

The background of the slide is a light gray gradient with several realistic water droplets of various sizes scattered across it. The droplets have highlights and shadows, giving them a three-dimensional appearance.

# THE COLD WAR: STRATEGIES OF CONTAINMENT

**CONTAINMENT MODIFIED: EISENHOWER AND NUCLEAR  
STRATEGY**

## Our Class Session Topics

1. Prelude to Containment: A Tense Partnership
2. Containment Begins: The Truman Administration and the late 1940s
3. Containment Implemented: Korea
4. **Containment Modified: Eisenhower and Nuclear Strategy**
5. Containment Challenged: Khrushchev and Cuba
6. Containment Punctured: Vietnam
7. Containment Revised and Victorious: Détente and Dissolution



## President Dwight Eisenhower (1953-1961)

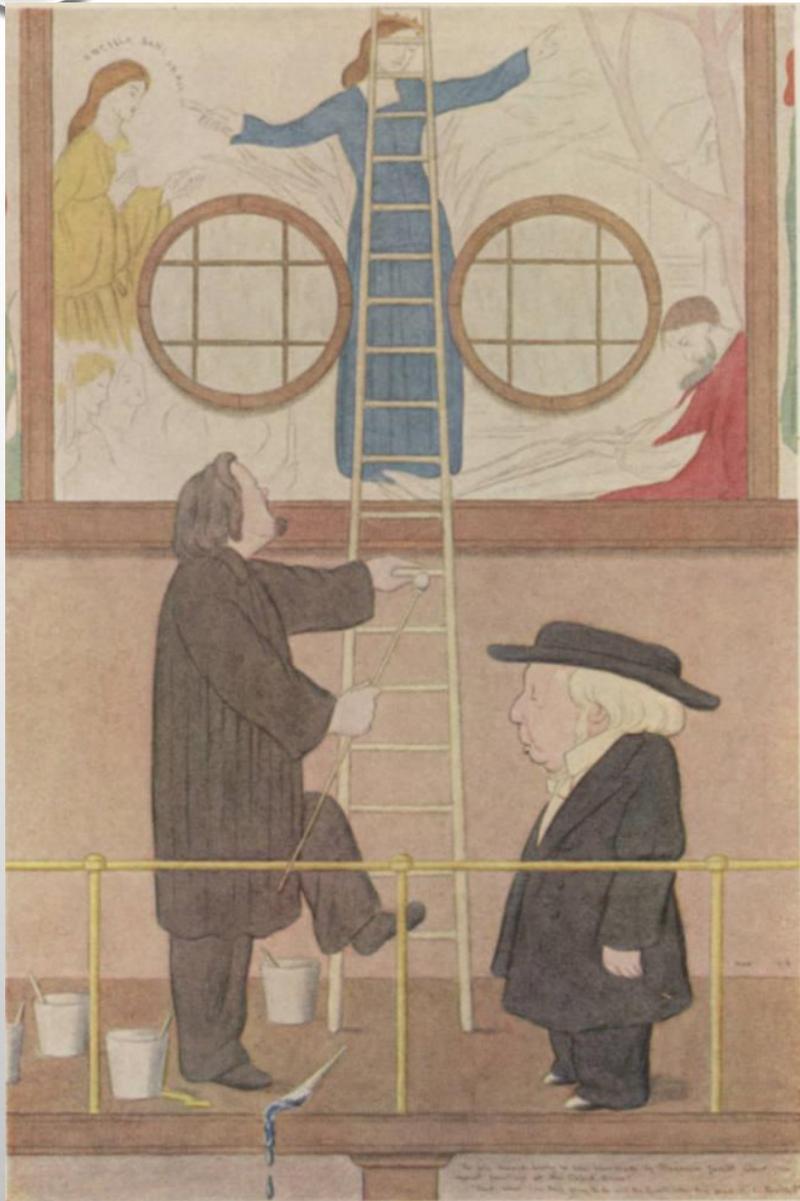
- Succeeded Truman after beating Democrat Adlai Stevenson in the general Presidential election of 1952
- Ran so “Asia first, liberation and isolationist oriented” Ohio Senator Robert Taft would not get the Republican nomination
- Campaigned on ending Korean War and reducing military expenditures and budget deficits
- Strategy: reduce conventional arms spending and increase nuclear reliance.
  - Results in “massive retaliation” brinkmanship strategy



## Nuclear Brinkmanship: threatening with the Bomb

- Eisenhower signaled he would use tactical nuclear weapons in Korea and China if Korean negotiation stalemate did not end
- Tactical nuclear weapons were also considered at Dienbienphu, North Vietnam in 1954
- Nuclear signaling in Berlin crisis of 1948-1949
- In part, 1950-1960 a pessimistic time in US vis a vis Cold War despite success in Europe





## Nuclear Weapons

"And what were they going to do with the Grail when they find it, Mr. Rossetti?"

