned to the forefront. By the end of the month such concerns appeared trivial as Chinese troops swarmed over the Yalu River.\footnote{Memorandum, November 25, 1950, in Ferrell, \textit{Off the Record}, 200.}

Following a strong showing in the November midterm elections the Republicans’ willingness to support the President’s foreign policy steadily evaporated. After the end of a hostile and partisan campaign that saw their party pick up twenty eight house and five senate seats, Taftite, nationalist, Republicans continued their assaults on Truman for implementing policies that brought on the war in the first place. Although the Republicans failed to win control of either house, the election results threatened the delicate pro-administration bi-partisanship that had allowed Truman to secure his foreign policy agenda. The election brought key anti-communist, Republicans into the Senate, including Richard Nixon (R. Ca.) and Everett Dirksen, both of whom favored a more partisan approach to foreign policy. This trend imperiled the political viability of bi-partisanship and as a result, a debate on national security policy was inevitable. The administration’s failure to anticipate a second invasion of the Korean peninsula in less
than five months left it wide open for attack and put the political gains made in the 
previous months in real jeopardy.

By December, the momentum behind the CPD project and its policies had 
gathered pace, yet the national security crisis facing the country was deteriorating rapidly. 
In Korea, Chinese forces had forced the U.S. Eighth Army into a state of what seemed 
like permanent retreat. From a scenario only six weeks previously where MacArthur 
predicted that he could transfer a full division to Europe, the contrast could not have been 
starker. Internationalists no longer feared the loss of public support as a result of apathy. 
Instead, the strategic reality they faced in Korea allowed Taft and the Republicans to 
argue that they had bungled national security once again. Moreover, internationalists 
faced the prospect that in the face of failure in Asia the American people might question 
the worth of an increased military commitment in Europe.

On December 11, a meeting of the CFR’s Aid to Europe group addressed these 
very issues. Henry Wriston urged the group to capitalize on the popularity of Dwight 
Eisenhower and his support for the principle of European defense as an American 
security issue. At the meeting Wriston noticed that Eisenhower seemed agitated. With his 
“work for the committee clearly in mind,” Wriston suggested that the general “do 
something about it.” What he suggested was a letter to Truman, signed by all those 
present, with Eisenhower’s name at the top, which “outlined the situation as we see it.”

The group proceeded with its discussion of European security and they agreed 
that if Eisenhower went to Europe he had to bring a sizeable contingent of American

120 Schulzinger, The Wise Men of Foreign Affairs, 139-141.
troops with him. Even though Truman had made the commitment some months previously to deploy extra divisions in Europe, the deterioration of the American position in Korea prevented any significant move in this direction. Eisenhower told the group he believed that UMS was the best way to provide the troops needed for “assuming command responsibility for Western Europe.” Although the Pentagon had urged Eisenhower to promote UMT, he felt they were “looking for a system that would work over a long period of time.” The general believed that the situation called for more immediate action and even suggested that he might make the introduction of UMS a condition for taking the command in Europe.\(^{121}\)

Eisenhower drafted the proposed letter to Truman, initially including a recommendation to establish a blue ribbon citizens committee to promote public support for the internationalist agenda. Wriston pointed out, however, that the planned establishment of the CPD the following day would make this redundant and so they removed the suggestion from the final draft. The letter raised the group’s fear that if “our potential enemies choose to attack us in our present posture we face disastrous circumstances.” With UMS in mind, Eisenhower spoke of the need for “immediate unified exertion and sacrifice” and argued that the advantage of such a system was the ability to “produce military forces at maximum speed.”\(^{122}\) CFR historian Robert Schulzinger argues that this letter represented the “high point of Council influence in the

\(^{121}\) Digest of Discussion, Study Group on Aid to Europe of Council on Foreign Relations, December 11, 1950, Box H, Tab M, CPDC, TSV Papers.

\(^{122}\) Letter from Study Group on Aid to Europe of Council on Foreign Relations, to President Harry S. Truman, December 11, 1950, Box H, Tab M, CPDC, TSV Papers – Truman acknowledged receipt of the letter through Averell Harriman, saying it was “an interesting document” which he read with “a lot of pleasure.”
early Cold War,” as the backing of this group gave Truman the support he needed to pledge that should Eisenhower accept the NATO position he would send him to Europe with an army of 180,000 American troops. It was not long before CFR President Frank Altschul joined the CPD and increased the cooperation between the organizations even further than Russell Leffingwell had anticipated.123

Feeling reassured by the process of consultations from September through December, Voorhees had assembled a core group of elite figures who eventually formed the mainstays of the CPD’s Executive Committee. Alongside the two chairmen, this group was made up of the president of Williams College James Phinney Baxter, the president of Brown University Henry Wriston, the president of Princeton University Harold W. Dodds, esteemed scientist Vannevar Bush, former government officials William L. Clayton and William L. Marbury, prominent Washington lawyer John Lord O’Brian, the former Secretary of War, Robert P. Patterson, and publicist Stanley Resor. From this point on the as yet unnamed committee adopted a blanket ban on membership for anyone serving in a government position. As an indication of Conant’s importance to the project, the members made an exception for him to keep his position on the General Advisory Committee of the Atomic Energy Commission. To enhance the influence of the committee Voorhees targeted individuals who, as a result of previous government employment, had authorization to view classified material. It was clear from this early time that the CPD leadership intended to restrict membership to elite members of society and never seriously considered the notion of developing a grass-roots element that would have considerably increased its influence in any impending national debate.

123 Schulzinger, The Wise Men of Foreign Affairs, 141.
Voorhees had made significant strides in preparing the infrastructural needs of the small organization that they initially envisaged. He rented offices in Washington D.C. and circulated several potential names for the new organization, including Committee for Atlantic Defense and Committee to Strengthen the Defense of the Western Democracies. He prepared lists of potential members and an estimated budget, which placed the operating costs of the committee for a lifespan “until Congress adjourns next summer, or about nine months” at $17,400. Indicating the limited role Voorhees anticipated the committee would play, this figure did not include expenses for a propaganda effort and the expansion of the committee’s membership beyond thirty or so members.\(^{124}\)

From early on in the formation process the leading members decided that the committee would remain essentially a small organization and that the prestige of its members, combined with the strength of its message, would be enough to challenge the critics of UMS and internationalism. Moreover, aside from Conant, Voorhees, Bush, and Patterson only a small handful of members were able to make significant commitments of time to the cause. In many respects, the ability to commit time or effort to the cause rated low on the criteria for membership. Frequently a potential member’s reputation was more important than the strength of their support for the committee’s policies. In spite of later attempts to increase the regional diversity of the elite members they chose, the vast majority of the committee’s members came from the Northeast.\(^{125}\)

\(^{124}\) TSV Memorandum, November 4, 1950, O.F. # 4, CPDC, TSV Papers.

\(^{125}\) TSV Memorandum, October 11, 1950, Box H, Tab F, CPDC, TSV Papers.
The Crucial Meeting: The CPD and the DOD

With a sense of broad support from various influential groups, Conant and Voorhees simultaneously looked to official channels of support and had good reason to believe they might find it from the Pentagon. Not only had suggestions of a citizens committee during the NSC-68 review process received a welcome reception, but other indicators pointed to a potentially positive response from the administration. The adoption of the Acheson-Nitze attitude to containment was a major factor in this belief as the country’s senior national security managers held similar views to the men who formed the CPD. While Conant “generally” agreed with NSC-68, his reservations had diminished after the outbreak of the Korean War, which “consummated [his] conversion to Cold Warrior.”

One meeting was always more important than the rest in determining the fate of Conant and Voorhees’ project – with Secretary of Defense George Marshall. In October, Voorhees had begun working on a draft of a “statement of principles” that formed the core of the CPD’s policy platform. Not on this list, but as important as any that were, was the private conviction of the founding members that the Truman administration must welcome the formation of the committee. As the senior advisor to the President on military matters, Marshall’s attitude and support for the committee’s policy platform was therefore crucial.

As early as October, Conant asked Voorhees to draft a letter to Marshall to determine whether their endeavors would be of use to him. Indicating the importance of this first contact, Voorhees consulted with the core group of members and the Deputy

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Secretary of Defense, Robert Lovett. In the letter he described the fledgling committee as a “small group of interested citizens,” and articulated their concern over “the problem which you and all of us face as to achieve in time adequate Western European defense.” At this time the PRC’s involvement in Korea remained peripheral and the prospects for the American led forces in Korea were still good. Voorhees raised the familiar concern that the ending of the Korean War would make securing further public support for European defense measures more difficult. In the opinion of the committee members the “gravity of the civilized world’s peril is not adequately understood.” Consequently, they were considering enlarging to form a citizens committee, “wholly non-political in character, acting without partisan or other criticism of the past.” Such a group could help in “strengthening the public support of such stern measures as may be necessary.”

Voorhees enclosed the five page statement of principles he had written with the letter. This document outlined the “stern measures” in more detail. Prominent amongst these were the committee’s support for UMS. Both documents went to great lengths to demonstrate that the group did not have a “fatalistic acceptance” that war with the Soviet Union was inevitable. More importantly, Voorhees made it clear that they would not proceed if Marshall felt it would “not be constructive to do so.”

On October 27, Voorhees and Vannevar Bush met personally with Lovett and turned the letter and statement over to him for personal delivery to Marshall. They then

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127 Correspondence re. proposed letter and a meeting with Secretary Marshall, Oct-Nov 1950, Box H, Tab F, CPDC, TSV Papers.

128 Letter CPD to George Marshall, October 24, 1950, CPDC, Box I, TSV Papers.

129 Statement accompanying letter to Sec. of Defense George Marshall, Box I, CPDC, TSV Papers. Lovett suggested some revisions to this document to make it more palatable to Marshall.
met with Assistant Secretary of Defense, Marx Leva, who handled legislative matters for the Pentagon. This began the high level meetings with Pentagon officials that lasted for the duration of the CPD’s existence and accounted for the popular view that the CPD existed as a quasi-official organization. Although some committee members floated the suggestion that the Pentagon should designate the CPD as unpaid consultants, the willingness of the administration to make information available to the committee meant they quickly dropped this idea.\textsuperscript{130} Leva had instructions to examine the group’s statement and prepare a reply for Marshall. Voorhees contacted several other officials at the Pentagon at this time, most notably Secretary of the Army, Frank Pace, who reiterated the support Voorhees had received from other senior military figures over the past few months for a citizens committee. Pace told Voorhees that “there is not a question in my mind but that the need for this is great.”\textsuperscript{131}

Lovett had assured Voorhees that Marshall would respond within two days. But, as an indication of Marshall’s hesitancy to cooperate with the group, the reply did not come until a week later. With the administration badly in need of friends this proved to be an offer that Marshall ultimately could not turn down. In his response, the Secretary referred to the proposed organizing of a citizens committee as an “undertaking of great importance.” Much to the group’s delight he requested a face-to-face meeting in order to “assist us all in getting off on the right foot.”\textsuperscript{132}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{130} TSV Memorandum, October 11, 1950, Box H, Tab F, CPDC, TSV Papers.\\
\textsuperscript{131} TSV Memorandum on Committee Developments, November 14, 1950, Office File # 5, CPDC, TSV Papers.\\
\textsuperscript{132} Letter from Marshall to Voorhees, November 3, 1950, Office File # 4, CPDC, TSV Papers.
\end{flushright}
It was not unreasonable for the committee members to presume that their views on military manpower would cohere with Marshall’s. In 1944, as Army Chief of Staff, Marshall had described UMT as “the essential foundation of an effective national military organization” and continually lobbied for such a system after the war. As such, Marshall at least supported a universal system. On October 9, 1950, however, during a meeting with the State Department Policy Planning Staff, Marshall revealed his fundamental view of the CPD project and its main policy. He complained to those present, including Dean Acheson, Averill Harriman, and Paul Nitze, that “a group of prominent educators, including President Conant” was preparing a memorandum arguing for “compulsory military service.” He told the meeting that he was “not wholly in agreement with the ideas of this group” and he reflected on the political difficulty of maintaining a large standing army. Problems would arise “not only with the Congress, but also with the soldiers themselves.” Despite the uncertain future he warned these confidants of the need to “be realistic in appraising what we were undertaking,” something he felt the CPD position lacked.

