

DEAN
ACHESON
PRESENT
AT THE
CREATION

MY YEARS IN THE
STATE DEPARTMENT

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CREATION

My Years in the State Department

DEAN ACHESON

*From the Library of
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PRESENT
AT THE
CREATION



“Had I been present at the creation I would
have given some useful hints for the better
ordering of the universe.”

—Alphonso X, the Learned,
1252–84, King of Spain

TO HARRY S. TRUMAN

“The captain with the mighty heart”

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

WITHOUT THE indefatigable and scholarly help of three assistants who have been with me every step of the way through this book, the effort would have been beyond me. Mrs. Marina S. Finkelstein, now Editor of Publications of the Harvard Center for International Affairs, and Miss Corinne Lyman, at present on the faculty of Ohio Wesleyan University, took over the scholarly examination of innumerable documents that fell from me during twelve busy years like autumn leaves, fitting the account of an individual life into greater surrounding action and tracing the influence and reaction of each on the other. They thus laid the foundation for my work and then rendered equal assistance by reviewing it and holding me to what Honor Tracy's Irish priest might have called the straight and narrow path between truth and error.

Miss Barbara Evans has played once more in this our sixth book together her familiar role as the custodian of my papers, my memory, and my conscience. From the first deciphering of an exotic calligraphy to the last grooming of the proof, she has pursued the serpent of error like a female St. Patrick. My gratitude to these three invaluable colleagues is great indeed.

For all of us the correction of errant memory has been greatly aided by the kindness of former Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Dr. William Franklin, Director of the Historical Office of the Department of State. Assistance on matters too numerous to list was rendered also by Dr. Arthur Kogan, Donald J. Simon, and Wilmer P. Sparrow, all of the Department of State, and by their helpful and resourceful staffs. To all we are deeply grateful.

Due to the forethought and kindness of the late Dr. Robert Oppenheimer, Director of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, a group of my colleagues in the State Department met at the Institute with him and me every other month during 1953 and 1954 to record our recollections of how the major foreign policies of President Truman's Administration came into being and our appraisal of the considerations that affected them and us. This group included Dean Rusk, W. Averell Harriman, Herbert Feis, Edward W. Barrett, Paul H. Nitze, Adrian S. Fisher, Joseph E. Johnson, George W. Perkins, and George C. McGhee, and (to stimulate and cross-examine us) McGeorge Bundy, then Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Harvard, Dr. Edward M. Earle of the Institute, and Professors George A. Graham and Harold Sprout of Princeton University. These seminars added to the account of those times the essential factors of causation that the bare official record so rarely reveals.

APOLOGIA PRO LIBRO HOC

"Pen, ink and paper," John Adams confided to his diary in 1770, "and a sitting posture are great helps to attention and thinking."¹ I shall need them all in writing this book, which only five years ago I forswore. Why, I was then asked, "stop with the experiences of Morning and Noon? Why not go on to Afternoon, the time of larger events?" Because "detachment and objectivity" would become suspect. "The element of self-justification could not be excluded." It was all very simple, reasonable, and probably the right decision.

Yet I do go on. Why? Because I have changed my mind. The experiences of the years since I wrote have brought the country, and particularly its young people, to a mood of depression, disillusion, and withdrawal from the effort to affect the world around us. Today detachment and objectivity seem to me less important than to tell a tale of large conceptions, great achievements, and some failures, the product of enormous will and effort. Its hero is the American people, led by two men of rare quality, President Truman and General Marshall, served by lieutenants of whom I had the great good fortune to be one. The enormity of the task before all of them, after the wars in Europe and Asia ended in 1945, only slowly revealed itself. As it did so, it began to appear as just a bit less formidable than that described in the first chapter of Genesis. That was to create a world out of chaos; ours, to create half a world, a free half, out of the same material without blowing the whole to pieces in the process. The wonder of it is how much was done.

In the epigraph Alphonso X, King of Spain, is quoted to the effect that if he had been present at the creation he would have given some useful hints for the better ordering of the universe. In a sense the postwar years were a period of creation, for the ordering of which I shared with others some responsibility. Moreover, the state of the world in those years and almost all that happened during them was wholly novel within the experience of those who had to deal with it. "History," writes C. V. Wedgwood in her biography of William the Silent, "is lived forwards but it is written in retrospect. We know the end before we consider the beginning and we can never wholly recapture what it was to know the beginning only."² In a way, this volume is an attempt to do just that; for those who acted this drama did not know, nor do any of us yet know, the end.

