

THE SOLDIER DIPLOMAT: WALTER BEDELL SMITH,
AMERICAN AMBASSADOR TO MOSCOW, 1946-1949

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of
Texas State University-San Marcos
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements

For the Degree

Master of ARTS

By

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San Marcos, Texas

December 2003

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to begin by thanking my wife, Andrea Barlow, and our daughter, Emily, for their patience and love. Thanks to Dianne Barlow, M.Ed., who offered invaluable advice throughout the editing process. In addition, I would like to thank my brother, Andrew Barlow, M.S., for always giving me encouragement.

I am very thankful for the members of my thesis committee. My deep appreciation goes to Dr. Dwight Watson for his guidance and friendship. I would also like to express my thanks to Dr. Mary Brennan for her unique ability to engage and inspire her students. Finally, it is my chief advisor, Dr. Dennis J. Dunn, to whom I owe the most overwhelming debt of gratitude. Dr. Dunn provided me with expert instruction on writing and Russian history.

This manuscript was submitted on November 21, 2003.

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CHAPTER I

DIPLOMATIC AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Walter Bedell Smith was President Harry S. Truman's ambassador to the Soviet Union between March 1946 and March 1949. He was an effective diplomat during a crucial period when relations with the Soviet Union were beginning to deteriorate. His relationship with the Soviet leadership was one of the most important realities in politics following the end of World War II and the beginning of the Cold War.¹

Truman believed that a clash with the Soviet Union was inevitable.² He was particularly troubled by the growing

¹ Stephen P. Gilbert, Soviet Images of America (New York: Russak & Company, Inc., 1977), 12.

² Gabriel Gorodetsky, "The Origins of the Cold War: Stalin, Churchill and the Formation of the Grand Alliance," Russian Review 47, issue 2 (April 1988): 149. In Reflections on a Ravaged Century (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 200), Historian Robert Conquest supports Gorodetsky's assertion that the "root cause" of confrontation was the Soviets' belief that conflict with the capitalist world was inevitable.

Soviet hostility to the West in the waning days of the war. He was also concerned about the burgeoning difficulty of implementing the wartime agreements with the Soviet Union.³ He feared that hostilities were escalating because Stalin pursued an uncompromising expansionist foreign policy that pushed Communist ideology at home and abroad. Truman concluded that a firm policy of containment was necessary to stop Soviet aggression.⁴ His policies reflected the American public's apprehensions and fears, which had been aroused by the blowing winds of the Cold War.⁵

A critical component of Truman's policy of containment was the selection of an American ambassador in Moscow who could stand up to the Soviets and who could clearly articulate American resolve and strengths, while countering Soviet enmity. The new ambassador would have to be a person who could comfort the Soviets without exacerbating

³ Harry S. Truman, "International Affairs and Foreign Policy," *Message to the Congress on the State of the Union and on the Budget for 1947* (Washington, DC. 21 January 1946).

⁴ Dennis J. Dunn, Caught Between Roosevelt and Stalin (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1998), 261.

⁵ Smith, "Comments in Response to Foreign Minister Molotov's Reply to Ambassador Smith, May 9, 1948," A Decade of American Foreign Policy: Basic Documents, 1941-1949 (Washington: Dept. of State Publications, 1985), 622.

the developing antagonistic relationship. Furthermore, the ambassador would have to be an official who could provide valuable information and advice for the direction of American foreign policy. If the Soviet dictator continued with his oppositional policies, Truman wanted a diplomat who would not cower before Stalin, and who also could maintain control of the relationship.

Truman's choice for ambassador to Moscow was Lieutenant General Walter Bedell Smith. "Petulant, ascetic, strong tempered and widely disliked,"⁶ Smith seemed like an unlikely candidate as the American ambassador to the Soviet Union. However, Truman thought Smith's thorny personality would be an asset in Moscow. He admired Smith's capacity for hard work, loyalty, and bluntness. He also liked Smith because he agreed with Truman on the origin of the Cold War, namely that it was caused by the Soviet Union.

Smith followed George F. Kennan, perhaps the most knowledgeable American expert on Soviet Russia, who held that Stalin and the Soviet government were singularly responsible for the breakup of the wartime alliance and the

⁶ D.K.R. Crosswell, The Chief of Staff: The Military Career of General Walter Bedell Smith (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), xx.

advent of the Cold War.⁷ He also concurred with Kennan's analysis in explaining why Stalin and the Soviets plunged into the Cold War—because the "innate antagonism between capitalism and socialism" had become "deeply imbedded in foundations of Soviet power."⁸ Kennan concluded that confrontation with the Soviet Union after World War II was unavoidable. Smith accepted this assessment completely.

In Smith's mind, the Soviet Union and the Western democracies had widely divergent peace aims, in large part because of the incompatibility of Communism and capitalism, and thus the Cold War followed as naturally as night followed day.⁹ Historian John Gaddis, basing his opinion on the newly opened Soviet archives, thought that Smith and

⁷ See, for example, Kennan's book Russia and the West Under Lenin and Stalin. Against Kennan were the revisionist historians who basically blamed the United States or capitalism and included such figures as William A. Williams, Walter LaFeber, Gar Alperovitz, and Gabriel Kolko. John Lewis Gaddis initially represented a middle position, arguing that the United States and Soviet Russia each had some responsibility for the Cold War. After the Soviet archives were opened, Gaddis revised his view and agreed with the orthodox historical school. See his What We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

⁸ George F. Kennan, American Diplomacy: 1900-1950 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 95.

⁹ Walter Bedell Smith, My Three Years in Moscow (Philadelphia and New York: J.B. Lippincot Company, 1950), 231.

Kennan were right. In 1997, he wrote, "The resulting asymmetry [of ideology] would account, more than anything else, for the origins, escalation, and ultimate outcome of the Cold War."¹⁰

This thesis will provide the first scholarly study of Walter Bedell Smith's career as the American ambassador to the Soviet Union. The thesis focuses on Smith's diplomatic assignment within the context of major global events that occurred during the formative years of the Cold War. This research examines President Truman's consideration of Walter Bedell Smith for public service as the American ambassador to Moscow. In particular, it assesses Smith's role in the resolution of a number of international conflicts, including the Iranian Crisis of 1946, the Greek and Turkish Crisis of 1946-1947, and the Berlin Crisis of 1948.

In addition, it provides an examination of Ambassador Smith's assessment of the Soviet state. It also identifies the problems related to Soviet expansion in Eastern Europe and the ensuing impact on world politics. Finally, this

¹⁰ John Lewis Gaddis, We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 17.

research demonstrates how Smith influenced major foreign policy decisions during his ambassadorship.

This thesis relied on primary sources in English. Above all, it used Smith's published memoirs of his experiences as ambassador to the Soviet Union entitled *My Three Years in Moscow*. Smith's memoirs continue to provide historians with the most reliable and informative account of his service in Moscow. *My Three Years* also offers a rare glimpse of Smith's role in times of diplomatic crisis. Other primary sources that were used include the correspondences of Smith and of other governmental officials. Many of Smith's official correspondences can be found in the State Department's publications, *Foreign Relations of the United States (1946-1949)*, as well as the multi-volume work published by Princeton University Press, *Documents on American Foreign Relations*.

There were sources that were not available for this study of Ambassador Smith. General Smith's public papers located in the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library in Abilene, Kansas were not used. However, most of Smith's official diplomatic papers can be found in the *Foreign Relations of the United States*.

Declassified documents in the Soviet Union archives have also not been studied because the author did not have the financial resources or Russian language proficiency to use these sources. However, the information from the Soviet archives was not needed for the purpose of this thesis, since its focus is on Smith and not the Soviet perceptions of Smith. While the Soviet documentary evidence might add some detail, the information would not change the fundamental description of Smith that emerges from the major sources used in this paper. Moreover, the Soviet documents that have appeared in English have not yet suggested the need for any radical revisions in the prevailing picture of Soviet policy or of the description of Smith, which has been outlined here.¹¹

Beyond Smith's own memoirs and the published United States documents, there are several monographs and one article that have significantly contributed to the development of our understanding Smith's place in foreign policy history, although none of these works have studied Smith's assignment in Moscow in detail. For example, the

¹¹ Scott D. Parrish, "New Evidence on the Soviet Rejection of the Marshall Plan, 1947," (Washington DC, March 1994): 3. Parrish's article was submitted to the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars as part of the Cold War International History Project.

Yale project, which is devoted to publishing Soviet archival manuscripts in English, has not published any monographs that affect the image of Smith drawn here.

Smith's principal biographer is Daniel Croswell, who has written *The Chief of Staff: The Military Career of General Walter Bedell Smith*. His book examined Smith's military career and offered limited information on Smith's early life. Croswell remarked about the "biographer's nightmare" when dealing with the fragmentary evidence of Smith's personal life. He wrote, "Smith took pains to deprive historians of insights into the personal aspects of his life." According to Croswell, Smith remains a rather shadowy figure because he was neither colorful nor terribly interesting.¹² Such an assessment by Smith's main biographer indicates that more work needs to be done on Smith. It also underscores the need for this thesis, which examines Smith's experience in Moscow—another understudied aspect of Smith's life.