With a meeting with Marshall secured for November 20, Voorhees scheduled a strategy session at the Harvard Club in New York. Robert Patterson, James Phinney Baxter, General Edward S. Greenbaum, William Marbury, and Howard C. Petersen, Patterson’s Assistant Secretary of War, attended the November 8 session. At this meeting they agreed that “the first specific matter requiring attention” was the military manpower

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134 “Memorandum of Conversation, by the Director of the State Department Policy Planning Staff (Nitze), Meeting, October, 1950,” *FRUS*, 1950, III, 366.
issue. Moreover, they decided that the committee should stick to the position Conant outlined for universal military service and that they should not complicate the matter by making any recommendation for universal military training, even though it was apparently “in the mind of General Marshall.” Patterson made clear his outright opposition to any support for UMT, which he believed would hamper a real legislative resolution of the manpower issue as it would not have any real affect on the problem for several years.  

Had this group employed their close contact with Dwight Eisenhower they might have known that they were in for a tough time. In a diary entry dated November 6, Eisenhower noted that he had personally “urged universal military service of two years duration without pay for eighteen-year-olds. Jim Conant is in general agreement. Marshall does not agree, ditto Lovett.”

In need of further recuperation from his illness, Conant missed the meeting with Marshall. In his place and owing to his stature in the Department of Defense, Patterson took the lead at the meeting. Marshall gave a long but informal talk indicating that although he had not made a decision on the military manpower issue he was definitely not an advocate of UMS. After this William Marbury noted how he saw “Bob Patterson’s wrath rising.” The former Secretary of War said, “Well General, we will, of course, not go ahead with this project if you don’t want us to.” Marshall, apparently feeling misunderstood, argued that he could not give a clear view of the Pentagon’s manpower

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135 TSV Memorandum of November, 8 1950 Meeting, dated November 14, 1950, Box H, Tab I, CPDC, TSV Papers; TSV Memorandum of November, 8 1950 Meeting, dated November 9, 1950, Box H, Tab I, CPDC, TSV Papers.

position as they did not yet have one. Marshall informed them that he did not want to hold up the committee from organizing as, unaware of the amount of groundwork already done, he thought this would take a lot of time. Vannevar Bush asked Marshall whether it would be “helpful or harmful” if the committee openly campaigned for universal military service. In a key indication of how he viewed the committee’s potential to be useful, Marshall replied that even if the Pentagon decided to ask for a more limited program, if the committee came out for a stronger program it would help in the “process of educating the public and the Congress.”

Still enraged, Patterson said he would not be willing to advocate UMS if the Pentagon was “going to come along afterwards and ask for some ‘watered down’ program.” He felt that under such circumstances the CPD “had better just mark time.” At this point Dodds and Wriston diplomatically, and rather inaccurately, alleged that the committee had not decided on a final position anyway, and did not want to do anything that was not in harmony with the Pentagon. Neither of them had attended the New York strategy session where the committee had in fact endorsed Conant’s view that it was for UMS or nothing. In an attempt to keep the meeting from collapsing, Marshall’s Assistant Secretary for Manpower Issues, Anna Rosenberg stated that she felt the committee was on the “right track.” Felix Larkin, the General Counsel of the Defense Department, who was in the process of drawing up manpower legislation options for Marshall’s approval,

said that he thought the legislation being prepared would “substantially accomplish the objectives of the Committee.”

It is clear, however, that Marshall was never in favor of UMS and as result any proposals made by the Pentagon under his watch would never accomplish the CPD’s main objective. Following their disappointing meeting with Marshall the committee members dined with Rosenberg, Larkin, and Marx Leva. The three Pentagon officials obviously recognized that the committee could be useful to the Pentagon. They tried to assuage the committee members clear sense of disappointment and told them that the manpower proposals they were working on would be “closely in line” with their views. In a rage, Bush “opened up on them with both barrels.” He told the officials that the meeting had brought the efforts of the organization to a “standstill.” Moreover, he claimed that they were “shocked and disheartened” by Marshall’s “defeatism and timidity.” The officials tried to take the blame by suggesting that they had “not sufficiently prepared” Marshall for the meeting. In a moment of clear political calculation, Anna Rosenberg gave them her own explicit, personal commitment to UMS. Leva implored them to proceed as “he doubted whether such a program could be adopted without the assistance of just such a committee.”

In these meetings the Pentagon officials suggested the real role they intended the CPD to play, one which they genuinely believed could “be of real help.” Marshall had

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139 Ibid., 15.
140 November 22, 1950, Further notes relative to meeting with General Marshall on November 20, Office File # 8, TSV Papers.
blatantly told the group that even if the Pentagon desired a more limited program the committee’s campaign for a stronger program would be helpful in trying to convince congress and the American people. This demonstrates that the CPD was never the real quasi-official organization suggested by Jerry Sanders and Samuel Wells. In the relationship envisaged by the Pentagon, the CPD’s expertise, independence and willingness to hype, and even overhype, the manpower issue would serve the administration’s needs.

As a result of perceived broken promises to support UMS, Conant believed the Pentagon had deliberately given the CPD “the run-around.” As an indication of the serious change in Conant’s attitude towards Marshall, a man he had previously described as the greatest American other than George Washington, he later referred to the Secretary’s staff as the “forces of evil” and Marshall himself as “a smarter politician than we took him for and not as honest or open hearted as often depicted.” Conant believed that Marshall “a fanatic proponent of UMT” had used the CPD “for purposes that were not UMS.” Moreover, he referred to the eventual Universal Military Training and Service Bill showed to them in early January 1951, as a “fake document” used to lead the CPD “down the garden path.” While the invective employed by Conant may go too far, his biographer James Hershberg correctly asserts that it is difficult to disagree with Conant’s conclusion that the CPD suffered a “double-cross” at the hands of the Secretary of Defense. William Marbury described his reaction to this first meeting between the

141 Sanders, Peddlers of Crisis; Wells, “Sounding the Tocsin.”

142 James B. Conant to William Marbury, February 20, 1971, CPDC, TSV Papers; Hershberg, From Harvard to Hiroshima, 552.
CPD and the Pentagon that he was “still not quite convinced that there is a full meeting of minds.” This aptly described the nature of the Pentagon and the CPD's relationship for the duration of the committee’s existence.143

The Decision to Proceed

The meeting with Marshall could not have been much worse. In many respects an outright rejection of their plan to form a committee would have been better. Instead, Marshall’s intention to make his decision on manpower policy within the next two weeks put the committee’s plans in a state of limbo. As they had received assurances that the Pentagon would consult with them on manpower legislation, the committee agreed that their organization should continue in its present modest form until administration manpower policy was clearer.144

The mood regarding the meeting at the Pentagon lifted somewhat when Voorhees reported to the group that “I am informed that General Marshall in a meeting with the three Service Secretaries and the Joint Chiefs of Staff… said in substance that he felt that this was a most important group.” What is more, he reported that Marshall had spoken of his pleasure at the formation of their committee and believed it would be “tremendously valuable.” Apparently at this meeting Marshall argued that there was no reason why they should be in agreement on policy in what was only their first discussion. These revelations led Voorhees to report to the committee the mistaken belief that Marshall


144 November 21, 1950, Memorandum detailing meeting with General Marshall on November 20, Office File # 7, TSV Papers.
“genuinely welcomes the formation of the committee and feels that it will be of real help to him.” From Voorhees’s own discussions with senior military figures he knew that there was a general level of support for their committee and UMS. Marshall would have known that the military establishment welcomed the CPD’s message and would not have wanted to alienate senior military figures while still making his mind up on specific proposals.

While the meeting with Marshall fell far short of Conant and Voorhees’s minimal expectations, the momentum behind the organization had built to a point that it formal establishment was almost a foregone conclusion. They had settled on Conant’s choice of “Committee on the Present Danger” as the group’s name. Despite the decision to “postpone action” to enlarge the committee, or release a public statement, a subcommittee made up of Vannevar Bush, John Lord O’Brien, William Marbury, and Voorhees assembled to confer with the Defense Department and formalize the committee’s positions on manpower legislation, in order that their actions “would be helpful to the Secretary of Defense.”

On December 3, in New York a group of these eleven senior members met and put the final touches on the organization of the Committee on the Present Danger.

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145 November 22, 1950, Further notes relative to meeting with General Marshall on November 20, Office File # 8, CPDC, TSV Papers.

146 Hershberg, Harvard to Hiroshima, Fn. 59, 883. The use of the term “present danger” in the committee’s title invoked Oliver Wendell Holmes’s 1919 Supreme Court decision on the abridgement of First Amendment rights of free speech in cases where a “clear and present danger existed.” Conant’s close friend, CPD member, and lawyer John Lord O’Brien was involved in arguing this case.

147 November 21, 1950 Memorandum detailing meeting with General Marshall on November 20, Office File # 7, TSV Papers.
Voorhees presented a position paper on the manpower issue, which Robert Sherwood had helped revise and Rosenberg and Leva at the Pentagon had approved. Voorhees took the position that the agreement between the Pentagon and the CPD on the details outlined in this paper had a “definitizing” effect on the relationship between them. He told the committee that he had received further assurances from the Pentagon that they believed the committee would be helpful.

Feeling reassured, the committee accepted new members including *New York Times* owner Julius Ochs Adler, and decided to invite renowned psychologist Dr. William C. Menninger to join. Furthermore, they decided that if the committee would have a chairman that Conant should fill the role. Still recuperating, Conant had to accept the role that dominated his time for the next two years over the phone. As a condition he demanded any public statements should not identify anyone as chairman. In seeking to capitalize on the association of Conant’s name with UMS and the internationalist viewpoint, the CPD quickly disregarded this stipulation. Upon the advice of Stanley Resor, the owner of the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency, and eventual Executive Committee member, they organized a public statement and a press conference for December 12, 1950.149

148 Conant was not present due to medical problems. At this meeting were James Phinney Baxter III, R. Ammi Cutter, Harold W. Dodds, Edward S. Greenbaum, Robert P. Patterson, Howard C. Petersen, Robert E. Sherwood, Stanley Resor, James Stillwell for William L. Clayton, Henry M. Wriston, and Tracy S. Voorhees.

149 Notes of meeting on December 3, 1950, Box H, Tab I, TSV Papers. They initially planned for December 13, but altered the date out of a concern that it would clash with a similar announcement by the AAU. Also there was growing speculation that Truman would declare a national emergency and the CPD did not want their message to get lost.
Presenting the Danger

At the Willard Hotel in Washington D.C., James Conant, flanked by several Executive Committee members, formally announced to the world the establishment of the Committee on the Present Danger. In a statement fashioned by Robert Sherwood, Conant described the CPD as an organization “formed in the American tradition by civilians acting on a non-partisan basis.” He described the peril facing the United States in stark terms. “The acts of naked aggression by powerful Communist forces in the Far East constitute a grave threat to the survival of the United Nations, and a peril to the very security of the United States.” In his statement he placed the battle against isolationism and the need for UMS at the heart of the committee’s mission. He chided the isolationists who urged a withdrawal from overseas commitments as providing nothing more than “a counsel of despair.” The security policies presented in the statement focused on Europe, which made their position almost as much a repudiation of the Asia-first supporters.150

Next, Conant turned to supporters of UMT when he dismissed a training program as insufficient. In order to provide the necessary three and half million strong army, he argued that “universal military training is no longer an adequate solution of the problems which now face us because it does not provide a force in being,” He stated that “the time has come for a new concept that universal service in defense of our freedom is a privilege and an obligation of our young men.” Echoing Voorhees’s New York Times Magazine article from the summer, Conant laid out the sense of urgency and sacrifice the CPD believed was necessary: “The doubt is not whether such a program is too arduous. The

doubt is whether it is arduous enough” and “we have no time to lose.” In an allusion to NSC-68, he referred to the nature of the enemy faced by the United States, and the reasoning behind the policies they proposed: “We shall at the least have created strength which may convince the fourteen men in the Kremlin that further aggression will not pay.”151 Conant told the reporters assembled that the CPD would expand from its current membership of twenty five and “strive to further the above purposes.” A press release issued later that day allied the position of the CPD with a recent resolution of the Association of American Universities on manpower issues.152

The relationship between the Committee on the Present Danger and the Truman administration was far from the harmonious depiction reported in any historical account or in the contemporary media, where one newspaper referred to the CPD as the “Paul Reveres of the Atomic Age.”153 This lack of harmony resulted from a misunderstanding over two issues. First, they each had a different view of what the CPD would be and do. The second concerned the CPD’s failure to understand that out of political pragmatism the Pentagon was less committed to certain issues, particularly on the matter of military manpower, than the committee. When Conant and Voorhees established the CPD, both the committee and the administration were well aware that they had different agendas. The reason that both parties continued the relationship was as a result of simple expediency as political events came to a head.

