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## The Defence and Security Environment, 1945-9

The period 1945-9 was crucial in establishing the broad parameters of post-war Canadian defence and security policy. While the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 would force Canada to reformulate defence policy so that it reflected the Cold War more directly, the first few years after the Second World War were nonetheless critical in determining the general approach that the Canadian government would take toward defence issues and problems in the ensuing decades. Several of the defence decisions made between 1945 and 1949 had long-term implications for the shape, structure, and roles of the Canadian military. Outside the country, this was also a time of enormous strategic change. The single most important development was the division of Europe into rival power blocs. In addition, a series of dramatic innovations in weapons technology revolutionized the use of force, and decision makers had to familiarize themselves with an environment in which the use of military power could have devastating consequences. This chapter thus examines several developments, both within and outside Canada, that had enormous implications for the evolution and articulation of Canadian strategic thought in the 1950s and early 1960s.

### **The Domestic Defence Environment**

Defence planning, the nation's early policy on nuclear weapons, and the emerging defence partnership with the United States were the major defence issues of concern to Canada in the immediate postwar period. Not only were these issues important at the time, but the decisions reached in connection with them had repercussions that lasted decades.

### **Postwar Defence Planning, the Politics of Procurement, and the 1949 White Paper**

Canada entered the postwar period with the status of a significant military power. In most measures it ranked fourth behind the United States, the

Soviet Union, and Britain. Within months of VE Day, though, the blueprint for a much smaller defence establishment was in place. Initial postwar funding and force levels were determined at a September 1945 meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Defence (formerly the War Committee), which set the defence budget for the 1946 fiscal year at \$172 million. The navy was told to plan for a force of 10,000; the army, a force of between 20,000 and 25,000 (to form the nucleus of a larger body in case of general mobilization); while the air force was reduced to a regular strength of 15,000 to 20,000 personnel and ten squadrons.<sup>1</sup> This was the services' harsh introduction to the fiscal realities of postwar Canada, and it set the tone for defence developments for the next several years. In a political environment in which change was the only constant, and given a strategic environment that was expected to remain stable and relatively benign, the principal objective of the Department of National Defence in the immediate postwar period would be simple survival.<sup>2</sup>

The strategic rationale of the postwar Canadian military was first articulated in 1947, when Defence Minister Brooke Claxton prepared a critical memo titled "Observations on the Defence Needs of Canada." Claxton described the types of roles that Canadian forces should be able to perform and offered a general description of how future conflict could begin and evolve. The minister believed that there were only two possible theatres of conflict in which Canadian forces could be used: Western Europe and North America. It was "very unlikely," however, that Canadian forces would be called upon to fight in Europe within the next five years, mainly because of the deterrent value of the United States and the implicit nuclear threat that US military involvement entailed. With regard to North America, the minister believed that it would be a secondary target in any future conflict, primarily intended to divert valuable resources away from the European battle zone. Future war would unfold in a manner similar to the Second World War, and therefore there was no need to maintain large regular armed forces. The need, rather, was for general training so that this small force "can be the nucleus of a greatly enlarged war effort."<sup>3</sup>

On 9 July 1947, Claxton presented his first estimates speech to the House of Commons, an address that expanded upon the themes discussed in the earlier memo. After reviewing Canada's war effort, Claxton identified three broad purposes for which the country required a military: (1) to defend Canada against aggression; (2) to assist the civil power in maintaining law and order within the country; and (3) to carry out undertakings Canada might assume in cooperation with friendly nations or under any effective plan of collective action under the United Nations.<sup>4</sup> Following this assessment, Claxton listed fourteen long-term objectives of the department, including closer coordination of the armed services, joint intelligence, and

planning groups to review defence plans; the maintenance of adequate reserves of equipment and weapons; and closer integration of the armed forces with a view toward standardization.<sup>5</sup> The minister also discussed new weapons introduced during the war – atomic bombs, jet aircraft, and rockets were all mentioned – and concluded that such systems effectively eliminated Canada's traditional sense of isolation and distance. Still, caution was required in assessing how these changes in technology would affect Canada's defence requirements in the long term.

Claxton's speech was noteworthy for several reasons. It represented, as Douglas Bland has noted, the first identification and articulation of distinctly Canadian functions for the military, objectives that were "not driven by external commitments, nor were they foreign to Canadian citizens."<sup>6</sup> The notion, for example, that Canadian forces could be used to carry out international "undertakings," while hardly a radical concept in later years, was still quite novel in the late 1940s. Further, the fourteen objectives formed a fairly comprehensive list, and several found their way into subsequent DND white papers and policy statements.

Despite the attempt at identifying a strategic rationale for the postwar Canadian military, defence spending remained low. This began to change in 1948-9, though, when the defence budget was increased to \$269 million. The following year, with Cold War tensions rising still higher, spending grew by almost 50 percent to \$385 million.<sup>7</sup> With this increase in funding the minister was able to announce a number of re-equipment programs, which provide a glimpse into the thinking of the department and the relative priority assigned to the services' procurement requests.

The service that was the biggest beneficiary of the increase in spending was the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF). In 1948, it took delivery of 85 British-made Vampire jet fighters, 30 Mustangs, and 23 North Star transports resulting in a considerably improved air force in just one year.<sup>8</sup> In addition, pre-production and engineering work began on an all-Canadian jet interceptor, the CF-100, designed by A.V. Roe Canada. These developments represented a significant change, as over the previous few years the RCAF had been compelled to do without any active squadrons, and its skeletal core of 12,000 men had been assigned to administrative tasks and training.<sup>9</sup> However, the growing recognition of the importance of air forces in the postwar world, as well as the costs associated with aircraft production, signalled a sustained period of spending growth.

Despite the general uncertainty of the immediate postwar period, it is possible to detect at least some semblance of strategic thinking regarding the air force's basic mission and equipment. No legitimate security threat existed right after the war, or certainly none that would justify the maintenance of a large air force. That began to change in the late 1940s, when not

only did relations with the Soviet Union deteriorate but the Soviets began producing and deploying large numbers of bombers. To defend against this potential threat, aircraft were required to intercept and engage Soviet planes. The rationale behind the acquisition of modern fighter aircraft and the early development of the CF-100 is therefore clear. The air force gave up the strategic-bombing role it had performed during the war and instead put more emphasis on air defence and reconnaissance. While not all of these changes were welcomed by RCAF personnel, there was, at a minimum, an attempt to determine the kind of air force that Canada required and the basic missions it was intended to perform.

