

The Impact of NSC-68 on American Foreign Policy During the Cold War

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Following the end of World War II, the strenuous relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union, which had arisen due to the urgent need to counter the Nazi German threat during WWII, disintegrated and hostilities between the US and USSR erupted. The resulting post-WWII international order constituted a bipolar system, which was characterized by the establishment of the two superpowers of the capitalist USA and the communist USSR. This international order pitted the two superpowers against one another and launched the global competition for power and prestige, which would persist until the collapse of the USSR in December 1991, and the ensuing conclusion of the Cold War. This competition for global supremacy produces the question: what guided American foreign policy throughout the Cold War? This paper examines the policies and recommendations contained within the National Security Report 68 (NSC-68) and analyses how this document constituted the guiding framework for the US' foreign policy decisions throughout the Cold War. To demonstrate the connection between NSC-68 and American foreign policy in the Cold War, the paper begins by examining the content within NSC-68 and then proceeds to apply NSC-68's policies and recommendations to the decisions that America made during the Cold War, which include: the massive buildup of the US's military, the pursuit of containment, the development of the thermonuclear bomb, and finally the decision to enter Vietnam. Throughout these analyses, the paper asserts that the policies within NSC-68 constituted the principal guiding force behind American foreign policy decisions throughout the Cold War, regardless of the Party or President in power.

Introduction

Following the end of World War II there was a distinct shift in the global order marked by the creation of two superpowers: the USA and USSR. Unlike prior world orders, which had historically been composed of a balance of power between multiple states, after WWII power was divided in a bipolar fashion, pitting the socialist USSR against the capitalist USA. The creation of this bipolar world saw the rise of determination, on both sides, to dominate the other and spread their ideology on a global scale. This paper will demonstrate that the National Security Report 68's principal policies of containment, military expansion and foreign aid to the free world guided and influenced American foreign policy and American interactions with the

USSR throughout the Cold War and also brought the US into Vietnam. This essay will focus on the National Security Report 68's (NSC-68) influence on American foreign policy during the Cold War as well as NSC-68's connection to American military planning, which sought to contain communist expansion across the globe. This paper will first define NSC-68 and examine key policies within the document, then analyze the influence NSC-68 had on the creation of a new American foreign policy and finally examine how the application of NSC-68 in American foreign policy brought the US into the Vietnam War.

Definition of NSC-68

Following the victory of communist forces in China and the USSR's successful detonation of the atomic bomb, Secretary of State Dean Acheson tasked the Policy Planning Staff to review the United States' national security strategy.¹ Led by Paul Nitze, the Policy Planning Staff constructed NSC-68 based on their perceptions of the Kremlin's outlook and foreign policy behaviour.² The report was presented to President Truman on April 11th, 1950 and was approved as a statement of America's national policy for the next four-to-five years by the National Security Council on September 29th, 1950.³ NSC-68 entered into effect following Truman's approval on September 30th, 1950.⁴ The creators of NSC-68 examined the fundamental intentions of the Kremlin and the consequential conflict of values between the two superpowers, analyzed Soviet territorial intentions and capabilities in comparison with those of the United States and finally provided four

¹ Luke Fletcher, "The Collapse of the Western World: Acheson, Nitze, and the NSC68/Rearmament Decision," *Diplomatic History* 40, no.4 (2016): 750.

² Paul H. Nitze, *Forging The Strategy of Containment*, (Washington: National Defence University Press, 1994), 11.

³ Following the presentation of NSC-68 to President Truman on April 11, 1950, Truman submitted the paper to the National Security Council (NSC) for review. The review process ended on September 29 when the NSC approved NSC-68, Truman approved the decision on September 30, 1950. (Samuel F. Wells, "Sounding the Tocsin: NSC 68 and the Soviet Threat," *International Security* 4, no.2 (1979): 131.)