151 Ibid.

152 Press Release, December 12, 1950, Box H, Tab K, CPDC, TSV Papers.

The military mobilization envisioned in NSC-68 required a commitment from American taxpayers unlike any other in the country’s past. Even though NSC-68 forecasted limited, conventional, proxy wars in the mode of the Korean War, it also predicted long spells of peace time when the American public might question the need for maintaining the kind of force envisioned. Sustaining this public support, in the words of one State Department official, required a “national effort.” The sense of crisis that permeated in Washington at the end of 1950 made gaining public support all the more crucial. Informal estimates agreed upon by the drafting committee that wrote the report placed the cost of implementing NSC-68 at $50 billion annually. Eventually, Paul Nitze outlined a budget going through 1955 of $235 billion, plus a further $52 billion to pay for the Korean War. These figures represented vast increases in the defense budget and would lead to a much larger standing military than Americans had traditionally tolerated. As a result this new program for national defense would require a huge effort to build and maintain public support. The Democrats had already proposed an excess profits tax in the hope of raising an additional $3.3 billion in revenue. 154

By December 1950, with the U.N. military forces in retreat in Korea, the administration’s political standing had reached a low point and public confidence in the president and his administration had deteriorated greatly. In an acknowledgment of the grave atmosphere consuming the country, Truman declared a state of national emergency in the hope that such a move would “rouse the country.” 155


155 Kepley, The Collapse of the Middle Way, 104.
Truman employed a range of media that when compared to the later attempts of the CPD to similarly “wake up” America, highlighted the committee’s narrow influence. While speaking on all radio and television networks, the president also experimented with live video feeds to numerous movie theaters. Truman laid the blame for the crisis on the “rulers of the Soviet Union.” He laid out a four point plan for dealing with the Cold War threat involving continued working through the UN, strengthening the defenses of Western Europe, increasing American military capabilities through procurement and an expansion in military personnel from 2.5 million to 3.5 million, and placing the U.S. economy on an “even keel” through cuts in non-defense spending, increased taxes and tight price controls.156

Truman gave the speech after Acheson advised that he had to take measures “to reverse the business as usual tendencies in the country.” Truman’s advisors, particularly in the State Department’s Office of Public Affairs, feared that too bellicose a response from the White House to political challenges could have disastrous effects on public opinion and the administration’s freedom to act in Korea and the wider Cold War. On January 4, Truman suspended all public relations efforts promoting NSC-68. Alarmed at what he deemed an unacceptable level of “public disclosure of classified information regarding this nation’s national security policies,” Truman ordered the National Security Council to rein in public disclosures of policies pertaining to the NSC-68 series. This effectively tied the administration’s hands in the political fight for public opinion during the Great Debate. Perhaps prudent in terms of maintaining national secrecy and security, this decision, however, made fighting the numerous critics of administration policy

156 Casey, Selling the Korean War, 176.
extremely difficult. Truman had approved the creation of the administration’s own citizens committee but the Chinese intervention prevented Acheson from ever developing the project. Now, the CPD offered the best alternative available to the administration.\textsuperscript{157} Yet, the CPD were not well prepared for the style of political debate they entered. A crescendo of attacks over the course of the past year from the right of the Republican Party, most noticeably from Senator Joseph McCarthy, contributed to the Truman administration’s “growing ineffectiveness” and the State Department’s inability to act as a “mouthpiece for administration policy.”\textsuperscript{158} With Acheson the favorite target of both the McCarthyite and Taftite opposition, and the persistent rumors that Stuart Symington, the chairman of the National Security Resources Board, would soon replace Marshall at the Pentagon, Voorhees commented on the political weakness of the administration’s team.

“As of today we have a Secretary of State, a Secretary of Defense, and a Deputy Secretary of Defense, all in uncertain position before the public, and perhaps in their own minds.” At this point the CPD had only existed for a week. An organization that developed from four months of slow, but careful preparation, now stumbled into an atmosphere of political turmoil.\textsuperscript{159}

Conant’s first foray into this national security debate, an article on UMS in \textit{Look} magazine, served as an “initial and not well-aimed shot.” Unbeknownst to the CPD chairman, \textit{Look} publisher Gardner Cowles had approached Charles W. Cole, the

\textsuperscript{157} Steven Casey, “Selling NSC-68,” 687, Memo of Conversation with the President, November 27, 1950, Box 67, Acheson Papers, HSTL.

\textsuperscript{158} Casey, “Selling NSC-68,” 684-685.

\textsuperscript{159} TSV Memorandum to the Members of the Committee on the Present Danger, December 19, 1950, OF# 16, CPDC, TSV Papers.
President of Amherst College, to write a piece for publication in the following issue that countered the arguments made by Conant. Cole argued that total conscription would hurt America and that “either the world crisis was dangerous enough for total mobilization or it was not.” On December 4, in between Conant’s submission of his piece and its publication, the AAU had held a special meeting on the issue of UMS at which they endorsed a system of limited deferments. In turn, the CPD also altered its position and as result the published article in *Look* no longer reflected the committee’s position. Both organizations now endorsed a policy of including 75,000 preferential deferments to allow for officer training through ROTC. Conant later conceded that his article had been “rushed to print” and that Cole “had much the better argument.” The CPD needed to do better, and soon, if they were to make a difference.¹⁶⁰

The opportunity to get involved came quickly. On December 20, 1950, former President Herbert Hoover gave a stirring radio and television broadcast. He aimed a direct shot at Truman administration foreign policy and the response indicated that the American people might respond well to a resurgence of isolationism. Hoover offered a startling alternative to Truman’s internationalism as he promoted the adoption of a Fortress America approach. Under this strategy U.S. national security policy would focus solely on the territory of the United States. In what amounted to a policy of abandonment, Hoover argued that Europe, still suffering from “battle shock,” had failed to respond to American efforts to “elevate their spirit and achieve their unity,” but was still more than capable of defending itself. Despite the clear anti-European sentiment of his speech,

Hoover ironically invoked a distinctively European symbol when he argued that the United States stood as a “Western Hemisphere Gibraltar of Western Civilization,” and that America’s preservation must be the “foundation of our national policies.”\footnote{161 Text of Hoover’s Speech on Preserving the Western Hemisphere, \textit{New York Times}, December 21, 1950, 21.}

An attack by such a respected figure at a time when the administration was already on the back foot in the public relations battle over foreign policy was more than just untimely, it was disastrous. This attack, along with a similar one by Joseph Kennedy, a renowned isolationist, required a response otherwise Truman risked losing the support generated by Eisenhower’s recent official appointment as supreme commander of NATO forces in Europe. Now with the administration’s national security policy under constant barrage, the sight of the hugely popular World War II hero at the helm of NATO’s military forces provided a sense of stability in much the same way that Marshall’s appointment to the Pentagon had three months before.

In shaping its response, the CPD was buoyed that Truman had recently restated his personal support for a system of universal military training. Although not the system the committee endorsed, the continued endorsement of the principle of universality was significant.\footnote{162 Truman Speech, December 15, 1950, in \textit{Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Harry S. Truman : Containing the Public Messages, Speeches, and Statements of the President}, Volume 6, (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office 1961-66) 741-746; Truman message, December 19, 1950, in ibid., 750.} Responding to Hoover’s widely publicized address provided the CPD with an important early opportunity to demonstrate that they could act as an effective mouthpiece for the internationalist agenda. In a pattern the CPD would repeat, its response was timid and failed to make any real impression. Two members, Robert
Patterson and William Clayton, a former Assistant Secretary of State for Economic Affairs, took up the mantle for responding to Hoover. Demonstrating that the committee was not yet ready to mount any serious campaign, Patterson and Clayton’s responses merely amounted to writing similar editorials and letters. In Patterson’s letter to the *New York Times* he did not even mention the CPD by name. The former Secretary of War had already assailed the Hoover speech when he had spoken on the same night at the Waldorf Astoria to a gathering of the Interfaith in Action Committee. Here Patterson condemned Hoover and others who supported a withdrawal of American forces as offering no more than a “counsel of discouragement, despair and defeat.” While the tone was effective, the scope of the response to a letter, an editorial, and a speech to an influential but limited audience meant that the former president’s neo-isolationist agenda made a much greater impact. Indeed, Voorhees reported to the committee in early January that “Mr. Hoover’s proposal for a fundamental change in our military policy toward Europe has received wide public acceptance” As an indication that the CPD’s response had failed, Voorhees informed the committee members that “mail to congress is said to be running very heavily in this direction.”

It is clear that the “present danger” the CPD fought against was not the Soviet Union, so much as the supporters of the resurgent isolationism that took hold in the wake of the Truman administration’s failures in the Korean War. Although this spike of isolationist sentiment had less depth and strength than the CPD realized, it seemed that

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the tide of popular support in December 1950 was turning in its favor. Although the implications of a retreat to isolationism represented a threat to the principles upon which the CPD based its worldview, it was unlikely that the internationalist basis of U.S foreign policy would change.

Gallup polls released in January, 1951 gave Truman a dismal thirty six percent approval rating, but suggested a much better prospect for the continued support of the American people for an internationalist foreign policy. With a presidential election set for the following year, 1951 provided the last opportunity outside of the election season for potential candidates to establish their credentials. An ideological shift in American foreign policy remained unlikely and improbable unless a politician affiliated with the isolationist wing of the Republican Party won the White House. Two polls of presidential trial heats, one pitting Truman against two very different candidates, Taft and Eisenhower, indicated the weak support for isolationism. Although behind in both polls, Truman only trailed the Ohio Senator by three points with forty-one percent of respondents indicating their support for the president. Against Eisenhower, a supporter of the CPD’s agenda, however, Truman trailed by over thirty points as the hugely popular general took a fifty-nine percent share of the vote. These polls show that although Taft and other isolationists could certainly make life difficult for the Truman administration in the coming months, they did not have the support needed to drastically re-orientate American Cold War policy in the manner the CPD feared.165

CHAPTER 3: ELITE FAILURE – THE CPD AND THE GREAT DEBATE

Historian David Kepley argued that “once a generation… the American people have questioned their basic assumptions about the relations of the United States with the rest of the world.” 166 The Great Debate that occurred between January and April 1951 was one of those occasions. Although eager to enter the fray, the CPD was far from ready for the political maelstrom that engulfed the country. The committee’s evolution, as outlined in the previous chapters, was slow and unsteady. Events overtook the fledgling committee and as a result they struggled to establish themselves as an effective national opinion maker. In spite of a more nervous awareness than most Americans of the issues at stake, the CPD’s role in the debate was undermined by poor planning, a single-minded approach to policy, and an inflated belief of self-importance.

