

Scholarly Horizons: University of Minnesota, Morris Undergraduate Journal

Volume 3 | Issue 1

Article 2

February 2016

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Samuel Gill

University of Minnesota, Morris

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Recommended Citation

Gill, Samuel (2016) "Presidential Modernity: Harry Truman and the Foreign Policy Decision Making Process," *Scholarly Horizons: University of Minnesota, Morris Undergraduate Journal*: Vol. 3 : Iss. 1 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.morris.umn.edu/horizons/vol3/iss1/2>

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Presidential Modernity: Harry Truman and the Foreign Policy Decision Making Process

Abstract:

Harry Truman is an overshadowed figure in presidential politics and history. His presidency was wedged between two titans of the office, the politically savvy Franklin Roosevelt and universally beloved war hero Dwight Eisenhower, and his overall influence and impact is downplayed when compared these two men. This research examines what influence Truman exerted upon the executive branch by asking “how has Harry Truman influenced the foreign policy decision making process of office of the presidency and how, if at all, could his actions be considered modern?” Through a comparative case study analysis of four foreign policy events, this paper highlights the progression of Truman’s decision-making process and shows how it assumed a modern style.

Samuel Gill

POL 4205: Seminar in American Politics

12/12/15

The presidency as an institution is one of the most fascinating and controversial leadership positions in the world. Faced with an ambiguous set of powers loosely defined by Article II of the United States Constitution, the 44 men who have occupied the White House have had to decide how to best approach executive power and decision-making without overstepping any perceived or traditional institutional boundaries. With a large, expansive Executive Office of the Presidency and the advent of modern technology, specifically television, presidents are now categorized into two primary groups, pre-modern and modern. Sitting on the cusp of this transition was the 33rd president, Harry Truman. Occupying the office from 1945 -1953 Truman was in office immediately after the tumultuous changes brought by FDR that impacted virtually all areas of the presidency. One way in which FDR was not modern was in his personal decision making style. Truman – lacking the charisma and political acumen of FDR, had a chance to greatly change the executive branch decision-making process, an area that FDR address. With this in mind, the question must be asked whether or not Truman was able to contribute to the development of the office of the presidency that in a meaningful way that helped prepare future presidents for the duties expected of them in a modern world?

This question is important because Truman is often a forgotten figure in 1940 - 1950's era politics due to the two men who preceded and followed him, respectively. Many people cite FDR as the first president to drastically expand presidential powers and have a firm grip on the public relations aspect of the presidency (i.e. fireside chats, powerful orator, New Deal, etc.). Dwight Eisenhower was the product of WWII and the public's desire for a strong leader who would confidently lead the United States during a time of global uncertainty and turmoil. Between these two presidential titans sat a man

whose political career was born out of crooked Missouri politics and who many believed would fail miserably following the death of Roosevelt. Instead, he expanded presidential powers and helped to institutionalize much of the executive branch's decision-making process. Truman exhibited many modern traits that his predecessors did not, especially within the realm of foreign policy decision-making. Particularly, to what extent did Harry Truman help shape the foreign policy decision making process of the office of the presidency and how, if at all, his actions would be considered "modern?"

There are four particular cases that illustrate the effect Truman had on the foreign policy decision-making process of the executive branch. These cases are: the dropping of the Atomic Bomb, the creation and implementation of the Marshall Plan, the handling of the Berlin Crisis/Airlift, and the Korean War. In each of these foreign policy cases, I will be looking for indicators of Truman's modernity and clues that point to his long-term impact on the presidency.

Literature Review

There are three distinct bodies of research that apply to the study of Truman and decision making: what defines the modern presidency as an institution, the presidential decision making process (foreign policy in particular), and Truman's specific decision making style and executive action. Combining these various sources with the rest of this literature review, we can start to see the extent to which Harry Truman should be considered a modern president.

The literature regarding what defines the modern presidency as an institution, presidential decision-making process (foreign policy in particular), and Truman's specific decision-making style, illustrates how Harry Truman marked an important and

noteworthy transition between the pre-modern and modern presidential eras. Although he cannot be considered completely modern, there are two important factors that I believe define Truman's modernity: the expansion of the EOP staffing system and the increased presidential responsibility over foreign policy affairs, including: the development of the National Security Council and the role of various advisors.

The first substantial body of evidence that relates to presidents and foreign policy decision-making looks at the presidency as an institution and how the executive branch operates. George Edwards and Stephen Wayne (2010) note how the "contemporary presidency bears little resemblance to that which the framers of the Constitution" had originally intended (2010, 5). They examine how the policy-making role of the president has drastically expanded and predictably conclude that FDR was the first modern president because his administration was "characterized by presidential activism in a variety of policy-making roles" (2010, 7). Edwards and Wayne's assertion is in no way novel or unique; it is generally agreed upon that FDR was the first modern president.

Even though there seems to be a general consensus that FDR was the catalyst for the development of the modern presidency, Nichols (1994) claims that the modern presidency is a misnomer because every presidential administration has exhibited modern characteristics but one fairly recent development that clearly defines a great modern presidency has been the use of presidential authority to foster the expansion and organization of the executive branch's personnel.

