A major achievement of Secretary of State Dean Acheson was establishment of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. President Harry S. Truman and Vice President Alben Barkley watched him sign the pact on April 4, 1949, in Washington.
By ALDEN WHITMAN

One of the principal moders of the American posture in the postwar world, Dean Goodenough Acheson, an urbane, elegant, sharp-minded and even sharper-tongued lawyer, helped to create what he called ‘‘half a world,” a free half through containment of the Soviet Union by American military power and political alliances.

As a member of the State Department almost continuously from 1941 to 1953—for the final four years he was President Harry S. Truman’s Secretary of State—Mr. Acheson articulated a policy and practice that assumed the Soviet Union was bent on world conquest, whether its enemies were the English-speaking peoples of the West or the Russian-speaking peoples of the East. He was a student of the Russians. They were abusive; they were rude. I just didn’t like them.”

Toward those he liked, Mr. Acheson had a gentleman-of-the-old-school loyalty. One example was his friendship with Alger Hiss, a former State Department official who was convicted of perjury in a sensational spy-ring case.

Mr. Hiss was a friend of long standing and was already under some suspicion when Mr. Acheson was confirmed as Secretary of State. He resisted at that time his ties to Mr. Hiss (“And my friendship is not easily given, nor is it easily withdrawn”) and later, after Mr. Hiss’s conviction, when many of his friends vanished, Mr. Acheson met the situation boldly by telling a new conference, “I do not intend to turn my back on Alger Hiss.”

Mr. Acheson, however, had no riposte to President Nixon’s (whose Indochina policy he warmly supported), although Mr. Nixon in 1965 had lashed out at “Dean Acheson’s College of Cowardly Communist Conformity.” He indicated that President Nixon had “gone ahead doing what we did” in combating Communism.

Enjoyed Capitol Politics

As a broker in power who helped to plot many of his policies through Congress, Mr. Acheson relished his enjoyment of Capitol politics and his fund—

ness for Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg, the Republican leader, and Senator Tom Connally, Democratic counterpart. Some of his happiest moments, he said, were spent in the Capitol backrooms with these and other cronies. “Some of my worst enemies on the Hill were my best friends,” he remarked.

To facilitate a bipartisan foreign policy, Mr. Acheson went on occasion to sign the draft bills that the Republicans could “correct” them, to their glory, in the name of bipartisanship. And once he, so far as he could, sat down to write a speech for a critic of the Bretton Woods bill. “It was the best attack on the bill ever delivered,” he re-called with a merry laugh.

The personal touch that made Mr. Acheson a Capitol favorite was also the key to his dealings with many foreign diplomats. “The best diplomats, it is on the personal level,” he said, adding:

“I got along with everybody who was housebroken. But I was very close to the Russians. They were abusive; they were rude. I just didn’t like them.”

Toward those he liked, Mr. Acheson had a gentleman-of-the-old-school loyalty. One example was his friendship with Alger Hiss, a former State Department official who was convicted of perjury in a sensational spy-ring case. Mr. Hiss was a friend of long standing and was already under some suspicion when Mr. Acheson was confirmed as Secretary of State. He resisted at that time his ties to Mr. Hiss (“And my friendship is not easily given, nor is it easily withdrawn”) and later, after Mr. Hiss’s conviction, when many of his friends vanished, Mr. Acheson met the situation boldly by telling a news conference, “I do not intend to turn my back on Alger Hiss.”

“Congress,” Mr. Acheson wrote in “Present at the Creation,” “fell into a tantrum and the press got all excited.”

Nevertheless, and with perhaps a touch of arrogance, Mr. Acheson stood by Mr. Hiss. When, in the same tenacity, he declined to dismiss John Carter Vincent, a State Department official under fire from Mr. McCarthy, or O. Edmund Clubb, Students of Mr. Acheson have suggested that his defense of Mr. Hiss, Mr. Vincent and Mr. Clubb was, in part at least, from his Brahminic viewpoint, or Mr. McCarthy’s right-wing attacks—that Mr. Acheson had “lost” China, pursued a “non-win” policy in Korea and “codded” Communists in government.

Picture of a Diplomat

And indeed, Mr. Acheson was as lofty in physique as he was in manner, tall, erect, with wavy hair, bushy eyebrows and a guardian’s mustache. He looked, in his impeccable tailored clothes and black horn-burg, every inch the formidable diplomat. Added to that was an air of authority and a bright mind’s disdain for what he called “niddles.”