In a similar fashion to the Truman administration, CPD greatly overestimated the military danger posed by the Soviet Union. The CPD’s greatest mistake, however, was in miscalculating the appeal of neo-isolationist sentiment. Indeed, they failed to recognize the inherently political rather than ideological nature of the Great Debate. In late December, the loose Republican coalition that Taft had cobbled together in the Senate had barely held together over issuing a party resolution censuring Dean Acheson, suggesting that the Taftite faction represented a much weaker threat than the CPD realized. 167 This lack of cohesion forced Taft and his supporters to latch onto the


167 Casey, Selling the Korean War, 184.
European troop deployment issue and manipulate it into a much bigger constitutional question. This cost them dearly as many Republican senators, including Alexander Smith (R. NJ), recognized the upcoming debate as “a dispute over policy masquerading as constitutional conflict” and ultimately shied away from the fight.\textsuperscript{168}

Two resolutions, one in the House and one in the Senate, introduced in early January, set up a congressional debate on the president’s constitutional right to deploy troops without prior congressional notice or approval. Truman had announced in late December his intention to proceed with plans to deploy extra divisions to Europe. House Republican Frederic Coudert (NY) set the ball rolling when he presented his resolution requiring the president to obtain congressional approval for any overseas deployment. Truman’s response was that he could “send troops anywhere in the world.” With regard to Congress he argued “I don’t ask their permission, I just consult them.” Emboldened by the sense that the political pendulum was swinging their way, the neo-isolationists sensed an opportunity to hit back against the Truman administration; thus Senator Kenneth S. Wherry introduced a second resolution in response to Truman’s defiant attitude. This resolution was similar to Coudert’s, but it dealt specifically with the planned European deployment. This amounted to a direct attack on the president’s ability to conduct foreign policy in a time of war.\textsuperscript{169}

On January 5, Taft stepped into the fray and delivered the longest speech of his career on foreign policy. Although a strong candidate for the Republican nomination for

\textsuperscript{168} Johnson, 	extit{Congress and the Cold War}, 51.

the presidency in 1952, Taft did not have strong foreign policy credentials and viewed this crisis as an opportunity to change that perception. In his speech, he mirrored the strategy that Hoover had outlined in his December radio address. At the time the Korean War began, Taft had praised Truman for his swift response; however, he now insisted that “he had no authority whatever” to commit American troops at that time to Korea or in the future to Europe. Significantly, he argued that not only did Truman need to consult with Congress, but that Congress must approve any deployment. As the timing of military deployments is a key component of their usefulness, these maneuvers put Eisenhower’s European mission in real jeopardy. 170

The Great Debate ended on April 4, when after four months of tedious deliberating the Senate passed a compromise resolution sponsored by Senator John L. McClellan (D. Ar.). With the help of his counterpart, Harry Byrd (D. Va.), who had little appreciation for Harry Truman, McClellan’s resolution declaring the “sense of the Senate” that should the president seek any further deployment beyond the four divisions requested that he would need to consult with Congress, ended the neo-isolationist threat to Truman foreign policy. At first, Senate isolationists mounted a challenge to McClellan’s compromise, but ultimately moderate Senate Democrats and Republicans cobbled together a commanding 69-21 vote in favor of accepting the resolution. Even Taft fell in line and voted in favor. While Truman had the “moral, if not legal” requirement of consulting congress, that he did not want to send more than the approved

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170 Congressional Record, 1951 97:56.
four divisions ended his interest in fighting the isolationists. Moreover, the failure to mount a more serious challenge represented the “last hurrah of the isolationists.”

Conant’s biographer, James Hershberg, argued that the CPD could “justly claim a substantial share of credit for the success of the Truman policy.” Although the CPD did push for the administration’s policy – “under the banners of unity, anti-Communism, Eisenhower, and preparedness” – the committee’s inherent limitations, the weakness of its publicity campaigns, and the fact that Taft and his supporters made similar mistakes in winning public support, meant that the CPD found itself trailing in the wind rather than leading from the front. As the military situation in Korea improved, the nature of the CPD’s rhetoric appeared increasingly overheated. As the Great Debate culminated, the Truman administration decided that it no longer needed a more extensive draft policy. The CPD’s inability to convince the Truman administration to continue its pursuit of UMS represented the CPD’s ultimate failing as a relevant political force.

Great in the Debate?

Looking over research that Conant had prepared for his autobiography in the late 1960s, Voorhees complained that the materials presented a predominant view that the CPD had focused on UMS as a single issue, rather than as a part a package. The reality, however, was that the CPD did expend an inordinate amount of its time focusing on the issue of UMS. Indeed, had the CPD focused their attention on highlighting the defensive

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deficiencies in Europe and showed a greater willingness to show flexibility on issues such as the age when UMS would start, they may have at least secured the concept of a universal burden of service. Had the committee shown a willingness to take a stronger stance against McCarthyite style attacks on the Truman administration, it may have found the administration more willing to support to their positions on UMS.173

The CPD’s response to isolationist challenges to Eisenhower’s NATO appointment and the European troop deployment marked a significant improvement from their earlier efforts at responding to Herbert Hoover. Eisenhower had already indicated his support for the CPD’s program, and Conant and Voorhees actively sought ways to “align the committee with Eisenhower in the public mind.”174 On January 7, the CPD had issued a forceful statement by Conant calling for public support for Eisenhower’s “great mission.” The New York Times put the story on page one and numerous regional newspapers across the country reprinted it. Conant painted a picture of the European continent threatened by “a menacing, despotic power.” He conceded Taft’s charge that the recent communist aggression in Korea was insufficient proof that the Soviet Union planned to invade Western Europe. Yet, the CPD Chairman argued that it was “beyond dispute” that the Kremlin was “bent on conquering the world” and that “Europe is the next great prize.” Conant focused on the themes of American unity behind Eisenhower and creating a credible European defense that would make the prospect of aggression unprofitable for the Soviets. He accused the neo-isolationists of playing politics over

173 Tracy S. Voorhees, Notes for Dr. Conant, June 12, 1967, Box I, CPDC, TSV Papers.

174 Hershberg, Harvard to Hiroshima, 519.
European security as he noted that they had not called for the withdrawal of the significant American forces already there.175

Upon his return from Europe in late January, Eisenhower delivered a compelling behind closed doors presentation to Congress on the situation in Europe. The neo-isolationist attacks on the president’s authority to reinforce NATO made the reception of this report crucial. While any report by Eisenhower carried a significant amount of political capital, the outcome was far from clear. To the members of Congress who agreed with Taft that the European nations had not done enough to rebuild their own defenses, Eisenhower argued that it was crucial that the United States send the European allies a powerful demonstration that they were not alone. The general made clear his hope for a deployment in the region of ten or eleven divisions. The continued opposition in Congress, plus the deteriorating situation in Korea, meant that the administration had to compromise. A report in the New York Times suggested that there had “been a softening” of Taft’s position and that it appeared that he would not “challenge seriously the recommendations” of General Eisenhower.176 In mid February, Truman authorized Marshall to testify that the Pentagon planned to only deploy four divisions to add to the two already there. This would bring the total American commitment to Europe to 180,000 men – far short of the mass deployment the CPD or even the isolationists had envisioned.177

175 New York Times, January 8, 1951, 1, 7.


177 Offner, Another Such Victory, 435.
In the meantime, meetings with Pentagon officials on the military manpower issue continued. After seeing a first draft of the bill the Pentagon planned to introduce in Lyndon Johnson’s Preparedness Sub-Committee, the CPD raised its serious concerns that the bill fell far short of its expectations. Indeed, the bill did not provide for an immediate employment of UMS and the provisions for a universal national burden were, to say the least weak, and widely open to interpretation. When at a December, 11 meeting at the Pentagon, Anna Rosenberg assured the committee that, after reading the CPD’s initial memorandum on UMS, that “this… is our position too,” had gone a long way to convincing the founding members to actively organize and campaign. Now the bill they had agreed in principle to support fell far short of what the Pentagon officials had led the committee to expect.

Prior to sending their bill to Congress, the Pentagon consulted with the CPD again. At a meeting in early January, William Marbury, a member of the CPD’s Manpower Subcommittee, “exploded” at the Assistant Secretary of Defense, Marx Leva. The bill they presented the committee with was not much better than the previous draft. In essence, the bill extended selective service as it had existed, and created the mechanism for a future system of universal military training under a proposed National Security Training Corps. Leva was unable to say that the bill explicitly authorized the president to induct all eighteen-year-old men into service without deferments, and as a result Marbury unleashed a tirade of anger upon the Pentagon official. He reminded Leva

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178 Notes of meeting on December 11, 1950, CPDC, TSV Papers.
that the committee had “gone out on a limb in reliance on the assurances of Ms. Rosenberg that the administration bill would be clear and unequivocal on this point.”

Leva urged Marbury to focus on the principle of universality as a primary goal, yet on this issue the wording did not reflect a strong commitment. Another Manpower Subcommittee member, Robert Patterson, later raised similar concerns with Anna Rosenberg. Although unsure about the legislation, Voorhees, along with Marshall, and Rosenberg, testified before Johnson’s committee that the CPD supported the administration’s bill. In a rather dubious statement Voorhees claimed that the CPD supported the bill “because it is a real universal military service bill and not merely an extension of the Selective Service Act to include 18 year olds.” As he had little else to cling to, Voorhees endorsed Marx Leva’s view that an ambiguous clause that gave the president the power “to induct men by age group is the distinguishing feature.” Marshall himself, in an act that the CPD later seemed to forget, gave vigorous testimony in committees in both the Senate and House. He argued that the immediate need of the Department of Defense was for a system of UMS, but that the need for such a measure might be temporary.

The final form of the bill sent to the full Senate on January 17, 1951 had little chance of passing as it stood, and would not have delivered the CPD’s goal of UMS. Conant’s biographer, James Hershberg described the bill as “being wide open to erosion,

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180 Ibid., 20.

181 U.S. Senate, 82nd Congress, 1st Session, Preparedness Subcommittee of the Committee on Armed Services, Universal Military Training and Service Act, 1951, hearings on S.1, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1951, 1081-1082.)
criticism, and counterproposals from Congress."¹⁸² In other words, the Pentagon designed this bill as a trial balloon, a vague piece of legislation which deliberately raised the bar above the preferred policy of the department. Once Congress altered and amended the bill what remained gave the Pentagon what they had wanted: the continuation of the draft based on selective service, with the potential for UMT in the future. The CPD members knew that the bill was imperfect. That they did not recognize the true reason for the flaws implied their own political naivety more than any duplicity on the part of Marshall and his staff.

Not only was the recruiting of such a large body of young men impractical, but at that moment the U.S. armed forces did not have the immediate need for them. While Eisenhower envisioned an eventual deployment of ten to twenty divisions in Western Europe, the Truman administration was not considering any more than six, which was well within means as the current draft actually provided more than enough men, and never failed to meet the Pentagon’s, if not the CPD’s, demands.¹⁸³ Truman’s eventual decision to hold the deployment at four extra divisions significantly limited the impact on the Army’s manpower reserves. Various initiatives undertaken by Marshall, including better recruitment measures and improved operation of the draft boards, meant that by April 1951 he had successfully doubled the strength of the armed forces from its level at the start of the Korean War. In doing so, the army had recruited more men between June


¹⁸³ George Q. Flynn, *The Draft, 1940-1973*, 117. By June 1951 the draft supplied an average of 5.5 percent more men than requested. Anna Rosenberg reported to Truman in October, 1952, that the draft could meet all needs through 1954 without changes to the deferment system.
1950 and April 1951 than it had between August 1940 and February 1942 when the nation prepared to mobilize for World War II.\textsuperscript{184}

Another problem was the lack of facilities, finances, and personnel required to train such a large body of young men. On these issues Rosenberg testified to the Senate Preparedness Subcommittee that the bill reflected the potential, rather than the actual, needs of the armed forces. She argued that the Department of Defense “is not asking for all 18-year-old men, but is asking that the men from age 18 to 19 be made available for induction.” She told the committee that in the next year the maximum number of men they could use was 400,000 to 450,000, and the same for 1952-53. In essence, this invalidated the concept of universal service sought by the CPD. The Pentagon bill reflected the political reality that universality was never likely to pass a vote in Congress, and, under current circumstances, was impractical to operate. Conant tried to argue that the basis of military service upon a universal burden was important for maintaining the fairness and democratic nature of the system. Had the CPD focused on this element they might have at least secured a limitation on the level of the broad deferments they opposed so vigorously.\textsuperscript{185}

In all, these problems demonstrated the different mind-sets of the Pentagon and the CPD on military manpower. Marshall showed an interest in UMT as a pragmatic means of reducing the time need to prepare a large military force in the event of war. In


Marshall’s eyes the difficult political atmosphere, the improved performance of the draft, and the continued localization of the Asian conflict to the Korean peninsula, made any push for a universal military system, either training or service, redundant. The CPD’s commitment to universal military service was based as much on its understanding of the Soviet threat as it was the belief that only a universal system could prevent the burden of fighting the Cold War falling on the less-privileged in American society. Although not oblivious to the often inequitable nature of the draft, Marshall’s primary responsibility was to ensure the national security. The reality was that the Pentagon needed neither UMT nor UMS to secure that aim.