Nonetheless, Croswell did make a major contribution to the understanding of Walter Bedell Smith. His work was the first definitive biography that focused on Smith's unique talents for war planning and management. Instead of

¹² Croswell, *The Chief of Staff: The Military Career of General Walter Bedell Smith*, xx.

focusing on Smith's contributions as combat officer, Croswell chose to study Smith's responsibilities as a staff officer. Through careful documentation, Croswell successfully demonstrated how Smith's staff management contributed to the organization and coordination of the Allied alliance.

According to Croswell, Smith's complete loyalty to his superiors, coupled with his military expertise, provided Eisenhower the opportunity to coordinate successfully the Allied coalition during World War II. Croswell points out that while Smith was not fascinating or well liked, the Chief of Staff was, nevertheless, largely responsible for Allied success on the battlefield. In summary, Croswell's *Chief of Staff* is a valuable biographical study of Smith's career as a military planner, but it is not a study of his postwar life as a diplomat.

A second notable but brief biography is William Snyder's article entitled "Walter Bedell Smith: Eisenhower's Chief of Staff" in the journal *Military Affairs* in 1984. As his title suggests, however, Snyder's scope was limited to Smith's career while serving under General Eisenhower's command. The article is like Croswell's study, focuses on Smith's military life.

Another valuable contribution to the history of Walter Bedell Smith's public life was Ludwell Lee Montague's *General Walter Bedell Smith as Director of Central Intelligence, October 1950-February 1953*. Montague served under Smith as a staff officer for the Joint Chiefs of Staff and later followed the newly appointed director to the Central Intelligence Agency.¹³

Montague's well-researched history of the CIA showed how Smith successfully transformed a weak and doomed agency into an efficient and powerful organization. Montague's book aptly demonstrated how Smith developed a task force capable of gathering and analyzing its own intelligence. Still, Montague's work was purposefully limited in scope. He focused on an organizational study of Smith's administration at the Central Intelligence Agency. Furthermore, his history of Smith's administration at the CIA served less to provide a history of the man than it did to contrast two organizations—"one representing the agency that Smith found, and the other the one that he left."¹⁴

¹³ Ludwell Lee Montague drafted the proposal- JIC 239/5, (1 January 1945) which eventually led to the CIA's establishment in 1947.

¹⁴ Richard Gid Powers, review of General Walter Bedell Smith as Director of Central Intelligence, October 1950-February

The earliest non-scholarly treatments of Smith were typically brief, biographical anecdotes by Smith's colleagues. These early commentators were often government officials, diplomats, or military leaders directly involved in the political and military process of countering Soviet aggression. They were advocates of containment; and their perceptions and corresponding accounts of Smith were colored by their preoccupation with the balance of power in Europe and their anti-Communist orientation. These pundits believed it was of "vital importance for the national security of the United States that the USSR not only perceive America's capability to defend its interests throughout the world but also recognize America's willingness to confront whatever risks may be involved in doing so."¹⁵ As a group, these men generally respected Smith's no-nonsense approach to the Soviet government.

Among such commentators are Omar N. Bradley, George C. Marshall, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Franklin Roosevelt, and John Foster Dulles. However, none of these men intended to study Smith's life exclusively. Thus, their observations

1953, by Ludwell Lee Montague, In The American Historical Review 99(April 1994): 684-685.

¹⁵ Stephen P. Gilbert, Soviet Images of America, iii.

of Smith's political life were incomplete and subjective. Often, too, these leaders were too polarized in their views to offer a fair and impartial analysis.

Only after Smith's death did historians like Croswell begin to place Smith's contributions to the United States within the context of his time. Historian John Gaddis points out that history should treat its subject as "a discrete episode with a known beginning and end, not as a continuing or even permanent condition..."¹⁶ Slowly, professional historians are beginning to piece Smith's life together and present a clear view of the former general.

While the non-historians and historians cited above help to fill a void in the current historiography of Walter Bedell Smith, there is still a great deal to be done. Above all, no one has yet attempted to assess Smith's role as the U.S. ambassador in Moscow. This thesis begins to fill that gap.

¹⁶ Gaddis, We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History, 282.

CHAPTER II

SMITH'S EARLY LIFE AND MILITARY CAREER

*Diplomacy has rarely been able to gain at the conference table
what cannot be gained or held on the battlefield.*

-Lieutenant General Walter Bedell Smith

Walter Bedell Smith was born on October 5, 1895, into a middle class family. Walter was a sickly infant. His parents, William Long Smith and Ida Francis, expressed much anxiety about the health of their newborn son. However, Smith soon developed into an active and playful young boy.¹⁷ Growing up in Indianapolis, Smith always wanted to be a soldier. His aunt Lena Bedell recalled for the *Indianapolis Star* how he would fill her parlor with toy soldiers, "ambushing them under rocking chairs and deploying them in battle formation sometimes as far as the

¹⁷ Croswell, *The Chief of Staff: The Military Career of General Walter Bedell Smith*, 4.

dining room."¹⁸ As he remarked later in life, "I always wanted to be an army officer. I never thought of anything else."¹⁹ Smith might have been influenced by the fact that a member of the "Smith clan" had fought in every U.S. war since the revolution.²⁰

The young man was eager to begin his career in the military. In 1911, he dropped out of a vocational high school at the age of sixteen to join the Indiana National Guard as a private. Smith went on to serve in France with the Army's 4th Division during World War I, where in November 1917, he was commissioned through the Officer Training Corps program. The promising young combat veteran continued to advance through the ranks in the army during peacetime. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s Smith undertook a series of staff and training assignments. After briefly attending Butler University in 1935, Smith attended the Command and General Staff College from 1933-1935 and later

¹⁸ J. Kent Calder, "The Ultimate Spear Carrier," Editor's Page. Indiana Historical Society (2000).

¹⁹ "Indiana's Walter Bedell Smith" in Indianapolis Star Magazine (18 October 1953), Smith file no. 13, Indiana State Library. Quoted in Croswell, The Chief of Staff: The Military Career of General Walter Bedell Smith, 4.

²⁰ Croswell, The Chief of Staff: The Military Career of General Walter Bedell Smith, 4.

attended the Army War College from 1936 to 1937.²¹ In 1939, Colonel Smith was transferred to serve with the Army Chief of Staff, George C. Marshall.

The Second World War exposed Smith to a wide range of organizational and administrative problems that were created by the rapidly expanding U.S. Army. Smith's managerial style of leadership was well suited for this kind of challenge. Marshall recognized Smith as the staff officer most competent to organize the American and British efforts in coalition warfare. According to historian William P. Snyder, "Smith was familiar with the problems of the Army's expansion and with the details of evolving Allied strategy. He knew the Washington scene as well as or better than Eisenhower."²²

Smith did not seek personal credit and glory during his career. Rather, he reflected the "corporate values and bureaucratic mind of a modern military organization."²³ His guarded behavior as a staff officer was often mistaken for

²¹ Directors and Deputy of Central Intelligence Agency, "Overview of Walter Bedell Smith's Public Life," <http://cia.gov/cia/di/dddcia/smith.html>

²² William P. Snyder, "Walter Bedell Smith: Eisenhower's Chief of Staff," Military Affairs 48 (January 1984): 7.

²³ Croswell, The Chief of Staff: The Military Career of General Walter Bedell Smith, xviii.

rudeness and boorishness. Among his peers, however, he was widely respected as an energetic and capable officer.

Croswell points out that Smith's relationship with General Dwight D. Eisenhower and George C. Marshall was the single most important influence on Smith. Smith emerged as a close and devoted follower of General George C. Marshall. Smith worked closely with General Marshall in Washington until 1942. However, Smith's career did not really take off until he was appointed Chief of Staff in the Mediterranean and European theaters of war under the command of General Dwight D. Eisenhower.²⁴

Smith was not the obvious choice for the position of Eisenhower's Chief of Staff. Smith often alienated other officers with his churlish personality. "A blunt, profane, and often bad-tempered man, Smith had displayed little of the tact and diplomacy one might hope to find in a senior officer expected to work closely with allied forces."²⁵ However, General Eisenhower believed Smith possessed a clear understanding of the challenges that the alliance faced. He made it clear to General Marshall that he wanted Smith as his Chief of Staff. Under Eisenhower's

²⁴ Ibid., xvii.

²⁵ Snyder, "Walter Bedell Smith: Eisenhower's Chief of Staff," 6.

leadership, Smith served as the Chief of Staff from 1942 to 1945.

Smith's primary duty as Eisenhower's Chief of Staff was to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of the army's staff. His responsibilities also required him to act as a liaison to the staff and General Eisenhower. The delegation of power to Smith allowed Eisenhower to enjoy near-total authority over the officer corps during the war. Smith was able to wield significant decision-making powers at staff headquarters. This situation suited Smith well and allowed Eisenhower more freedom.²⁶ General Eisenhower recognized Smith's hard work and promoted him to the rank of Lieutenant General on January 13, 1944.