The same cannot be said, however, for either the navy or army. The former was in the worst shape of the three services. At the conclusion of the war, the navy had hoped to build a force capable of varied roles, but fiscal restraint resulted in a service unsure of its basic mission or purpose. The Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) was authorized to have 10,000 personnel in 1945; the figure was cut to 7,500 the following year, but recruitment difficulties meant that even this reduced number was not attained. In the early post-war period, there was confusion in both naval ranks and among senior defence officials regarding what the peacetime mission of the RCN should be, confusion that was reflected in a jumble of service roles and tasks.<sup>10</sup>

Although the army did not suffer from the confusion and low morale evident in the navy, it too experienced difficulty in adjusting to its peacetime role. Authorized in 1946 to have an active force of 25,000 and a reserve force of 180,000, the army consisted of only 20,000 men in 1949, at which time Claxton slashed the reserve ceiling to 50,000. The army was organized into five regional commands; its main function during this period was to man the Alaska Highway and various northern installations, and to maintain itself in readiness for the unlikely event of direct attack.<sup>11</sup> To defend Canada in such a scenario, the army formed a brigade called the Mobile Striking Force that could be moved by air and was capable of operating in the polar regions. Also formed during this period were the Canadian Rangers, a part of the Reserve Force that was intended to provide security and surveillance in remote areas along the coasts and in the North.<sup>12</sup> In the absence of any legitimate risk of a land invasion, however, and in the presence of a widespread belief that war in Europe was unlikely, critics questioned the very need for a Canadian army. The scepticism may have contributed to the low priority given to modernizing army equipment during the early postwar period.

In the fall of 1949, Claxton produced his second major statement on defence policy, titled *Canada's Defence Programme*. The document began with a section on the "International Situation" that reviewed the major defence developments of the postwar period. It examined the terms of the recently

signed North Atlantic Treaty and discussed the defence implications of Canada's membership.<sup>13</sup> This was followed by a section on the "Defence Objectives of Canada," which described the department's current beliefs on the possibility and direction of future conflict. This latter section began with a review of Canada's defence purposes: (1) to provide the force necessary to defend Canada; (2) to maintain operational staff, equipment, and training personnel that would be capable of rapid expansion; and (3) to develop joint defence plans with other nations.<sup>14</sup>

In a departure from prior statements, the document noted that "the only kind of war which would involve Canada would be a war in which Communism was seeking to dominate the free nations ... Such a war would be a war for survival." This passage indicated the greater urgency with which the government now considered the Soviet threat, and revealed the type of conflict that was considered most likely. With regard to actual conflict scenarios, the paper noted that as a member of an alliance "it is obvious" that Canada would not fight alone against Communist forces. Rather, Canadian defence policy "assumes that our armed forces will be used in association with those of friendly powers."<sup>15</sup> With these passages, the department indicated that the emerging defence partnerships with the United States and the Atlantic alliance now formed the twin cornerstones of Canadian security policy. In short, the paper revealed that Canada viewed its security as indivisible from that of its allies, an appreciation that was frequently – although not always – reflected in the subsequent strategic thinking articulated by department officials.

The 1949 defence program document refined several of the concepts first identified in Claxton's estimates speech of a few years earlier, and it further clarified the strategic rationale for Canada's postwar defence policy. As such, it represents a turning point and forms a natural break in Canada's post-1945 military development. Perhaps most important, the approach that it codified toward the Soviet Union was to remain largely unchanged for the next several decades. Hostility toward the Soviet Union, despite the ebb and flow of the Cold War, was to become the basic assumption of postwar Canadian foreign and defence policy.

### **Canada's Early Policy on Nuclear Weapons**

One defence issue that demanded immediate government attention in the early postwar period was Canada's position regarding nuclear weapons. Decisions on the future direction of Canada's nuclear program, on the cooperation that had existed during the war with the United States and Britain, and even whether or not to pursue an independent nuclear program all had to be made shortly after the war's conclusion. A brief look at how these decisions were reached helps place this country's subsequent nuclear policy in historical context.

The wartime collaboration between Britain, Canada, and the United States resulted in the detonation of two atomic weapons in 1945. Scientists from all three countries had pursued a common objective, and all shared in the knowledge that their efforts had helped shape the final outcome of the war. Despite this "success," however, there remained considerable confusion at war's end over the precise rights and responsibilities of the various parties to the knowledge behind the bomb. Whereas it was clear that the United States had supplied the bulk of the financial, physical, and scientific/intellectual energy of the program, there was no denying that the two junior partners had made significant contributions. In Canada, for example, the British-Canadian Montreal laboratory that operated under the authority of the National Research Council conducted several key experiments, particularly in gaseous diffusion and plutonium separation, while the Eldorado Mine on Great Bear Lake in northern Canada was an important source of uranium for the bomb project.<sup>16</sup>

This trilateral wartime partnership was shattered in 1946 by the US passage of the Atomic Energy Act (the McMahon Act), which prohibited the dissemination of fissionable material to any foreign country. From that point on, nuclear cooperation was confined to the supply of raw materials and the exchange of limited scientific and technical information. While the act produced little response in Canada, it generated considerable resentment in Britain. This was probably a result of the fact that by this time the British had already made the decision to establish their own domestic nuclear weapons program.<sup>17</sup> The Mackenzie King government, in contrast, had decided to focus on the civilian applications of nuclear energy.

The early Canadian position on the control of nuclear weapons was established in a memo written in the fall of 1945 by Lester Pearson, then the Canadian ambassador to the United States, in preparation for a conference between the three nuclear partners.<sup>18</sup> The memo began with a series of assumptions about the nature of nuclear weapons, arguing that the atomic bomb "is something revolutionary and unprecedented; a new departure in destruction and annihilative in effect." It further noted that unless atomic energy was somehow contained, nuclear proliferation would undoubtedly occur, as it was not realistic to believe that other countries would not manufacture their own weapons. The subsequent arms race would lead to "fear, suspicion, rivalry, desperation, and war; only in this case war would probably mean international suicide."

Policy recommendations followed from these observations. The memo suggested that Canada opt for international, indeed for supranational, control. Hence, the knowledge possessed by the United States, Britain, and Canada could be "traded" for a system of control under the authority of the United Nations. Such an offer, proposed in good faith, could be rejected only by those states whose motives were suspect. Pearson's proposed

solution to the issue of international control involved a three-step process – prohibition of manufacture, destruction of existing weapons, and the sharing of all basic scientific knowledge. The central provision in this plan was that national manufacture and use of atomic weapons would be banned. The memo also called for the establishment of an international commission “of scientists of world reputation” to conduct periodic investigations of nuclear facilities (a kind of forerunner to the International Atomic Energy Agency). Pearson concluded that without regular inspection, effective international control over nuclear weapons would prove impossible.

