

Eisenhower's new look defence policy analysis



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Dwight D. Eisenhower could be arguably of the most influential president's in United States of America's History. Elected as the 34th president of the United States, he was previously a General in the American army with a rank of five stars and he was a Supreme Commander during World War II and oversaw key battles such as the Normandy Landings. This general, after the United States, victory would go on to win a bid to become President of the United States. One of the most important areas in which his leadership would be most notable is his "New Look" policy to deal with rising tensions with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. This essay will scrutinize the goals and achievements of Eisenhower's "New Look" policy and how efficacious it was in design, intent and execution.

In order to grasp the motivations, timings and reasons behind Eisenhower's New Look defence policy -which had a focus on upholding U. S military commitments at lesser costs -one must realize that after the successful utilization of nuclear weapons in the World War II in Hiroshima, Japan on the 6th of August, 1945, and the subsequent atomic bomb in Nagasaki on the 9th of August, 1945, traditional forms of battle -which involved a heavy and almost singular reliance on troops on the ground -was made obsolete (Barlow, 1972: 2). Furthermore, by the time Eisenhower began his first term as President in 1953, Soviet Union and The United Kingdom had already been exploring their nuclear capabilities, however, despite the United Nations call for an abolition of atomic weapons in January of 1946, the USSR tested its first atomic bomb on the 29th of 1946, while the United Kingdom tested nuclear weapons on the 3rd on October, 1945 (Icanw. org, 2017). This non-compliance by both the United Kingdom -an ally of the U. S -and the <https://assignbuster.com/eisenhowers-new-look-defence-policy-analysis/>

Soviet Union, meant that the rising tensions caused USSR's expansionist ambitions, its war with Japan and seizing of southern parts of and the Japanese's Kuril and Sakhalin islands in 1945, its Berlin Blockade, its alliance treaty with communist China for three decades (1950) and the Korean War (1950 - 1953) -which heavily weakened its relationship with the West -meant that the USSR, when combined with its nuclear capabilities, could not be ignored by the West or the U. S, and proved to be an antagonism to its virtues of liberty (BBC, 2013). Another reason as to why tensions with the USSR and communist China was an issue of much unease was communism. The rising tides of communism were particularly of interest to the US because had begun to witness a slackening of solidarity and hesitancy with its allies when it came to supporting solid action against communist aggrandizement (Cooling and Watson, 1989).

In the face of the aforementioned actions by the USSR, the relationship with a post-war Eisenhower's U. S was, to say the least, strained. Eisenhower's campaign for president included his ideas that would later become known as his " New Look Policy". In his campaign, he was sure to stress that after the costs attributed to World War II, the Soviet threat to the U. S would negatively affect the U. S. in two major ways: economically and militarily (Barlow, 1972: 11). After hearing the recommendations of the out-going Truman Administration, which supported the USSR's opponents in Europe, Eisenhower favoured Truman's " Containment" policies which, according to Barlow (1972: 10), placed an emphasis on enlarging the numbers of the armed forces, putting more effort into conventional forces located in Europe, launching " a Far Eastern Defensive Perimeter and security system,"

increasing assistance to Formosa's Chinese nationalists and French forces in Indochina and extending more aid to countries surrounding the USSR and CPR. This stance by the Truman administration was prudent, but it would soon become insufficient. This insufficiency would become apparent not only because of the Soviet's nuclear test in August on 1953 -which was seven months into Eisenhower's presidency -but because of the economic stability Eisenhower longed for and campaigned for, was now threatened by the USSR. Due to this ostensible gridlock, Eisenhower suffered from much indecision because he knew that another war could impart irreparable damage to the U. S. economy, but he also wished to somehow mitigate or "contain" the growing threat that the USSR and its allies had become.

Moreover, the first crucial modification in the U. S. nuclear strategy under Eisenhower took place on the 12th of January of 1954 (Njolstad, 1994: 16). This shift -which would later become known as "massive retaliation" -was announced by Eisenhower's Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, and stated that if the any future mêlées with communist countries should occur, the U. S. would decide to "depend primarily upon a great capacity to retaliate, instantly, by means and at places of our own choosing" (Njolstad, 1994: 16). This stance, which is a decisive and steadfast stance in terms of foreign policy, could be argued to be decisive, but harboured a spirit of offensiveness that Eisenhower's predecessors (Truman and Roosevelt) were reluctant to take. In fairness to Eisenhower and his Secretary of State, Barlow (1972: 1) clarifies that the words "massive retaliation" were not used in a context that involved the U. S.'s response to a foreign conflict, but concerned only local defences. In contrast, Njolstad (1994: 16-17) argues

that even if the words “ massive retaliation” were not uttered by Dulles, the message within Dulles’ speech on the 12th of January, 1954, the speech was unambiguous; the United States, it seemed, would respond to any future aggression or attacks it overseas bases, itself or its allies within the Cold War with a swift nuclear attack on Chinese and Soviet cities, military installation/bases and industrial plants.