As the senior American officer, Eisenhower was so impressed with Smith that he turned over operational activities to him during the war and further named him Chief of Staff of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF). A colleague once described Smith as "the best Chief of Staff ever."²⁷ British Prime Minister Winston Churchill also praised General Smith's

²⁶ Croswell, *The Chief of Staff: The Military Career of General Walter Bedell Smith*, xxi.

²⁷ Snyder, "Walter Bedell Smith: Eisenhower's Chief of Staff," 12.

abilities. Churchill particularly liked his suggestion to broaden the scope of *Operation Overlord*. In a letter to President Roosevelt, the Prime Minister wrote that Smith had "proved invaluable in providing information and coordination for future decisions."²⁸

Smith was the chief planner of the American invasion of North Africa. He also assisted General Eisenhower with the coordination of the Normandy invasion. In the course of the war, as the alliance with the USSR became more critical, he also obtained experience in dealing with the Soviet military commanders. He often oversaw the coordination with the Red Army on matters of logistics and planning. Smith's reputation as a forceful and articulate emissary also prompted his assignment as head of Allied negotiations with Italy during the latter's surrender in September 1943. Later on May 7, 1945, he signed the German surrender document on behalf of the Allies in Reims, France.²⁹ After the war Smith also served eight months of occupation duty in the American zone in Germany. This

²⁸ Winston S. Churchill, The Second World War: Closing the Ring, vol. 6 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1979), 396.

²⁹ Croswell, The Chief of Staff: The Military Career of General Walter Bedell Smith, 11.

assignment involved him in constant contact with Soviet occupation and military authorities.

Smith returned to the War Department in January 1946 to take over the Operations and Planning Division of the General Staff.³⁰ "This was the type of duty to which I had been looking forward to," Smith later wrote.³¹ However, as Smith started his administrative duties in Washington, James F. Byrnes, the Secretary of State, approached him about assuming the position of the ambassador to Moscow. Secretary Byrnes considered Smith an outstanding candidate for ambassador to the Soviet Union.

The Secretary of State believed that the State Department should have an ambassador that the Russians knew at least by reputation.³² Byrnes also thought that Smith's experience as a military officer would impress or intimidate the Soviets. As a soldier-diplomat he thought Smith could "get under the Russians' skin" and obtain frank answers to the many questions that vexed the United States about the USSR.³³ Secretary Byrnes also stressed to Truman

³⁰ Smith, My Three Years, 13.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 14.

³³ Ibid., 15.

that the administration needed a diplomatic representative who could candidly inform Washington if he felt that some aspect of U.S. policy were wrong. He thought Smith could do that and could also help the State Department adopt future policies concerning the expansion of Communism.³⁴

Truman agreed.

Truman was a meticulously calculating, decisive, and highly intelligent president. Although he had often been uninformed about most aspects of the Soviet Union, he possessed a common sense approach to policy and international relations. He believed that actions spoke louder than words, and he was very suspect of Soviet behavior following negotiations at Yalta and Potsdam.

President Truman did not want an ambassador in Moscow like Joseph E. Davies, who had been sympathetic to the Soviet Union. Davies was the ambassador to Moscow from 1936-1938 during the Roosevelt administration. Truman desired to have a strong voice that described events and attitudes clearly and realistically, without embellishment or bias. Smith seemed to be that man, and Truman accepted

³⁴ George Kennan, "Stalinism, Its Impact on Russia and the World," ed. G.R. Urban (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 375.

Secretary Byrnes' recommendation and offered Smith the Moscow post.³⁵

Smith wanted very much to accept Truman's offer, but he thought his military rank might prevent his appointment. However, Truman believed that appointing a diplomat with a strong military background was precisely what Washington needed. Moreover, Stalin mistrusted career diplomats and might interpret Smith's military background as evidence that President Truman was serious about Soviet-American relations and had intentions of backing diplomacy with a show of military might.

In any event, Smith was eager to continue public service under the Truman administration. He went so far as to request a reduction of his permanent rank if it would help with his appointment as ambassador.³⁶ Instead, the Truman administration asked Congress to pass special legislation, which ultimately authorized Smith to retain

³⁵ The post in Moscow had been vacant since Smith's predecessor, W. Averall Harriman, left Moscow for his new appointment as the ambassador to London in January 1946.

³⁶ "Smith to Dwight Eisenhower, 28 November 1945," Smith Papers. In a letter to President Eisenhower on November 28, 1945, Smith pleaded to be considered for continued public service.

his rank as lieutenant general while he simultaneously took on the assignment of ambassador for the State Department.³⁷

Smith prepared for his assignment in Moscow by getting educated about Soviet Russia. Smith noted, "I was subjected to the most intensive educational cramming of my entire life."³⁸ During Smith's lessons, he was so inundated with background information that he felt it was coming out of his ears.³⁹ Smith's instructors included the officers of the Eastern European Division of the State Department, headed by Freeman Mathews and Elbridge Durbrow, who later served as the Minister-Counselor in Moscow. The ambassador-in-training also had the advice of Charles Bohlen, one of the State Department's most prominent Russian experts.

Shortly before leaving Washington for Moscow, Smith took the advantage of having a long and informative conversation with President Truman.⁴⁰ The leaders discussed Smith's responsibilities and the current political climate

³⁷ Smith, My Three Years, 14.

³⁸ Ibid., 27.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

in Moscow. During their talk, Truman stressed that he hoped Smith could help to set things right with the Soviet Union, but without further sacrificing the interests of the United States and its Western Allies.⁴¹

Smith was a clear-headed, hard-nosed individual with a reputation for cold professionalism and loyalty. Although unimaginative and inflexible, Truman liked Smith because he shared his opinion of Stalin and the Soviet Union. Both thought the Russians could not be trusted. They considered the Soviets to be inveterate enemies of the United States because of its Communist ideology, and were responsible for the Cold War. From Truman's point of view, Smith was the ideal ambassador for the USSR and perhaps a partial antidote to Soviet bellicosity.

⁴¹ Ibid.

CHAPTER III

SMITH IN MOSCOW, 1946-1947

Smith and his diplomatic staff left for the Soviet Union on March 24, 1946, to serve at the American embassy in Moscow for three years. Accompanied by his wife, Mary Eleanor, Ambassador Smith and his staff arrived in Moscow on March 28, 1946. George F. Kennan, the Minister-Counselor of the embassy, warmly greeted them.⁴² He had been acting charge d' affaires from the time of W. Averill Harriman's departure in January 1946.⁴³ Kennan served as mentor and principal advisor to Smith during the first months in Moscow. His experience as the senior diplomatic officer of the mission proved invaluable to Smith's success. Smith acknowledged Kennan's contributions to the mission in his memoirs, noting that Kennan was "an outstanding Russian specialist who spoke Russian perfectly

⁴² Ibid., 38.

⁴³ Ibid.

and was actually more cultured in Russian than are most Russians."⁴⁴

Smith's first impression of the Soviet Union while driving through the streets of Moscow was one of general grayness. "Its people showed acutely the aftermath of years of war and a prolonged state of military mobilization."⁴⁵ After Smith arrived at the embassy, he quickly settled into the diplomatic headquarters. Spaso House was a dilapidated pre-Revolutionary mansion that housed the ambassador and his staff. Smith considered Spaso House to be in ill repair. "I could not have been more depressed by the sight of the American establishment during my first days in Moscow."⁴⁶ The American compound had served as the residence of American Ambassadors in Moscow since William C. Bullitt (1933-1936) selected the building in 1933.⁴⁷ Smith and his staff worked out of another somber-looking building not far from Spaso House that also served as headquarters for the American delegates.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 86.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 39.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 94.

⁴⁷ Dunn, Caught Between Roosevelt and Stalin, 30.

As the Cold War heightened, Spaso House saw few guests from among the Russian leadership. Ambassador Smith was also increasingly restricted to fewer official contacts with the Kremlin. Despite every reasonable effort to improve relations with the Russians, meetings remained infrequent and formal. Smith commented that on the ambassadorial level, "our professional contacts with top Russian officials were limited to not more than two or three a month, on the average. Socially, we saw them even less frequently."⁴⁸

The new ambassador quickly felt the chill of the Cold War after his arrival at Spaso House. "Our greatest complaint against the Soviet Government's treatment of us stemmed not from our physical discomfort, but from the restrictions placed upon our freedom as individual human beings."⁴⁹ This infringement on personal freedom was consistent with the tireless efforts of the Kremlin to isolate the Western diplomats from the Russian citizens. Even ambassadors like Smith had restricted access to the city.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 108.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 98.