The effect of Pearson’s memo is difficult to determine, although the document certainly seemed to form the conceptual basis of the Canadian approach to nuclear issues for several years. What is clear is that the trilateral conference ended with a consensus on the need for a new international body, the United Nations Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), whose responsibility would include future efforts at international control. The Pearson memo became one of the few substantive Canadian efforts at analyzing the impact of the nuclear revolution, and for that reason alone deserves careful consideration.<sup>19</sup>

As important as it was, though, the memo did not start from first principles, as it seemed to take for granted that the central question of domestic manufacture had already been determined. Indeed, the Canadian decision not to manufacture nuclear weapons has to this day gone largely unexamined, as if the decision itself was so obvious that no investigation of it is required. This might be linked to the fact that Canadian scholars have failed to uncover any evidence that a debate on the issue took place – either at the governmental or public levels. It appears instead that no formal decision was ever made and that Canadian policy simply evolved after the war along with the realization that a domestic nuclear weapons program would serve no legitimate national interest.<sup>20</sup>

In spite of the lack of investigation, it would be disingenuous to overlook the question of domestic manufacture entirely. In his classic study *Canada’s Changing Defence Policy, 1957-1963*, Jon McLin identified two possible reasons for the Canadian decision. First, Canada was not a military power, nor were Canadians a military people, and they thus rejected a weapon whose sole purpose seemed to be the power to hurt. Second, Canada had no strategic need to develop nuclear weapons, as it was inconceivable that Canada would end up in a major military challenge where it could not rely on the assistance of the United States. Taken together, these two considerations were so persuasive that “the Canadian government adopted its non-nuclear course after World War II not so much by deliberate choice as by unconscious assumption.”<sup>21</sup> This judgment still appears accurate, as there remains no indication that the Canadian government seriously considered the option of independently producing nuclear weapons.

A more recent book by Brian Buckley argues that because the country's political leaders and decision makers did not see any useful role for a nuclear-armed Canada, there simply was no need for a comprehensive debate on an issue that generated near-unanimity.<sup>22</sup> However, Buckley also suggests that if different individuals had held key positions of power in the mid- to late 1940s, the outcome might have been different. In any event, the latter conclusion seems to fly in the face of the wide range of factors (many of which Buckley discusses) that led to the decision in the first place.

Having decided not to manufacture bombs of its own, Canada focused on the future control of nuclear weapons as well as the international body designed to oversee such efforts, the Atomic Energy Commission. Canada was made a permanent member of the AEC. The first major issue the commission dealt with was a proposal put forward by the American delegate, Bernard Baruch, on the international control of atomic energy.<sup>23</sup> Canada was cautiously supportive of the plan, hopeful that it might lead to more intense discussions. However, the Soviet reaction was entirely negative, and negotiations quickly bogged down in acrimony amid conflicting charges and countercharges. Observers to this day remain divided over which party was ultimately responsible for the failure of the Baruch plan. Few, though, would deny that the plan lacked credibility and may have been little more than a public relations ploy at a time when neither the Americans nor Soviets were seriously interested in the control of nuclear energy or its byproducts.

An additional comment should also be offered regarding the research complex at Chalk River, Ontario. This was a nuclear facility built during the war whose primary purpose was the experimental production of fissile material for nuclear weapons. Based on an advanced heavy water design, the plant produced plutonium at a rate three times greater than that of comparable American reactors of the day.<sup>24</sup> As noted by James Eayrs, most of this plutonium was sold to the United States, although a small amount was kept in Canada for research purposes.<sup>25</sup> Through the revenue acquired as a result of these sales, the Canadian government was able to construct a second, more advanced research reactor (the NRU) at the same location in the early 1950s. Early Canadian nuclear research resulted in considerable expertise, and led in 1952 to the formation of Atomic Energy of Canada, which was designed to market the peaceful application of nuclear energy.<sup>26</sup>

This discussion reflects the ambiguities of Canada's early nuclear policies. As prime minister, Mackenzie King maintained a declared policy that Canada would not manufacture, possess or use atomic weapons, nor would it be party to any agreement that would make Canada the "custodian" of other countries' bombs.<sup>27</sup> In spite of these declarations, Canada's early position on nuclear weapons was inconsistent. On the one hand, Canada was an important supplier of both the scientific knowledge and technical materials

needed to produce nuclear weapons, but on the other it maintained an official policy consistent with that of a non-nuclear state. The policy probably reflected what the government *wanted* Canada's position to be. The country's direct participation in the Manhattan Project made any declaration of nuclear "virginity" problematic. So did the construction of US Air Force and Strategic Air Command bases in Newfoundland and Labrador in the years following the war, and the sale of plutonium to the Americans and British throughout the 1950s.<sup>28</sup> Thus, when considering Canada's later protestations on the dangers presented by nuclear weapons, one should not lose sight of the fact that this country was hardly an impartial bystander in the early years of the atomic age.

Unfortunately, the mid- to late 1940s was not the last time that the Canadian government would have to make decisions about the nuclear weapons issue. As discussed in Chapter 4, nuclear weapons, and more specifically the decision(s) to acquire and deploy them, became a divisive issue in Canadian defence policy between 1958 and 1963. For now, though, the important point to note is that Canada's early dealings with nuclear weapons, while hardly controversial, were certainly not as straightforward as the government of the day claimed. It was a pattern that was to be repeated some years later.

### **The Emerging Defence Partnership with the United States**

The extensive wartime collaboration between Canada and the United States led to concern in Ottawa that in the postwar period, the United States would continue to push for measures that the Canadian government might not be eager to adopt. Ottawa realized that North American defence would increasingly be a cooperative affair. However, significant concerns over both sovereignty and the control of forces had not been resolved during the war.<sup>29</sup> Thus, in the postwar period, the Canadian government became increasingly sensitive to the sovereignty implications of new defence arrangements.