Many wondered how the imma-

culate and patrician Mr. Acheson was able to form an almost perfect union with the small, perky, Midwestern Mr. Truman, a creature of rough-and-tumble Missouri politics in “Present at the Creation,” Mr. Acheson gave an answer, saying:

“As only those close to him know, Harry S. Truman was two men. One was the public figure—peppery, sometimes belligerent, often didactic, the ‘give-em-hell’ Harry. The other was the patient, modest, considerate and appreciative boss, helpful and understanding in all official matters, affectionate and sympathetic in any private worry or sorrow . . . Mr. Truman’s methods reflected the basic integrity of his own character.”

Another factor was that Mr. Acheson, with all his mature cockail-circuit charm and quick grasp of complex issues, was reared in fairly modest circumstances, Born April 11, 1893, in Middletown, Conn. Dean Goodenough (pronounced “goodrum”) Acheson was the son of an English-born clergyman and a mother whose family were Canadian whisky distillers. Edward Acheson had entered the Anglican ministry, emigrated to Canada and then to the United States, where he became Episcopal Bishop of Connecticut.
To Yale and Harvard

Deans was submitted to the fashionable rigors of Groton under the stern Endicott Peabody and went on to Yale, from which he was graduated in 1913. After marrying Alice Stanley, a painter, in 1917, he gained a Harvard law degree in 1915 and spent his first two years out of school as law secretary to Supreme Court Justice Louis D. Brandeis.

Mr. Brandeis was like a father to me,” Mr. Acheson recalled in 1970. That Justice and Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes greatly influenced his legal thinking. Just as did his very close friend of later years, Justice Felix Frankfurter, with whom he often strolled about Washington. The two were congenial on all issues except Israel, which by mutual consent they never discussed.

The Justice, a Zionist, favored the State of Israel, while his friend was disinterested by it as upsetting the Mideast balance. Their friendship, though, was such that Mr. Acheson dedicated one of his books, “Morning and Noon,” to “F.F.”

In 1921 Mr. Acheson joined the capital firm of what is now Covington & Burling, of which he became senior partner. One of Washington’s largest law establishments, it gave Mr. Acheson a comfortable life—a house in Georgetown, a farm in Maryland—and a clientele that included 260 of the nation’s largest corporations. When he was not in government, he practiced law.

A Democrat, Mr. Acheson supported Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932 and was appointed Under Secretary of the Treasury in 1933, a post he held for six months. He broke temporarily with the New Deal when he found himself unable to approve devoting the gold content of the dollar. He thought that doing it by Executive order was unconstitutional, and he learned from newspapermen that his “resignation had been accepted,” his personal relations with the President, however, remained good, and he supported him in 1938 and 1940.

Judgeship Declined

Just before the 1940 campaign, Mr. Roosevelt offered to appoint him to the Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia, a step below the Supreme Court. “I told the President I just can’t sit on my tail and listen to foolishness,” he recalled in his 1970 interview. “Then the President offered to make me a special Assistant Attorney General. But I told him no, I could do him more good on the outside.” He was active in the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies and that I would write campaign speeches, which I did. Well, then the war came along and I went into the State Department.”

As Assistant Secretary of State in 1941 (Cordell Hull was Secretary), Mr. Acheson was intimately concerned with a number of undertakings that accompanied America’s emergence as the world’s greatest capitalist power. He helped to elaborate the Lend-Lease arrangements that poured $39 billion in American and civilian items into lands resisting Fascism and Japanese warlords.

He was also liaison man with Congress, and had a hand in developing postwar international organizations, including the Food and Agriculture Organization, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank) and the International Monetary Fund.

After Mr. Hull stepped down, Mr. Acheson served under Secretaries Edward R. Stettinius, Jr., a man, he said in his memoirs, who “had gone far with comparatively modest equipment.” Then he was Under Secretary of State when the department was headed by James F. Byrnes and by Gen. George C. Marshall.

When Mr. Truman became President in April, 1945, Mr. Acheson formed bonds with him that were to last for their lives. Among his first chores for Mr. Truman was obtaining Senate approval for States membership in the United Nations. “I did my duty faithfully and successfully,” he wrote in his memoirs. “But always believed that the Charter was impractical.”