Most of Smith's contact with the Soviet government rarely concerned momentous issues of war and peace. Rather, his conversations with the Kremlin revolved around more practical matters.⁵⁰ Much of his time was taken up by performing routine, yet complicated administrative duties.⁵¹ The ambassador observed that actual diplomacy was only occasionally required during his assignment because the Soviet system limited contact between diplomats and Soviet leaders in Moscow.⁵²

Ambassador Smith's first official diplomatic responsibility after his arrival in Moscow was to slow down the alarming deterioration of U.S.-Soviet relations.⁵³ Smith was initially optimistic about this task and felt that his first essential task was to make an effort to restore confidence and mutual understanding between the United States and Soviet Union.⁵⁴ To facilitate this assignment, President Truman instructed Smith to call upon

⁵⁰ Ibid., 85.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Vojtech Mastny, The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity, The Stalin Years (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 46.

⁵⁴ Smith, My Three Years, 31.

Stalin at the earliest possible moment.⁵⁵ Truman instructed Smith to make it very clear to Stalin that the United States had made agreements at Yalta and Potsdam in good faith and hoped to see those pacts carried out in good faith.⁵⁶

As the American ambassador to the Soviet Union, Smith believed it was paramount to outline to the Soviet government with "complete clarity and frankness the position of the United States."⁵⁷ To be successful in that responsibility, Smith attempted to cultivate a positive relationship with the Kremlin.

On April 4, 1946, just two days after his arrival, Ambassador Smith met with Joseph Stalin for the first time in a semiformal environment.⁵⁸ Smith's memoirs describe his first meeting with Stalin. Smith reported the most essential facts of their first meeting without much of the cynicism that was characteristic of his later correspondences.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 27.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 29-30.

⁵⁷ Smith, "Statement to the Soviet Foreign Minister, 4 May 1948," Documents on American Foreign Relations: 1948 (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1950), 600.

⁵⁸ Smith, My Three Years, 27.

Smith was direct with Stalin. The first question Smith presented to Stalin was, "What does the Soviet Union want, and how far is Russia going to go?" The ambassador explained to Stalin that this question was a prime concern in Washington. Despite his wariness with diplomatic language, Smith softened the question by assuring the Soviet leader that he appreciated Russia's desire for territorial security and its suspicions of the United States. However, he stressed that such suspicions were unwarranted. Smith further told Stalin that the United States was apprehensive about the Soviet Union's behavior. In particular, Smith wondered about the timetable for the Soviet withdrawal from Iran. He warned Stalin that the Kremlin's refusal to publish a timetable was leading to an "inevitable reaction of the American people to the continuance of a policy by the Soviet government, which would appear to have as its purpose the progressive extension of the area of Soviet power."⁵⁹

In addition, Ambassador Smith acknowledged that the United States was in the process of trying to demobilize its armed forces rapidly in Europe and the Pacific.

⁵⁹ Smith, "Statement to the Soviet Foreign Minister, 4 May 1948," Department of State Bulletin vol. XVIII: 679.

However, he stated, the growing suspicion between the two countries might delay that demobilization. Smith also pressed for greater evidence of Soviet cooperation in support of the principles of the United Nations Charter.⁶⁰

Stalin eventually answered Smith. He told Smith that the United Nations would not be able to provide the security that Soviet Russia expected after the war.⁶¹ Stalin also elaborated on a number of his other concerns. Stalin's foremost problem was his perception of an alignment of the United States and Britain against the Soviet people. Stalin also wanted to reduce the Soviet military establishment, but the threat of Anglo-American cooperation against Soviet interests prevented him from doing so. However, he told Smith that the Soviet government would be willing to discuss a mutual reduction of armaments.

Smith reassured Stalin that the United States and Britain were not united in an alliance to thwart the Soviet Union. He emphasized that the United States had "no desire whatsoever to see the world divided into two major groupings, nor to diverge a large part of its income to the

⁶⁰ Smith, My Three Years, 50-51.

⁶¹ Ibid., 53-54.

maintenance of a military establishment which such a world situation would necessitate in elementary self-defense."⁶²

Stalin replied by assuring the American ambassador that the Soviet Union had no intention of attacking any country unless it was a case of self-defense.⁶³

At the conclusion of their meeting, Stalin encouraged the ambassador to "prosper his efforts" and pledged to help him. The Soviet leader promised to be at Smith's disposal at any time. In turn, Ambassador Smith again reassured Stalin that the United States was not aligning with Britain against the Soviet state. Before leaving, Smith reiterated the growing American intention to contain Communist expansion throughout the world.⁶⁴ The ambassador returned to his opening question, "How far is Russia going to go?"

⁶² Smith, "Statement to the Soviet Foreign Minister, May 11, 1948," Documents on American Foreign Relations vol. X. ed. Raymond Dennett and Robert K. Turner (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1950), 600.

⁶³ Smith, "Telegram to the Secretary of State, 5 April 1946," Foreign Relations of the United States: 1946 (Washington: Dept. of State Publications, 1969), 732-736.

⁶⁴ Adam B. Ulam, Expansion and Coexistence: Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-73 (New York and Washington: Praeger, 1974), 452-453.

Looking directly at the ambassador, Stalin replied, "We're not going much further."⁶⁵

In retrospect, Smith's question seemed naïve and was at best an invitation to Stalin to go as far as he could, but he framed it in a somewhat threatening context, implying that the United States would resist further expansion of Communism and American public opinion was turning against the Soviet Union. Smith might have lacked the diplomat's touch and shrewd language, but his no-nonsense, direct approach, combined with his military background and reputation, were perhaps sobering to Stalin. At any rate, Stalin seemed to proceed more cautiously in his foreign policy.

After his meeting with Stalin, the first major crisis for Smith was the Iranian Crisis. The Allies began their occupation of Iran in 1940. The Soviets controlled the northern part of Iran, the U.S. the middle, and the British occupied the south. The Allied troops had occupied Iran to secure the desperately needed supply routes to the Soviet Union and to protect Iran's oil from falling into the hands of the Axis powers.

⁶⁵ Smith, My Three Years, 53.

The Allies had agreed that the occupation of Iran was critical for success, but they also agreed to withdraw after the war. The United States and Britain withdrew their forces six months after the war, but the Soviet Union refused to depart. Iran was attractive to Moscow. It presented Russia with an additional source of oil and it was a gateway for introducing Communism into the Middle East.

Iranian diplomats vehemently objected to the Kremlin's encroachment on Iran's independence. They criticized Soviet failures to secure troop withdrawal from Iran as agreed to in the Tripartite Treaty.⁶⁶ After the Iranian government appealed to the United Nations for assistance, the United States took up the Iranian issue. The State Department demanded that the Soviet army immediately withdraw "all Soviet forces from the territory of Iran, to promote the international confidence which is necessary for peaceful progress."⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Allen Dean Wright, Iran and the Superpowers: 1941-1945 (Waco: Library Binding Co., 1981), 44.

⁶⁷ Kennan, Department of State Bulletin (17 March 1946), 435-436. This note was delivered to the Soviet Government, upon the instruction of Secretary of State James F. Byrnes.

By March 1946, the American government made the Soviet Union's refusal to depart Iran a major issue.⁶⁸ Nonetheless, despite immense pressure from the West, the Soviets refused to budge on Iran. The Soviets' refusal to withdraw their forces from Iran was significant because it was the first major confrontation of the Cold War, revealed Soviet tactics, and demonstrated a successful policy to counter Soviet behavior. In a brief meeting with Smith, Stalin complained to the ambassador that Washington was being particularly "unfriendly" in insisting on a United Nations confrontation over Iran, rather than letting the Soviets work out a solution with the United States.⁶⁹

To the Truman administration, countries like Iran were susceptible to Communism because of the political and economic void created after the withdrawal of the Allies. Like the British government, the Truman administration was adamant about defending the Middle East from the spread of Communism. The United States also believed that if handled carefully, Iran could provide a model of a small nation emerging from colonialism toward democracy.

⁶⁸ Randall B. Woods and Howard Jones, Dawning of the Cold War, The United States' Quest for Order (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1991), 111.

⁶⁹ William Taubman, Stalin's American Policy: From Entente to Détente to Cold War (New York: Norton, 1982), 149.

The Kremlin was taken off guard by the United States' resolve to protect Iran from Communist influence. By the end of March 1946, the Soviets agreed to leave Iran. Two months later, the Soviet army left Iran, abandoning the puppet Azerbaijan Democratic Party. The Americans then stepped in and protected Iran. They expected the Soviets to continue to try to destabilize Iran by "intensified infiltration and clandestine activity."⁷⁰ The U.S. also feared that the Soviets were still in a position to exert considerable economic pressure on Iran.