Within one year of the conclusion of the war, Canada was in the midst of its first concerted effort to define its postwar security relationship with the United States. Three related issues topped the agenda: a US request to build and staff Arctic weather stations in the Far North; Recommendation 35 from the Permanent Joint Board on Defence (PJBD) that the two countries continue their wartime collaboration on continental defence; and a planning document, the *Basic Security Plan*, drawn up by the Canada-US Military Cooperation Committee (MCC), that called for an elaborate system of continental air defence.<sup>30</sup>

Among the three requests, it was the latter that caught the government most off guard. Canadian political apprehension over the MCC report led to a series of bilateral meetings in late 1946, and a compromise between Canadian and American diplomatic and military personnel was reached.<sup>31</sup>

The US delegation, led by senior State Department official George Kennan, softened (and ultimately withdrew) its demand for a continental air defence system. The basic American message was that there was no rigidity to US thinking, and that any initial steps taken in air defence would be relatively modest and inexpensive.<sup>32</sup> This approach met with widespread Canadian approval, as a policy of firmness and patience avoided commitments that would have been difficult to meet in a fiscal environment where defence issues were not priority items. Nevertheless, the meetings revealed the increased importance attached to continental defence matters, an issue area that would, with time, attract near-constant attention.

With regard to defence cooperation, the wartime military partnership between Canada and the United States had been governed by the *Joint Canadian-US Basic Defence Plan No. 2*, more commonly known as ABC-22, a document drawn up by the joint defence board in the summer of 1941. The plan was intended to ensure that the wartime strength of the United States and the British Commonwealth would be combined in an effective and efficient manner. It was clearly not suitable for the situation at war's end, and the question of what would take its place quickly arose.

In the spring of 1946, the Permanent Joint Board on Defence presented a draft proposal of Recommendation 35, which would govern future military cooperation between the two countries. It ensured continued close cooperation with respect to the interchange of military personnel, standardization of equipment and methods of training, and the free and comprehensive exchange of military information.<sup>33</sup> Despite Canadian political concern about agreeing to a formal bilateral alliance, the federal government gave official approval in the fall to a slightly modified Recommendation 35, which was subsequently renamed Recommendation 36. Concern over the possible Soviet reaction led to a joint decision not to make a formal announcement.

By early 1947, a series of dramatic press accounts made the initial strategy untenable, and Prime Minister King was forced to make a statement to the House of Commons that explained that "in the interests of efficiency and economy" the two countries had decided to continue the wartime collaboration of their defence establishments.<sup>34</sup> This cooperation, which would "necessarily be limited," was based on the principle that each country retained control over military activities undertaken on its territory, and remained free to determine the extent of future military collaboration.<sup>35</sup> While the statement played down the importance of the accord, the obvious conclusion was that Canada had openly allied itself with the United States. Indeed, the 1947 Declaration of Principles on Defence Cooperation (also referred to as the Joint Statement on Defence) was to guide the framework of North American defence until the negotiation of the North American Air Defence Command (NORAD) agreement a decade later.<sup>36</sup>

Also of bilateral concern during this period were American requests for access to facilities on Canadian soil. As James Eayrs has noted, the complexity of the Canada-US defence relationship meant that requests could come via the PJBD, the US embassy, or a variety of military service channels, and "by the summer of 1946 they were arriving thick and fast."<sup>37</sup> American requests included the permanent maintenance of planes and installations at the air force base at Goose Bay, Labrador; the opening of new weather stations in the Arctic islands; construction of new radar stations in the Canadian North; the operation of the Northwest Staging Routes; the maintenance of far northern airfields; and the provision of facilities for various exercises and training programs on Canadian territory.<sup>38</sup> The number of requests was a fairly accurate gauge of American defence interest in Canada, and indicated to the Canadian government the urgency with which the United States was increasingly approaching defence issues that required some degree of Canadian participation and/or agreement.

Particularly difficult to resolve were requests to reinforce and expand the base at Goose Bay and to build and operate a series of radar stations in the Arctic. Regarding the former, the Goose Bay base attracted considerable attention from US Air Force planners in the immediate postwar period, as it was the only one in North America from which bombers might reach Soviet targets with the prospect of safe return. By early 1947, the United States had requested to station both bomber and fighter groups there to augment forces proposed for deployment at Harmon Field, an additional American base in Newfoundland. US officials, in an apparent attempt to convince their Canadian colleagues of the importance with which they viewed the base, noted that Goose Bay "could be said to be the most important all-round strategic air base in the western hemisphere."<sup>39</sup> While Canadians searched for a way to emphasize a non-military aspect of the base, the United States denied the request, and ultimately Canadian permission was granted to station long-range bombers.<sup>40</sup>

The other issue of concern was the construction of radar stations in the Canadian North. As noted, the draft Canada-US Basic Security Plan had called for an elaborate program of air defence, of which one component was to be the rapid construction of a radar network. While the plan itself was dropped, the concept of radar warning was not. By 1949, in the face of mounting pressure to take action, the Canadian government decided to replace the Arctic radar project with a more modest proposal: the Pinetree Line, completed in 1954, consisted of radar stations running the entire length of Canada. While this line was not the most technologically advanced, it was only the first of a series of such radar lines, and would with time herald a new era in bilateral defence cooperation.

In sum, the Canadian government recognized that the war had changed the requirements of continental defence, and Canada was prepared to

compromise in order to meet American concerns. Recognizing the enormous power and responsibility that the United States was to play in the postwar period, Ottawa was anxious to take a cooperative role in North American defence. However, this did not mean that Canada meekly accepted whatever defence initiatives the United States proposed. On the contrary, as the discussion regarding the initial MCC proposal demonstrated, Canada insisted that the United States not directly challenge Canadian sovereignty and/or interests.

The expanding military partnership with the United States was driven by several factors: a wide range of political, economic, and historic ties; a growing perception of the Soviet threat as well as a common appreciation of approaches to dealing with that threat; and an increasingly intimate interservice relationship that frequently acted outside the formal parameters of the political executive of either country.<sup>41</sup> Regardless of which factor may have been most significant, the net result was that Canada began to codify its defence relationship with the United States in ways that it had previously avoided.

### **The International Environment**

The immediate postwar years were also critical for a series of external political and strategic changes that were to influence international events for decades. These included the Cold War and the political division that it caused, advances in weapons technology, and the changes in war planning brought about by those advances.

### **The Beginning of the Cold War and the Establishment of Rival Power Blocs**

Interpreting the origins of the Cold War has long been a hotly debated subject in international relations. Liberals argue that the Soviet Union emerged from the war obsessed with security and determined to establish a buffer zone around its borders with the West. According to this view, the West could do little to alter these interests, as Moscow was intent on increasing its global reach.<sup>42</sup> Revisionists, on the contrary, argue that the principal American interest at the end of the war was to make the world safe for American capitalism, and thus the United States never took into consideration the legitimate security concerns of the Soviet Union. The revisionists also point out that the fiercely anti-communist views of the American people, aided and abetted by their political representatives, made any compromise difficult.<sup>43</sup> Still another school blames Stalin, arguing that while his goals were not ideologically motivated, they were vague and ill-defined.<sup>44</sup> His methods of achieving limited objectives created distrust, for even if his actions were defensive they were perceived by the West as threatening to its security.