DEAN ACHESON

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

xv

APOLOGIA PRO LIBRO HOC

xvii

PART ONE: YEARS OF LEARNING

Assistant Secretary of State, 1941-1945

1. ENLISTMENT FOR THE WAR TO COME 3
The World Around Us: *The European Civil War; The Asian Civil War* — American Attitudes Toward the Outside World: *The Eighteenth-Century Experience; The Nineteenth-Century Experience* — American Notions About China
2. THE "OLD" STATE DEPARTMENT 9
The Secretary of State — A House Divided Against Itself — My Colleagues — The Location of Bureaucratic Power — My Search for a Function
3. THE YEAR WE HELD OUR BREATH 21
Agony of Irresolution — Instruments of Decision — The Battle Over Policy Toward Japan — Lend-Lease — Help to Russia — Sunday, December 7
4. RETROSPECT 36
5. ECONOMIC WARFARE AT HOME 39
Henry Wallace's Great Invasion — The President Broadens the Battle Royal — The Budget Bureau Confounds Confusion — Peace Through Human Sacrifice
6. ECONOMIC WARFARE ABROAD: DEADLOCK 48
Deadlock in Sweden — Deadlock in Switzerland — Deadlock in the Iberian Peninsula — A Blow to Break the Deadlock
7. ECONOMIC WARFARE ABROAD: DEADLOCK ENDS 58
The Swedes and Swiss Give Way — Spain Cracked Last — Conclusions About Economic Warfare and Other Matters
8. PREPARATION FOR AN UNKNOWN WORLD 64
The Establishment Organizes — Events Intrude — The Four Wise Men: *The Vandenberg Saga*

9. THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE STAGE	73
Food and Agriculture — UNRRA Launched — A Forecast of the Division of Poland	
10. THE BRETTON WOODS AGREEMENTS	81
Lend-Lease Negotiations with Moscow	
11. A CHANGE OF SECRETARIES AND OF JOBS	87
Brave New World — Organizing for My New Job	
12. CHIEF LOBBYIST FOR STATE	95
The Plan of Campaign — The Theory of Nonpartisan Foreign Policy — The Practice of Nonpartisan Foreign Policy — Reflections About Congress — We Take Our Case to the People — The Fourth Term Begins — The End of an Era	
13. SUCCESS, DISENCHANTMENT, AND RESIGNATION	104
Back to Lobbying — First Encounter with the United Nations — The War Ends and I Resign — An Attempted Jail Break	

PART TWO: ACTION BEGINS

Under Secretary of State, August 1945-June 1947

14. A NEW JOB AND WIDENING RESPONSIBILITIES	119
The Mystery of My Appointment — The End of Lend-Lease — Introduction to Atomic Energy — A Brush with Senators — A Congeries of Tasks	
15. TROUBLE IN HIGH PLACES	129
The Nine-Thirty Meeting — Strange Interlude — An Atomic Conference at the Summit — UNRRA and the British Loan — Introduction to China and General Marshall — Rift Between President and Secretary of State	
16. WASHINGTON AGENT FOR THE MARSHALL MISSION: PHASE ONE	139
The Situation As We Saw It — A Word About General Marshall — We Draft the General's Instructions — Months of Hope	
17. THE ACHESON-LILIENTHAL REPORT	149
A Social Faux Pas — Stalin's Speech and Kennan's Report — International Control of Atomic Energy	
18. THE DEPARTMENT MUFFS ITS INTELLIGENCE ROLE	157
The Nature of Intelligence — Primacy Is Offered to the Department — We Meet Opposition — The High Command Wavers — A Pre-McCarthy Attack — Secretary Byrnes Decides Against Me — I Decide to Resign	
19. THE QUEBEC AGREEMENT	164
My Introduction to Secret Diplomacy	