Edwards and Wayne detail two models that have been used to organize presidential staff, the hierarchical model and the spokes of the wheel model. Even though more recent presidents have tried the spokes of the wheel model, they all return to the

reliable hierarchical model because it better regulates the flow of information, appointment making, and project oversight. They also highlight that clearly differentiated roles and a clear operational hierarchy characterize a modern presidential staff. Within this hierarchy, James (1969) highlights the importance that a strong and diverse staff plays when it comes to the institutionalized duties and expectations of a modern president. She notes that with the increased demands placed on the president, he needs to have a staff hierarchy that can provide him with the appropriate resources to intelligently make decisions. Hart (1987) similarly comments on the importance of having a capable staff. Detailing the increased power of the Executive Office of the President, Hart argues that the White House Office has expanded to help with three critical components of the modern presidency – control of the executive branch, political outreach, and policy advice. Having a competent staff that handles these day-to-day operations is necessary for a modern president to focus on the larger issues at hand. As staff expanded to handle these operations, the process by which controlling these employees had to become more formalized. Pfiffner (2000) describes the importance of having a centralized figure, other than the president, to delegate tasks and handle trivial conflicts. He asserts that the contemporary White House cannot operate without an effective chief of staff, or someone acting in a similar capacity.

I argue that the development of the extensive and multilayered executive office staff is a central measure for a president's modernity. It is the one primary factor (other than the use of radio, TV, etc.) that truly separates modern presidents from their predecessors. According to Shaw (1987), the "difference between the two eras lies in the...institutionalization of the White of Staffing in the modern era compared with the

low-key, small-scale pragmatism of the earlier period.”¹ Even though Roosevelt was the first president to expand the size of the executive staff, Truman and his efforts to institutionalize the Executive Office of the President clearly exhibit the key modern characteristics.

A second substantial area of research that directly relates to the executive office staff examines the presidential decision making process. In addition to handling the everyday operations of the executive branch, Walcott and Hult (2005) agree with James, Hart, and Pfiffner that the presence of a structured, hierarchical staff defines a contemporary presidency and helps with the presidential decision-making process. They take it a step further by claiming that advocacy from multiple individuals must supplement the standard model of staff hierarchy in order to provide a more comprehensive and balanced approach to decision making.² Multiple qualified individuals must all present their viewpoints and opinions together in a meeting with the president so that he or she will be able to make an informed and expedient decision. Similarly, Edwards and Wayne assert that the president cannot just be provided with differing views. These views must also be advocated for so that through the process of debate, the best ideas and assertions rise to the top.

These advocates can be any number of individuals, including cabinet heads, members of Congress, and personal advisors. Steven Redd focuses on the role of advisors to the decision making process (2002). Redd finds that presidential decision-making has become a communal affair between the Chief Executive and his advisors. This small

¹ Shaw, M. (1987). *The Modern Presidency: From Roosevelt to Reagan*. New York: Harper & Row.

² Walcott, C. E., & Hult, K. M. (2005). *White House Structure and Decision Making: Elaborating the Standard Model*. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 35(2), 314.

group of people help the president by iterating the political ramifications of various decisions and help him process complex and multi-faceted problems. Despite their critical role, these advisors often have a difficult time disagreeing with their boss. Not only are their jobs at risk, but Edwards and Wayne also acknowledge that presidents, because they rely on their personal staff for information and to carry out specific duties, usually select individuals that have similar beliefs, attitudes and opinions. When everyone has the same beliefs, there usually lacks a presence of dissent and constructive debate. Additionally, when the president has a relatively homogenous group of aides, it tends to promote groupthink during high stress situations. According to Irving Janis (1972), the stress promotes unanimity and eliminates the productive and necessary debate between advisors who have differing opinions, and the author documents how major foreign policy decisions reflected a lack of healthy disagreement and discussion.

As America's global involvement expands, presidents have to increasingly focus on foreign opponents and balance their roles as Commander and Chief and Chief Diplomat. Beginning with WWII, Phil Williams (1982) highlights the important distinction that, different from other wars, the national crisis did not end following the signing of the Japanese Instrument of Surrender. The Cold War with Soviet Russia forced the once temporary notion of the wartime presidency into a permanent role. The expanded duties as a result have forced the president to assume a more active foreign policy stance and, after examining John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson, two modern Cold War presidents, Newmann (2014) identifies six key areas to consider when looking at presidential foreign policy decision making: formal decision-making processes, informal decision processes, prime movers, horizontal range of participation, vertical

range participation, and coalition structure. By combining these variables, one can then approach how modern presidents conduct foreign policy.

The final body of relevant research examines Harry Truman, especially the effect he had upon the presidency as an institution and his foreign policy decision-making and strategy. When Truman left office, Ferrell outlines two areas in which he made a fundamental impact: the way he transformed the executive branch and his personal leadership qualities exhibited while president.³ Truman felt that, following FDR, the executive hierarchy was disjointed and unorganized. McCullough (1992) explains that the early years of the Truman presidency was classified by uncertainty and confusion. Roosevelt appointments frequently disregarded Truman's orders and thought themselves better than their new boss. Once a majority of these individuals resigned or were replaced by Truman, the staff hierarchy stabilized and Truman was able to implement his vision for the institutional structure of the executive branch.

For example, under Truman, the cabinet was given more concrete duties, such as attending regular meetings and conferences with the president and close aides. Similarly, Pfiffner notes that, although Truman did not have a formal chief of staff and appointed somewhat dubious individuals to important posts, it was under his administration that more authority was delegated to staffers and that they started to receive more fixed and long-term assignments.⁴ As their duties increased, these staffers started to hire their own aids and the multilayered executive office we now know today started to take shape.

³ Ferrell, R. (1983). *Harry S. Truman and the Modern American Presidency*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown.

⁴ Pfiffner, J. (2000). *The Modern Presidency*. Boston, MA: Bedford St. Martin's Press. 48.