The differences, based on the “ massive retaliation” were most notable because they signalled the United States viewed nuclear weapons a device one only uses when all other strategies have been exhausted, but it suggested the United States had now adopted a nuclear-first response to attack or aggression from the Soviet Union or Chinese (Njolstad: 1994: 17). Furthermore, Eisenhower utilized press conferences at the time to stress the fact that unlike Truman, he would utilize nuclear weapons against attacks or conflicts that strategic targets that were imperative to the U. S. and its allies (Njolstad: 1994: 17). Another key tenet of “ massive retaliation” was the imprecise timing and location of US nuclear ambitions; this was deliberate on the part of Eisenhower because “ one of the major objectives of massive retaliation was to undermine whatever assumptions the Soviet leaders might have had about symmetry between their own aggressive acts and the subsequent American responses” (Njolstad: 1994: 18).

In order to properly gauge the successes and failures of the “ New Look” defence policy, the effectiveness and the environment which prompted its implementation must be discussed. During Eisenhower’s early rule as President, the U. S had an evident and tactical superiority because of its vast stores of atomic weapons (hydrogen bombs), while the Soviet Union was

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significantly inferior because of the grave immaturity of its nuclear capabilities (Slanchev, 2014). This reliance on atomic weapons to help contain Soviet ambitions and communism, according to Barlow (1972: 31), had more discernible influence -due to the fear of what happened in Hiroshima and Nagasaki -during Roosevelt's and Truman's presidencies, but also held significant weight during Eisenhower's presidency.

Despite the somewhat staunch reliance Eisenhower could be as having when it came to his Massive Retaliation's dependence on nuclear weapons, Eisenhower was actually disinclined to a nuclear confrontation. According to Soapes (1980: 58), Eisenhower not only had an interest in curtailing the nuclear arms race that had begun well before Nagasaki and Hiroshima, but he was also wary and fearful of a nuclear holocaust as it seemed this was the directions that the world was heading towards. This addition inputs a different dimension into the mind of Eisenhower because it replaces the image of Eisenhower being a general with and an enthusiasm for war, with one of a cautious leader that prioritized peace. During this time in history, it was no secret that America had, not only a stockpile of nuclear weapons, but a growing arsenal. Eisenhower, in response to this arsenal, stated that, "security through arms is only a means...to an end. Peace, in a very real sense is an end in itself..." (Soapes, 1980: 58).

In contrast to the aforementioned hesitation put forward Soapes (1980), Rubinson (2011: 295) states that in all of Eisenhower's terms in office, a pronuclear inclination has always been present in his New Look policy, Massive Retaliation and brinkmanship policies (brinkmanship was a view that essentially threatened war to achieve a goal, but had no intention of

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following through), furthermore, in towards the end of January 1956, Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, and U. S. UN Representative, Henry Cabot Lodge, associated world peace to U. S. nuclear munitions by saying, "The greatest single factor in the world today for peace is our atomic superiority."

The effectiveness of Eisenhower's New Look policy is a topic solicits strong opinions from academics. An obvious weakness that one might gather from Eisenhower's administration's heavy reliance on nuclear weapons on the divergence from conventional forces. United States General, Maxwell Taylor, debated even if a conflict should arise, the U. S. would still need conventional forces, and the massive cuts that Eisenhower had subjected the army to -in favour of nuclear weapons -could not mitigate communist aggression in place Korea (Slanchev, 2014: 5). Furthermore, General Taylor, in reference to Korean war -in which North Korea (backed by the USSR and China) invaded South Korea (backed by the U. S.) in hopes of unifying the country -stated that nuclear weapons would largely ineffective against a war that was fighting an ideology instead of a visible opponent (Slanchev, 2014: 5). This weakness of the Massive Retaliation policy in Eisenhower's New Look policy is immensely striking because it brings to the forefront the point that much of the Cold War was a war of ideologies backed by military force. Because both the USSR and the US were polarized as figureheads in the conflict between communist and capitalism, the war in Korea was, in many ways, a proxy war. Secondly, nuclear weapons, if used in the Korean conflict, could geologically devastate the very country they wished to free from the clutches of communism or capitalism, and because both forms of

governments needed the land to be viable for agriculture, a nuclear weapon could end up destabilising the country's land in a way that persisted for many decades.

Another weakness of the New Look was its lack of consideration that the USSR, which was severely behind in nuclear technology, would quickly develop its own nuclear capabilities. The USSR's nuclear capabilities were at a point where they could launch their own nuclear weapons in the year of 1957; this not only made the United States' Massive Retaliation largely less effective, but it meant that the U. S. could no longer use its nuclear weight to acquire certain assurance from the U. S. (Slanchev, 2014). This outcome by Eisenhower's policies is described by Power (2014: 14) a failed psychological threat, and, because this threat was no longer viable, the U. S. now looked weak (in terms of diplomacy) because the "all-or-nothing" premise which was the foundation of the New Look defence policy had now backfired massively. Furthermore, Massive retaliation received much backlash from Americans: former governor of Illinois and future United States Ambassador to the United Nations, Mr. Adlai Stevenson II said in criticism of Massive Retaliation, "Are we leaving ourselves the grim choice of inaction or a thermonuclear holocaust? Are we indeed inviting Moscow to nibble us to death?" (Barlow, 1972: 54). This backlash cost the Eisenhower's administration dearly because they had placed their defense and foreign policy on what was essentially a bluff, and now that the U. S. had lost its domination on nuclear weapons, it found itself uniquely vulnerable against a nation it had ostensibly bullied into submission with the threat of a nuclear assault.

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