⁴ Wells, "Sounding the Tocsin," 138.

possible courses of action for the US to pursue.⁵ NSC-68 claimed the fundamental design of the Kremlin was to retain and solidify absolute power, initially within the Soviet Union itself and then in territories under its control; the report warned that the Kremlin's plan entailed the complete subversion of governments in countries outside of the Soviet world and their replacement with a government which was subservient to and controlled by the Kremlin.⁶ The authors of NSC-68 concluded that in order for the Kremlin to achieve its fundamental goals the US, as the principal centre of power in the non-Soviet world, must either be "subverted or destroyed."⁷ NSC-68 illustrated the nature of the Kremlin's policies towards areas that were not under its control; these policies required the elimination of resistance towards the will of the USSR and the extension of the Kremlin's influence and control.⁸ The authors of NSC-68 concluded that the Kremlin's strategic and tactical policies were affected by the Soviet concern towards the capabilities of the United States; the report stated that not only was the US the greatest obstacle impeding Soviet global domination but also the only power which could, through the use of force, destroy the USSR.⁹ NSC-68 provided four possible courses of action for the US to follow in the ongoing situation at the time. These were the following:

- a. Continuation of current policies, with current and currently projected programs for carrying out these policies;
- b. Isolation;
- c. War; and
- d. A more rapid building up of the political, economic, and military strength of the free world than provided under a, with the purpose of reaching, if possible, a tolerable state of order among nations without war and of preparing to defend ourselves in the event that the free world is attacked.¹⁰

⁵ National Security Council Report, NSC 68, "United States Objectives and Programs for National Security," History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive (1950), 44.

⁶ Ibid.6

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid. 13

⁹ National, "United States Objectives and Programs for National Security," 14.

¹⁰ Ibid., 44

The continuation of current policies, from the military point of view, would produce an American military which would become less and less effective as a war deterrent against the USSR. NSC-68 claimed that the improvement of state readiness was of urgent importance in order to prevent the USSR from launching war.¹¹ The Report stated that a buildup of American military strength was a precondition for the prevention of the spread of communism into the free world as well as the protection of the United States.¹² In regard to the option of isolation, NSC-68 stated that entering an isolated position would allow the USSR to dominate Eurasia without meeting armed resistance and thereby dwarf the United States in both power and size.¹³ NSC-68 predicted that in this scenario the USSR would use this new power to eliminate the power of the US and thus remove the obstacle to the Soviet's imposition of global supremacy.¹⁴ NSC-68 stated that there was no way for the US to make itself inoffensive to the USSR other than by complete surrender to its will; moreover, isolation would eventually condemn the US to either submit or to fight defensively, without allies and with significantly more limited offensive capabilities than that of the USSR.¹⁵ As for the possibility of war, NSC-68 stated that the ability of the US to conduct effective offensive operations was limited to the use of atomic weapons.¹⁶ NSC-68 claimed that although a powerful strike could be delivered on the USSR, it alone would neither force or persuade the Kremlin to surrender.¹⁷ The Report stated that, in this scenario, the Kremlin would still retain its ability to use the forces under its control to dominate Eurasia; furthermore, NSC-68 cautioned that this scenario would produce a long and difficult struggle, which would destroy freedom-loving people and the free institutions within Western Europe.¹⁸ The final course of action proposed within NSC-68 was that of a rapid buildup of political,

¹¹ Ibid., 49

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 52

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ National, "United States Objectives and Programs for National Security," 52.

¹⁶ Ibid., 53

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

economic, and military strength in the free world.¹⁹ This plan reflected the belief that the frustration of the Kremlin's plans required the free world to construct a functioning political and economic system and to pursue a political offensive against the USSR; moreover, in order to successfully develop a functioning political and economic system, the free world required a military shield to protect it from Soviet expansion.²⁰ The objective of this course of action was to postpone and avert the disastrous circumstances, which might arise in 1954 due to the USSR's predicted fission and thermonuclear capabilities, through the construction of a successful economic and political system that was supported by adequate military strength.²¹

The influence NSC-68 on American foreign policy

Following the adoption of NSC-68 by the National Security Council on September 29th, 1950, Truman approved the decision and ordered the executive departments and agencies within the U.S government to implement the study's conclusions into their policies.²² Although the National Security Council approved the conclusions of NSC-68 as a statement of policy to be followed for the next four-to-five years, NSC-68 continued to be vital factor in influencing American foreign policy throughout the duration of the Cold War. Rather than returning to a post-war isolationist foreign policy as it had following WWI the United States constructed a new foreign policy focused on the buildup of the American military, the containment of the expanding Soviet Union and the expansion of foreign aid towards Western Europe.