Mr. Acheson was Under Secretary for almost two years, from August, 1945, to July, 1947, but much of that time, owing to the absence of his chief abroad, he acted as the Secretary. His intractable definition of Soviet policy was elucidated at this time. Stalin, in early 1946, spooked out for Soviet preparedness in what he saw as a hostile world. Analyzing the speech in a telegram to the State Department, George F. Kennan, then charge d’affaires in Moscow, concluded that Soviet policy would be to use every means to infiltrate, divide and weaken the West.

Mr. Kennan’s proposals for coming to terms with the Russians did not, however, appeal to Mr. Acheson. “To seek a modus vivendi with Moscow would be to prove chimerical,” he wrote in his memoirs, adding in another place that “Soviet authorities are not moved to agree by any nagging.”

Meanwhile, Mr. Acheson was busy, with David E. Lilienthal, of the Tennessee Valley Authority and a group of scientists, drafting a policy paper on international atomic matters. At the time, the United States believed it held a monopoly, and proposed that “no nation would make atomic bombs or the materials for them.” Instead, there would be an international authority, with inspection controls and other checks to assure peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

Many of the proposals appeared in what was called the Baruch plan, named for Bernard M. Baruch, who was not in Mr. Acheson’s pantheon. “I protested the generally held view that this so-called ‘adviser of Presidents’ was a wise man,” he later wrote. “My own experience led me to believe that his reputation was without foundation in fact and entirely self-propagated.”

As Mr. Acheson perceived events in 1946-47, the Soviet Union was embarking on an “offensive against the United States and the West” in the Balkans and the Mideast, which was to reach a crescendo in Korea in 1950. He discerned special danger spots in Greece and Turkey. And an early 1947, when the British reported they could no longer afford to support the royalist Greek regime, he shaped the Truman Doctrine, by which $400 million in emergency military and economic aid was provided to those two countries—in Greece to counter “Communist” insurgents and in Turkey to strengthen her armed forces.

Heart of the Doctrine

The heart of the Truman Doctrine was the assertion that “it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.” Then and later, however, such commentators as Walter Lippmann questioned whether this was not a formula for America as a world policeman and whether it did not involve repression of legitimate nationalist or revolutionary movements.

In Mr. Acheson’s view, however, “the corruption of Greece and India would infect Iran and all the

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The Marshall Plan, in the view of historians such as Louis J. Halle, contributed to the Berlin blockade and Soviet absorption of Czechoslovakia in 1948. Stalin, this argument holds, saw the plan as a design to plant American influence and military power in Western Europe, and he reacted by tightening his vise on Eastern Europe.

For 18 months after the Marshall Plan was offered, Mr. Acheson was out of the State Department at his request to return to a more financially rewarding law practice. "I was tired," he explained. In this period, however, his personal relationships with the President and other leading Washington figures continued to be close. And he was back as Mr. Truman's Secretary of State in January, 1949.

Stating his feelings about Communism in his confirmation hearings, Mr. Acheson said: "It is my view that Communism as a doctrine is economically fatal to a free society and to human rights and fundamental freedom. Communism as an aggressive factor in world conquest is fatal to independent governments and to free peoples."

Although such a statement might appear to be unequivocal evidence of Mr. Acheson's anti-Communism, it failed to satisfy many on the far right, including Senator McCarthy, Senator William F. Knowland, the Republican leader, and Representative Richard M. Nixon, then aspiring to national prominence. And he was hectored for four years as an insufficiently stinging anti-Red.

The China affair, especially painful to Mr. Acheson, was touched off in the summer of 1949 by a 1,000-page White Paper designed to explain the victory of the Communists despite $3-billion of American assistance to Chiang Kai-shek. The Acheson document described the Chiang regime as "corrupt, reactionary and inefficient," and added: "The unfortunate but inex-
The attacks "of the Primitives," as he termed them, made it seem that Mr. Acheson was insensitive to Asia. But it was he who established the policy of nonrecognition of the Communist Chinese and supported military and other aid to Chiang Kai-shek in China, where he fled in 1949.

Furthermore, in May, 1950, Mr. Acheson sought and obtained economic and military aid for France in Indochina, whose help battle Ho Chi Minh, thus setting America's fateful role in Vietnam. "I could not then or now think of a better course," he said. Additionally, his Japanese peace treaty contained provisions for American military bases in Japan.