20. THE PUZZLE OF PALESTINE	169
The Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry — The Cabinet Committee — Once More Unto the Breach — The Yom Kippur Statement: October 4, 1946 — Bevin Throws In the Towel — Responsibility Passes to the UN	
21. TROUBLE BREWS IN WASHINGTON	183
Trouble from a Commencement Speech — Restlessness in the Cabinet — Trouble from a Lady — Mr. Molotov Pays Us a Visit — Bull in a Good-Neighbor Shop — The Immolation of Mr. Byrnes	
22. TROUBLE BREAKS IN EUROPE	194
Stalin's Offensive: <i>The Eastern Mediterranean; Trouble Moves Eastward to Iran; Then to Greece and Turkey</i> — A Reception Committee of One — Battening Down the Hatches	
23. WASHINGTON AGENT FOR THE MARSHALL MISSION: PHASE TWO	202
Russian Intentions in China — Chiang's Manchurian Blunder — General Marshall's Influence Declines — Hope Fades — The General Packs Up — Last Scene	
24. GENERAL MARSHALL TAKES OVER	212
Nature Deals a Cold Hand — The Stuff of Command — The Decision to Help Greece and Turkey	
25. THE TRUMAN DOCTRINE	220
The President's Message — Vandenberg and the Legislation	
26. THE CRISIS BROADENS: BIRTH OF THE MARSHALL PLAN	226
First Stirrings — My Speech in Mississippi — Clayton's Second Memorandum — General Marshall's Harvard Speech	
27. MUSTERED OUT	236
My Successor Is Chosen — Taking the Salute — The Habit-Forming Drug of Public Life — Return to Semiprivate Life: <i>The Citizens' Committee for the Marshall Plan</i> — A False Alarm — The First Hoover Commission: <i>Battle Over a Chief of Staff; Recommendation of One Service in State; My Later Attempt to Create One Service</i>	

PART THREE: YEARS OF RESPONSIBILITY

Secretary of State, 1949-1953

Section A. Decisions Were Made Fast in 1949

28. RECALLED TO ACTIVE DUTY	249
Nomination, Hearings, and Confirmation	
29. THE WORLD THAT LAY BEFORE US	254
The State of the Department — An Indispensable Aide — The State of the World: <i>The Arab-Israeli Impasse; United States Policy Toward Germany; Crisis in Germany; The Blockade of Berlin</i>	

30. AN EVENTFUL SPRING 264
 The Expectation — Point Four — Strengthening the Free Nations — The Unexpected: Ending the Blockade: *The Jessup-Malik Talks; Meeting with Bevin and Schuman; Agreement to Lift the Blockade* — Reflections on Soviet Diplomacy
31. THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY:
 AN OPEN COVENANT OPENLY ARRIVED AT 276
 Problems of Negotiation: 1. *The Press*; 2. *The Parties*; 3. *The Congress*; 4. *New Members*; 5. *The Problem of Italy*; 6. *The Issue of Automatic Involvement* — A Cat Among the Pigeons — At Length a Treaty Emerges
32. ALLIED POLICY TOWARD GERMANY 285
 The Senate Advises and Consents to Ratification — Tripartite Agreement on Germany: *Resolving French Worries* — A Progress Report to the Nation
33. THE FOREIGN MINISTERS MEET IN PARIS 291
 Our Objective Clarified — Liturgy and Tactics in the Council — We Move to Paris — The Setting of the Conference — The Meetings Begin — A Bleak Exchange About Germany — We Try Private Ministerial Meetings — The Conference Faces a Crisis — The Conference Straggles to an End
34. SUMMER BRINGS DIFFICULT DECISIONS 302
 The China White Paper: *The Emotional Nature of the China Issue* — The Military Assistance Program: *The Nature of the Political Issue; The Nature of the Military Issue; Vandenberg Leads a Revolt; We Try a New Lure; And Catch a Fish* — An Ill Wind Blows Some Good
35. ANGLO-AMERICAN ATOMIC COOPERATION REVIEWED 314
 The British Raise the Question — Our Advice to the President — The Blair House Meeting — The Meeting with the Joint Committee
36. DEVALUATION OF THE POUND 322
 "The British Are Coming!" — Anglo-American Relations — Futile Meetings — The Point Finally Is Reached — More Talk: *With Bevin and Schuman; With Other European Colleagues* — The NATO Council Meets
37. MORE MEETINGS AT HOME AND ABROAD 330
 On Latin America "Nothing New" — UN Problems Still Remain — Relations with Yugoslavia — A Visit from Pandit Nehru: *Nehru on the Faults of Others; Nehru on Kashmir* — The Paris Conference: *German Policy Issues* — First Meeting with Adenauer — First Visit to Berlin
38. A REAPPRAISAL OF POLICIES 344
 The President's Instructions: *The Hydrogen Bomb Decision* — China to the Fore Again — The "Strategic Concept"