Within foreign policy, Ferrell points out that although he assumed an active stance, similar to his predecessor, Truman's foreign policy strategy differed from Roosevelt because he was willing to bridge the gap with Europe and the Far East. Before, America preferred to "maintain a distance from Europe, and often celebrated its stupidities, but all of this ended during the Truman administration."⁵ In order to address America's growing influence on the world stage and to handle the country's new responsibilities post WWII, Truman needed to find ways to consolidate power among the various military branches. This desire to create a more centralized planning structure was reflected through the development of the National Security Council (NSC). This apparatus, created by the National Security act of 1947, was intended to consolidate the national security decision-making process and assemble the various military and domestic department heads into one council that could help the President. When the NSC was in its formative stages, government officials disagreed over what powers should be granted to the council. Burke (2009) highlights the various attempts made by powerful government individuals, including Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal, to give the Senate power to name the NSC's executive director and to grant the NSC policymaking authority. Forrestal tried mightily to bring the NSC under the Pentagon's control but after strong statements by President Truman and through cunning action by Truman's aides, the NSC was housed under the Executive office of the President and was solely advisory in nature.

In addition to the development of the NSC, there is a body of research that highlights specific cases which, combined, can better illustrate Truman's decision-making process and his impact on the modern presidency. Richard Neustadt (1980) and

⁵ Ferrell 65.

Harry Price (1955) detail the implementation of the Marshall plan following the end of WWII. Both Barton Bernstein (1975) J. Samuel Walker (1997) examine Truman's use of the Bomb in Japan. Roger G. Miller (2000) looks at the Berlin Airlift while Dean Acheson (1971) and Gary Hess (2009) focus on the Korean War. Finally, David McCullough's biography on Harry Truman helps to fill any gaps in these cases and provides a general overview of Truman's presidency.

Research Design

Harry Truman had a significant and meaningful impact upon the foreign policy decision-making process of modern presidents. He provided the initial institutionalized staff framework for the Executive Office, and he began the process of encouraging a structured, well-defined environment that efficiently and meaningfully assigns projects and duties to advisors and staff members. For these reasons, Harry Truman is a critical case in the development of the foreign policy strategy and decision making process of the executive branch. There are no formal dependent or independent variables to my research. Instead, I am focusing on Harry Truman's behavior in office. By combining examples from cases with the framework for a modern presidency, I hope to demonstrate that Harry Truman fit primarily within the framework of a modern president and that he institutionalized decision-making process.

In order to determine the extent to which did Harry Truman helped shape the foreign policy decision making process of the office of the presidency and how these actions classify him as a modern president, a case study analysis will be the best approach. Although there might be some quantitative data related to my topic, the best

and most appropriate kind of data I will use comes from descriptive, qualitative case studies.

That being said, case studies are not without weaknesses. For example, the amount of information needed to adequately address cases is often exhaustive. Who is to say that the researcher covered/omitted all of the relevant facts and let their personal bias creep in? Another problem relates to the poor external validity that often plagues case study analysis. By looking at a narrow and focused phenomenon, it is hard to generalize the findings to other situations. Finally, there is considerable debate regarding the strength of the casual inferences made under case study design. Without quantitative data, how can one definitively prove what exactly influenced the dependent variable or observed phenomenon beyond the details in the cases.

Even in the face of these shortcomings, case studies can still be helpful and necessary means of collecting information. They can address difficult to observe phenomenon, help gather information on specific and narrow topics, but most important is that they allow for a deeper examination of concepts and causal processes. It is for this final reason that the case study approach is the most appropriate method for collecting information for my paper. I cannot physically manipulate the variables of my study since it has a focus in the past, I am attempting to answer a “how” question, and Truman’s effect on presidential foreign policy decision making process is a phenomenon that is relatively difficult to observe. A comparative case study analysis is the only research design that could come close to effectively answering my research question.

Under this design, I will have one critical case and multiple individual studies that branch off of this central case. The critical case in this design will be Harry Truman and

his tenure as president. Under this somewhat broad critical case, there are four main foreign policy issues during Truman's presidency that specific cases will examine in greater detail: the dropping of the Atomic Bomb, the implementation of the Marshall plan, the Berlin airlift, and the Korean War. Under each of these cases, there are five factors that determine modernity: formal meetings, role of advisors, level of presidential accountability/decisiveness, residual Roosevelt influence, and whether the decision followed the spokes of the wheel or hierarchical model of leadership (hierarchical being a modern strategy). Ideally, with each of these factors, we will see Truman's foreign policy decision making evolve into a more modern process.

For the Atomic Bomb, I examine the works of Bernard Bernstein and Samuel Walker. These author's are key because while Walker's piece has a Truman focus, Bernstein also factors in Roosevelt's influence upon the drop of the Atomic Bomb. For the Marshall Plan, I will be using Richard Neustadt and his book on presidential power. This source is key because it details Truman's relationship with General Marshall and provides less historical background, helping to emphasize the salient pieces of information. I will use the research of Roger Miller to examine the Berlin Airlift and I plan on using Truman's Secretary of State Dean Acheson's account *The Korean War*, as well as research from Gary Hess, to investigate the Korean War. For all of these cases, David McCullough's *Truman* will also help to fill blank areas and will reinforce weak areas of my argument.

My case study approach has poor external validity. Examining Truman specifically, this study cannot be generalized or applied to other presidents or larger political trends/movements but this is not my goal for this paper. I intend to use these

case studies to look closely at how Truman affected the office of the presidency. As a result, the internal validity of this study is quite strong because of the extensive and tightly focused nature of these cases. Each case study that I have chosen to examine contains a wealth of information because each of these foreign policy developments was extremely significant. For my paper, I am only going to focus on how Truman made decisions and how his staff his was involved with these decisions.