*Benjamin Jowett*

# Putin's problems using tactical nuclear weapons

Use of threat

Escalation from use

Imbalance of response

Psychological horror

World reaction

Control of fall out

Precision

Deterrent effect



## United States nuclear monopoly in 1945 – 1949

- “Only” about 100 US atomic bombs by 1950; 1 or 2 for Soviets by 1952
  - Delivery with US B-29s, new B-36s and new B-50s (no missiles yet)
  - Soviets had no reliable delivery system until ICBMs in 1957
  - Took several weeks to ready the US plane and atomic bomb
  - Stalin and Soviets bluffed “non-concern” to avoid providing US negotiating leverage



## No explicit US nuclear doctrine before early 1949

- Atomic bomb seen as weapon that gave great “conventional weapons type” advantage – “more bang for the buck”



- US hesitant to use atom bomb against Soviets in late 1940s though
  - theory of war based on the necessity of “total war” and “total victory”
  - memory of the wartime alliance with the Soviet Union
  - humanitarian impulses
  - lack of clarity about the world wide situation
  - US domestic and political restraints (unlike Soviet Union)
  - US dependent more and more on atom bomb
  - Berlin crisis threat set a precedent though

## Strategic and Diplomatic problems with developing a nuclear use doctrine

### Tactical use problems

- Nuclear weapons extremely destructive; hard to use “tactically”
  - Atomic bomb destroys everything in a 3-mile radius
  - Thermonuclear bomb (after 1954) destroys everything in a 10-mile radius
  - US policy makers had a WW II view (analogy) of strategic bombing (with inconclusive results) though tactical bombing was used also (see D-Day)
  - Tactical targets (battlefield targets)
    - “collateral damage” presents the moral and psychological problem
    - Moving tactical targets
    - Own forces too close
    - Fall out
    - Effect on European Allies



## Strategic use problems



- “No first strike” policy by US – remnant in part of Pearl Harbor
- Would be demonstrated by Kennedy in Cuba
- Extreme uncertainty re effect of a first strike
  - Hence, surviving retaliation strike capability of Soviets
- Effect on European Allies (the drawbacks of being a nuclear battlefield)

- Hence, need many nuclear weapons to increase % of survival from retaliatory strike and to hit many strategic targets
- US “solved” this with multiple domestic and foreign nuclear weapons and locations
- But this increased Soviets anxiety and tensions from surrounding US bases and US arsenal size; reinforced Soviet fears re US intentions
- Also gave rise to US public concern



- **Containment strategy made nuclear weapons especially dangerous**
  - **Enormity of modern weapons made war repugnant, but US backing off gives Soviets a “blank check” for expansion.**
  - **Soviets would necessarily be the aggressors under US “strategy of containment” and would possess initiative for a nuclear first strike consistent with US fears (Pearl Harbor analogy)**
  - **Eisenhower’s answer to first strike was massive retaliation**
  - **Massive retaliation also became doctrine of deterrence for the Eisenhower Administration (reducing flexibility though)**

## Danger also in US view of how WW3 would begin

- US war doctrine not to engage in a “first strike” but would conduct military buildup while front line Allies held the line (e.g., WW2)
  - Post WW2 US leaders expected WW3 to be like WW2
  - USSR believed to have no qualms re: surprise attack
  - With nuclear weapons of USSR, US could no longer count on Allies to hold a line while US assessed events and decided a threat has become unambiguous
  - Pre-emptive strikes a hard sell politically



To strike or not to strike?

- “First strike” by Soviets may be too devastating
  - Resistance to aggression can no longer be coming into a battle long in progress to tilt the scales, e.g., World War I and World War II.
  - Now survival depends not only on US strength, but US ability to recognize aggression against hard to identify vital interests and react
  - In the nuclear age, by the time threat has become unambiguous it may be too late to resist it.

## Historical Analogies inappropriate

- Nuclear technology made possible for the first time in history a shift in the balance of power solely through internal technological developments (see North Korea)
  - Results
    - constantly changing strategic environment requiring constant monitoring
    - constant weapons development to maintain status quo
  - Thermonuclear weapons by both sides changed balance of power and created avoidance of use of power (historical anomaly) of nuclear but also conventional weapons