The common thread in these interpretations is the idea that the Cold War could have been avoided if only policy makers had been sensitive enough to the interests of the opposing side. This interpretation, while appealing, is almost certainly an oversimplification. The fact remains that in the aftermath of the war there was an enormous power vacuum in continental Europe brought about by Germany's defeat, and it would have been difficult to fill this peacefully even among countries with common political and military interests. Given the array of differences between the United States and the Soviets, such an accommodation may well have been impossible. The void in Europe allowed the Soviets to extend their authority into the heart of the continent. In its own interest, the West was compelled to try to mitigate this shift in the global balance of power. Consequently, as the war ended, conflicting strategic interests led to mutual recriminations.<sup>45</sup> This hostile atmosphere naturally affected political relations, which began their downward spiral within a matter of months.

If one had to identify a birthdate for the Cold War, John Lewis Gaddis has argued that February 1946 would be as good as any.<sup>46</sup> In that month, Stalin implied that as long as communism had not replaced capitalism as the most important form of economic organization, war between the two sides was inevitable. One month later, before an audience that included US president Harry Truman, former British prime minister Winston Churchill delivered his famous address in Fulton, Missouri, in which he charged that an "iron curtain" had been rung down across the heart of Europe. The speech accelerated a widespread and growing hostility toward the Soviet Union by comparing it to Nazi Germany. By August – exactly one year after the war's end – US-Soviet relations had declined to the point where President Truman considered using military force to prevent Soviet intervention in the defence of the Turkish Straits.

While Soviet actions were often not as threatening as some US officials made them out to be, a pattern was being established. For Western decision makers predisposed to believe the worst about the Soviet Union and its policies, the ideological tone of Soviet pronouncements confirmed that Stalin would, if he could, exploit systemic developments, vacuums of power, and the popularity of local Communist parties to serve the Kremlin's interests.<sup>47</sup> Signs of Soviet aggressiveness achieved a heightened salience, and conflicting evidence was routinely dismissed. Not that there were, in any event, a shortage of threatening signs. In Poland, Romania, and Hungary, unpopular Communist minorities consolidated their power and began receiving military aid, officer training, and strategic guarantees from the Soviet government. Other flashpoints during 1946-7 included Manchuria, Iran, Greece, and Turkey. Not only did the Soviets rupture the appearance of great power cooperation in the United Nations, but they isolated themselves from international economic cooperation. Their rejection of the

Bretton Woods agreements, the principal Western postwar economic plan, illustrated their penchant for independent and autarkic courses of economic development.

Curiously, however, despite the acceptance by most Western policy makers of Soviet aggressiveness, Western policy lacked a coherent strategy. That changed in the aftermath of a 1946 telegram, written by the American chargé d'affaires in Moscow, which was later revised and published anonymously in the influential American policy journal, *Foreign Affairs*.<sup>48</sup> The thesis of George Kennan's "long telegram" was that the entire thrust of American policy toward the Soviet Union during and after the Second World War had been misguided. That policy, whether in the form of Franklin D. Roosevelt's emphasis on integration or bargaining, had assumed the existence of no structural impediments to normal relations with the Soviet Union. Kennan's argument, on the contrary, was that because of its need for external enemies to justify its own domestic repression, traditional diplomacy could never reassure the Soviet regime. Moscow could be expected to try to expand, taking advantage of every opportunity as it arose. To counteract this, Kennan argued that Soviet leaders were responsive to demonstrations of force, as Russia was fundamentally weak and its rulers would retreat when faced with a determined foe.<sup>49</sup>

As Gaddis has noted, rarely has a single set of ideas had such an immediate impact on a nation's foreign policy.<sup>50</sup> Kennan's paper struck a chord with decision makers in Washington, and within months it had been accepted as official US policy. The strategy of containment brought together the new American interest in maintaining a global balance of power with the perceived Soviet challenge to that equilibrium in a part of the world that could hardly be more pivotal – Western Europe. Kennan's approach formed a tightly focused policy for dealing with the Soviet Union. There were four elements to it: (1) no further efforts would be made to conceal differences with the Soviets; (2) there would be no further concessions in negotiations; (3) US military strength would be expanded and requests for military and economic aid would be looked upon more favourably; and (4) negotiations on a number of different fronts would continue, but only for the purpose of registering Moscow's acceptance of American positions or for publicizing Soviet intransigence for the purpose of winning allies abroad.<sup>51</sup>

While containment involved a more aggressive approach with the Soviets, it was the subsequent enunciation of the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan that revealed a recognition that the Cold War would be a long-term struggle, one that would pit two global systems against one another in a wide range of political and economic contexts. US officials realized that their initiatives would probably antagonize the Soviets, but they felt compelled to take action nonetheless. The United States was caught in a classic dilemma whereby the steps deemed essential to promote its own

security clashed with the security imperatives of its adversary. The Soviets, seeing Communists excised from the governing coalitions in Western and southern Europe, and frightened by the spectre of German reconstruction under Western auspices, could be expected to fight back. American officials were willing to accept a further rupture in the US-Soviet relationship because they were convinced that the dangers of inaction exceeded the risks involved in provoking the Soviets.<sup>52</sup>

The gathering storm clouds in US-Soviet relations were reflected in NSC-20/4, passed in late 1948. Titled "US Objectives with Respect to the USSR," the National Security Council document repeated many of the now-common refrains in US security policy. The main fear pertained to "Soviet domination of the potential power of Eurasia." The aim of US policy was to "reduce the power and influence of the USSR to limits which no longer constitute a threat to the peace, national independence and stability of the world family of nations."<sup>53</sup> NSC-20/4 embodied the core ingredients of US national security policy in the postwar period – globalism and anti-communism. However, the study offered no clear definition of objectives or priorities, no assessment of the attributes and weaknesses of various tactics, and no insight into the opportunities generated by prospective rifts within the Communist world.<sup>54</sup>

In early 1950, just a few months after the confirmation of a Soviet atomic test, the basis of US security policy in the Cold War was established. NSC-68 presented the Soviet threat in stark terms, stating that "the Soviet Union has one purpose and that is world domination," and furthermore, "unlike previous aspirants to hegemony, is animated by a new fanatic faith, anti-thetical to our own, and seeks to impose its absolute authority over the rest of the world."<sup>55</sup> US goals were designed to reduce Soviet power on its periphery, establish independent countries in Eastern Europe, and "foster a fundamental change in the nature of the Soviet system, a change toward which the frustration of the design is the first and perhaps most important task."<sup>56</sup> The report, written by Paul Nitze, the director of policy planning in the State Department, urged the rapid expansion of American military capabilities and the strengthening of US allies.