Ideally, I expect that the case study approach to these various foreign policy developments under the Truman administration show that Truman is the father of modern presidential foreign policy decision-making process. Whether or not the thesis is proven, a case study design is the only feasible way I can attain the information needed to address this sort of question. I turn now to the first of the four cases

The Atomic Bomb

Harry Truman assumed office at a critical junction during WWII. The Germans were on the defensive in Europe and the United States forces were making noticeable gains in the Pacific. These gains, although strategically important, came at great cost. The bloody pacific battles, including Leyte Gulf and Iwo Jima were still fresh in the memories of all Americans when Truman took over following Roosevelt's untimely death in April of 1945. Seeking to quickly resolve hostilities in the Pacific, Truman was immediately briefed about America's fearful new weapon, the Atomic Bomb.

As Vice-President, Truman knew nothing about the Bomb. Roosevelt kept him largely in the dark about the Manhattan Project and any details related to the development, construction, or testing of the powerful weapon. It was only after Truman

became president that he was fully briefed on the Bomb and its implications. Following the successful test of the Plutonium Bomb, Truman felt sufficiently comfortable with the technology and directed his aids to determine the best cities in Japan on which to drop the deadly projectile.⁶ One month later, on August 6, the B-29 Superfortress *Enola Gay* dropped the first ever Atomic Bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. Following a second bombing of Nagasaki on August 9th, the Japanese rulers finally acquiesced to American demands and unconditionally surrendered, thereby disbanding their ruling aristocracy and removing the Emperor they so fanatically followed.

The process leading up to the dropping of the Atomic Bombs provides the first glimpse into how Truman initially approached foreign policy decision-making in the war context. Immediately following his swearing in, Truman was approached by Roosevelt's Director of the Office of War Mobilization James Byrnes and was informed about the existence of the Manhattan Project. On April 25, Truman held a follow up meeting with Byrnes, Secretary of War Henry Stimson, and Lieutenant General Leslie Groves. It was at this meeting that Groves explained the Manhattan Project in greater detail and Truman agreed to Stimson's request that a special committee be formed to "consider the implications of the new weapon ...especially...for the post war era."⁷ This committee reached two important conclusions, that the Bomb should be deployed without warning and should target a large industrial area supporting the Japanese war effort as "to make a profound psychological impression on as many of the inhabitants as possible" and that no

⁶ Walker, J. (1997). *Prompt and Utter Destruction: Truman and the use of Atomic Bombs against Japan*. Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press.

⁷ Walker 15.

information shall be shared with Soviets regarding the Bomb or America's atomic progress.⁸

Truman generally shared these concerns but wanted to ensure that the United States had a working version of the Bomb before any further action was taken. After he was informed of the successful test of the Plutonium Bomb, Truman was now faced with a few key questions that needed to be addressed: To what extent should the Soviets be informed of the American's atomic progress and was Soviet intervention even necessary following the successful detonation at Alamogordo? Although Truman always maintained that he traveled to the Potsdam Conference to secure Soviet participation in the Pacific, the stunning success of the Plutonium Bomb detonation had many of Truman's closest advisors, even George Marshall, questioning whether or not Russia was actually needed to end the war.⁹ After multiple formal meetings and consultations with advisors, Truman agreed with Byrnes that Soviet influence in the Pacific should be limited and that the Bomb should be used as a powerful diplomatic tool.¹⁰ As a result, the Soviets were kept in the dark and plans went ahead to drop the Atomic Bomb on Japan.

The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was one of the first and, arguably, one of the most important foreign policy decisions made by Harry Truman. What many fail to realize is that, while Truman is credited for dropping the Bombs on Japan, it was Roosevelt who actually irrevocably set the wheels in motion to dropping the Bomb. For example Truman, when he assumed office, wanted to continue Roosevelt's policies and live up to the man's legacy. Therefore, it was just assumed that the Bombs would be used

⁸ Walker 17.

⁹ Bernstein, B. J. (1975). *Roosevelt, Truman, and the Atomic Bomb, 1941-1945: A Reinterpretation*. Political Science Quarterly. 45

¹⁰ Walker, J. (1997). *Prompt and Utter Destruction: Truman and the use of Atomic Bombs against Japan*. Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press. 66

on Japan.¹¹ Additionally, many of Truman's advisors at this time were Roosevelt appointees, including the man who had a significant influence on the decision to drop the Atomic Bombs, primarily James Byrnes.¹² All of these factors combined, including steadfast public support of unconditional surrender by Japan, led Truman to drop the Bomb.

Even though this process seemed like a Roosevelt initiative, there were glimmers of Truman's new decision-making style and his steps towards institutionalizing the decision making process. For example, Truman actually listened to his advisors opinions and respected their experience. Following the conclusion of the Okinawa campaign, Truman called together the Joint Chiefs of Staff for a meeting with the purpose of ending the war with Japan. Instead of telling the Chiefs what he wanted, Truman merely listened and accepted their recommendation that the island of Kyushu should be attacked first. Although he did make his intentions clear that he wanted to end the war as quickly and with as little American casualties as possible, Truman still accepted the opinions of the Chiefs of Staff and understood the value of their arguments.¹³

As the talks and meetings wore on regarding Japan, Truman usually deferred to the wishes of his advisors when he did not have a strong opinion on an issue or was unsure of the correct decision (in the case of Byrnes wanting to delay Soviet entry into the war with Japan). When, on the other hand, he was sure on an issue, he acted decisively.¹⁴ Even though Truman involved his advisors in the decision making process,

¹¹ Bernstein, B. J. (1975). Roosevelt, Truman, and the Atomic Bomb, 1941-1945: A Reinterpretation. *Political Science Quarterly*. 35

¹² Bernstein 35.