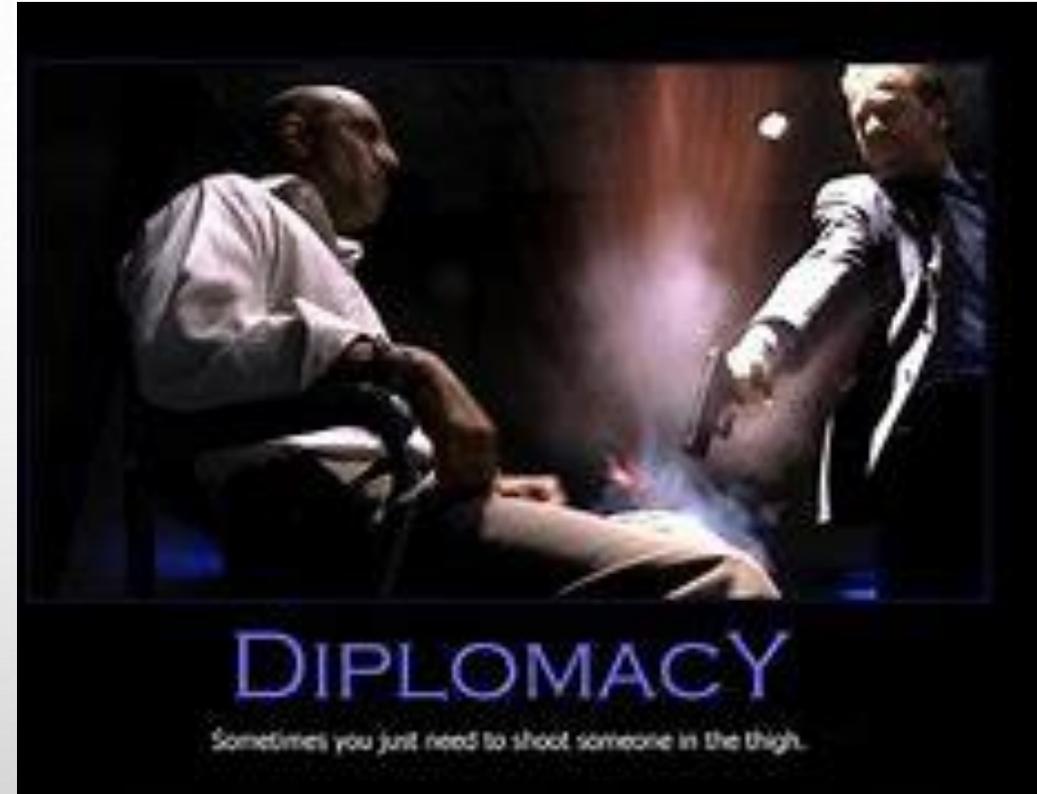
Questions so far?



## ○ Conducting Diplomacy in the Nuclear Environment

What is Diplomacy? *The art of influencing the decisions and behavior of foreign governments through negotiation and other measures short of war or violence; art of controlling power, one's own and others*

- Does not exclude **threat** of war or violence
- Any explicit or implied threat of war in negotiation must be credible



## War historically served a purpose

- Not all past international settlements were brought about by reasonableness and negotiating skill
- Credibility created in part by past wars
- Even during period of harmony, it was understood that a negotiation which failed did not always return matters to their starting point but might call other pressures, such as war and/or sanctions, into play
- Motive behind international settlements always combination of the belief in the advantages of harmony and the fear of the consequences of proving obdurate.

## Why current need for threat of war?

- Any harmony between Communism and Capitalism explicitly rejected by Soviet Marxist-Leninist doctrine
  - Both US and USSR saw the other as insatiable (agreements are only amnesties)
  - Soviets were a “revolutionary” power, not seeing the international capitalist system as *legitimate*, which produces aggressive opposition
- Any renunciation of war/force by West would create a vacuum which Soviets would fill – containment must be constant and credible



## Problems in revolutionary period like Cold War

- “revolutionary” state gives priority to change over maintenance of status quo and/or harmony.
- This problem was manipulated by the Sino-Soviet bloc, determined to prevent the establishment of an equilibrium and organized to exploit all hopes and dissatisfactions for its own ends.
- To the extent that recourse to force has become impossible, the restraints of the international order (rule following) may disappear as well. The cost/benefit analysis is unbalanced

## The possible consequences of the renunciation of force

- eliminates the penalty for intransigence
- places international order at the mercy of its most ruthless or most irresponsible members

However, nuclear weapons created a difficult coercive threat

- Creditability of use
  - Their use posed problems in morals, allies, practicality, and destructiveness of opponent and of US
  - Destruction of opponent's resources in first strike left first striker without "hostages," licensing opponent to "go for broke"
  - Destruction great, even for the first user (e.g., rebuilding of Europe after WWII)
- Also challenged creditability of conventional weapons due to escalation threat
- The big risk: would the opponent use them too?

Result: Nuclear technology created “tacit nonaggression treaty” (they ain’t all bad)

- However, lack of explicitness and trust created nerve wracking ambiguity (not the purpose of treaties)
- War no longer a conceivable instrument of policy
  - o “Competent rationality” presumed but not certain
- Leads to international disputes being settled only by diplomacy
  - But if threat of war impossible or incredible, diplomacy may lose its efficacy.

- Other threats of force, e.g., sanctions, economic restrictions, not as powerful and can be countered with allies
- Instead of resolution of tensions, inability to use force may perpetuate all disputes, however trivial
- In an “international society” of “sovereign” states, power as last resort vindicates a state’s interpretation of justice and/or defends its “vital interests”
- Nuclear weapons produced ambiguity; however, did restrain total war between superpowers as it continues to do today.
  - World has not reached though a crisis that calls for their use

Questions?



**Next Week: Containment  
Challenged: Khrushchev and Cuba**



**&**