Unlike the CPD, the administration quickly recognized and appreciated that some form of UMT might be salvageable. Marshall never abandoned the principle that a training system could reduce the time required to mobilize the American citizenry in the event of another general war; thus the Pentagon continued to pursue the possibility that the Universal Military Training and Service bill making its way through Congress might provide a such a system. When on March 13, Anna Rosenberg made remarks to this effect over dinner, Conant was left bitterly disappointed. Here she made clear that the Pentagon was only interested in fighting for UMT and not UMS. While admirable, Conant’s idealism prevented him from recognizing that the administration did not see the issue in the same black and white terms as he did. While somewhat effective in raising public awareness and interest, the CPD’s media campaign did not, nor could it have, swayed the entire political establishment to Conant’s personal point of view. As the
Senate whittled away at the bill, Marshall admitted to Conant that although it was “not exactly what we wanted,” it represented a “great step in the right direction.”

Conant had altered his position of total opposition to deferments based on an Association of American Universities report that argued the resulting disruption to campuses across the country would be intolerable. Conant remained skeptical about deferments and was determined that they should be kept to a minimum. In his testimony to the House Armed Services Committee on March 8, 1951, he supported the inclusion of a small number of deferments. Partly out of a strange loyalty to the CPD’s commitment to the Pentagon, but mostly out of a recognition of the “political opposition to hard-line UMS,” Conant endorsed a program for the deferment of 75,000 men accepted to college. Privately, he and other members were hugely disappointed with what they viewed as vacillation from the administration. Their disappointment turned to defeat when, on March 31, Truman signed an executive order at the request of Selective Service director, Lewis Hershey, instructing draft boards to allow deferments based on strong academic records and privately administered aptitude tests. Known as the Trytten System, this plan was more palatable politically and did not require several months of negotiating with Congress. Yet, it severely dented the likelihood that universality would form the basis of future draft policy.

On the evening of Sunday, April 8, in a radio interview with recent CPD recruit Edward R. Murrow, Conant spoke on the subject of “Your son and Universal Military

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Service.” Going out a month after the Senate had passed an emasculated version of the Pentagon’s manpower bill and only two days before the House voted on it, the interview represented a last ditch effort by the CPD to make its case to the public for UMS. Despite their deep displeasure with the original form of the Pentagon’s legislation, numerous CPD members, including Conant, Voorhees, Bush, and Patterson had given testimony to Senate and House Committees in support of it. They had recognized the weakness of the legislation but “swallowed their qualms” and gave it their full public endorsement.\(^{188}\)

In the interview, Murrow argued that the weakness of the bill and the administration’s refusal to put up a strong fight for it had created a great amount of confusion, as numerous amendments repeatedly altered the age requirements and length of service. Given the chance to elaborate on the differences between Selective Service and UMS, Conant characterized the former as out of step with the current situation and only “useful in time of total war,” an eventuality the CPD believed UMS would help avoid. When Murrow mentioned Truman’s Executive Order to implement the Trytten Plan, Conant read a “prepared statement, lest my language become too violent.” Here, Conant declared that extensive deferments based on college entrance “violates the democratic principle of equality of sacrifice.” He warned that Selective Service created a system of privilege that resulted in an “unfair distribution of the responsibility” of military service.

The rest of the interview allowed Conant to distance the CPD from the administration’s position. No longer confined to support Marshall on the manpower issue, he used the platform to distinguish the CPD’s positions on numerous issues. He

\(^{188}\) Hershberg, *Harvard to Hiroshima*, 547.
spoke of CPD’s goal of creating a “climate of opinion favorable to General Eisenhower’s great mission” and of the need to “build an adequate defense of Europe,” which required an armed force of 3.5 million men, and which out of practicality and fairness, necessitated a system of UMS. Conant upheld his position in support of the deferment of 75,000, but now recognized that officer training requirements might demand further deferments. He contended that any deferment from service did not end one’s obligation, as those with particular qualifications and aptitudes “may well be needed for specialized tasks.”189

From James Conant’s denunciation that George Marshall and his staff had led the committee “down the garden path,” it is clear that the Chairman believed the Defense Department had used the CPD.190 By lobbying for the more stringent manpower policy of universal military service, Marshall had secured the continuation of Selective Service by accepting the compromise offered by Congress. Marshall got the system he had wanted all along, with the vague possibility of UMT in the future if necessary.

Even though the Universal Military Training and Service Act, 1951, signed by Truman in June, provided the mechanisms for enacting UMT in the future, through the establishment of the National Security Training Commission (NSTC), the moment was lost. The provision that the government could only enact UMS if both the president and Congress considered it was no longer necessary to demand more than six months service of men less than 19 years of age, created sufficient political barriers to make it unattainable. The changing Cold War and domestic political atmospheres, highlighted by

189 Transcript of interview of James B. Conant by Edward R. Murrow, Tab Y, CPDC, TSV Papers.
the stalemate in Korea, and, ironically, Eisenhower’s election to the presidency, ensured its final demise. When the NSTC did recommend implementing a system of UMT in 1952, the House of Representatives simply voted the measure down.\footnote{Hershberg, From Harvard to Hiroshima, 551.}

According to various Gallup polls between 1942 and 1956, public support for UMT never dipped below 60 percent. From 1945 to 1950, it averaged close to 75 percent.\footnote{John M. Swomley Jr., “A Study of the Universal Military Training Campaign, 1944-1952” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Colorado, Boulder, Political Science Department, 1959), 287, quoted in Aaron Friedberg, In the Shadow of the Garrison State, 167. n.66.} The CPD had the challenge of convincing the American people that UMS was not just a more severe draft measure, but a more effective, fairer, one. With these levels of public support, convincing the American people seemed a much easier task than convincing Congress, which had consistently voted down any attempt to introduce UMT. As the military situation in Korea improved by March, the strategic imperative for UMT, let alone UMS, appeared to wane. The CPD’s inability to affect national public opinion prevented it from persuading Congress that wholesale conscription in the form of UMS benefitted American national security needs. In assessing why this failure occurred, it is important to examine strategic decisions made by the CPD during the Great Debate and the quality of its public relations efforts.

**Ill-Prepared for a Fight**

At a meeting on January 6, 1951, the CPD sowed the seeds of its own failure by refusing to recognize the wholly inadequate nature of the committee to the task ahead. The purpose of this meeting of the CPD’s Executive Committee was a reassessment of
the organization’s role in the unfolding national debate. Even though they made some important changes, they did not go far enough. It was at this meeting that the committee enshrined its elite based strategy. While elites have traditionally influenced foreign policy decisions, securing political support for UMS required a crescendo of public support that Congress could not ignore. At the very least, the CPD needed to create the appearance of such public support. A grass-roots strategy, similar to that employed by the CMP, which utilized regional foreign policy associations and local press, was more appropriate to this task than the CPD’s elite strategy.

From the start the CPD decided to keep the number of members to a relatively small number. Membership was by invitation only. By relying solely on the reputation of its elite members, the radical nature of the committee’s policies required a significant public relations effort to carry its message to the American public. When the Senate started debating the idea of UMS in early 1951, thousands of Americans had voiced their disapproval of the measure in writing. The CPD remained ill-equipped to meet this delicate challenge. Although the Executive Committee assured Voorhees that he would not be “handicapped by any question of funds,” the CPD’s campaigns were largely ineffective.

Voorhees put together a small staff including Carroll Kilpatrick, the former head of the San Francisco Chronicle’s Washington Office, as his assistant. Louis Lyons, the head of the Nieman Foundation of journalism at Harvard, agreed to spend three days a week in Washington providing public relations advice to the committee. William E.

193 *Newsweek*, Vol. 37, January 1, 15, 1951
Sanborn and cartoonist Munro Leaf rounded out the day-to-day staff of the committee. Voorhees decided against employing a public relations firm to aid the CPD. This proved to be a blunder, as the small, part-time team could not match the services of a professional public relations firm. Consequently, the quality of the committee’s publicity efforts suffered.

The Executive Committee failed to tackle problems related to the committee’s membership and scope. It established a host of specific policy subcommittees to give it the appearance of having a wide range of interests, but in reality these subcommittees rarely met and had little or no impact. Though they often discussed how to spread its message to the widest possible audience, the CPD never considered a much broader, national organization. As a result, the members continually worried that the committee had the appearance of being a Northeastern, elite organization. Indeed, its refusal to consider a grass-roots element further alienated the CPD from the administration. The CPD failed to respond to prodding from Francis Russell of the State Department’s Office of Public Affairs to adopt the model of the CMP in order to “both mold public opinion and also give expression to public opinion which already exists.” In fairness, Voorhees did not have the resources to recruit sufficient nationwide support in a quick enough time for a broader committee. The time wasted deliberating over the Pentagon’s position on UMS made this impossible.

194 Notes of Action Taken at Committee Meeting, January 6, 1951, Box H, Tab P, CPDC, TSV Papers.
195 TSV Memorandum, January 24, 1951, Office File # 23, CPDC, TSV Papers.
196 Ibid.
197 Casey, Selling the Korean War, 187.
Several members raised concerns regarding the need for greater geographical and professional diversity in the organization. They eventually decided that the committee was “too largely Republican,” and that they should consider more Democrats for membership. They also expressed a preference for business figures over the inclusion of anymore college presidents. The decision that they needed “one more prominent Roman Catholic, and if possible an Italian” demonstrated that the committee’s commitment to diversity was purely cosmetic.\textsuperscript{198} In February, they discussed the need to include some women and labor leaders. While they invited several women to join, the only female member was Robert Patterson’s widow, who took her late husband’s place in May, 1952 at a time when the CPD was largely inactive.\textsuperscript{199} Both David Dubinsky, the president of the influential International Ladies Garment Workers Union, and Arthur Goldberg, the General Counsel for the CIO, eventually joined demonstrating a strong labor support for the CPD’s program. Here, the CPD had ready made structures through which it could have built up mass public support for its policies, but once again the committee’s members refused to take advantage of the opportunity in front of them.\textsuperscript{200}

Despite an initial decision against establishing local or regional committees, a later concession made to one of the most active members, movie mogul Samuel Goldwyn, led to his establishment of a California Committee on the Present Danger. As a result, the Executive Committee approved for an increase of the overall membership to a

\textsuperscript{198} Notes of Action Taken at Committee Meeting January 6, Dated January 8, 1951, BOX I, Tab XX, TSV Papers.

\textsuperscript{199} Memorandum from Tracy S. Voorhees to the Members of the Committee on the Present Danger and to the Members of the California Committee, May 8, 1952.