NSC-68 is widely regarded as the first comprehensive statement of US postwar national strategy. For the first time in the post-1945 period, a definition of goals and a general statement of methods oriented primarily to the needs of the Cold War was articulated. It was directed toward the objectives of balance and stability in US security policy. That policy was now firmly based on the model of the Cold War, and of the global competition with the Soviet Union that it had spawned. As Melvyn Leffler has observed in his study *A Preponderance of Power*, "in the worldview of NSC-68, there was no room for neutrality; diplomacy was a zero-sum game. The stakes were global preponderance."<sup>57</sup>

Thus, by the start of the Korean War in June 1950, the Cold War global system had largely been established. Two rival power blocs – with hegemonic powers at their helm – were in the process of being formed, and countries around the world were coming under increasing pressure to join one of the respective “camps.” The United States and the Soviet Union, as the dominant nations of the new system, had enormous powers and responsibilities. While direct conflict between the two had been avoided, a pattern was being established in which each side would test the patience of the other in an area of vulnerability, pushing it to the point where a direct military confrontation seemed not only possible but likely, as in the case of Berlin. Only at that point did the crisis subside, to be replayed somewhere else under slightly differing circumstances.

As a prominent member of the Western alliance, Canada had to adjust rapidly to the altered global security environment, which it did with energy and enthusiasm. Canadian defence and external affairs officials generally shared the views of their American colleagues on the dangers represented by the Soviets. Canada may have lacked the political compulsion to characterize every Soviet act in the worst possible light, but political leaders nonetheless warned the public of the threat from Soviet policy in order to win acceptance for the increased burdens of taxation and defence.<sup>58</sup>

Canadian policy of the day cannot merely be dismissed as anti-Communist and pro-American, although it certainly was both. As John Holmes has noted, “if the chips were down, Canadian governments and, the evidence suggests, the Canadian public had no doubt which side they were on.”<sup>59</sup> This was not so much the American side as it was the side that included both the United States and most of Canada’s other allies as well. Canada quickly realized that its interests – particularly those of a political nature – were not always consistent with those of the United States, and it often sided with other members of the West in intra-alliance disputes. At the same time, though, officials in Ottawa realized the “special relationship” that Canada had with the United States, and that there might be occasions where a choice between the two would be required. The ambivalent Canadian policy was to avoid weakening the United States while assisting in the weaving of a larger political web to control the behaviour of all states.<sup>60</sup>

### **Military Innovation and the Power of Nuclear Weapons**

The atomic bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki were the most formidable weapons the world had ever seen, but several years would pass before the full impact of the nuclear revolution was recognized in defence and government circles. Several important military developments took place in the immediate postwar period, including advances in bomber aircraft and the slow growth of the American nuclear stockpile, the Soviet atomic explosion of 1949, and the decision to develop hydrogen weapons.

From 1945 through 1948, the era of American nuclear monopoly, the US system for stockpiling nuclear weapons and making them available for use was extremely limited. Indeed, the precise extent of this was not known until quite recently. For several decades the assumption had been that, as the only nuclear nation, the United States must have had overwhelming nuclear superiority.<sup>61</sup> In fact, it is questionable whether the stockpile in the early postwar years was large enough to be meaningful in a strategic sense. There were, for example, only two nuclear weapons at the end of 1945, nine in July 1946, and thirteen one year later; by 1948, the number had begun to increase more rapidly, with fifty weapons available.<sup>62</sup> Throughout this period a “doctrine of scarcity” existed among US military planners.<sup>63</sup> This was probably a factor in the initial reluctance to develop war plans that took advantage of the American atomic monopoly.

However, the small number of weapons was not the only factor that raised doubts about the possible effectiveness of US nuclear forces. Another consideration was that none of the bombs were stored assembled and it took forty men two days to put each one together. Further, each was a “Fat Man” implosion bomb that weighed about 4,500 kilograms and was relatively inefficient in its use of fissionable material.<sup>64</sup> The bombs were so large and cumbersome that loading one onto a bomber entailed installing a special hoist in a pit, placing the bomb into the pit, rolling the aircraft over it, and then lifting the weapon into the specially modified bomb bay.

The B-29 was, until 1950, the mainstay of the Strategic Air Command and the principal delivery vehicle of the US nuclear forces. Through 1948, there were only thirty specially configured B-29s in SAC modified to carry atomic bombs, all in the 509th Bomb Group based in Roswell, New Mexico.<sup>65</sup> The range of this aircraft was 7,000 kilometres, meaning that its effective combat radius was only 3,500 kilometres; for the bombers to reach targets in the Soviet Union, the United States would have to make use of overseas bases or aerial refuelling. While the latter alternative seemed preferable, it carried additional requirements for the operation and maintenance of several hundred tanker aircraft as well as raised numerous logistical difficulties for the US Air Force. Thus, there was much concern during the immediate postwar period about identifying strategically suitable bases that would permit the refuelling of American aircraft. Attention quickly focused on three main locations for such bases – Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa.

During the period in which base rights in these areas were being negotiated, the most critical US bases were in Canada, Britain, and Japan, which as a result of close security ties were the countries where agreements were reached most quickly. Of these, the UK bases were considered the most vital from 1945 to 1950. Not only could they be a principal launch point for

attacks on the Soviet Union but they were also the main recycling centres under US war plans for planes and crews returning from missions originating outside Britain.<sup>66</sup> UK concern over the Soviet threat and the desire to cooperate with the United States on military matters resulted in the rapid negotiation and construction of three SAC bases – at Mildenhall, Sculthorpe, and Lakenheath – and plans were under way to build up to five more.<sup>67</sup> Despite the quick success in negotiating these arrangements, though, it was widely realized in the United States that the best solution would be to deploy longer-range aircraft that did not need forward bases at all.

