Emotions and Foreign Policy: Some Reflections on Theory, Method and Practice

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At a first glance, emotions and the history of US foreign policy may seem an odd mix. Looking closer, however, we can see that emotions are tied to cognition and rational thought. Emotions are omnipresent and vital to human agency, which makes the inclusion of the emotional perspective vital to historical analysis.

This paper sets out to do three things. First, it seeks to present and explore the emotional aspect of US foreign policy history in relation to policy-makers and to discuss its inclusion in the analysis of historical events and driving forces. Second, it suggests and discusses methodological approaches and source material to analysing historical emotions in US foreign policy. Third, it offers a short “test case” as an example of where the emotional aspect of US foreign policy history could be applied, namely the development of the Cold War strategic document NSC 68 from the spring of 1950. The test case is not developed fully as it serves only as a suggestion for further study.

The Emotional Aspect of US Foreign Policy

Traditionally, the integration of emotions as an analytical element into the historical study of the foreign policy of the United States has not been commonplace. The history of US foreign policy has thus been viewed as something determined in a different realm altogether and by different means and driving forces than anything found within an emotional framework. Realist historians have looked to the rational acts of rational men who cared about the national interest. Revisionist historians have focused on economic motives and the furthering of American capitalism as a significant driving force. Even those historians who have taken an interest in the role of ideas have tended to focus on the rational and non-emotive side of their subject matter. Recently, however, historians have increasingly looked at other aspects of American foreign policy, such as gender,
race, culture and emotions – and expanded and rebranded the subject matter as American foreign relations.¹

The inclusion of emotional aspects in the study of US foreign policy (which is my preferred term here as foreign relations look to broader relational aspects, such as tourism, culture, corporations and the like, whereas I am looking specifically at policy: political decisions, thoughts and discussions made by a variety of policy-makers in a highly political setting) and the men and woman involved in the process is still a relatively new endeavour. The scholar who has performed the most extensive analyses of this issue is historian Frank Costigliola.² One of the central arguments by Costigliola and others is that not only important are emotions important for a full understanding of events and causation, but they are in fact vital. The indispensability is especially related to the connection between emotions and intellectual history. “Cognition is profoundly influenced by feelings”, writes historian Barbara Keys in her analysis of Henry Kissinger – a proponent of Realpolitik in theory and practice - whose thinking, she shows, had a distinct emotional component, even if Kissinger tried to mask it. The reverse dynamic is equally true, she argues, because “(…) emotion is often shaped by cognition.”³

What does it mean, then, to study the emotional aspects of the history of foreign policy? First, it means to detect the emotions themselves. These can be basic emotions, such as happiness, sadness, surprise, disgust, anger and fear, which psychologist and behavioural scientist Paul Ekman suggested were “universal” emotions exhibited by people around the globe as observed through their facial expressions (though if we move beyond the paradigm of basic emotions, a host of other emotions such as greed, envy, pride, love can be added).⁴ Advances in neuroscience have tended to confirm the findings that emotions seem to be connected with facial expressions and thereby universal by examining the brain activity of their patients when shown angry or happy faces through functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI).⁵ Historians, however, have objected to this

universalization of emotions and instead suggested that emotions must be seen to be constructed in
the social and temporal context in which they were experienced. This means that the basic emotions
on which Ekman and others have worked must be allowed to mean different things to different
people, at various junctures in time and in various cultures.⁶

If we accept that emotions are socially, culturally and temporarily constructed, what
does it mean to study an emotional aspect to the history of US foreign relations, or in this case
specifically the history of US foreign policy in relation to decision-makers? Overall, we look for
signs of emotions in historical source material (for further discussion on how this can be done, see
the methodology section below). The emotional signs can indicate two overall aspects of the
historical inquiry, or two levels of analysis. First, it can shed light on the general emotional context
of the period and society in question, a sort of “mood of the time”. These are structural, large-scale,
 systemic emotions akin to a fear of communism in the United States during the 1940s and 1950s
and are found in the population at large and also among policy-makers. Second, we are looking for
the emotions of policy-makers (elected officials, cabinet secretaries, civil servants, Foreign Service
members, presidential aides, political advisors and appointees etc.) either individually or in small
groups. How did they feel in specific situations regarding specific policy issues? Was there a link
between experienced emotions and the ensuing policy decisions?