\textsuperscript{200} Confidential List of Proposed Members, February 16, 1951, Office File No. 30, CPDC, TSV Papers.
paltry one hundred members. The California Committee remained subordinate to the CPD and did not represent an attempt at grass-roots campaigning.  

The CPD leadership encouraged the members to take any opportunity to speak publicly on behalf of the committee. Speeches given by CPD members, however, such as J. Robert Oppenheimer’s address to the University Club in New York, or Voorhees’s address to the United Council on World Affairs, too often occurred at events with a limited public exposure. Executive Committee member Julius Ochs Adler ensured that the New York Times reported the CPD’s activities and that the paper’s editorial pages provided a supportive tone to the committee and its message. This allowed the CPD to reach a sizeable audience with relative ease. New York Times readers, however, did not generally need convincing that internationalism was the way forward. Furthermore, the paper often buried the coverage of the committee in the back of the paper. The CPD’s failure to connect with local newspapers around the country represented another missed opportunity to increase its reach.

The most extensive manner in which the CPD conveyed its message was through a series of radio broadcasts that ran for the duration of the Great Debate and into early June. The first CPD broadcast occurred on the NBC network on February 7, after “very favorable” arrangements made by Stanley Resor and his associate Joseph Boyle. Resor first mooted the idea for this broadcast in late January as a means to bolster public

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201 TSV Memorandum, February 16, 1951, BOX H, Tab P, CPDC, TSV Papers. The Committee’s membership never reached this high. The main CPD reached a membership of around fifty-five, and a further forty joined the California CPD.

202 Notes of Talk given by J. Robert Oppenheimer, June 7, 1951, CPD Folder, Edward R. Murrow Papers, Notes of Address June, 14, 1951, Tab DD, CPDC, TSV Papers.
support for the impending report from Eisenhower to Congress on the European military situation. Earlier in the month Conant had issued a statement to the press in support of Eisenhower’s fact-finding mission in Europe, but now with the political atmosphere increasingly tense, Resor advised that the situation required a more forceful demonstration of the committee’s position and support for Ike. Initially reluctant, Conant delivered a forceful call for UMS. Conant’s suggestion that initiating UMS would bring the United States closer to the rather uninspiring goal of a “global stalemate” dampened the rhetoric and overall quality of the message. Once again, the *New York Times* provided the CPD with follow up coverage, but as usual not on the front page.\(^{203}\)

Following this broadcast, the Mutual Broadcasting System (MBS) contacted the CPD about making its network available on Sunday evenings, for a period of six or seven weeks, to make presentations on “issues which the committee feels require better public understanding.” Listenership records for these broadcasts do not exist, but the size of the MBS network, with over five hundred affiliates nationwide, suggests that they allowed the CPD to reach far beyond its initial target audience of *New York Times* readers.

The CPD carried out thirteen MBS broadcasts beginning on March 4 with Vannevar Bush speaking on “The Atomic Bomb and the Defense of the Free World,” and finishing on June 3, with Conant deliberately repeating the same message in “The Defense of the Free World in the Atomic Age.” Voorhees had informed MBS from an early point that they would “stop the programs while they were still good.” Fearing listener drop off in the summer months and believing that by June they would have “told

\(^{203}\) *New York Times*, February 8, 1951, 10; Memorandum, January 24, 1951, Office File # 23, Memorandum, January 31, 1951, CPDC, TSV Papers.
the story as effectively as we can,” the CPD had always intended that Conant’s second address would be the series finale.204

Though the CPD remained enamored with its efforts, the quality of the broadcasts varied greatly. Availability and public stature often determined the lineup of speakers. The topics covered tended to be at the speaker’s discretion, rather than the committee’s. In regular progress reports, Voorhees revealed the ad-hoc manner in which the Executive Committee chose speakers and the lack of central editorial control over the subject matter. In these reports, Voorhees was only able to reveal assumptions about what topic upcoming speakers would lecture on. Although this allowed the CPD a certain amount of freedom to react to political developments, it was the committee’s fear of entering the political fray that prevented it from orchestrating a more coordinated media campaign. As a result the committee picked topics that would not involve the CPD directly in partisan issues and effectively diminished its ability to influence the outcome of the major political debates of the time.205

When the committee considered publishing the transcripts, Edward R. Murrow provided the Executive Committee with comments on each of the broadcasts. Murrow labeled Bush’s opener as the “key address of the series,” and thought that while James Phinney Baxter’s address, entitled “The Danger Within and Without,” represented the “best of the series,” Baxter’s low profile dented its impact. Murrow described William L.

204 Memorandum, April 13, 1951, Further Progress Report on the Series of Radio Addresses, Office File # 58, CPDC, TSV Papers.

205 Memorandum, February 16, 1951, Office File # 30, CPDC, TSV Papers, Memorandum, April 13, 1951, Further Progress Report on the Series of Radio Addresses, Office File # 58, CPDC, TSV Papers.
Clayton’s delivery of his talk, on “The Road to Peace,” as “not good,” and several of the other broadcasts received the comment “I support omitting this entirely.” Despite this criticism, the leadership remained pleased with the broadcasts, whose success may have had more to do with the stature of the speakers than the content of the speeches. An indication of this was the decision to leave one spot open should Bing Crosby join the committee.\textsuperscript{206}

On April 17, the CPD published what was amazingly its only major newspaper advertisement. With the country gripped by the controversy created by Truman’s dismissal of General Douglas MacArthur, the steering committee appointed to approve all CPD media activities feared that the American public might forget the Universal Military Service and Training Bill making its way through Congress at that time. For this task, Stanley Resor put the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency at the service of the steering committee; however the performance was not greatly improved. Made up of Vannevar Bush, John Lord O’Brien, William Marbury, Voorhees and Conant, this subcommittee approved a full-page text advertisement that presented the CPD’s, rather than the Pentagon’s, view of the bill.

Warning Americans that “this week Congress is deciding the future of our armed forces,” the committee chose text that highlighted its hope that this bill would provide a system of service and not just training. They suggested that the United States could only avoid further war if it created “adequate forces to man the weapons,” which could best be done by implementing UMS. Failing to realize that they had missed the boat, the CPD

\textsuperscript{206} Notes on Transcripts of CPD Broadcasts on MBS, Committee on the Present Danger File, Edward R. Murrow Papers, Memorandum, April 3, 1951, Box I, Tab XX, CPDC, TSV Papers.
presented four provisions they deemed essential. The first was acceptance that the law should clearly provide for UMS; the second was the establishment of eighteen years of age as the ideal entrance point into the system; and the third called for a removal of the ceiling on the military of four million personnel. The fourth revealed a late admission by the CPD that a system of training might have some worth, but only “for later use.” They called on citizens to wire the chairs of the Senate and House Armed Services Committees, Richard B. Russell and Carl Vinson, to urge that the bill that emerged from the conference committee reflect these positions.  

The advertisement, which appeared in fifteen newspapers, all in major cities, confirmed the growing divide between the committee and the administration. That the committee could only get the advertisement placed on page twenty-eight of the New York Times, its most sympathetic publication, further demonstrated the inadequate nature of the CPD’s use of the media. Even with Resor’s help, the CPD’s quarter page advertisement towards the back of the paper did not compare well with the full page editorial on page twenty-one of the same edition, written by the publisher Basil Brewer, that lambasted Truman’s treatment of Douglas MacArthur as a “Shameless Betrayal.”

The CPD made other attempts at reaching out to the public, but none of them could have given it the influence and role which past studies have indicated. Two notable examples of the CPD’s attempts to employ a media campaign demonstrated the typical failure of the committee’s elite strategy. The first, a pamphlet produced by Munro Leaf

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which depicted a cartoon character of an ostrich entitled “The Danger of Burying Our Head in the Sand,” which although produced to a highly professional standard, immediately negated its impact in the new television age through the choice of the outdated medium of the pamphlet and the limited print run of the pamphlet to some 50,000 copies. The second was a March of Time documentary based on Vannevar Bush’s well received book *Modern Arms and Free Men*. On March 21, at the offices of the Carnegie Institute, the CPD sponsored a premier viewing and although those present received the film well, it did not get a wide release and once again the CPD missed an opportunity to make its message count. 209

The CPD went to great lengths to deny the charges of being lobbyists, but the denials made little sense. These efforts included having Senator Alexander Smith enter a letter by Voorhees arguing against the claim into the *Congressional Record*. Voorhees’s claim that upon taking legal advice he, and only he, registered as a lobbyist did little to refute the claim. The considerable amount of testimony that the committee gave to Congress and the privileged access to the Pentagon’s policy process, sufficiently demonstrates the hollowness of the claim. Voorhees argued that he had registered out of an “abundance of caution,” but the argument had little merit. The committee’s counsel, John Lord O’Brian, argued that Federal Regulation of Lobbying Act did not require its registration as the committee’s members were unpaid. Voorhees, however, still registered. 210


For the most part, the critics of the CPD came from the right of the conservative movement. The conservative media, particularly the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Washington Times-Herald*, ran regular opinion pieces denouncing the committee, its membership, and its message. Senator Everett Dirksen (R. Il.) and Congressman John T. Wood (R. Id.) led the criticism of the CPD in Congress. Dirksen lambasted the CPD as “salesmen” pitching the same similar internationalist “bill of goods” that had led the United States into World War II, and had sold the American people the Marshall Plan with the promise that it would “stop Communism.” Dirksen declared that the CPD was a “professional lobby,” which contained members of the pre-World War II Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies, who still had the “same determination to put America on the road to disaster.” In rather alarming tones, Wood argued that such internationalists should be recognized “for what they are – potential traitors to the United States.”

### Away on Mount Olympus: The Fallacy and Foolishness of Non-Partisanship

Arthur M. Schlesinger Sr. made the most insightful criticism of the CPD when he wrote that “until the CPD is willing to descend from Olympus and mix in the fray” it would never achieve its goals. Key liberal constituencies, including the Americans for Democratic Action, trade unions, and senior Truman administration figures, supported the CPD’s objectives, but the committee’s consistent refusal to take hard positions on

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211 *Congressional Record*, April 4, 1951, 3271; *Congressional Record*, February 8, 1951, A668.

important partisan matters that posed a greater threat to American internationalism than any differences on military manpower policy. By staying “non-partisan” on such issues as McCarthyism, the furore over Truman’s dismissal of MacArthur, and partisan Republican attacks on Dean Acheson, the CPD reduced its overall moral authority. Although acting in a partisan way threatened to undermine the bi-partisan support the committee sought, by refusing to support the beleaguered Truman administration in matters where the CPD held a similar position, the committee missed important opportunities to demonstrate its usefulness. In turn, this would have helped win the backing of key administration personnel for its policies – a more important first step in securing its goals. Once again the committee’s decision to remain as an “elite pressure group” influenced this strategy and, as a result, further diminished its capability to secure public support for the internationalist cause. Voorhees argued that getting involved in these issues could doom the consensus amongst the membership to act in other areas, but this did not mesh with Conant’s position that there was “never any question but that ours was a temporary organization.” As the CPD never planned for a long existence avoiding these issues made little sense.213

The CPD’s attitude toward the controversy created by Truman’s decision to dismiss MacArthur demonstrated that the frustration between the CPD and the administration went both ways. Already disappointed that the CPD had not branched out into a grass-roots organization, the Truman administration lost any remaining faith in the CPD as a valuable public relations force. Truman’s White House aide, Ken Hechler

213 Casey, Selling the Korean War, 189; Hershberg, From Harvard to Hiroshima 507; Conant, My Several Lives, 519.
argued that “it was generally agreed that the CPD, consisting of people who are only interested in a high-level approach, was totally inadequate” for the administration’s needs. The determination from the CPD that the MacArthur issue was “all politics” further exasperated the Truman administration.²¹⁴

As the tension between Truman and MacArthur built up in late March and threatened to divert attention from the “troops for Europe” issue, Voorhees issued a statement on behalf of the CPD to try and refocus the debate. The statement reiterated the committee’s belief that the most pressing question facing the country was “how best to defend the United States,” and that these issues were in danger of being “obscured by an unnecessary question as to the respective constitutional powers of the president and Congress.”²¹⁵

A day after the successful vote in the Senate on the troop issue, House minority leader, Joseph Martin, read an incendiary letter from MacArthur in which he proposed escalating the Korean War in direct opposition to the wishes of President Truman. MacArthur indirectly repudiated the plan to send American troops to Europe, by saying that in Asia, “we fight Europe’s war with arms, while the diplomats there still fight it with words.” In a clear attack on the President, MacArthur claimed in an interview that day that the administration’s Korean policies “would be ludicrous if men’s lives were not

²¹⁴ Ken Hechler, Memo of meeting at Barriere’s, quoted in Steven Casey, Selling the Korean War, 243.