Section B. Problems Came Faster in 1950

39. THE ATTACK OF THE PRIMITIVES BEGINS 354
 The Theme of China Lost — The Theme of Communist Influence: *The Conviction of Alger Hiss*

40. THE ATTACK MOUNTS	362
Senator McCarthy Merges the Themes — Taft Supports McCarthy — The Attack Reaches Its Climax — A Few Bright Spots — Concluding Thoughts	
41. A NEW DEFINITION OF FOREIGN POLICY	371
Academic Interlude: <i>Senator Taft Makes a Point</i> — NSC-68: <i>A Difficult Pregnancy; The Threat Stated; The Response Recommended; We Explain to the Country; The Need for National Unity</i>	
42. EUROPE AND THE SCHUMAN PLAN	382
Scene 1: Paris — Scene 2: London — Scene 3: Lancaster House — Behind the Scenes	
43. BALANCED COLLECTIVE FORCES FOR EUROPE	390
Social Interludes — The Tripartite Meetings: <i>Declaration on the Middle East</i> — The Fourth Meeting of the Council: <i>Basic Problems Emerge</i> — Accomplishments at London — A Report to Congress	
44. WAR IN KOREA: THE OUTBREAK	402
Seven Days in June: <i>Saturday, June 24; Sunday, June 25; Monday, June 26; Tuesday, June 27; Wednesday, June 28; Thursday, June 29; Friday, June 30</i>	
45. WAR IN KOREA: THE FIRST CRISIS	414
Thoughts on an Authorizing Resolution — An Anxious Summer: <i>Anglo-Indian Peace Initiatives; Arms and the Men; MacArthur Drops Some Bricks; The Crisis Eases</i>	
46. SEPTEMBER DECISIONS	426
A Peace Treaty for Japan: <i>The Situation in Japan; The Nature of the Problem; A New Cast of Characters; The Filibuster Ends; Agreement and Decision to Go Ahead</i> — Germany and the Defense of Europe: <i>The Need for German Participation; French Desire for U.S.-European Integration; The "One Package" Proposal</i>	
47. SEPTEMBER SURPRISES	441
General Marshall Returns to the Pentagon — The "One Package" Proposal Stalls: <i>Adjournment with Progress</i> — Next Phase in Korea: <i>Inchon: "Operation Common Knowledge"; "Perilous Gamble or Exemplary Boldness?"; Uniting for Peace; Long-Range Policy and Crossing the Parallel; Instructions to General MacArthur; "A United, Independent, and Democratic Korea"</i>	
48. OCTOBER ODYSSEYS	456
Pilgrimage to Wake — Another Round in NATO — A Bad Fright — I Criticize My Critics — MacArthur Moves North — Schizophrenia at GHQ — The Last Clear Chance	
49. "AN ENTIRELY NEW WAR"	469
Disaster Rattles the General — Washington Plans Next Moves — Steady As You Go	
50. DECEMBER DESPONDENCY	478
The Atlee Visit — A National Emergency Proclaimed — The Brussels Conference — The Great Debate Opens	