When handling either large-scale or small scale emotions in a foreign policy historical
context, we need to be wary of overinflating their importance. Emotions should not be seen as
determinants in any situation, especially not in policy decisions. Emotions are one factor among
several that can illuminate driving forces behind specific policy agendas, decisions, discussions and
experiences – and as always we should be careful not to fall into the trap of monicausal
explanations, whatever the alluring single cause.

Methodology
How then can we go about the actual study of emotions in history? As all historical phenomena they
no longer exist and consequently, we must study the remnants of the past – the traces of evidence
that point to previous existence – and examine their importance in a wider context.

⁶ See e.g. Peter N. Stearns, “Emotional Change and Political Disengagement in the Twentieth-Century United States: A
Case Study in Emotions History”, Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research, vol. 10, no. 4, 1997;
See also the recent book by Jan Plamper, The History of Emotions: An Introduction (Oxford: Oxford University Press,
2015), translated from the original 2012 German version by Keith Tribe. Plamper’s work is the first book-length
introduction to the history of emotions.
There are different ways in which to study the emotional aspects of history both on the systemic and the individual/small group level. Historians could look at the history of a single emotion like Peter N. Stearns has done in his work on the historical roots of fear in the United States. This approach is very successful in examining a single emotion over time and will be able to speak very well to issues of change and continuity. It is perhaps less successful in investigating specific events and developments and the actors connected to them at critical junctures in time. Here, in the case of NSC 68 and its authors, we need to allow for the analysis of several emotions (all with their own history), their interplay and the group in which these interactions took place. For that reason we can use Barbara Rosenwein’s idea of emotional community.

**Emotional communities**

Rosenwein defines emotional communities as:

“(…) largely the same as social communities – families, neighborhoods, syndicates, academic institutions, monasteries, factories, platoons, princely courts. But the researcher looking at them seeks above all to uncover systems of feeling, to establish what these communities (and the individuals within them) define or assess as valuable and harmful to them (for it is about such things that people express emotions); the emotions that they value, devalue, or ignore; the nature of affective bonds between people that they recognize; and the odes of emotional expression that they expect, encourage, tolerate and deplore.”

These communities can be large or small, ranging from an entire population such as the inhabitants of the United States (the systemic level) to groups of decision-makers such as a presidential administration, a government department, a division of that department, or relatively small group such as the Policy Planning Staff responsible for NSC 68 (individual/small group level).

The *source material* used to illuminate emotional aspects would be different for these two types of emotional communities. In the case of a systemic level-community, we would look for polling data on the public’s emotional attitude toward a variety of issues (f. ex. “do you fear an attack by terrorists/foreign countries etc.”), media reports on protests or peace marches, citizens’ letters to the President or other elected officials, or consumer spending (increase in the purchase of firearms and civil defence shelters might indicate a heightened sense of public fear). In the case of smaller groups we need to look at the papers of individual actors (such as diaries, memoranda and

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8 Barbara Rosenwein, “Problems and Methods in the History of Emotions”, p. 11
personal letters) as well as the policy papers of a particular group or interviews with the groups’ participants.

If we focus specifically on the smaller groups, which will form the basis for our test case, how can we then approach the study? Overall, we need to investigate at least three elements: 1) composition of the group (who were the members, what was their background, how did they come to be members of this group); 2) group dynamics (hierarchy, competition, animosity/friendship etc.); and 3) group emotions/thoughts/outlook on life – generally (baseline emotions as point of reference) and specifically (related to a particular policy issue). Once these three elements are in place, we have an established knowledge about the actor and a framework through which to interpret the emotional aspects.

In highly cohesive groups, we should pay particular attention to group dynamics, policy results and the relation to people outside the group. As Rosenwein theorized, an emotional community (for our purposes: a small group) might very well demarcate its limits by emotional reactions either to specific events or general baseline emotions (this could be a particular kind of anti-communism). This might serve to strengthen the cohesive bonds within the group and to define the group as an emotional community by displaying acceptable and non-acceptable behaviour to other people outside the group.

The element of emotional development in a community where emotions are a large part of the identity might indeed be limited – meaning that emotional norms could be “locked in” and require extraordinary circumstances to change. The bridge to study of group decision-making becomes apparent. Psychologist Irving Janis proposed that groups could become so cohesive and closed that they would exhibit what he called groupthink – referring “to a deterioration of mental efficacy, reality testing, and moral judgment that results from in-group pressures.” The cohesion of the group and the level of their work, wrote Janis, were important to obtain groupthink, because “only when a group of policy-makers is moderately or highly cohesive can we expect the groupthink syndrome to emerge as the members are working collectively on one or another of their important policy decision.” Janis found that the groupthink syndrome was a significant problem (his original case study was the failed Bay of Pigs invasion by the Kennedy Administration in April of 1961) and the prescriptive parts of his research tried to find ways of avoiding the process. But not all groupthink on a small scale (the tendency to close groups and become less susceptible to outside influence) is a naturally occurring phenomenon that probably cannot be eradicated. On this small

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scale, we could probably find traces of this type of group dynamic in most groups – in the history of US foreign policy we could identify hundreds of examples, whose cohesion led to a closed process that might be able to explain why policy outcomes would not always reflect every point of view that was available at the time.