In Europe, meantime, Mr. Acheson's theme was to build up areas of strength to counter the Soviet Union. And under his guidance, NATO, or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, was established in Europe.

One consequence of NATO was Mr. Acheson's renewed interest in West Germany, whose industrialization as a Federal Republic he advanced and whose armament he promoted. He was on good terms with Konrad Adenauer, the Chancellor, recalling him fondly in 1970 as "a most delightful person." The separate German state was not accepted, however. In the opinion of Mr. Kennan, for example, it solidified the division of Europe by "arousing latent alarm among the Soviet leaders.""An open, undogmatic challenge to our internationally accepted position as the protector of South Korea, an area of great importance to the security of American-occupied Japan," Mr. Acheson decided that "we must steel ourselves to the use of force... to see that the attack failed." His method was to work through the United Nations Security Council, then being boycotted by the Soviet Union. The Council called the attack "an unprovoked act of aggression," and it was under this authority that American troops, with Gen. Douglas MacArthur in command, moved onto the Korean peninsula in a "police action" to repulse the North Koreans.

Critical of MacArthur
The "police action" was supposed to be limited, but General MacArthur apparently exceeded his instructions by pushing the North Koreans to the Yalu River (when the Chinese entered the conflict) and had to be recalled. A storm broke out over both Mr. Truman and Mr. Acheson. Recalling the episode in his 1970 interview, Mr. Acheson said, "MacArthur was a jackass. If he'd done what he had been told to do, the war would have been finished early, but he wanted to be spectacular, and he loused it up."

Out of office in 1955, Mr. Acheson was a scornful critic of John Foster Dulles' policy of "massive retaliation" to Soviet actions. "This didn't make any sense at all," he recalled afterward. "We had very few nuclear weapons." But he approved Mr. Dulles' continuation of his policy of American shoulderings of global responsibilities.

When Mr. Acheson returned to private life, he commented, "To have positions of great responsibility and authority in defense is a little gift." However, not only was he active in Washington in the fifties, but also he was a White House advisor of Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson. His protege, Dean Rusk, was Secretary of State in those Administrations, and Mr. Acheson was often called upon to discuss the problems of American-occupied Japan.

One of the most troublesome of Mr. Acheson's problems was Korea, where conflict between North and South erupted in 1950. "Plainly, this attack [from the North] did not amount to a casus belli against the Soviet Union," he said.

"Equally plainly, it was an open, undisguised challenge to our internationally accepted position as the protector of South Korea, an area of great importance to the security of American-occupied Japan," Mr. Acheson decided that "we must steel ourselves to the use of force... to see that the attack failed.""His method was to work through the United Nations Security Council, then being boycotted by the Soviet Union. The Council called the attack an "unprovoked act of aggression," and it was under this authority that American troops, with Gen. Douglas MacArthur in command, moved onto the Korean peninsula in a "police action" to repulse the North Koreans.

In that interview, Mr. Acheson said that Mr. Kennedy "did not seem to me to be in any sense a great man. I did not think he knew a great deal about any of the matters which it is desirable that a chief of state or a President of the United States should know about. He was not decisive."

In retirement, Mr. Acheson also took to the typewriter, producing six books, including "Present at the Creation," an account of his State Department years that won the Pulitzer Prize in 1970.

In the last year he wrote several articles for the Op-Ed page of The New York Times. In one, discussing the publication of selected from the Pentagon Papers by the Times, he wrote:

"We need a severe Official Secret to prevent irresponsible or corrupt transfer of secret papers from the Government to publishers, a commission of the quality of the Royal Commission recently created in Britain under the chairmanship of Lord Frankish, to determine how this present disclosure came about and what laws and procedures we need to prevent its repetition and for the latter declassification and release of such papers."

In the concluding pages of "Present at the Creation," Mr. Acheson wrote his own epitaph in these words:

"In 1914 Kaiser Wilhelm II referred to 'Britain's contemptible little ally.' When I had taught him to revise that opinion, its survivors often referred to themselves as 'the old contempitibles.' I am happy to greet my country's change of President's State Department with his affectionate appellation and assure them, as they look back upon their service under his leadership during those puzzling and perilous times, that they played a vital role in setting the main lines of American foreign policy for many years to come and that they do feel in their hearts that it was nobly done!"