Section C. 1951: Year of Troubles and Progress

51. CALMING WORRIES AT HOME AND TO THE SOUTH 491
The Great Debate Flares and Fizzles: *Briefing the Supreme Commander; The Debate Reaches Its Apogee; General Marshall Damps the Fire* — Reassurance for the Good Neighborhood
52. DOUBLE TROUBLE IN IRAN 499
Crisis in Iran — Phase One: The Shah's Attempt — Phase Two: The Mosadeq Revolution: *Mosadeq: A Sketch from Life; A Critical Spring; Violence Impends* — Phase Three: The Harriman Mission — Phase Four: Hope Fades
53. ATTEMPTS TO STABILIZE THE KOREAN WAR 512
On the Korean Front — On the United Nations Front — On the Tokyo Front — The Parallel Once More — The Final Showdown
54. THE RELIEF OF GENERAL MAC ARTHUR 521
The Days of Decision — The Communications Mix-Up — The Senate Hearings — Reflections
55. THE MOVE FOR AN ARMISTICE IN KOREA 529
Peace Feelers — The Kennan-Malik Talks — The Decision to Negotiate Through Ridgway — Foul-Up As Negotiations Start — Negotiations Off and Fighting On — Negotiations Resumed at Panmunjom
56. PEACE WITH JAPAN 539
The Path to San Francisco — The Rules of Procedure — The Conference
57. NATO IN STAGNATION 551
France in Two Minds — Propaganda at the Palais Rose: *An Agenda As a Weapon of War* — Three Ministers in Search of Solutions: *For German and Defense Problems; For Economic and Rearmament Problems* — Schuman on Morocco
58. EGYPT AND THE MIDDLE EAST COMMAND 562
The New Crisis of "Black Saturday" — Drift to Stalemate — Reflections
59. OTTAWA AND EXCURSIONS WITHOUT ALARUMS 569
A Futile Council Meeting: *Invitations to Greece and Turkey; The Temporary Council Committee* — De Gasperi's Visit — The Attack on Jessup: *Ambassador to the Vatican; The Collision* — Preparation for Paris
60. THE "DISARMAMENT ASSEMBLY" 578
The Moroccan Question — Reduction and Control of Arms: *The Tripartite Plan* — A Dinner at the Elysée Palace — The Proposal Straggles to Its End — We Meet with Adenauer
61. NATO MEETS IN ROME 588
Changes in the Department — Another Council Meeting Stalls — Year-End Summaries

Section D. 1952: Success and Failure at the End

62. THE CHURCHILL VISIT 594
A Word About Mr. Churchill — First Stage of the Visit — The Atlantic Command — The Yoshida Letter — Hands Across the Sea
63. DEATH OF A KING 607
Crisis in the Alliance — The King's Funeral: *The Pilgrimage to Windsor*
64. FOUR MINISTERS MEET IN LONDON 615
Two Begin the Session — Schuman Joins Us — Adenauer Completes the Group — A Busy Night — An Equally Busy Morning: *Quadripartite Meeting Resumed; Audience with the Queen; Confronting the Old Lion*
65. LISBON 622
French and German Military Finances — Other Pieces Fall Into Place — The Grand Slam — Dr. Salazar
66. ONCE MORE UNTO THE BREACH 629
Thunder on the Left — The President Withdraws — Spring in Washington — The April Pilgrimage — Distractions Crowd In: *Trieste; Tunisia; Berlin; The St. Lawrence Seaway* — Spring Thaw in Bonn
67. BONN AND PARIS 643
Success in Bonn: *Major Prerequisites to Final Agreement* — Apprehension in Paris
68. KOREA: FRUSTRATION, RIOT, AND REVOLT 651
Voluntary Repatriation of Prisoners — Revolt in the Compounds — Bombing Bothers Britain
69. A SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY 658
England: *Oxford Encaenia; Ministerial Meetings* — On to Berlin — Vienna, City of Dreams — Dakar — Rio de Janeiro
70. INDOCHINA 671
The Pre Korean War Phase — The Effect of the Korean War — Increasing Aid and Frustration
71. A SECOND TRY IN IRAN 679
One Effort Fails — New Characters Enter — Last Try — The President Approves a Variant — Eden's Vindication
72. ELECTION SUMMER 686
The ANZUS Meeting — Speeches Political and Otherwise — We Lose the Election
73. AN OPEN COVENANT OPENLY CONNIVED AGAINST 696
The Central Issue and Its Ambiance — The Menon Cabal — A Showdown Impends — Canadian Interlude and Finale

74. CHANGING THE GUARD	706
The Reluctant Conqueror — Farewell to NATO — Loyalty Problems Once More: <i>United States Citizens Employed by the United Nations</i> — A Final Memorandum	
75. LAST FAREWELLS	715
The Last Press Conference — Farewell to the Department — January 20, 1953	

PART FOUR: EPILOGUE

Retrospection in Tranquillity

76. SUMMING UP	725
The Struggle Through Illusion to Policy — Striking the Balance in Action — The President's Contribution — The Department's Contribution	

A P P E N D I C E S

NOTES	740
[Indicated by daggers (†) in the text]	
REFERENCES	770
[Indicated by superior numbers in the text]	
INDEX	779

Photographs may be found following page 398