Perhaps the same was true regarding emotions? A process of *groupfeel* – a situation, where the emotional boundaries set up were strong enough to shut out “emotional interlopers” or people trying to influence the policy result through a different set of feelings. Perhaps we can identify both extreme cases (akin to those that would fall under the original groupthink category) and more everyday cases of group cohesion and the possibility of incomplete results. The historian’s role in this process is of course not to point out mistakes and offer solutions, but to use these occurrences as analytical tools through which to gain a higher level of understanding.

*Language and Meaning*

It seems reasonable to continue the methodological quest of how to employ an emotional aspect to the historical study of US foreign policy by looking at language and meaning. Like so many other historical clues, the traces of emotions can be found in linguistic expression. But language alone does not provide infinite clarity, because we also need to uncover the meaning behind the words.

In an article on the tense East-West situation after Franklin Roosevelt’s death, Frank Costigliola sought “to shrink the exaggerated divide between those historians who focus more on state power and those historians who focus more on discourses and texts”. In this article, Costigliola used “a discursive analysis of conversations around that stove [in the American Embassy in Moscow] and in Washington and San Francisco to help explain a pivotal event, the shift in U.S. policy and attitudes toward the Soviet Union immediately following FDR’s death.”¹⁰ In looking at American diplomats’ conversations around a stove in Moscow, Costigliola is careful not to overinflate the importance of the discourse, or to treat the discourse as the only possible reality. But his argument is clear in the sense that he rejects the notion that the Cold War was inevitable and he attributes meaning and importance to the emotions these diplomats experienced while in Moscow during World War II’s last winter, which provided them with the desire to change US policy towards Moscow from FDR’s relatively conciliatory approach to the sceptical, distrustful one that eventually became Harry Truman’s.

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¹⁰ Costigliola, “After Roosevelt’s Death”, p. 2
From Costigliola’s approach we can learn to take emotions seriously, to examine language and discourse as (possible) representations of those emotions, and to analyse and to attribute meaning. This implies that whenever signs of emotions seem to appear in a text, we treat them the same way we would any other sign of thought, of bureaucratic infighting, of national interest, of the promotion of capitalism etc. We read, look for tendencies of exaggeration or dishonesty, analyse the result and search for meaning.

**Test Case: The Policy Planning staff and NSC 68**

NSC 68 was formally presented to President Harry Truman on 7 April 1950. Upon reading the document, bearing the comprehensive title “United States Objectives and Programs for National Security”, Truman forwarded the document to the National Security Council’s Executive Secretariat for the Council’s consideration under the security clearance “Top Secret”. The document thus entered the NSC numerical system as document #68. The following pages will examine two elements: 1) signs of emotions in the document and 2) the emotional community of the State Department’s Policy Planning Staff (PPS) whose members authored NSC 68.

*The Background*

NSC 68 was a strategy document that set out a proposal for US policy and strategy during the Cold War. The immediate reasons for writing the document were the “twin shocks” of the fall of 1949 (the successful detonation of the first Soviet nuclear weapon and the Communist victory in the Chinese Civil War) and the American decision to build the hydrogen bomb. These incidents and decisions meant that the United States now faced an altered situation and it needed a comprehensive strategy.

The longer-term background was essentially the story of deteriorating relations between the Soviet Union and the United States, which in the period from 1945-1950 became the Cold War. After Truman succeeded Roosevelt in April of 1945, a new and firmer policy towards the communist superpower became apparent and few expected a warm relationship to manifest itself. In February of 1946, Soviet leader Josip Stalin announced in a speech that the USSR would maintain its defence budget at war-time levels. In Washington, this development was met with

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11 “A Report to the National Security Council by the Executive Secretariat on United States Objectives and Programs on National Security, April 14 1950”, President’s Secretary’s Files, Truman Papers, Harry Truman Library (hereafter NSC 68)