Following the adoption of NSC-68 in September of 1950, the recommendations contained within the document began to significantly influence President Truman's policies, particularly in regard to the rapid buildup of the American military strength. Truman launched a mass buildup of America's military in both personnel and technology.²³ The fear of Soviet expansion into the free world, which was aggravated by the Korean War, led Truman to order a mass

¹⁹ Ibid., 54

²⁰ Ibid., 55

²¹ Ibid., 59.

²² Steven Casey, "Selling the NSC-68: The Truman Administration, Public Opinion, and the Politics of Mobilization, 1950-1951," *Diplomatic History* 29, no.4 (2005): 682.

²³ Nitze, *Forging The Strategy of Containment*, 98.

buildup of American conventional forces. Between 1950 and 1951 the size of the US military doubled from 1,495,000 to 3,249,400; furthermore, the military budget was increased from \$13.5 billion in 1950 to \$48 billion²⁴ in 1951.²⁵ The increase in both American military personnel and budget reflected American involvement in the ongoing Korean War, which in turn was stipulated by the recommendations within NSC-68. The Korea War fit perfectly with the concerns within NSC-68. Beginning in June 1950 the communist North Korean regime launched an invasion into capitalist South Korea.²⁶ Despite the reality that the USSR was hardly supporting the DPRK in their adventure into South Korea, American leaders remained oblivious to this reality and saw the North Korean invasion as another limb of the Communist Octopus.²⁷ By September, North Korean forces controlled the majority of South Korea and had pinned down South Korean and American forces into the Pusan Perimeter.²⁸ This situation in Korea gave Truman and the Congress the impetus to accept and endorse the policies within NSC-68. In addition to increasing the size and budget of the US army, Truman also launched the development of thermonuclear bomb.²⁹ Compared to the atomic bomb, which splits unstable uranium/plutonium atoms and creates a devastating blast of energy, the thermonuclear bomb uses a second phase of reactions that can be up to a thousand times more powerful than that of an atomic bomb.³⁰ Truman's decision illustrated the influence of NSC-68 in American policy making once again; NSC-68 stated that if the USSR developed a thermonuclear weapon before the US, Soviet pressure against the free world or an attack on the US

²⁴ In 1951 US dollars

²⁵ Raymond Ojserkis, *The United States & The Beginning Of The Cold War Arms Race: The Truman Administration's Arms Build-Up of 1950-1951*, (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group Inc., 2003), 254.

²⁶ David T. Fautua, "The "Long Pull" Army: NSC 68, the Korean War, and the Creation of the Cold War U.S. Army," *The Journal of Military History* 61, no.1 (1997):110.

²⁷ Wells, "Sounding the Tocsin," 140.

²⁸ Casey, "Selling the NSC-68," 667.

²⁹ Wells, "Sounding the Tocsin," 125.

³⁰ Buckley, "What's the Difference Between a Hydrogen Bomb and a Regular Atomic Bomb?"

would be significantly increased.³¹ Whereas, according to NSC-68, if the US developed a thermonuclear weapon ahead of the USSR the US would be able to increase its pressure on the USSR.³² Following the recommendations of NSC-68, which called for the development and stockpiling of thermonuclear weapons, Truman increased the Department of Defense's nuclear budget from \$39 billion in 1950 to \$102 billion³³ in 1951 for the purpose of researching thermonuclear weapons.³⁴ Thus, in terms of a mass military buildup and the rapid development of America's nuclear program, it is evident that NSC-68 had an immediate impact on the formation of American policy.

Another significant role of American foreign policy following the end of World War II and the rise of the Cold War was the policy of containment. The severance of the alliance between the US and the USSR post WWII introduced a world order controlled by two opposing superpowers, leading to the formation of a bipolar world order. The fear of Soviet expansion into Western Europe escalated following the USSR's successful atomic bomb test in August 1949, the victory of Mao Zedong in China and the launch of the Korean War; these three events aroused concern that America was unable to curtail the aggressive spread of communist forces.³⁵ To prevent the spread of the Soviet Union, particularly into Western Europe, NSC-68 called for an increase in conventional armaments in Western European nations.³⁶ In February 1951, Paul Nitze, the Director of Policy Planning, stated the primary goal of American foreign policy was the rearmament of Europe and that the US should supply 60 divisions to Western Europe to deter the threat of a Soviet invasion.³⁷ Following Nitze's recommendation Truman authorized the deployment of four divisions to Europe. By autumn of 1951 these deployments were completed with over 250,000 American soldiers deployed throughout Europe,

³¹ National, "United States Objectives and Programs for National Security," 38.