The Iranian crisis was resolved successfully because of a combination of American power, British support, and Smith's forceful presence in Moscow. Smith conveyed to Stalin the clear message that the U.S. would allow no wiggle room on Soviet evacuation of Iran, and Stalin soon blinked. Furthermore, the conflict informed Ambassador Smith of future patterns of Soviet diplomacy: Soviet leaders often employed pressure to coerce concessions from vulnerable nations while concealing their own intentions. When the United States rushed to the defense of the

⁷⁰ Central Intelligence Agency, "The Soviet Outlook In Iran," Weekly Summary Excerpt (20 December 1946). These intelligence reports provided the president with daily, weekly, and monthly summaries and interpretations of important developing events.

besieged nations, the Soviets condemned the United States' hostile reaction as a betrayal of trust.⁷¹

The next major crisis facing Ambassador Smith occurred in the Mediterranean and revolved around Greece and Turkey. In the aftermath of World War II, Greece was plagued by civil war. The Soviet's intensified Greece's instability by staging a Communist uprising in 1946. The Soviet Union attempted to overthrow the government in Greece that was supported by the British government by launching guerilla attacks from the nearby safe haven of Communist Yugoslavia.⁷² Secretary George C. Marshall reported that by March 1947, the Greek economic situation had deteriorated to the point of collapse as a result of the Communist insurgency.⁷³ The U.S. feared that the Kremlin was positioning itself in the Mediterranean to challenge

⁷¹ William Taubman, Stalin's American Policy: From Entente to Détente to Cold War, (New York: Norton, 1982), 149.

⁷² Stephen G. Xydis, "America, Britain, and the USSR in the Greek Arena, 1944-1947," Political Science Quarterly 78 (December 1963): 581.

⁷³ Department of State Press Release 170, Department of State Bulletin, vol. XVI (4 March 1947), 494.

Western strategic and economic interests in the entire region.⁷⁴

At the same time that the Soviets attempted to overthrow the Greek government, they moved troops to the border of Turkey and demanded that Turkey provide them with a naval base and cede the Dardanelle Straits. Although the Soviet pressure stressed the Turks, they also showed themselves willing to fight the Russians.⁷⁵

Smith advised the State Department to adopt a hard-line position against the Soviet Union on Greece and Turkey. The State Department accepted Ambassador Smith's position that the actions taken by the Soviet Union were hostile and threatened world peace.⁷⁶

The Soviets considered Smith's support of the United States' assistance in Greece and Turkey threatening. Vyacheslav Molotov, the Soviet Foreign Minister, stated to Smith that his government considered the current

⁷⁴ Randall B. Woods and Howard Jones, Dawning of the Cold War, 135.

⁷⁵ Leffler, "Strategy, Diplomacy, and the Cold War: The United States, Turkey, and NATO, 1945-1952," 807-808.

⁷⁶ Department of State Press Release, New York Times (21 May 1949): 2. Statement by the Department of State on 20 May, 1949 concerning conversations on the Greek question among representatives of the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Mediterranean situation "tense" because the U.S. Government's policies had violated "normal conditions of international economic cooperation."⁷⁷ The Soviet Union soon responded by increasing its aggressive policy in Eastern Europe and against Greece and Turkey. However, the Soviet Union could not afford a direct confrontation with the United States, nor could it risk further overt military operations in Greece.

President Truman, too, agreed with the ambassador's advice and asserted a bold policy of containment of the Soviet Union. Truman believed that without assistance from the United States, the Communists would continue to exploit the vulnerabilities of Greece and Turkey. On Greece, Truman said,

The very existence of the Greek state is today threatened by the terrorist activities of several thousand armed men, led by Communists, who defy the government's authority... The Greek Government has been operating in an atmosphere of chaos and extremism.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Molotov, "Statement to Ambassador Smith Regarding General Relations with the Soviet Union, 9 May 1948," Documents on American Foreign Relations, vol. X (Princeton: Oxford University Press, 1950), 604

⁷⁸ Harry S. Truman, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Harry S. Truman, 1947 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1963). Truman delivered his speech about the situation in Greece before the joint session of Congress on March 12, 1947.

On Turkey he stated, "There isn't a doubt in my mind that Russia intends an invasion of Turkey and the seizure of the Black Sea Straits of the Mediterranean. Unless Russia is faced with an iron fist and strong language, another war is in the making."⁷⁹ Ambassador Smith agreed with Truman's assessment that the Soviet Unions' primary goal was to establish a Communist government in Greece and to expand its influence in Turkey and the Mediterranean.

These developments in the autumn of 1946 led the United States to encourage Greek and Turkish opposition. Since Great Britain could no longer afford to safeguard Greece against internal unrest, nor Turkey to modernize and equip its army, the U.S. hoped to reshape alliance relationships and improve the military capabilities of Greece and Turkey. In doing so however, Truman assumed unilateral action in the Mediterranean.

Truman understood that previous levels of cooperation with the Soviet Union would not be possible after he refused to accept Soviet predominance in East Europe or influence in Greece or Turkey.⁸⁰ In an attempt to frustrate

⁷⁹ Truman, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Harry S. Truman, 1947.

⁸⁰ Parrish, "New Evidence on the Soviet Rejection of the Marshall Plan, 1947," 4.

the spread of Communism in the Mediterranean and Europe, Congress implemented the Truman Doctrine on March 12, 1947. The Truman Doctrine aimed to prevent vulnerable countries from falling under the Soviet Union.

Ambassador Smith argued that the real promise of the Truman Doctrine rested in the principle that aid could be delivered to any country resisting Soviet aggression.⁸¹ The new shift in international policy abandoned the assumption that Europe could manage its own economic reconstruction. This proactive extension of American support placed more emphasis on accepting world responsibility. Although the Truman Doctrine was intended to be defensive, it had the inevitable consequence of provoking unfavorable reactions from the Soviet leadership. Moscow quickly labeled the Truman Doctrine "a smokehouse for expansion," and described the policy as an example of American postwar imperialism.

Four months after the Truman Doctrine was introduced in March 1947, the United States implemented the Marshall Plan, officially known as the European Recovery Program. The Marshall Plan improved earlier methods of rendering assistance to other countries and represented a much more active and fundamental change in American foreign policy.

⁸¹ Smith, My Three Years, 197.

By July 1947, the United States had advanced nearly \$16 billion for post-war relief and reconstruction. Up to that point, foreign economic aid had been piecemeal and without any over-all planning.⁸²

The Marshall Plan was envisioned by George C. Marshall, Secretary of State, but was developed by the work of a State Department group led by Dean Acheson. This ambitious plan sought to achieve economic stabilization to countries hit hardest by the war and thus diminish the chances of influence from Communist countries. It was implemented partly in response to the advice of Ambassador Smith, who warned the State Department about the economic instability of Europe in the postwar period and the opportunity that such instability gave the Communists.

Ambassador Smith viewed the Marshall Plan as more than a means to stabilize European economies. Smith argued that it was the basis of the United States' foreign policy and represented the most promising means of assuring peace.⁸³ To Smith, the Marshall Plan provided Europe with a stabilizing force that would re-establish a group of

⁸² Olive Holmes, "Europe and U.S. Weigh Implications of Marshall Plan, 4 July 1947," Foreign Policy Bulletin, vol. XXVI.

⁸³ Smith, My Three Years, 331, 333.

"strong, free, virile and progressive states" in Europe, which could cooperate politically, economically, and militarily.⁸⁴ Such a force, Smith argued, would be able to resist effectively the encroachments of Communism and exert a profound attraction for the repressed and impoverished peoples now under the yoke of Communism.⁸⁵

Smith believed the Marshall Plan was not the only factor in effecting the transformation in Europe, but it was "the major force in the stabilization of Europe."⁸⁶ He also argued that the Marshall Plan marked the turning point in Soviet influence.⁸⁷ Historian Adam B. Ulam marveled that "never before in human history can one find an example of economic help extended on so vast a scale."⁸⁸

Up to 1947, Soviet policy was a careful amalgam of aggression and opportunity, but it was careful to avoid confrontation with the United States.⁸⁹ However, by July

⁸⁴ Ibid., 332-333.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 333.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 331.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 332.

⁸⁸ Adam B. Ulam, The Rivals: America and Russia Since World War II (New York: The Viking Press, 1971), 126-127.

⁸⁹ William Taubman, Stalin's American Policy: From Entente to Détente to Cold War, ch. 7.

1947, the Soviet Union, with its rejection of the Marshall Plan, became more publicly defiant of the United States' efforts in rebuilding Europe. Stalin lashed out at Truman's attempt to contain Communist expansion. Historian Scott Parish noted that the Marshall Plan:

radically changed Stalin's calculus, and led him to shift away from this more moderate line and adopt a strategy of confrontational unilateral action to secure Soviet interests. The Soviet leaders exploited their considerable, if still incomplete, political influence in Eastern Europe to counter the lure of American reconstruction credits.⁹⁰

This shift was attributable, in Parrish's view, to the Soviet leadership's "fear of its own vulnerability to American economic power."⁹¹

The Soviet Union attempted to undermine the growing amount of American aid overseas by implementing a hostile policy toward the West. Ambassador Smith described the Soviet rejection of U.S. economic assistance in Europe as "nothing less than a declaration of war by the Soviet Union on the immediate issue of control in Europe."⁹² However,

⁹⁰ Parrish, "New Evidence on the Soviet Rejection of the Marshall Plan, 1947," 4.

⁹¹ Ibid., 4-5.

⁹² Smith, "Telegram to the Secretary of State, 11 July 1947," Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers,

Smith argued that the prospect of a direct confrontation over the Marshall Plan remained low for two reasons.