Concerns about the effectiveness of the Strategic Air Command were greatly reduced in 1948-9, when the force's operational capabilities were improved considerably. First, initial deliveries were made of the B-36, the first truly long-range bomber. Second, an additional long-range aircraft, the B-50 (a modified version of the B-29), was also introduced, although in limited numbers.<sup>68</sup> Last, tanker aircraft for in-flight refuelling became operational (modified B-29s, designated KB-29Ms), although performance limitations meant that this capability remained limited for some years.

As a result of the changes, by 1950 SAC consisted of 120 modified B-29s, B-36s, and B-50s, with six bomb assembly teams trained and organized.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, the introduction of the new aircraft dramatically increased the capability of the United States to project military power; this was clear during the 1948-9 Berlin airlift, when the United States was able to resupply the city through the use of its air forces. Still, concerns over the performance of the new bombers led to limited production runs, and the United States had to remain dependent on overseas bases well into the 1950s, when the more advanced, long-range B-52 began entering service.

As noted, in 1948 the size of the US nuclear stockpile began to grow dramatically. The bomb was increasingly influencing US war plans, and it had come to dominate most conflict scenarios. However, no sooner had the US military finally started to adjust its thinking to include nuclear weapons than the US atomic monopoly was shattered: in August 1949, Western intelligence confirmed a Soviet atomic test. The Soviet Union would not have an operational nuclear force for several years, but such a development was considered a virtual certainty. This had a paradoxical effect in that while it discouraged doctrines based on atomic weapons as a uniquely American advantage, it also locked the United States into a nuclear strategy.<sup>70</sup> In effect, the United States now recognized that in the future all war planning would have to take account of the possible use of nuclear weapons, and strategies would have to be devised that would specifically recognize – and, it was to be hoped, avoid – this possibility. As later chapters demonstrate, US strategists and policy makers quickly came up with doctrines that emphasized the Americans' ability to defeat the Soviets in any nuclear conflict,

believing that such strategies would make a Soviet challenge less likely (a view not shared by Canadian officials).

The Soviet Union's ability to compete with the United States in several areas of weapons technology ended up surprising American officials throughout the period. The Soviet development of nuclear weapons came well before US intelligence had predicted.<sup>71</sup> The Soviet challenge in areas of conventional military technology, such as jet engines and radar, was similarly impressive. Soviet technological prowess was further demonstrated by the introduction of a series of bombers in the late 1940s. In 1948, the Soviet Union unveiled its version of the B-29, the Tu-4. Although the aircraft's range was limited, it was capable of return missions to Western Europe and one-way missions to North America, and it demonstrated a considerable ability in aircraft research and design, although it was widely regarded in the West as a virtual copy of the American plane. This bomber was quickly replaced by newer models of indigenous design – the Tu-16 Badger, Mya-4 Bison, and Tu-95 Bear, all aircraft that revealed a Soviet capability roughly comparable to that of the United States. By the early 1950s, then, defence planners in both the United States and Canada realized that the Soviet Union could threaten continental North America with an atomic attack that the air defences of the time would be virtually powerless to prevent.<sup>72</sup>

The response of the United States to the emerging Soviet capability for both the manufacture and delivery of atomic bombs was not to back down but to raise the stakes, moving to the development of hydrogen weapons. This ushered in an age of nuclear plenty and solidified a trend toward ever-increasing levels of destruction.<sup>73</sup> The decision to proceed on such a course was reached only after a divisive debate within the American defence establishment.<sup>74</sup> While the debate was highly charged and pitted fellow scientists against one another, what it overlooked was that the hydrogen bomb did not raise any fundamentally new questions. The "super" certainly increased the amount of destructive power available, but the moral and strategic issues it raised differed from those of a few years earlier only by a matter of degree.<sup>75</sup>

On a purely technical level, however, the hydrogen bomb did differ from its fissionable cousin. Given an atomic bomb to act as a trigger, a "super" required no expensive fissionable material because it was fuelled by hydrogen, the most plentiful element in nature. Each H-bomb was at least a thousand times as powerful as an atomic bomb. With the destructive power now available, SAC planners calculated that they could destroy three-quarters of the population of 188 Soviet cities, with casualties approaching 75 million people, within a matter of hours.<sup>76</sup> Further, unlike the atom bomb, an H-bomb was so powerful that only a few might force another great state to surrender. At the same time, it was difficult to conceive of a situation – *any situation* – in which it would make political or strategic sense to use one.

In sum, by 1950 both the United States and Soviet Union were well on their way to developing large and varied nuclear forces that could be used for both strategic and tactical missions. In addition, the means of nuclear delivery was steadily improving, as aircraft design and performance was in the midst of a revolution (the sound barrier was first broken in 1947), while missile programs in both countries had begun a long process of increased research and funding. These developments were to have enormous implications for the international security environment because they required entirely new modes of thinking – to which Canadians contributed – about the use of force.

As a neighbour and defence partner of the United States, Canada could not help but be affected by these changes. Even though Canada “chose” not to develop a nuclear force of its own, it was a strong supporter of the Western alliance, which by the early 1950s had adopted a strategy based on the early use of nuclear weapons in any future conflict.<sup>77</sup> In addition, Canada was home to several US air and naval bases, many of which played an important role in US strategic planning. The key point to note is that this was a period of rapid military change, and that by the start of the new decade many of the technological realities of the modern nuclear age had entered the defence debate.

### **The Strategic War Plans of the Superpowers**

In the early years of the Cold War, both the United States and Soviet Union believed that the best way to ensure security was by strengthening their military forces. Given increasing political differences, it is easy to understand why both had such views, but the attempts of each side to enhance its own military position only compelled the other to do the same. In short, there was no conception of security as a common problem, no realization that the only change that would be mutually beneficial in the long run was one that made *both* sides feel secure.<sup>78</sup> Further, as a result of differing military capabilities, each took a different path to achieving “security.” The United States, as a nuclear power, gradually emphasized its atomic capability, while the Soviets, lacking such a capacity until 1949, believed that massive amounts of conventional weaponry could make up for their lack of nuclear weapons.

Early American thinking on the future role of nuclear forces was contained in the 1945 “Spaatz Report,”<sup>79</sup> which set the conceptual tone for the following few years. While recognizing the powerful military effect of the bomb, the report emphasized the scarcity of the nuclear stockpile and the fact that such weapons would remain prohibitively expensive to produce, which meant that they were unlikely to enter American war plans in significant numbers. These conclusions were largely repeated in a subsequent report prepared by the Joint Staff Strategic Survey, which emphasized that if

the enemy had sufficient “stamina,” the atomic bomb might not be decisive.<sup>80</sup> This report further noted that victory in future conflict would still require physical occupation of the enemy homeland, a conclusion that revealed a basic failure to appreciate the enormity of the change that Hiroshima and Nagasaki represented.