³² Ibid.

³³ In 1996 US Dollars

³⁴ Stephen I. Schwartz, *Atomic Audit: The Costs and Consequences of U.S. Nuclear Weapons Since 1940*. (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 1998), 8.

³⁵ George C. Herring, "America and Vietnam: The Unending War," *Foreign Affairs* 70, no. 5 (1991): 107.

³⁶ Fletcher, "The Collapse of the Western World," 770.

³⁷ Ibid.

over 176,000 of which were stationed in West Germany.³⁸ NSC-68 claimed that unless the military strength of Western European states was significantly increased, they would be unable to effectively defend themselves against the USSR.³⁹ It appears evident that the policies outlined in the NSC-68 document played a highly influential role in America's containment strategy within Western Europe.

Another vital area of American foreign policy throughout the Cold War was the United States' supply of foreign aid to Western Europe and other countries, which were seen as vulnerable to communism. The authors of NSC-68 reflected the ideas of George Kennan in the construction of economic policies designed to both support America's allies and limit the strength of her opponents.⁴⁰ NSC-68 called for the American government to provide financial assistance for Western Europe in order to help it recover and construct a stable economy, and to other free countries threatened by communist forces.⁴¹ On October 10th, 1951, President Truman signed the Mutual Security Act, which replaced the European Recovery Program and marked a new phase in American foreign aid.⁴² Unlike the earlier European Recovery Program, which focused on the recovery of Western European economies via a direct injection of currency, the Mutual Security Act (MSA) called for the US to maintain and promote its foreign policy through the provision of military, economic and technical assistance to non-communist countries.⁴³ In terms of military aid, under Truman the first provision of military assistance was to Yugoslavia as per the 1951 Military Assistance Agreement.⁴⁴ This agreement was designed to help Yugoslavia buildup a strong military in order to deter the Soviets from launching an invasion into

³⁸ Wells, "Sounding the Tocsin," 140.

³⁹ John L. Gaddis and Paul Nitze, "NSC 68 and the Soviet Threat Reconsidered," *International Security* 4, no.4 (1980):172.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 174.

⁴¹ National, "United States Objectives and Programs for National Security," 54

⁴² Aurelius Morgner, "The American Foreign Aid Program: Costs, Accomplishments, Alternatives?" *The Review of Politics* 29, no.1 (1967):66

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Bojan Dimitrijevic, "The mutual defense aid program in Tito's Yugoslavia, 1951-1958, and its technical impact," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 10, no.2 (1997):20.

Yugoslavia.⁴⁵ The Military Assistance Agreement between the US and Yugoslavia stated that all Yugoslav orders for military equipment would be provided by the US.⁴⁶ By 1952 Yugoslavia was receiving shipments of military equipment including M-2 12.7mm anti-aircraft guns, M-47 tanks and F-84G jets.⁴⁷ In regard to economic aid, Congress authorized the allocation of \$1.4 billion to be used for aid towards countries of the free world, the free world, in turn, was defined as an alliance of democratic and independent countries.⁴⁸ Economic aid under the MSA ties into the final term of technical assistance, or Point Four. In this instance, the MSA sought to strengthen peace via the reversal of economic conditions, which in historical cases, such as Weimar Germany, had led to social and political instability and war.⁴⁹ Point Four sought to achieve what the ERP had accomplished in Western Europe during the late 1940's throughout rest of the undeveloped free world, especially in newly decolonized states in Asia and Africa.⁵⁰ This style of American foreign aid throughout the 1950's was designed with the distinctive purpose of preventing the expansion of communism into the free world; aid was not given to countries within the Soviet Union nor was it given to other non-Soviet communist states such as China.⁵¹

NSC-68 and the Vietnam War

The adoption of NSC-68 into the formal policy of the US government in September of 1950 illustrated the official reversal of US interactions within the international system. Unlike the period leading up to WWII where the US had been in a position of isolation, NSC-68 displayed to American politicians that America could no longer afford to return to this position in the wake of the expanding USSR. Rather, the US would have to pursue an aggressive foreign policy based on the premise of defeating and containing communism wherever it should

⁴⁵ Ibid., 21

⁴⁶ Ibid., 20

⁴⁷ Ibid., 23

⁴⁸ Robert A. Packenham, *Liberal America and the Third World: Political Development Idea in Foreign Aid and Social Science*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973),49.