¹³ Walker, J. (1997). *Prompt and Utter Destruction: Truman and the use of Atomic Bombs against Japan*. Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press. 37

¹⁴ Walker 74.

it was more due to the fact that he wanted to adhere to Roosevelt's policies.¹⁵ Even though Truman did begin to institutionalize the decision making process during the Atomic Bomb deliberations (multiple formal meetings with advisors and National Security Council), it took another foreign policy crisis that was further removed from Roosevelt's death that highlighted Truman's independent effect on the presidential foreign policy decision-making process: the rebuilding of Europe.

European Bailout

After 6 consistent years of brutal fighting, by April of 1945 Germany was physically and morally beat and finally surrendered. Unfortunately, the end of the war did not bring a return to prosperity; the European continent lay in ruins. Years of strategic bombing by both sides left major cities heavily damaged (if not completely annihilated), and displaced thousands of citizens. Facing a complete collapse of the Europe, Truman's Secretary of State George Marshall, in his famous Harvard speech of 1947, proposed the European Recovery Program, an ambitious and far reaching proposal that would see the United States loan European nations billions of dollars in economic aid. After approval by Congress, the plan went into effect and pumped vital aid into the beleaguered European economies. Whether or not Truman had a direct influence on the plan or its implementation, he had to ultimately decide whether or not the administration would put forward a plan to save European economies.

Following the war, a bailout of the struggling European economies was a key issue on Harry Truman's foreign policy agenda. Even before the war was entirely finished, Truman already had the idea of rebuilding Europe on his mind. Swayed by

¹⁵ Bernstein, B. J. (1975). *Roosevelt, Truman, and the Atomic Bomb, 1941-1945: A Reinterpretation*. Political Science Quarterly. 34

Stimson, who believed that an economically strong Germany was vital to the overall stability of the European continent, Truman believed that sharing America's wealth and prosperity with impoverished/struggling nations would help to spread democratic ideals of freedom and liberty around the globe.¹⁶ After hearing reports from both Kennan and Under Secretary Clayton, it became apparent that "a collapse in Europe would mean revolution and a tailspin for the American economy," and that a vibrant and robust Europe would be a power tool to prevent communist encroachment.¹⁷ Armed with this knowledge, Truman authorized his Secretary of State, George Marshall, to give a speech at Harvard on June 5, 1947 that outlined the Administration's plan for bailing out Europe. Although Marshall was widely popular, the Truman administration faced significant hurdles to pass a European bailout plan through Congress.

In 1946, the Democrats had lost control of both Houses of Congress for the first time in 14 years. Truman was less than two years into his presidency via succession and was struggling, both in the polls and with his own party. A belligerent majority led by Senator Robert Taft seemed unwilling to even consider cooperating with Truman.¹⁸ Yet, among this harsh political climate, Truman was able to get the Marshall plan passed through Congress with little delay. His ability to accomplish this seemingly impossible feat highlights another aspect of Truman that indicates his modernity, the willingness by Truman to delegate significant projects to competent staffers.

In this case, there is a reason that the European Recovery Program is known as the Marshall Plan and not the Truman Plan. Truman knew that any plan with his name on it

¹⁶ McCullough, D. (1992). *Truman*. New York: Simon & Schuster. 561.

¹⁷ McCullough 562.

¹⁸ Neustadt, R., & Neustadt, R. (1980). *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan*. New York: John Wiley & Sons. 36

would die in Congress and he had great respect for Marshall. Truman was known for saying that a lot could be “accomplished if you didn’t care who received the credit.”¹⁹ Even so, although Marshall’s name was attached to the program, it’s success or failure would be attributed to the man who, ultimately, had the job to approve the plan. When Marshall was drafting the recovery plan, he received the full backing from the White House. Truman assigned other top cabinet officials to help draft reports and papers that would help with legislative presentation.²⁰ Overall, Truman handed Marshall the reins during the formative stages of the recovery program and Marshall took “extreme care to keep the President always informed.”²¹ Although Marshall took the lead while crafting the plan and including European countries in the planning process, Truman also took steps behind the scenes to help his Secretary of State succeed.

When individuals questioned how much aid the American economy could safely provide to the struggling countries, Truman created two committees tasked with crafting a proposal, based upon an earlier plan created by the Committee of European Economic Cooperation (CEEC), to present to Congress. These committees played an important role highlighting the dangers of a European collapse and by providing helpful and factual recommendations that contributed to the final makeup of the recovery program.²² Truman also took active steps to recruit and work with members from the other party. Senator Arthur Vandenburg (R-MI), the chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, was seen as the Congressional lead for all things international. He was also an advocate for bipartisanship and, in 1946, with a Republican Administration seemingly inevitable two

¹⁹ McCullough, D. (1992). *Truman*. New York: Simon & Schuster. 564

²⁰ Neustadt, R., (1980). *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan*. New York: John Wiley & Sons. 40

²¹ McCullough, D. (1992). *Truman*. New York: Simon & Schuster. 563

²² Price, H. (1955). *The Marshall Plan and its Meaning*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press. 39

years down the road, was more willing to compromise.²³ Vandenburg's role in helping to win over Congressional support was crucial and was appreciated by Marshall, who called Vandenburg "his right hand man" and believed that he "never received full credit for his monumental efforts on behalf of the European Recovery Program."²⁴ These two men, along with other influential advisors, such as Clark Clifford and George Kennan, helped to make the Marshall plan feasible and able to pass Congress, all while receiving consistent support from Truman.

The Marshall Plan represented the first large foreign policy issue on Harry Truman's agenda that was not posthumously influenced by Roosevelt. Bolstered by the exciting and intense election of 1948, Truman confidence was renewed and "he was no longer Roosevelt's 'stand in'."²⁵ Although Truman was still willing to make the critical decisions, he had unwavering faith in Marshall and his actions. Truman's modernity stems from his close relationship with Marshall and other influential advisors, such as Dean Acheson and, according to Louis Halle, "[Truman's] ability to appreciate these men and to support them as they supported him." This was different from Truman's predecessors, especially Roosevelt, who was known for inciting conflict among his advisors and pitting them against each other.