First, Smith believed that Stalin desired a decade of peace to refresh the Soviet population and to complete more five-year plans. Second, Smith argued that the Soviet Union would not respond to any short short-term evaluation of the Marshall Plan by risking a war. They believed, Smith argued, that they had only a temporary stabilization to fear from the success of the Marshall Plan. Smith supported this conclusion by pointing to the Communist belief that capitalism was in its final period of decay, whereas the Soviet Union was advancing triumphantly from socialism to communism.⁹³

The Soviet leadership responded to the Marshall Plan with its own version of economic assistance. It offered a gesture of support, but it was a simple ruse designed to exploit neighboring countries by offering barter and trade agreements. The Soviet Union hoped that this strategy would nullify the propaganda advantages of the Marshall

1947, vol.3 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1972), 327.

⁹³ Smith, My Three Years, 327.

Plan.⁹⁴ However, the chief problem with the so-called Molotov Plan was that it exploited, rather than assisted the USSR's satellites.

Smith proved his value as American ambassador from Truman's perspective because he stood firmly against Soviet expansion in Iran, Greece, and Turkey. He also provided sound advice on the implementation of the policy of containment, particularly the evolution of the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan. His first two years as American envoy were hectic and strained, but generally successful in terms of American foreign policy.

⁹⁴ Smith, "Telegram to the Secretary of State, 5 November 1947," Foreign Relations of the United States: 1947 (Washington: Dept. of State Publications, 1972), 611.

CHAPTER IV

SMITH IN MOSCOW, 1948-1949

1948 to 1949 brought further strain to United States-Soviet relations and to Ambassador Smith. The American envoy confronted three crises during this period. The first was the Communist coup in Czechoslovakia in February 1948. The United States was taken off guard when in February 1948, the Communist party, under the leadership of Prime Minister Klement Gottwald, seized control of the government in Czechoslovakia.

Smith informed the State Department that Soviet pressures in Czechoslovakia threatened all of Eastern Europe and world peace. Of all the problems with the Soviet Union, the fall of Czechoslovakia was one that troubled the United States the most. Smith was concerned that a country with such long-standing ties to the United States could fall to the devices of a puppet government.⁹⁵ Smith realized that more advanced countries were also

⁹⁵ Smith, My Three Years, 321.

vulnerable to the spread of Communism. After Soviet persistence proved successful in Czechoslovakia, the United States feared it could no longer predict where Communism would triumph.

The second crisis that Smith was involved in was the Tito-Stalin rift. In early 1948, Tito and Stalin had a falling out. Tito wanted to control Albania and was resentful of Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe. Stalin desired to bring down Tito and control Yugoslavia.

Marshal Tito's open defiance to Joseph Stalin was the first major rift in the Soviet empire. The conflict struck at the very core of the Stalinist concept of expansion through world Communism. According to Ambassador Smith, the basic issue of hostility toward Tito was Stalin's attempt at direct control of the Yugoslav Communist Party. All other matters, Smith argued, were secondary.⁹⁶

In response to Yugoslavia's disloyalty, the Cominform (Communist Information Bureau) expelled the Yugoslavian Communist Party on June 28, 1948, for "anti-Party and anti-Soviet views incompatible with Marxism-Leninism."⁹⁷ Smith

⁹⁶ Ibid., 204.

⁹⁷ Alvin Rubenstein, Soviet Foreign Policy Since World War II: Imperial and Global (Cambridge: Winthrop Publishers, 1981), 56.

was surprised at the sudden expulsion of Yugoslavia from the Cominform.⁹⁸ Smith questioned the Yugoslav Party's success after its expulsion from the Cominform. He even hoped that the rebellious dictator could hold out against Soviet-Communist efforts.⁹⁹ Smith concluded that Yugoslavia's expulsion from the Cominform would lead to a tightening of Soviet control over foreign Communist parties.

Tito's rejection of the Soviet Union also suggested to Ambassador Smith that Soviet influence in Central Europe was becoming increasingly unmanageable. Smith likened the Soviet control of Eastern Europe to:

a dike holding in thick the churning torrents of the pent-up emotions of peoples, who may know little of real democracy at home but who historically have resisted every kind of foreign rule. The Yugoslav breach, like any leak through which angry waters find an outlet, threatens to grow larger with every passing day and, if unattended, eventually destroy the entire structure of control and inundate the surrounding area.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Smith, My Three Years, 203.

⁹⁹ Smith, "Telegram to the Secretary of State, 1 July 1948," Foreign Relations of the United States: 1948 (Washington: Dept. of State Publications, 1974), 1082-1083.

¹⁰⁰ Smith, My Three Years, 189-191.

Smith agreed with the State Department that Tito's split from the Soviet Union might present the United States with an opportunity. As Tito's government turned to the West for support, Smith believed the United States could moderate Tito by offering trade incentives and aid to Yugoslavia.¹⁰¹

Smith observed how the move to direct control of foreign Communist parties, particularly in Europe, had not come about from any development from within Russia itself, but from the disintegration of power in neighboring states.¹⁰² Russia had, for the first time, found herself "without a single powerful rival on the European land mass."¹⁰³ More importantly, the Soviet Union was in control of vast new areas of Europe after the war. Smith held that Soviet expansion led to an increase in responsibilities to the newly acquired peoples of Eastern Europe, but that the Soviets were not only unwilling, but also unable to extend the economic support to its satellites. Smith argued that the Soviet Union was neglecting its newly acquired

¹⁰¹ David Mayers, The Ambassadors and American Soviet Policy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 169.

¹⁰² Smith, My Three Years, 29.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

satellites by failing to develop resources, advance their industrial technology, or secure their military defenses.¹⁰⁴ In his mind, such a development would weaken Soviet control in Eastern Europe.

The third and final major crisis Ambassador Smith faced was the Berlin crisis. Soviet hostility toward the West peaked after the American, British and French zones of occupied Germany adapted a common currency in 1948 in preparation for political unity. In response, the Soviets implemented a blockade of Allied routes to Berlin on June 24, 1948, to prevent the political unification of West Germany.

Smith understood that the beginning of the Berlin Crisis was a chain of continual provocations deliberately manufactured to block the consolidation of Western influence in Germany.¹⁰⁵ Stalin had successfully placed the United States on the defensive, and though he was careful not to provoke war, Smith believed that the Soviet leader seemed to be prepared to gamble everything for the control of Germany.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 254.

Ambassador Smith became increasingly frustrated with the Kremlin's German policy. In Smith's mind, the Kremlin was willing to risk starving 2,250,000 Berliners and drawing the world into a major military conflict.¹⁰⁶ Smith alleged that the Soviet goal was to create an anti-fascist government in East Germany as a preliminary to a Soviet Socialist State, which would be directly loyal to Moscow.¹⁰⁷ To solve the crisis the United States started a massive airlift of food and supplies to Berlin. It also turned to Ambassador Smith, whom it hoped could persuade the Soviets to abandon their reckless policy.

Smith worked tirelessly to avert a military conflict by diplomatic methods. Smith held serious doubts that the airlift would be successful in supplying Berlin during the winter months. He was encouraged, however, by the U.S. military's logistical ability and by the morale that the airlift had instilled in Berliners.

Ambassador Smith began to push for more meetings with Soviet leaders about the deteriorating situation in Berlin. Smith, British Special Envoy Frank Roberts, and French

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 231.

¹⁰⁷ Smith, "Telegram to the Secretary of State, 2 April 1946," Foreign Relations of the United States: 1946 (Washington: Dept. of State Publications, 1969), 535-536.

Ambassador Yves Chataigneau met with V.M. Molotov and Stalin through the summer of 1948. They resisted Stalin's political and economic demands on Germany and insisted on the continued right of their countries to share in the occupation of Berlin.¹⁰⁸ Smith was particularly concerned about Germany's susceptible economy weakened by years of war and exorbitant war reparations.¹⁰⁹ The Soviets wanted Germany to pay war reparations in the sum of \$20 billion.¹¹⁰

In a separate series of meetings with Stalin and Molotov in August 1948 to resolve the Berlin crisis, Smith decided that the Soviet Union was determined to persist in its policy of resistance. The ambassador feared that the Soviet Union was recklessly leading the world toward war. Smith, however, refused to buckle. He told Stalin that the Western governments were only prepared to undertake negotiations in an "atmosphere free of all pressures" and

¹⁰⁸ W. Phillips Davidson, The Berlin Blockade (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 158-159.