²¹⁵ CPD Statement, March 31, 1951, Tab Z, TSV Papers.
involved.” This was the final straw and Truman duly fired him. Even George Marshall conceded “that the general should have been relieved two or three years ago.”

During this time much internal debate occurred amongst the CPD membership on how the committee should handle the matter. Voorhees produced a memorandum entitled “Areas of Agreement in the MacArthur Controversy.” Here he optimistically viewed the potential for consensus building created by the controversy. Voorhees argued that MacArthur’s own positions “fortified” more areas of agreement than division. He described MacArthur’s farewell address to a joint-session of Congress as an “antidote to the spirit of complacency about our nation’s danger.” Had MacArthur not agreed to “just fade away,” Voorhees may not have been so optimistic.

Voorhees approved of MacArthur’s labeling of the struggle with Communism in global terms, and hoped that the general’s internationalism and popularity in the Republican Party would help put an end to the resurgent neo-isolationism. How the CPD should proceed, however, was not clear. It was no surprise that the committee chose to release a formal Statement of Objectives on April 5 – just after the Senate vote on the troop issue and Martin’s revelation of MacArthur’s letter threatened to divert attention from the victory over the neo-isolationists. The first three objectives, of a total of eight, clearly related to the controversy and the CPD’s positions on it. The first called for an “American public opinion” that supported the defense of Europe “without the neglect of


217 Tracy S. Voorhees, Memorandum on Areas of Agreement in the MacArthur Controversy, April 26, 1951, Tab Y, TSV Papers, Weintraub, MacArthur’s War, 5.
the Far East.” Demonstrating where the committee’s priorities lay, the second called for “firm support” of Eisenhower’s mission as commander of NATO forces in Europe. In a call for unity, in typical CPD language, the third demanded that “political differences at home” should not “obscure our vision of the Soviet menace.”

Samuel Goldwyn, the chair of the California CPD, wrote a letter to Voorhees that sparked further internal debate on the MacArthur question. Goldwyn argued that the crisis risked diverting attention from the “present danger” and prevented the nation from “uniting for other important common objectives.” He proposed that the committee take out an advertisement to remind the American people of the fundamental areas of agreement that existed and encourage support for a policy of providing European defense. Goldwyn finished off by saying that he saw no reason why such a proposal should spark disunity amongst the committee membership, and that splitting the membership was “furthest from my thoughts.”

All the members who responded to Goldwyn’s letter largely agreed with its sentiment, but there was some caution over his suggestion that the CPD could take the lead on the issue. Edward R. Murrow sent Goldwyn the strongest reply of support. Despite a lack of coherent Far East policy, he maintained that after “full and public debate and senatorial action,” the United States must fulfill its “solemn and national commitments” to Western Europe. Murrow revealed his Europe-first inclination when he declared that “if such a proposal would split the committee then I say let’s split it.”

Regarding those members who had “been caught up in the MacArthur hysteria” and had

218 CPD Statement of Objectives, April 5, 1951, Tab S, TSV Papers.

219 Letter from Samuel Goldwyn to Tracy S. Voorhees, April 21, 1951, Ibid.
forgotten “where the main interest lies and where the solemn commitments have been made” he suggested the CPD was “better off without them.”\textsuperscript{220} In a statement that typified the committee’s timidity, Robert Cutler, an investment banker and former Assistant to the Secretary of Defense, argued that any attempt to take on MacArthur beyond the vague sentiments of the committee’s statement of March 31 would gain nothing but “mudslinging, brickbats, and wind” from the powerful forces aligned with the general.\textsuperscript{221}

The CPD continued to hold out hope on UMS until June when, just before departing for a two-month overseas trip, James Conant sent a memorandum to the CPD members. Here he first pointed to the positive by noting that “official American policy toward the defense of Europe has moved in the direction sought by this committee.” On the issue of UMS he recognized the committee’s “complete defeat,” and warned of the prospect of complacency should the Korean War end. In this event he suggested that “a few of the simple propositions we have put forward can well stand repeating.” Despite his disappointment at the defeat on UMS, Conant told the members that the fight “was well worth the while,” as the support of numerous educators for the concept of an armed forces of three-to-four million men meant that “as far as one segment of public opinion is concerned, the committee has succeeded in its educational campaign.” Conant had not

\textsuperscript{220} Letter from Edward R. Murrow to Samuel Goldwyn, April 27, 1951, CPD Folder, Edward R. Murrow Papers.

\textsuperscript{221} Letter from Robert Cutler to Samuel Goldwyn, April 25, 1951, Tab Y, TSV Papers.
started the CPD to educate academics on the need for UMS. Considering this, it is surprising that he did not recognize the committee’s overall failure. 222

It is clear that the claims made by Jerry Sanders and others that the CPD played a crucial role during the debates of 1951 do not stand up to scrutiny. While the CPD were an active force, it is doubtful that they played the key role in turning the tide in favor of the Truman administration. The committee’s main political opponent on the key issue of the European troop deployment, Robert Taft, had indicated his willingness to support the administration’s plan some time before the crucial vote in April. In a private conversation with Dwight Eisenhower the Ohio Senator repeatedly stated that he did not know whether he would vote for “four divisions, or six divisions, or two divisions.” This left Eisenhower convinced that Taft was playing politics with the issue. As a result, Eisenhower tore up a statement intended to disavow attempts to draft him for the presidency; something Taft would dearly have liked. That Taft seemed willing to consider as many as six divisions when the administration eventually settled on four confirms that the fight for the troop deployment did not need the CPD’s input and that Taft had used the Great Debate as an opportunity to tout his previously weak foreign policy credentials. 223

By the summer of 1951, both the Truman administration and the CPD were exasperated with each other’s timidity. The Pentagon and State were disappointed that the CPD refused to move beyond its elite strategy and develop a broad, national, grass-

222 Memorandum to the Members of the Committee on the Present Danger, July 11, 1950, Office File # 90, CPDC, TSV Papers.

roots network of like minded citizens. The CPD believed that the Pentagon had compromised too much in its manpower legislation and had misled the committee from the beginning on its commitment to UMS. Although the CPD may have been the most vocal supporter of internationalism outside of anyone in political office, its efforts were insufficient to make anything more than a small impact. Bush’s documentary did not receive a wide audience, and Munro Leaf’s cartoon ostrich provided an unwelcome metaphor for the Truman administration’s attitude to the Great Debate and for the CPD’s elite-centered campaigns.
CONCLUSION: DANGERS PRESENTED

In the August, 2004 edition of the New Yorker magazine, journalist Nicholas Lemann described the 1950s Committee on the Present Danger as “so far back in time that nobody remembers it accurately.” Leman wrote his piece, “Dangers Present,” in response to a “reconstituted” CPD that emerged in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Another re-incarnation of the CPD had appeared in 1976, when NSC-68 author Paul Nitze set up a committee for neoconservative, foreign policy activists, unhappy at the direction of U.S. foreign policy during the period of Détente. That these committees deliberately adopted the Committee on the Present Danger moniker is noteworthy, particularly considering Leman’s accurate assertion regarding the popular memory of the original CPD.224

The central argument of this thesis is that while an active force during the Great Debate, the CPD’s role in determining the path of American Cold War policy although undeterminable, was at best minimal. That the CPD had some influence is certain, but just how much is not clear. What is apparent is that had they adopted a grass-roots element, aggressively tackled McCarthyite attacks on the internationalist foreign policy agenda, and provided political support for Truman’s dismissal of Douglas MacArthur its influence would surely have been greater.

James Hershberg asserted that the CPD, with a membership network that extended to all levels of the elite echelons of American government, industry, and society, was the epitome of C. Wright Mills’ “power elite.” Yet, the strategy the committee adopted meant that, aside from the radio addresses and a small program of pamphleting, the CPD rarely reached beyond an elite or middle-class audience. Moreover, its refusal to tackle political issues head on meant that a different Mills’ label, “NATO intellectuals,” suited the CPD better.225

Based on Gallup polls which revealed strong public support for universal military training, it is fair to say that the American public would have supported the introduction of the CPD’s principal proposition of universal military service. As Aaron Friedberg has noted no matter how subtle or major the difference, “to most people conscription was still conscription.” Even the difference between UMT and UMS failed to resonate on a meaningful level. In the end it was service by compulsion, “even if it involved only a year or six months of dull and grueling training in the United States, instead of two or three years of potentially dangerous overseas military service.” Yet, Congress repeatedly dashed any attempt to introduce such a system and instead preferred a continuation of selective service with widespread deferments.226


226 George H. Gallup, The Gallup Poll, Public Opinion 1935-1971, Vol. II 1949-1958, (New York: Random House, 1972), 951, 984. On December 11, 1950, 64% of respondents replied yes to the question “In the future, do you think every able bodied young man (who has not already been in the armed forces) should be required to take some type of military or naval training for two years?” In a May 25, 1951 poll, 60% favored having “every young man” serve two years in the armed forces and a 18% favored one year. These polls show that a large section of the American public supported the sentiment of universal military training or service. It is not clear, however, if the measure had been enacted that the favorable sentiment
The CPD’s reluctance and ultimate refusal to pursue a strategy based on rousing grass-roots support allowed Congress to ignore the committee and its plans for UMS. The ability to reconcile the contradictory attitudes of the American public and the U.S. Congress eluded the CPD and demonstrated the limited influence of a purely elite citizens committee. The media utilized by the CPD, such as the *New York Times* and college commencement addresses, demonstrated how the committee concentrated its efforts on the “articulate, news-following, vote casting, middle- and upper-class public.” The committee’s efforts, however, were too often directed at audiences that already supported the same policies.²²⁷

The CPD point-blank refused to follow in the footsteps of the highly successful CMP. This decision seems even stranger when the crossover of personnel between the two committees is considered, as senior CPD members including James Conant and Robert Patterson played significant roles in the CMP’s success. While the CPD charted a more independent path from the government than the CMP had, the same administration figures who had helped the CMP, Dean Acheson, Robert Lovett, and George Marshall, were still working for the Truman administration, albeit in different roles. All three were initially willing to aid the CPD, but on the administration’s terms. The consultation process carried out by Tracy Voorhees from September through November 1950, convinced the committee members that their policies, particularly UMS, offered the only

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way for the United States to meet the “present danger” posed by the Soviet Union. Unlike the CMP, the CPD sought to make national security policy and not just promote it.

Conant had the CPD pursue UMS over other manpower solutions for two reasons. He believed that a system of training offered little benefit to national security or to the trainees who would more than likely need retraining in the event of a war. Conant viewed the concept of a universal burden as vital. He argued that Selective Service, and the system of deferments that went with it, was only viable when the country faced all out war. Unless this was the case the country would “face serious outbreaks of disloyalty among the young,” as during peacetime or a limited engagement the system was inherently unfair, undemocratic, and therefore un-American. Conant believed that the draft evasion and rioting that accompanied the Vietnam War resulted from the failure to adopt the CPD’s program in the 1950s. Despite this deep-seated conviction that the United States needed a military manpower system that spread the burden in a universal and democratic fashion, as chairman of the CPD Conant did not deem it necessary to campaign for its adoption with a similar approach.