Rescuing Berlin

Following the cessation of hostilities in Europe, the world observed the Cold War slowly start to develop as relations between the Soviet Union and the West became increasingly strained. From his public speeches and his overall attitude, it was clear that

²³ Neustadt, R., & Neustadt, R. (1980). *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan*. New York: John Wiley & Sons. 38

²⁴ As quoted in Price 65.

²⁵ McCullough, D. (1992). *Truman*. New York: Simon & Schuster. 555

Truman was going to take a hard stand against the expansion of communist influence. Speaking out in support of democracies around the world, Truman pledged to help any nation that was battling the influence of the “red menace.” Dubbed the Truman Doctrine, America led the Western powers in tightening down and hardening their stance against the Soviet Union and other communist nations. Unhappy with the actions taking place in western Germany and Berlin, the Russians became increasingly hostile during international talks with the Western powers.²⁶ Finally, in January of 1948, the Soviets had enough and restricted access to East Berlin.

What followed was one of the most ambitious and logistically challenging relief efforts in American history. The Berlin airlift required hundreds of transport planes from America and Britain to fly continuous resupply missions into the city. Without stopping, the massive cargo planes were able to successfully keep the millions of individuals in West Berlin supplied for the year that the Soviets had the city blockaded. Seen as an overall success, the Berlin Airlift reflected favorably upon Truman and his Administration and is an interesting example of his decision making process.

The Berlin Airlift represented a straightforward foreign policy decision by Truman: let the city of Berlin starve or to cave to Soviet demands. In a June 28 strategy meeting, four days after Stalin ordered the blockade, Truman made his intentions clear, interrupting his aides and asserting that “abandoning [Berlin] was beyond the discussion.”²⁷ Following this decision by Truman, the discussion turned to what was the best option to bail out the besieged city. Multiple options were proposed, including breaking through the blockade with an armored convoy and retaliating by closing off the

²⁶ Miller, R. (1998). 19. *To Save a City: The Berlin Airlift, 1948-1949*. Washington, D.C. Air Force History and Museums Program.

²⁷ Miller 56

Panama canal to Russian ships, but Truman realized the risks of using force against the Soviets.

Following the end of the war and demobilization, the U.S. only had 90,821 soldiers left in Germany. Combined with Britain's 103,426 and France's 75,000 personnel, these forces palled in comparison to the assets the Soviets could muster, including a force between 500,000 and one million men and hundreds of T-34 tanks and artillery pieces.²⁸ To avoid provoking open hostilities with the formidable Soviet army, Truman decided that an airlift would be the best option and ordered his commander in the field, General Clay, to begin a full-scale operation.²⁹ What followed a gargantuan program that, in a year, saw 277,804 flights in and out of Berlin, with a total of 2,325,809 tons of food and supplies delivered? Without an end in sight and facing an increasingly effective and efficient airlift from determined western powers, the Soviets realized that their strategy was not working and ended the blockade on May 12, 1949. A resounding success, the Berlin Airlift exemplified Truman's ability to decisively act on foreign policy issues and give his advisors a sense of direction.

The airlift represents one of the first times that Truman alone acted to address a foreign policy crisis. It was Truman that decided that America was to remain in Berlin. It was Truman who decided to use an airlift as the means for supplying a city of 2,000,000 inhabitants. Although he sometimes held strategy meetings, "Truman had consulted none of the White House Staff or any of his political advisers" over the decision to use or execution of the airlift.³⁰ This appears to be a step back from modern presidential decision-making strategy. Normally, staff is consulted, multiple solutions are

²⁸ Miller 30.

²⁹ McCullough, D. (1992). *Truman*. New York: Simon & Schuster. 631

³⁰ McCullough 631

recommended, and the president makes a decision. Although Truman did not consult with any advisors extensively regarding the airlift, his modernity is exhibited through the explicitness of his demands and how his advisors reacted.

When Truman did have meetings, the goal of staying in Berlin was already established and the discussion surrounded logistical concerns. Truman was able to give his advisors a sense of direction that, in turn, allowed for a more focused and productive discussion surrounding solutions. For example, at a National Security Council Meeting in July, General Clay made it clear that Berlin people would benefit the most from an airlift and that more transport planes were needed in order to successfully carry out the mission. Even though Air Force Chief of Staff General Hoyt Vandenberg expressed concerns over diverting more air resources to Berlin, Truman weighed the opinions of his advisors and, predictably, sent more planes to Berlin. Truman's staff and advisors still were able to express their opinions, but in a capacity that focused on the logistical concerns of carrying out Truman's orders, rather than suggesting alternatives.³¹ Even though his staff was limited on proposing alternatives to bailing out Berlin, there are examples of how advisors were able to provide input on Truman's plan, helping to solidify his desire to remain in Berlin.

On July 22nd, Truman met with his then Secretary of State George Marshall and Secretary of Defense James Forrestal. It was at this meeting that Marshall highlighted recent successful efforts in Greece, Italy, Finland, and Yugoslavia that thwarted Soviet aspirations and asserted that "failure in Berlin...would jeopardize the current trend in

³¹ McCullough 648.

halting communism.”³² It was not as if a majority of Truman’s advisors were against saving Berlin; many, including General Clay and Marshall, believed that saving the city was vital for containing the spread of Communism and for improving the “moral of Western, non-Communist Europe.”³³ It is for these reasons that a decision that was seemingly made unilaterally and off the cuff was actually, although primarily decided by Truman, a well thought out plan that had significant staff and advisor input.