⁴⁹ Packenham, *Liberal America and the Third World: Political Development Idea in Foreign Aid and Social Science*, 50

⁵⁰ Ibid., 49

⁵¹ Ibid.

arise. This section of the paper will analyze how the content within NSC-68 brought the US into Indochina and culminated into the Vietnam War.

Following the rise of the Cold War, the US government sought to combat and defeat the encroachment of communism wherever it was perceived to exist. The pursuit of this style of aggressive foreign policy soon led to the US entry into the conflict in Indochina between the French and the communist Viet Minh.⁵² During the initial stages of the conflict in Indochina the US was reluctant to support France as American politicians sought to avoid direct involvement in a colonial war; however, the fall of Chiang Kai-Shek in October 1949 sparked fears that a Chinese invasion into Indochina was imminent.⁵³ Reflecting this belief, in December 1950 the CIA issued a National Intelligence Estimate (NIE), which stated that a direct invasion of Chinese Communist troops into Indochina could occur at any time.⁵⁴ The CIA reported that in resisting communist forces, the US was the only country to which France could turn for support.⁵⁵ The CIA's reports reflected the fundamental pillars within NSC-68: that communist forces would try to dominate Eurasia and that only the US could prevent the expansion of communism.⁵⁶ Amidst the Korean War and the rise of communist China, the US began funding French operations in Indochina.⁵⁷ As the conflict in Indochina progressed the US continued to increase its support of France, by the time France withdrew in 1954 the US was paying for 80% of French war costs.⁵⁸ Following the withdrawal of French troops and the partitioning of Vietnam at the 1954 Geneva Accords, the next major escalation of the US in Vietnam came in 1961 following the infiltration of communist

⁵² Herring, "America and Vietnam," 107.

⁵³ U.S National Archives and Records Administration, "U.S. Involvement in the Franco-Viet Minh War, 1950-1954," Report of the Office of the Secretary of Defence Vietnam Task Force, File 5890485, (January 1969), 1

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 48

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 7

⁵⁶ National, "United States Objectives and Programs for National Security," 6.

⁵⁷ U.S., "U.S Involvement in the Franco-Viet Minh War, 1950-1954," 10

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

guerrilla forces from North Vietnam.⁵⁹ To combat this threat President John Kennedy sent American military advisors and equipment to South Vietnam, by 1963 Kennedy had sent over 16,000 military advisers to South Vietnam to strengthen defences against communist expansion from North Vietnam.⁶⁰ When analysing Kennedy's decision to ship American personnel to Vietnam it is evident that the concerns illustrated within NSC-68 played a key role in influencing Kennedy's decision; a communist victory in Vietnam would be a major blow to US prestige and influence throughout the world and would illustrate to leaders of other countries that the US was an unreliable ally. A communist victory in Vietnam would endanger the credibility of the US and would demonstrate to other countries facing the threat of communism that they were on their own, leading to a sense of distrust towards the US and a feeling of isolation within these countries.⁶¹ In history, feelings such as these had led to detrimental results, such as in 1939 when the USSR, following the failure of Britain and France to prevent the German occupation of Czechoslovakia in March of 1939, signed a neutrality pact with Germany.⁶² The US felt that if communism took hold in South Vietnam it could lead to a situation in which countries across the globe which felt threatened by communist forces, selected to avoid confrontations and accept a communist victory without offering any form of resistance. The increase of American involvement in Vietnam throughout the 1960s, reflected the recommendations contained within NSC-68. The fourth course of action proposed by NSC-68 called for the US to rapidly buildup the political, economic and military strength of the free world, as well as provide a military shield to protect the free world from Soviet aggression.⁶³ American involvement in South Vietnam mirrored this NSC-68 guideline, American troops were initially tasked with protecting the "democratic" South Vietnamese government and

⁵⁹ George C. Herring, "The Cold War and Vietnam," *Organization of American Historians Magazine of History* 18, no.5 (2004):19.

⁶⁰ Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, (New York: The Viking Press, 1983), 679.

⁶¹ Robert H. Miller, "Vietnam: Folly, quagmire, or inevitability?" *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 15, no.2 (1992): 121.