Conant’s opinion that the implementation of UMS was important to avoid serious fractures in American society led him to believe that the CPD had erred badly in agreeing to the AAU’s plan for limited deferments. Furthermore, it was clear that in endorsing the administration’s 1951 manpower legislation they had badly compromised on these principles. This conviction led Conant to suggest in the aftermath of the defeat on UMS that the CPD should simply disband. Eventually, the members decided against this course of action but a distinctive change in approach marked the remainder of the committee’s
existence as they were unwilling to compromise any further by openly promoting any Truman administration policies that they did not fully agree with. For the most part, the CPD’s activities after the summer of 1951 involved compiling reports supporting foreign aid provisions based on sources provided by the Pentagon and the CFR. They never again went out on a limb for the administration and operated largely behind-the-scenes. 228

These arguments regarding the CPD raise several important questions which require answers if we are to understand why two later generations of conservative, elite, Americans adopted the moniker of a failed organization. Nicholas Lemann’s comment regarding the popular memory of the CPD is instructive here. On the one hand, both re-incarnations of the CPD appear to have many similar characteristics of the original committee. Yet, they each operated in different foreign policy climates a generation or more apart from one another, thus making any comparisons somewhat superficial. Ironically, the most striking similarity is the recurrence of the same element that ultimately hindered the original CPD’s ability to influence public opinion. This, of course, was a reliance on an elite focused strategy and an aversion to grass-roots opinion making. Therefore the depiction of the original CPD’s influence in historical literature is misleading partly because, as Leman asserts, the accuracy of historical memory has failed us. The depiction of the CPD as either the crucial factor in the Great Debate, or as a sinister organization determined to militarize and expand the Cold War, has come about because historians have either failed to ask, or insufficiently answered the following questions.

If by the summer of 1951 the CPD program was a failure, why did they continue for two more years?

The answer here is relatively simple. Although disappointed, the CPD’s members did not believe they had acted in vain during the Great Debate. As this thesis demonstrates, the CPD’s major motivation for acting was the resurgence and political viability of isolationist sentiment at the end of 1950. Nonetheless, the CPD’s concern regarding the threat posed by aggressive, international Communism was genuine. While the Great Debate may have sounded the last hurrah of isolationism, the danger posed by the Soviet Union was still a present one. The authors of NSC-68 determined that 1954 represented the key year by which time the USSR would be in a position to take direct offensive action in the Cold War. Accordingly, many members, including Voorhees and Patterson, believed the CPD still had a role to play.

On numerous occasions the members debated the value of continuing with the committee. In 1952, the organization’s lynch-pin, Tracy Voorhees, wanted to resign in order to take a position in Eisenhower’s campaign for the presidency. Only Conant’s conviction that the former Under Secretary of the Army could do more good by staying with the CPD prevented Voorhees from leaving – an event which by itself would have marked the end of the committee.229

A meeting in December 1952 with President-elect Eisenhower turned out to be the last official act of the CPD. Much publicity had accompanied Eisenhower’s invitation

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229 Memorandum, “Possible future courses for the Committee,” September 25, 1951, Office File # 102; Notes of CPD meeting, October 24, 1951, O.F. # 107; Notes for meeting with Judge Patterson, November 29, 1951, Box I, Tab LL; Memorandum, re Continuance of Committee, February 11, 1952, OF #110; Memorandum re February 11 Memo, OF # 111; Tracy S. Voorhees to Dwight Eisenhower, September 29, 1952, TAB SS, CPDC, TSV Papers.
to the CPD to discuss national security policy, but the speculation did not suggest that after this meeting the CPD would come to an end. In the interim between receiving the invitation and attending the meeting, the CPD members collaborated to write a detailed position paper once again arguing for the implementation of UMS. The basic context of the paper was that the Universal Military Training and Service Act of 1951, so loathed by the CPD when it passed, actually provided a legal loophole for the president to use an executive order to introduce UMS. Conant’s suggestion at the meeting that the CPD “might no longer be necessary” came from a belief widely held amongst the membership that Eisenhower’s election would ensure the implementation of much, if not all, of their agenda. The irony of course is that Eisenhower’s New Look implemented policies that were anathema to everything the CPD had supported. Immediately after their meeting ended, Conant accepted an offer to go to Germany in the position of High Commissioner on a four-year appointment, thus effectively bringing the Committee on the Present Danger to an end.230

*Why do the CPD members look back on their experiences with the CPD so fondly?*

For the most part the CPD membership included former government officials or individuals who had played major roles during World War II and the early Cold War. The CPD gave them an opportunity to feel involved once again. Instead of advocating through other active groups such as the CFR, or the AAU, establishing a specific committee gave them a special purpose. Cold War historian John Lewis Gaddis recently noted that

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“people who live through great events are rarely the best judges of their lasting significance.” It is important to keep this in mind when examining the personal viewpoints of the CPD’s leaders, particularly Conant and Voorhees, regarding the committee’s overall impact.231

The CPD had its greatest success in providing a visible opposition to the resurgence of isolationist sentiment when the Truman administration was found wanting in this regard. Even though the CPD’s publicity campaigns were of limited quality and reached a narrow audience, they made the committee one of the most vocal defenders of the internationalist agenda during the Great Debate. When the Chicago Tribune, the Washington Times Herald, and political figures including Everett Dirksen and John T. Wood, took shots at the CPD they relished the fight as an opportunity to promote internationalist engagement, particularly in Western Europe, as the best means to avoid World War III. The attacks typically described the CPD as “salesmen” pitching the same internationalist “bill of goods” that had led the United States into World War II and sold Americans the Marshall Plan with the promise that it would “stop Communism.” Dirksen, in rather animated tones, portrayed the CPD as a “professional lobby,” determined “to put America on the road to disaster.” The Washington Times Herald editorialized that the “real danger” facing the United States was in “letting the CPD have even the slightest influence on U.S. policy.”232


232 Congressional Record, February 8, 1951, A668; Ibid., April 4, 1951, 3271; Washington Times-Herald, February 13, 1951, from clippings in Tab BBB, CPDC, TSV Papers.
These attacks and the deteriorating situation in the Korean War severely diminished the public relations effectiveness of many senior foreign policy figures in the administration, including Dean Acheson and to an extent the president himself. The CPD believed, however, that these crises would “do us some good in the long run if handled properly.” When tipped off about Everett Dirksen’s planned attack on its support for UMS and the European troop deployment, they viewed it as a chance to “strike a fresh blow for Eisenhower’s mission.” The CPD’s performances, however, rarely lived up to this rhetoric.233

In his memoirs, James Conant, the intellectual heart of the CPD, wrote that he “always cherished the thought that the Committee on the Present Danger by its statements and the broadcasts of several members played an important part” in shaping public opinion on the important foreign policy issues of the day. This is a sentiment shared by Voorhees in the rudimentary history of the committee he prepared for Conant’s use when writing his memoirs. The CPD’s consistent reluctance, however, to get involved in political battles that did not directly involve its specific policy issues prevented it from playing the critical role that the CPD leaders and Jerry Sanders assigned to it. Although most liberal supporters of the Truman administration, from Americans for Democratic Action and the Association of American Universities to the labor unions, were generally sympathetic to the CPD’s objectives, they were critical of the committee’s insistence on remaining “non-partisan.” The CPD did so out of a belief that anything else would fracture the consensus within the organization and prevent it from operating effectively. As a result they avoided the contentious issues of German re-

233 Robert Cutler to Senator Leverett Saltonstall, May 31, 1951, Tab CC, CPDC, TSV Papers.
armament, McCarthyism, and the political fall out of Truman’s dismissal of General Douglas MacArthur. This approach may have kept the committee intact, but it severely limited its usefulness and further antagonized the State Department who deemed its high-level approach as “totally inadequate.”

Why do other studies credit the CPD with playing such an important role?

It is important to note that few studies of the Cold War, the Great Debate, or NSC-68, credit the CPD with playing a major role. Those that do fail to provide sufficient evidence of how the CPD influenced the direction of U.S. national security policy. These studies, including those of Jerry Sanders, Samuel F. Wells, and James Hershberg mistake the level of the CPD’s activity for influence. In essence this boils down to a classic example of the logical fallacy of post hoc ergo propter hoc – loosely translated as after this, therefore because of it. It is unmerited to surmise that simply because the CPD advocated on behalf of NSC-68 that its activity was responsible for its implementation.

Wells’s argument that the CPD provided a “tocsin” for the American public in the same way NSC-68 had for the government is correct insofar as both deliberately oversold the Soviet threat. It fails to account, however, for the fact that the American public was generally well aware of this threat as the politically charged atmosphere of 1951 arrived without the aid of the CPD or NSC-68. As such, Jerry Sanders’ contention that the CPD’s campaigns were “superfluous at best, incendiary at worst” is not completely without merit. Indeed, Steven Casey argues the Truman administration held back in promoting

234 Ken Hechler, Memo of meeting at Barriere’s, quoted in Steven Casey, Selling the Korean War, 243.
the policies of NSC-68 as vigorously as the CPD had, because they feared “any such
effort to accentuate the danger could easily backfire, particularly by sparking domestic
pressure for a dangerous escalation of the Cold War.” 235

In “Sounding the Tocsin,” Wells argued that the CPD ceased operations as “all its
important policy recommendations, save only the institution of universal military service,
had become government policy” is misleading in two important ways. First, the failure on
UMS continued to haunt the CPD, and Conant in particular, right up until its final
meetings. Second, these policy recommendations did not originate with the CPD and
their implementation had much more to do with other factors unrelated to the committee,
including the Truman administration’s “deliberate rejection of a psychological scare
campaign.”236

As two organizations have since adopted the title of Committee on the Present
Danger and both claimed to continue its legacy, understanding the original CPD and the
extent of its influence on the Cold War is important for our understanding of how the role
of American elites in the development of foreign policy has evolved. The original CPD
members believed that they continued a distinctly American tradition of political
participation and organization through citizens committees. Yet, the manner in which
they interpreted that tradition had important ramifications for their ability to influence the
political debates of their time.

While the CPD may not have had the impact they desired in the early 1950s, they
did inspire later generations of elite Americans to adopt a similar attitude to that


236 Ibid., 690.
presented by acclaimed cartoonist Munro Leaf in the pamphlet he produced for the CPD. Entitled “The Danger of Hiding Our Heads,” the pamphlet depicted an ostrich burying its head in mounds of earth marked fear, isolation, and disunity. Perhaps the most positive contribution of the CPD was to embody the message presented in the pamphlet:

“It is our duty to ourselves, and to our children to get our heads out of the sands of fear, isolation and partisan disunity and to really go to work in earnest on the task of building the strength which is needed for the foundation of our only real hope for peace.”

It is clear though, that the specific policies advocated by the CPD, particularly UMS, would have profoundly affected the nature of American society. It is unlikely that UMS would neither have enhanced U.S. national security anymore than the policies the Truman administration enacted, nor changed the outcome or duration of the Cold War. Opponents of peacetime military conscription believed that such a program ran “counter to American traditions, that it would corrupt the nation’s youth, disrupt their education, and contribute to the militarization of American society.” The CPD and its supporters argued that the failure to spread the burden of defending American freedom in a universal, and therefore democratic, and “American” manner, would ultimately do more harm to those traditions. Conant and Voorhees proceeded with the CPD project convinced that the alternatives on the table during the Great Debate would leave the United States alone in the world against International Communism. They never realized the irony of an elite organization, with a selective membership, advocating the idea that the burden of providing national security must fall on every American.

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The process of the Great Debate determined that “ultimately it was this dual compromise between the principles of liberty and equity, and between principles and political realities,” that determined how the United States operated in the Cold War. As Aaron Friedberg has noted, the great question regarding the expansion of the U.S. government and its power over American citizens during the Cold War is “not that it was so big, but why it was not bigger.” As such there is much truth in Nicholas Lemann’s reflection that the flawed popular memory of the CPD was “too bad, because it has a resonant and instructive history.”

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