Conflict in Korea

The National Security Act of 1947, in addition to restructuring the institutional structure of the armed forces, also created the National Security Council (NSC). An advisory board comprised of various high-ranking officials from the administration and the military, the NSC was tasked to help the president address various foreign policy issues and crises.³⁴ One of their tools that helped them advise the president was their ability to draft comprehensive reports.

The council’s most famous and, arguably, most influential report was National Security Report 68, or NSC-68. Drafted in response to the successful Soviet test of a nuclear bomb, it advocated for an aggressive and proactive approach to addressing communist expansion by using the strategy of containment. Falling in line with the Truman Doctrine, containment sought to provide American resources and aid to countries to prevent the encroachment of Communism.

³² Miller, R. (1998). *To Save a City: The Berlin Airlift, 1948-1949*. Washington, D.C. Air Force History and Museums Program. 81

³³ McCullough, D. (1992). *Truman*. New York: Simon & Schuster. 631

³⁴ Burke, J. (2009). 18. *Honest Broker?: The National Security Advisor and Presidential Decision Making*. College Station: Texas A & M University Press.

It was only natural, following an all out invasion by communist North Korean forces of South Korea in June of 1950, that Truman was determined to intervene. What followed was a three-year war resulted saw hundreds of thousands of casualties and no clear winner. A dubious use of presidential war power due to a lack of a formal authorization by Congress, the Korean War is an important case that highlights Truman's decision-making process as it pertained to foreign policy crises.

When looking at Korea, there are two main decisions Truman had to make over the course of the war, whether or not to involve U.S. combat forces and if he should fire General MacArthur for insubordination. These two foreign policy decisions helped define the outcome of the war and demonstrated Truman's decision making style and process.

The June 1950 invasion of South Korea by North Korean forces came as a shock and surprise to many in America, including President Truman. The president immediately called together a meeting with his top advisors at the Blair House on June 25, 1950.³⁵ It was at this meeting that his advisors reaffirmed Truman's desire to respond to this act of aggression, discussed potential Soviet motivations behind the attack, and Secretary of State Acheson recommended that

1. General MacArthur should be authorized and directed to supply Korea with arms and other equipment over and above that already allocated under the Military assistance Program
2. The U.S. Air Force should be ordered to protect Kimpo airport during the evacuation of United States dependents by attacking any north Korean ground or air forces approaching it.
3. The Seventh Fleet should be ordered to proceed from the Philippines north and to prevent any attack from China on Formosa or vice versa.³⁶

³⁵ Hess, G. (2009). *Presidential Decisions for War: Korea, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf, and Iraq* (2nd ed.). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 18

³⁶ Acheson, D., & Acheson, D. (1971). *The Korean War*. New York: Norton. 21

After everyone in attendance was able to voice their opinion, Acheson's three recommendations, along with instructing General MacArthur to send a survey team to Korea to report in, were all approved by Truman. But he held off on deploying ground troops at that particular moment. The following day, after receiving news about the rapidly deteriorating situation in Korea, Truman called another meeting at the Blair House. Once again, after listening to the opinions of those in attendance, he agreed with Acheson's recommendation to authorize the deployment of U.S. Naval and Air units and, "on Tuesday, June 27, U.S. air and naval forces undertook direct support of the South Korean army."³⁷ Unfortunately this action wasn't enough. South Korean forces were in complete disarray, Seoul had fallen to the North Korean soldiers, and, following a personal inspection by MacArthur himself, it was strongly recommended to Truman that only the intervention of U.S. ground forces could halt the invasion.³⁸ Even though he was worried about, similar to the Berlin, provoking open hostilities with the Soviet Union, Truman understood the necessity of committing ground troops. After receiving these urgent reports from MacArthur and U.S. Ambassador to South Korea John Muccio, and after meeting once again with civilian and military advisors, "Truman announced that he would give MacArthur authority to deploy, as he deemed necessary, any ground forces under his command," thereby committing full U.S. military forces and taking the country to war.³⁹

Now that the war was underway, MacArthur was given particular instructions by which he was supposed to operate in the Korean theatre of war. After the U.S. forces had

³⁷ Hess, G. (2009). *Presidential Decisions for War: Korea, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf, and Iraq* (2nd ed.). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 23.

³⁸ Hess 27.

³⁹ Hess 31.

halted the North Korean advance and had pushed the communist forces back to the 38th parallel, Truman assented to the recommendations of both Acheson and Marshall and authorized MacArthur to undertake military action north of the 38th parallel. If Marshall sparked a Soviet response, he was to assume defensive positions and wait for Washington's instructions. If the Chinese became involved, MacArthur was "to continue military operations so long as the offered a reasonable chance of success."⁴⁰ Following a string of military successes, MacArthur became increasingly emboldened. Truman was uncomfortable with MacArthur's new independence and decided to meet the General on the tiny Wake Island in the Pacific in the Fall of 1950. MacArthur dominated this discussion and the conference ended without any assertion by Truman of his power over MacArthur. Coupled with MacArthur's order to begin an all out bombing assault on North Korean and Chinese targets without even consulting with Washington, there was a sense between Truman and his advisors that Marshall was becoming increasingly out of control.⁴¹ The final straw came on April 5, 1951 when MacArthur wrote a letter to the Minority Leader of the House that amounted "to a direct attack on [Truman's] policies."⁴² It was after this extremely public attack that Truman finally decided MacArthur must be removed from command.

Meeting with Marshall, Acheson, Harriman and General Bradley, Truman discussed various options and asked that the Joint Chiefs of Staff meet to come up with a suitable replacement. The Chiefs met with Truman three days later and announced that they unanimously supported removing MacArthur and replacing him with General

⁴⁰ Hess 47.