⁶² Geoffrey Roberts, "The Soviet decision for a Pact with Nazi Germany," *Soviet Studies* 44, no.1 (1992):67.

⁶³ National, "United States Objectives and Programs for National Security," 54.

training the South Vietnamese army.⁶⁴ In addition to military aid Vietnam was also one of the largest recipients of American economic assistance in the world, ranking as the third largest non-NATO recipient of aid and seventh largest recipient worldwide.⁶⁵ Continuing with their strategy of containment American military efforts intensified significantly following the launch of North Vietnamese aggression in 1964.⁶⁶ The threat of a communist takeover of the South posed a considerable threat by the end of 1964; at this stage there were approximately 170,000 Viet Cong/North Vietnamese Army (NVA) forces in the South, which were waging coordinated attacks on South Vietnamese forces.⁶⁷ Following the attack on the USS Maddox in August of 1964, Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which authorized President Johnson to use conventional military force in Southeast Asia.⁶⁸ This resolution resulted in the launch of Operation Rolling Thunder in March 1965. Operation Rolling Thunder was a gradual and sustained aerial bombardment conducted by the US Airforce over North Vietnam, which culminated in increasing numbers of American personnel in South Vietnam, totaling 184,300 by the end of 1965.⁶⁹ Following the mass deployment of American troops to Vietnam in 1965, the United States Assistant Secretary for the International Security Affairs, John McNaughton, stated the priorities of America's foreign policy towards Vietnam: 70% was to avoid a humiliating US defeat to their reputation as a guarantor, 20% was to prevent South Vietnam from falling under China's control, and 10% of American foreign policy priorities was to ensure the South Vietnamese people maintained a free way of life.⁷⁰ These three priorities reflect important policies put forward by NSC-68: upholding America's reputation, preventing the spread of communism and protecting the integrity of free societies. Mirroring the majority of American foreign policy priorities towards the situation in Vietnam, avoiding a

⁶⁴ Miller, "Vietnam," 110.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 397.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 400.

⁶⁸ Miller, "Vietnam," 118.

⁶⁹ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 680.

⁷⁰ Poowin Bunyavejchewin, "American motives behind the Vietnam War: a neo-realist perspective," *Veridian E-Journal* 4, no.1 (2011):370.

humiliating defeat, was NSC-68's objective of upholding the credibility of the US; NSC-68 stated that the US must maintain its integrity in the international system as any lapse in American credibility would weaken the resolve of free societies facing communist encroachment.⁷¹ Reflecting the objectives of NSC-68 once again was the intent of keeping Vietnam from falling into the hands of the Chinese communists. One of the vital policies within NSC-68 was the policy of containment, which called on the US to prevent and contain the encroachment of communist forces into the free world.⁷² Finally, in regard to the priority of maintaining a free way of life within South Vietnam, NSC-68 stated that one of the primary objectives of US was to ensure the protection of free peoples.⁷³ Through these analyses it is evident that the American strategy in Vietnam mirrored the policies and recommendations contained within NSC-68 and thus demonstrates the guiding role of NSC-68 in American foreign policy during the Cold War.

Conclusion

As is clearly demonstrated throughout this essay, the policies contained within NSC-68 played a guiding role in the formation of a new and distinct American foreign policy in the post World War II era. It can be argued that NSC-68 was successful in so far that by pursuing the suggestions contained within NSC-68 the US was able to remain ahead of the USSR in nuclear technology and also established deterrents against a Soviet invasion of Western Europe via the deployment of 250,000 soldiers to states in Western Europe, which in turn, maintained American confidence and reduced the likelihood of America pursuing drastic actions to defeat the USSR due to their perceived inferiority. However, the policy suggestions within NSC-68 guided America into the Vietnam War, which was a significant military defeat for the US and saw 58,220 American military casualties. Through the thorough examination of NSC-68's key policies of containment, military expansion, and foreign aid to free societies, it is evident that during the Cold War NSC-68 heavily influenced American foreign policy, American interactions with the USSR, and guided America's entry into Vietnam. In short, NSC-68

⁷¹ National, "United States Objectives and Programs for National Security," 36.

⁷² Ibid., 30

⁷³ Ibid., 9

marked the launch of a new and distinct American foreign policy which saw the formal abandonment of American post-war isolationism and rather America's adoption of the role of the protector of the free world.

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