¹⁰⁹ Central Intelligence Agency, "Implications of Soviet Policy Toward Germany," Weekly Summary Excerpt (19 July 1946)

¹¹⁰ Parrish, "New Evidence on the Soviet Rejection of the Marshall Plan, 1947," 7.

could not accept "any position which carried implication of negotiating under duress."¹¹¹

Stalin replied to Smith that the Soviet Union had no intention of forcing the Western governments from their designated occupation zones in Germany, while simultaneously arguing that the West no longer had the legal right to occupy Berlin.¹¹² Ultimately, Stalin wanted to forestall the centralization of political-economic authority in western Germany.¹¹³ Ambassador Smith blamed the breakdown of cooperation with the Soviet leadership on Stalin's unwillingness to accept a compromise with the Western Powers. According to Smith, Stalin was confident of the effectiveness of the blockade and had "lost interest in discussions that would produce nothing of benefit to the Soviet Union."¹¹⁴

Smith, nonetheless, remained steadfast. He showed the Soviets the face of defiance and determination. Three

¹¹¹ Smith, "Statement by Smith to the Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union (Molotov) Regarding the Implementation of General Principles for Terminating the Berlin Crisis, 12 August 1948," Documents on American Foreign Relations, vol. X (Princeton: Oxford University Press, 1950), 93-94.

¹¹² Smith, My Three Years, 242.

¹¹³ Mayers, The Ambassadors and America's Soviet Policy, 167.

¹¹⁴ Smith, My Three Years, 252.

hundred and twenty one days later, on May 12, 1949, Smith's diplomatic efforts proved fruitful. The crisis ended and the Soviets lifted the airlift on Berlin.¹¹⁵ The Berlin blockade had been Stalin's "most explicit challenge" to the West,¹¹⁶ and yet the Soviet Union was unable to extract any concessions from the West.

At the end of the eleven-month stand off, Ambassador Smith was unable to conceal his satisfaction over the Soviet Union's failure:

Without achieving a single stated Soviet objective, the Russians ended the blockade. The Soviet government had unsuccessfully attempted to halt the Western program of economic and monetary reform, and perhaps force the Western powers out of Berlin itself.¹¹⁷

Until the Berlin blockade, Ambassador Smith had openly supported a foreign policy based on relative patience with the Soviet government. However, the failed attempts of diplomacy over Berlin and the growing frustration with the Kremlin were beginning to solidify Smith's unwillingness to view Soviet Russia as anything but a hostile and belligerent enemy of the United States.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 231.

¹¹⁶ Kurt Loudou, ed., The Soviet Union in World Politics (Boulder: Westview Press, Inc., 1980), 85.

¹¹⁷ Smith, My Three Years, 231.

Besides the string of crises that Smith faced in 1948-1949, there were two other concerns that disturbed Smith. One concern was the isolation that the Soviet government imposed on him and the American embassy personnel. Soviet correspondence with Ambassador Smith was typically ambiguous, misleading, and terse. Smith could do little to change the tactics of Soviet diplomacy. Nevertheless, Smith remained steadfast in his primary duty to clearly set forth "the policies and purposes of the United States with regard to the Soviet Union, and thus avoid any unfortunate misunderstanding in view of the character of the current propaganda statements."¹¹⁸

The second problem that vexed Smith was Soviet anti-Western propaganda. The Kremlin launched a "peace offensive" in May 1948. This renewal of anti-Western propaganda started when the Soviet Foreign Office deliberately distorted the truth in a diplomatic exchange that Smith had with Molotov.¹¹⁹ In a declaration read to Molotov, Ambassador Smith reaffirmed the United States'

¹¹⁸ Truman, "Statement by President Truman, 11 May 1948," A Decade of American Foreign Policy: Basic Documents, 1941-1949 (Washington: Dept. of State Publications, 1985), 623.

¹¹⁹ For documentation on the May 1948 exchange between Ambassador Smith and Molotov, see Foreign Relations, 1948, vol. II, pp. 845-874.

official position toward Russia's tactics of deceit and propaganda when he said, "The United States has no desire whatsoever, to see the world divided into two major groupings, nor to divert a large part of its income to the maintenance of a military establishment which such a world situation would necessitate in elementary self-defense." Smith also warned Molotov that an inevitable crystallization of non-Soviet areas of the world would form if threatened by actions of the Soviet state.¹²⁰

The purpose of Smith's meeting with Molotov had been to clear any Soviet misunderstanding of the nature and course of American foreign policy. The Soviet leadership however, chose to interpret Smith's words as a threat of war.

Soviet propaganda quickly mobilized to persuade world opinion that the Soviets wanted peace, whereas the United States did not.¹²¹ According to Smith, the purpose of the Soviet's full-scale propaganda campaign was designed to disrupt unity in the West. American policy, institutions,

¹²⁰ Smith, My Three Years, 159.

¹²¹ Carlisle H. Humeslsine, Executive Director of the Secretariat, "The Soviet 'Peace' Offensive," Draft Paper Prepared in the Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States: 1949 (Washington: Dept. of State Publications, 1976), 840.

and culture were subjected to the most hostile, bitter, contemptuous attack from Soviet propaganda, according to Smith. In particular, the United States was portrayed as "an imperialistic, aggressive nation, where a small group of selfish, predatory millionaires dominates all capitalistic trusts, which in turn dominate the country, that workers are subjected to complete exploitation and literally kept in chains."¹²² According to the American Ambassador, the Soviet government preached that it was the only nation that represented true democracy and stood for what was right.

Elbridge Durbrow, the American Chargé in the Soviet Union, gave Smith his impression of the Soviet anti-American campaign: "Day in and day out, during past months, tom-toms of Soviet propaganda have beat out themes that American and British reactionaries are seeking to foment new war against the USSR." Durbrow insisted that this action was intended to raise opposition to the West and spur the Soviet public by means of the "specter of coming war to all out effort on the five-year plan."¹²³

¹²² Smith, My Three Years in Moscow, 98.

¹²³ Elbridge Durbrow, "Telegram to the Secretary of State and Ambassador Smith, 18 September 1946," Foreign Relations

Smith agreed with Durbrow's analysis. He, in turn, urged President Truman and the Secretary of State to counter Soviet propaganda with a campaign of truth. Smith believed that the American public should be aware of the potential threat that the Soviet Union created with its propaganda. He wanted to expose these Soviet tactics "by reminding the public of many previous examples of Soviet deceptive soothing maneuvers which caused Soviet adversaries to be less vigilant and permitted the Kremlin to regroup its forces for further aggression."¹²⁴

Smith believed that the Soviet propaganda campaign was a product of Soviet weakness vis-à-vis the West and of Russian tradition. He argued that Russia had always provided its people with a series of enemies and political adversaries. Before the Communist Revolution, there was the bourgeoisie, then the Trotsky sympathizers, and eventually the German Nazis. He believed that it was unrealistic to expect the Soviet Union to change its longstanding beliefs. The propaganda machine had simply shifted its focus from earlier villains to the capitalists

of the United States: 1946 (Washington: Dept. of State Publication, 1969), 783.

¹²⁴ Smith, "Telegram to the Secretary of State, 22 April 1948," Foreign Relations of the United States: 1948 (Washington: Dept. of State Publications, 1974,) 833.

who threatened the ideas of Mother Russia and world revolution.

The Kremlin also used propaganda, Smith believed, to maintain its control of the Soviet citizens and to keep the people working under the new five-year plans. Smith reported his opinion of Soviet society to the Secretary of State in early 1948:

The Russian people are under the curb of a new five-year plan with usual emphasis on development of heavy industry and military-economic potential coupled with an aggressive and xenophobic propaganda line, which has succeeded in convincing a sector of the population that the capitalist imperialists are making every effort to launch a new world war.¹²⁵

Smith believed that the totalitarian structure of the Communist regime weakened the USSR. From his point of view, the KGB, the police agency used for political control, deprived the Soviet citizens of its finest politicians, artisans and scientists by sending millions of people to concentration camps. Many of these gifted individuals were sent to prison solely for political or class reasons. The camps often used the deportees for forced labor. Ambassador Smith estimated that at the time

¹²⁵ Smith, "Memorandum to the Secretary of State, 7 February 1948," Foreign Relations of the United States: 1948 (Washington: Dept. of State Publications, 1974), 804.

of his tenure in Moscow, the strength of the entire involuntary labor force was equal to about 8 percent of the total population of the Soviet Union—about fifteen million people.¹²⁶ Smith portrayed the Soviet Union as a weak state held together by force:

...Thus the Soviet regime is nailed in place by bayonets and held together by an omnipresent demonstration of force as well as by the psychological trickery of propaganda. The individual, his personal liberties and, to a considerable extent, his dignity as a human being, are submerged—all in the interest of the system as a whole, whose material achievements, particularly in vast stretches of backward territory, is ample evidence of impressive power.¹²⁷

Furthermore, Ambassador Smith reported on the restrictions placed upon the average individual in Russia. He surmised that most Soviet citizens concentrated on living in stark circumstances while trying to avoid any entanglement with authorities.¹²⁸ "With civil society virtually destroyed, everyone was supposed to become his brother's spy. The unattainable ideal of the system was a situation where all people were at the same time inmates of

¹²⁶ Smith, My Three Years, 121.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 130.