⁴¹ Hess 56.

⁴² Acheson, D., & Acheson, D. (1971). *The Korean War*. New York: Norton. 103.

Matthew Ridgeway.⁴³ After listening to the opinions of all of his advisors present, Truman approved the Chiefs of Staff's recommendation and ordered the replacement of MacArthur.

Both of these decisions illustrate how Truman evolved while in office and highlight another modern aspect of his foreign policy decision making style: the methodical and deliberate way in which he made decisions during the Korean War. Contrary to common stereotypes, Truman was actually quite methodical when deciding whether or not to involve U.S. troops in Korea and if he should fire MacArthur. In each case, he held multiple formal meetings with advisors and was constantly conferring with military and State Department officials. In the case of MacArthur, Truman did not succumb to his highly publicized impulsive temper. Instead of dismissing MacArthur on the spot, Truman held his feelings in check and was remarkably composed.⁴⁴ He met repeatedly with his closest advisors, including Marshal, Acheson, Bradley, and Harriman, without ever once indicating whether or not he believed MacArthur should be relieved. Following the Joint Chiefs recommendation that MacArthur should be removed based upon strategic military concerns, Truman finally indicated that he was of the opinion that MacArthur was no longer needed and ordered the relevant papers to be drafted.⁴⁵ By relieving MacArthur, Truman removed an annoying thorn in his side and allowed for more competent individuals to lead American forces on the Korean peninsula.

Both of these decisions (committing ground forces in Korea and relieving MacArthur of command) represent an amazing exercise of self-restraint by Truman. They also clearly illustrate how, by going through multiple channels and by regularly

⁴³ Acheson 104.

⁴⁴ McCullough, D. (1992). Truman. New York: Simon & Schuster. 839.

⁴⁵ McCullough 840.

conferring with military and civilian advisors in structured and formal meetings, Truman followed a clearly demarcated decision making structure which respected his staff hierarchy. All in all, these two decisions clearly reinforce the modernity of Harry Truman's foreign policy decision-making style.

Analysis

Harry Truman Foreign Policy Decision Making Progression

*Heavily influenced by the opinions of only a few primary advisors, mainly Roosevelt's former Director of The Office of War Mobilization, James F. Byrnes

When analyzing Truman's foreign policy decision-making process, there are five different factors that, if present (or not present), indicated modernity, including the number of formal meetings held, the role of various advisors, the extent to which the decision was Truman's, how much influence Roosevelt or his advisors played, and whether the decision followed the spokes of the wheel or hierarchical model of decision-

	Formal Meetings	Role of Advisors	Truman Decision	Roosevelt Influence	Spokes v. Hierarchical
Atomic Bomb	Low	Low	Low	High	Spokes*
Marshall Plan	Medium	High	Medium	Low	Spokes
Berlin Airlift	Medium	Medium	High	Low	Hierarchical
Korean War	High	High	High	Low	Hierarchical

making laid out by Edwards and Wayne. Through examining the chart above, there are a few interesting cells that deserve recognition.

With the exception of the Berlin airlift in the Role of Advisors column, we see that the decision making process of Harry Truman followed a pattern that points to his modernity and how he affected the foreign policy decision making process of the presidency. In terms of formal meetings, Truman held no meetings with advisors regarding the decision process to drop the Bomb. It was implied that the weapon was going to be used by America on Japan because that was the plan that Roosevelt pushed, James F. Byrnes advocated for, and Truman, nor any of his top advisors, truly questioned. This is why Roosevelt's influence over the dropping of the Atomic Bomb is classified as high, whereas every subsequent foreign policy decision that was made by Truman saw little to no Roosevelt influence. By the time Truman decided to bail out Europe and the Marshall Plan was created/administered, most of Roosevelt's advisors were no longer a part of Truman's Administration, including James F. Byrnes, Roosevelt's former Director of the Office of War Mobilization and Truman's former Secretary of State who played a very large and vocal part in sticking to Roosevelt's plan as it pertained to the Atomic Bomb.

This becomes a common trend in the cases other than the Atomic Bomb, that after enough time passed and Truman was able to surround himself with individuals he was comfortable with and respected (George Marshall or Dean Acheson), the decision making process became more efficient and centralized. Both the Berlin Airlift and The Korean War show how Truman was able to be a decisive leader. What set him apart from Roosevelt in this regard is that, when Roosevelt made decisions unilaterally and without a consensus from his advisors, Truman would make his decisions after every one of his advisors had voiced their opinion. Yet, after hearing all of his advisors' opinions, it was

Truman who made the final decision. The buck stops here was not an overstatement, and that is why the cells for the Berlin Airlift and Korean War under “Truman Decision” are classified as High.

Overall, through examining various foreign policy events under Harry Truman’s presidency including the dropping of the Atomic Bomb, the Marshall Plan, the Berlin Airlift, and the Korean War, start to see a pattern emerge. This pattern saw Truman call more formal meetings than his predecessor, involved his advisors in the decision making process, became more decisive, shed the influence and obsession over Roosevelt’s preferences, and adopted the hierarchical model of decision-making that saw Truman surrounded by advisors who handled the minutia of details that did not require Truman’s attention; allowing the Missouriian to act as the nexus for decision making and focus on the important issues that required significant attention. Even though he still exhibited some traits that wouldn’t be considered modern, such as his lack of initial consultation with advisors before deciding to order the Berlin Airlift, it was under the Truman administration that the important progression in institutionalized decision making style and process took place. Truman was able to bridge the gap between two important and well know presidential figures and create the decision-making framework that Eisenhower was able to build from. Harry Truman was able to overcome his predecessor’s shadow and make a significant and influential contribution to the operation of the foreign policy decision-making process of the modern executive branch.

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