

Life Magazine Declares the Cold War March 18, 1946
by Keith P. Dyrud

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A Presentation with pictures from *Life* magazine

In the late summer of 1945 the Second World War was coming to a close. As the leader of the winning coalition, the United States would now have to preside over the restructuring of the world. The United States had no enemies, but it did have vital interests. *Life* magazine editors understood the foreign policy perspective of vital interests very well. During the months that followed the end of the war *Life* analyzed US vital interests and examined the response of the Soviet Union to those interests. Whether in China or in Europe, *Life* determined that Stalin did not intend to challenge those interests.

Life did, however, provide expression for three groups that were to challenge the "vital interests" foundation of foreign policy. These three interest groups strongly supported a shift of United States foreign policy to an "enemy" foundation: the executive offices of the government, the military contractors who had no plans for peacetime production, and the military that wished to maintain its preeminence in American life. Only with an enemy could the government persuade its citizens to support the costs of production of military hardware, a large standing military, and a foreign policy that, according to some contemporary analysts, was designed to contain our future enemies (the Soviet Bloc), our former enemies (Germany and Japan), and also our allies. The accommodation of these interests required American policy makers to develop a rationale for the domination of global policy. Christopher Layne and Benjamin Schwartz recently observed, "The Cold War provided the impetus for the strategy of preponderance, which was directed against both the Soviet Union and the Western sphere," ("American Hegemony-Without an Enemy," *Foreign Policy* No. 92, Fall 1993, p. 8).

While ads and articles were providing arguments for this American policy shift, *Life* magazine did not adopt this change editorially until March 18, 1946 when it finally accepted the need for an enemy. Its editorial in that issue, "Getting Tough with Russia," revealed, "Real peace requires more than 'getting tough.' We must know what we value above peace." The editorial clearly pointed out that Russia's values clashed with our own. Our values were more important than peace, and more noble than "vital interests." From then on, Russia became **the enemy** and the "Cold War" was introduced as a just war. Russia had not threatened our vital interests, but now it threatened our values.

In 2000 the United States again faces a world without an enemy. It does have vital interests, but as Benjamin Schwartz of the Rand Corporation said in that 1994 article: "The Cold War provided the impetus for the strategy of preponderance." Will the United States continue to maintain that "American Hegemony-Without an Enemy"? T

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