By 1947-8, official US thinking about the atomic bomb began to change. Several factors accounted for this transformation, but the most important was the realization that early thinking on the scarcity of the bomb might have been inaccurate and the recognition that Soviet conventional superiority needed to be balanced by American nuclear power. Thus, at this time, the US military began designing war plans that took full advantage of the US nuclear monopoly, placing reliance on a massive atomic blitz in the opening stages of any future conflict with the Soviet Union.<sup>81</sup> The blitz was to have two major objectives – to slow down the enemy advance and to destroy sufficiently valuable social and economic targets as to quickly compel Soviet surrender.<sup>82</sup>

The emerging American emphasis on nuclear weapons meant that its options in case of a Soviet military challenge were limited. This was revealed during the 1948 Berlin crisis, when President Truman authorized the use of atomic weapons in the event of war.<sup>83</sup> Although Truman regarded atomic bombs as horror weapons to be employed only in the last resort, it was important, if deterrence was to work, that he affirm publicly that he would not hesitate to use them if necessary.<sup>84</sup> By the turn of the decade, any remaining US hesitation on nuclear use had been eliminated, and the bomb began to revolutionize American thinking on the use of force and the possible course of future conflict.

In contrast, early postwar Soviet military doctrine was based on Stalin’s concept of “permanently operating factors.” This theory was rigidly adhered to not only because of Stalin’s personal power but also because its merit seemed to have been demonstrated by the victories of the Second World War.<sup>85</sup> Stalin contended that to win in battle, a government needed to be able to depend on a number of constants, such as stability on the home front and the morale of the army. War was seen as a total clash between societies, in which all the strengths and weaknesses of the belligerents influenced the final result. In addition, there was a belief that success on the battlefield was dependent on having varied and capable military forces. Last, Soviet officials advanced the notion of historical determinism – that is, that the Soviets had the advantage of representing a superior social and economic form of society, and that their eventual victory was thus inevitable.

As for Soviet views on nuclear weapons, the country spent the period 1945-9 largely playing down their importance. This was not surprising, given that the Soviets did not yet have such weapons, and that under the

permanently operating factors major changes in strategy were rare and tended to take decades to be fully appreciated and understood. Reflecting this belief, Stalin noted in 1946 that “atomic bombs are meant to frighten those with weak nerves, but they cannot decide the fate of wars since atomic bombs are quite insufficient for this.”<sup>86</sup> Indeed, even after the first Soviet atomic test three years later, Stalin continued to issue statements that indicated he was largely sceptical of nuclear weapons.<sup>87</sup> In this regard, it seems likely that given the early US advantage in both weapons design and forces, the Soviets were reluctant to stress a new mode of warfare that would undermine their considerable advantage in conventional forces.

Rhetoric aside, however, the early postwar strategic views of the United States and Soviet Union were surprisingly similar. Both continued to see the next war as a kind of repeat of the Second World War. Each side understood and appreciated the destructiveness of nuclear weapons, but neither thought such weapons would be truly decisive. On the American side, this scepticism was linked to the limited atomic stockpile and the difficulties associated with delivery, as well as some lingering doubts about the significance of the weapons themselves. On the Soviet side, the Stalinist notion of permanently operating factors did not permit any radical changes of strategy. Thus, in many respects, neither country was initially convinced that nuclear weapons represented a true revolution in the use of force.

By 1950, however, this began to change. US government reports recognized the radically different nature of the emerging security environment and the types of conflict most likely to unfold should war with the Soviet Union occur. For their part, the Soviets quickly began concentrating on increasing weapons yields, hoping to nullify American technical sophistication with brute force – a practice that continued for decades. With the growth in weapons stockpiles on both sides in the early 1950s, nuclear weapons not only began to dominate war planning, but increasingly played a critical role in *political* discussions and negotiations. A state of mutual atomic deterrence was coming into being, although it would be some time before defence analysts recognized this new reality. In such an environment, strategic thinking needed to be reformulated to take account of new conditions, a challenge posed to all countries but most of all to those, like Canada, that found themselves on the front line of the emerging global divide and whose defence policies therefore had added symbolic importance.

### **Looking Forward, Looking Back:**

#### **The Canadian Defence Environment in 1950**

The years 1945-9 were critical in setting the broad framework of postwar Canadian defence and security policy. Domestically, the period began with the Canadian military reeling under a massive program of demobilization

in the aftermath of the war, but ended with funding increases and new equipment purchases, a trend that would grow stronger in the coming years. Further, two issues demanded immediate attention – Canada's policy on nuclear weapons and the emerging defence partnership with the United States. Regarding the former, while Canada decided not to produce nuclear weapons, it had extensive ties to their development, a policy ambiguity that was rarely acknowledged. As for the latter, the Canada-US defence partnership revealed a Canadian appreciation of the power and responsibility of the United States, and a recognition that continental defence cooperation was preferable to unilateral American defence initiatives. The decisions reached on these matters would have enormous implications over the following decade. Last, partly out of a desire to balance this country's ties with the United States, Canada joined an alliance of Western states for whom an attack against one would be regarded as an attack against all.

With regard to developments in the external environment, the combination of the Cold War, military innovation, and changes in strategic thought and war planning resulted in a vastly different security landscape in 1950. The growth of the US nuclear arsenal, combined with advances in aircraft, meant that the United States could now literally destroy the whole of Soviet society in a matter of hours. For their part, the Soviets did not yet have the combined nuclear force of the United States, and would not achieve strategic parity until the late 1960s, but their nuclear capabilities were on the verge of rapid growth and Western policy makers certainly had to assume a considerable Soviet atomic capacity. Indeed, with growing resources of wealth and power, many in the West believed that the Soviets might challenge the United States directly, or more likely, the American commitment to the defence of Europe, an area that was believed to be particularly vulnerable.

This was the strategic environment that Canadian defence officials encountered in 1950. It was one dominated by the global competition for power and influence, and the scientific and technical advances that had made the use of force a deadly gamble. Around the world, analysts struggled to make sense of the new environment, but it was in the United States where the largest concentration of defence observers could be found. This emerging community quickly focused its attention on the nuclear revolution, and the changes that were occurring as a result. In Canada, officials in the Department of National Defence struggled with many of the same issues, although the understandings that were reached frequently reflected different interests, concerns, and values.