¹²⁸ Mayers, The Ambassadors and America's Soviet Policy, 169.

concentration camps and secret police agents—a unique combination in human affairs.”¹²⁹

Ambassador Smith expressed his disgust for the Soviet regime to the Secretary of State as early as January 1947 when he wrote, “This system bears not the faintest resemblance to genuine democracy. Soviet elections are political puppet shows in which masses dance to strings pulled by party bosses. Their purpose in foreign affairs is to conceal the reality of a police state behind a constitutional facade.”¹³⁰

The ambassador’s final days in Moscow were unhappy ones. He had grown weary of the restrictions placed upon him in Moscow. In addition, the propaganda materials being distributed by the Soviet Foreign Office were igniting his temper more frequently.¹³¹ Additionally, Smith’s health had deteriorated in the cold climate of Moscow. After three years of service, Smith decided to relinquish his post as the American ambassador in Moscow.

¹²⁹ Leszek Kolakowski, Stalinism, Its Impact on Russia and the World, ed. G.R. Urban (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 258.

¹³⁰ Smith, “Telegram to the Secretary of State, 17 January 1947,” Foreign Relations of the United States: 1947 (Washington: Dept. of State Publications, 1972,) 521.

¹³¹ Smith, My Three Years, 157.

Before Ambassador Smith departed the Soviet Union, he shared his concerns about Soviet policy to President Truman. He told Truman that the irreconcilable hostility of Communist propaganda against the West would lead to further polarization between the United States and the Soviet Union.¹³² He also argued to the President that Soviet policy, in his mind, was a marriage between Russian imperialism and Communist ideology that could not be broken by any American diplomatic intervention. Finally, he told Truman that he believed that Soviet actions would prompt an unfavorable reaction from the United States and, thus, would continue to perpetuate the growing climate of suspicion and antagonism that came to characterize the Cold War.¹³³

Smith's final years in Moscow were momentous. He faced the Communist coup in Czechoslovakia, the Tito-Stalin split, and the Berlin Crisis. In each situation, he provided sound advice to the State Department and to President Truman. He maintained essential channels of communication between the Soviet Union and the United States, despite a succession of difficult and protracted

¹³² Ibid., 320.

¹³³ Ibid., 315.

negotiations. His last months were also a time of strain. He was growing weary of the isolation that the Soviets imposed on him, the flood tide of propaganda that they leveled against him and the United States, and the bitterly cold climate of Moscow.

CHAPTER V

EPILOGUE

Smith returned to the United States in March 1949.¹³⁴ The former ambassador left Moscow with a unique understanding of Russia. He warned that there were no experts on the Soviet Union; there were only varying degrees of ignorance. Smith had come to the bleak conclusion that the Soviet regime was a prisoner of its own dogma. This doctrine called for a worldwide revolution that would result in the eventual downfall of capitalism. Soviet policy was, according to Smith, dictated by hostility toward the West. Ambassador Smith hoped that his country would, "stick to [its principles] calmly, determinedly and courageously" because the stakes were too

¹³⁴ As a replacement for Ambassador Smith, President Truman nominated Vice Admiral Alan G. Kirk, U.S.N. retired. Kirk had been the American ambassador in Brussels since 1946.

high, and the alternatives were too terrible, to permit even a suspicion of irresolution.¹³⁵

After returning to Washington, Smith published his memoirs titled *My Three Years in Moscow*. His critical view of the Soviet system created uproar after the *New York Times* printed some of its more sensational descriptions on December 2, 1949.

Stalin leveled a series of attacks against the ambassador after the memoirs were published. The Soviet dictator was outraged that Smith's memoirs went beyond detailing the daily administrative duties of the U.S. embassy in Moscow. Stalin branded Smith as a mad general playing the part of a lying diplomat.¹³⁶ Ten days after its publication, *Pravda* wrote that the former ambassador was a "slanderer," a "warmonger," and a "mad general." Other Soviet newspapers reported that the main preoccupation of the "petty soul" of Smith was to supply slanderous reports to Washington.¹³⁷ Smith's memoirs upheld the then current

¹³⁵ Smith, *My Three Years*, 55.

¹³⁶ Special to the *New York Times* on 13 December 1949, "Gen. Smith Scored as Liar by Pravda; Soviet Organ Brands Memoirs of Former U.S. Envoy as a 'Furious Slander,'" *New York Times* (1857-Current file) p. 7.

¹³⁷ *New York Times*, "Gen. Smith Scored As Liar By Pravda," p. 1.

belief that the United States shared little culpability for the Cold War.

Once back in Washington, Smith continued his service. In 1949, he briefly took command as a four star general of the First Army in Korea. However, President Truman was fed up with the intelligence failures at the beginning of the Korean War. He decided to utilize Smith's military and diplomatic experience.

On October 7, 1950, Smith was sworn in as the fourth Director of the Central Intelligence Agency. The new director moved quickly to streamline departmental procedures. Smith increased the director's authority and removed many of the bureaucratic restrictions that impeded the agency's ability to gather intelligence effectively and conduct covert actions. Under Smith's leadership, the CIA worked hard to prevent future surprises from the Soviet Union. His prior service in Moscow had prepared him for the realities of the Cold War. Ludwell Montague regarded Smith as the real founder of the CIA, who inherited "a faltering and diffident bureaucratic morass and pounded it into shape for combat in the looming Cold War."¹³⁸ He is

¹³⁸ Ludwell Lee Montague, General Walter Bedell Smith as Director of Central Intelligence, October 1950-February 1953 (University Park: Penn State Press, 1992).

still remembered as one of the CIA's most successful directors. Smith retired from the CIA on February 9, 1953.¹³⁹

In late February, Smith served briefly as the Undersecretary of State during the early years of the Eisenhower Administration. However, with his health failing, Smith resigned in October 1954. Smith continued to serve periodically on several governmental boards and committees throughout his retirement.¹⁴⁰ Two years before his death, Smith published his account of Eisenhower's leadership in *Eisenhower's Six Great Decisions: Europe 1944-1945*. While Smith's book had little historical value, it did illustrate his complete loyalty to his former chief. Shortly after its publication, Smith's health deteriorated and he withdrew from the public's eye. The aging public servant had left little time for the development of a

¹³⁹ Allen W. Dulles assumed the directorship of the CIA following Smith's retirement.

¹⁴⁰ A few of Smith's numerous professional responsibilities during retirement included: Consultant for the Special Projects Office (disarmament), 1955-56, and Chairman of the Advisory Council of President's Committee on Fund Raising, 1958-61.

private life.¹⁴¹ His final years were spent outside the public sector with his wife, Mary Eleanor.

On August 9, 1961, the former ambassador died of a heart attack, at the age of 65. His wife died just two years later. As the *New York Times* observed, "Only President Eisenhower and the late General of the Army George C. Marshall were said to have matched the range and duration of "Beetle" Smith's more than four decades of service in the military and civilian branches of the government."¹⁴² It was a fitting and well-deserved epitaph.¹⁴³

President Truman made a wise and prudent selection with Smith. The President trusted him to help secure the United States against whatever dangers it might confront, although at times, it was difficult to sense what dangers might arise.¹⁴⁴ Smith was particularly effective during the crises in Iran, Greece, Turkey, and Berlin.

¹⁴¹ Croswell, *The Chief of Staff: The Military Career of General Walter Bedell Smith*, xxi.

¹⁴² *New York Times*, (10 August 1961), 1ff.

¹⁴³ Snyder, "Walter Bedell Smith: Eisenhower's Chief of Staff," 12.

¹⁴⁴ Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History*, 12.

Truman liked that Smith was willing to take orders without interjecting his own vision of foreign policy. To be sure, Smith was neither a well-educated or experienced diplomat. However, Truman must have expected that Smith would continue to behave like a soldier in Moscow and even contribute to Stalin's suspicion of the United States.

Smith supported Truman's policies and adopted his views of Soviet Russia. They both agreed that a brutal dictator ruled the Soviet Union, and considered Stalin to be a committed, shrewd and untrustworthy ideologue. Smith's appointment in Moscow reflected the Truman administration's evolving hard-line policy toward the Soviet Union. Smith also supported a vigorous and direct line of attack in countering and exposing Soviet methods, policies and ideology. He proposed that the United States should take every opportunity in official speeches, international exchanges, and especially in the forum of the United Nations to take the advantage and to make it more difficult for the Kremlin to associate their policies with the wishes of the Russian people.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ Smith, "Memorandum to the Secretary of State, 4 November 1948," Foreign Relations of the United States: 1948 (Washington: Dept. of State Publications, 1974), 930-931.

He proposed that the United States should take every opportunity in official speeches, international exchanges, and especially in the forum of the United Nations to take the advantage and to make it more difficult for the Kremlin to associate their policies with the wishes of the Russian people.¹⁴⁶

Smith provided the United States with a capable diplomat in Moscow who was able to advise intelligently the State Department on matters of foreign policy toward the USSR. His service as the American ambassador in Moscow and his contributions to the American people were both substantial and invaluable. Smith argued that American foreign policy had to meet the challenge of checking Soviet expansion because the stakes were too high and the alternatives too terrible to permit even a suspicion of irresolution.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Smith, "Memorandum to the Secretary of State, 4 November 1948," Foreign Relations of the United States: 1948 (Washington: Dept. of State Publications, 1974), 930-931.

¹⁴⁷ Smith, My Three Years, 335.

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