12 Paul Nitze with Ann M. Smith and Steven L. Rearden, *From Hiroshima to Glasnost: At the Center or Decision – A Memoir* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1989), pp. 87-92
suspicion and fear. The State Department asked diplomat George F. Kennan, the chargé d’affaires at the American embassy in Moscow and a part of a select group of experts on the Soviet Union (the so-called Kremlinologists), to analyse Stalin’s speech. Although Kennan was not particularly concerned about the contents of the speech, he embraced the opportunity to give his expert opinion (until then, not often sought) on the reasons for current Soviet policy and the future prospect for US-Soviet relations. The resulting document - the Long Telegram – provided the basis for the major policy recommendation that would be forever connected with his name, containment (although he would not call it that until the following year, when he published an anonymous article on the “Sources for Soviet Conduct” in Foreign Affairs).

In Kennan’s mind – and in the minds of most experts on the Soviet Union – the Soviet Union’s expansive tendencies (especially in Western Europe) had to be contained and blocked. The United States could simply not allow for another country to acquire additional influence in areas where it had significant interests. The means of containment were primarily to be political and economic. The basic view of the Soviet Union that supported an essentially non-military strategy was that the communist superpower at its core was continuing a traditional Russian approach to foreign policy that was defensive and that emphasized being surrounded by a buffer zone of friendly states for fear of invasion. The expansion that needed to be contained was a threat, but was not a sign of a Soviet desire for world domination. Kennan and the Kremlinologists read it in primarily defensive terms, although he did see a situation that needed to be addressed. As a proponent of realism, Kennan also denied that the essential source of discord between East and West was ideological. He did acknowledge the problematical aspects of communism (and he himself was a fervent anti-communist), but maintained that the overall foreign policy outlook was traditionally Russian.

Kennan’s version of the containment policy was not the only version in Washington. Just as he was about to undertake new responsibilities as the first head of the newly created Policy Planning Staff at the State Department, the wheels had been set in motion for a presidential presentation of an aid programme to Greece and Turkey. The Truman Doctrine, which the President announced to Congress in a speech on 12 March 1947, did not match Kennan’s containment. The $400 million seemed acceptable in Greece, where a left-wing or communist victory in the civil war might enable significant Soviet expansion in South-East Europe, but providing aid for Turkey was problematic, because it threatened Soviet access to the Mediterranean (which was one of its

reasons) and was overly provocative in Kennan’s eyes. He much preferred the Marshall Plan announced in June, on which he worked as much as any advisor. This was aid to Europe, dependent on economic integration, and truly a Kennan-style form of containment.\(^1\)

In 1949, when Dean Acheson replaced George Marshall as Secretary of State, Kennan’s days in the State Department were coming to an end. He was no longer the diplomatic superstar he once was, and his brand of containment - Europe-oriented, economic and political instead of military, defensive instead of offensive – was no longer in fashion. In December of 1949 he was promoted out of the PPS to the position of Counselor (officially the number three man in the Department), where he worked as a sort of roving ambassador until his retirement in the summer of 1950. The new head of the PPS was Paul Nitze, a former Wall Street banker, whose outlook was different from Kennan’s: he was a stronger proponent of military power, he saw the world in a different, more ideological light and he did not have the same level of knowledge about the Soviet Union that Kennan did. It was up to him to deal with the momentous events of the fall of 1949 and to coordinate the study that the president requested of the Secretaries of State and Defense on 31 January 1950: “a reexamination of our objectives in peace and war and of the effect of these objectives on our strategic plans, in light of the probable fission bomb capability and possible thermonuclear bomb capability of the Soviet Union.”\(^1\)

The Contents

The document began by presenting a bleak analysis of the world situation, in which the Soviet Union was identified as the main threat. NSC 68 proposed that the country “ unlike previous aspirants to hegemony, is animated by a new fanatical faith, antithetical to our own, and seeks to impose its absolute authority over the rest of the world.”\(^1\) The United States thus opposed a power, whose fundamental purpose was completely different from its own. While the US drew on the preamble to the American constitution (“…to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and to Posterity”) and thus to promote individual freedom and the American way of life, Soviet leaders were looking “to retain and solidify their absolute power, first in the Soviet Union and second in areas now under their control.” This effort required “the complete


\(^1\) NSC 68, p. 3

\(^1\) Ibid., p. 4
subversion or forcible destruction of the machinery of government and structure of society in the
countries of the non-Soviet world and their replacement with an apparatus and structure subservient
to and controlled directly from the Kremlin.” The role of the United States was to act as the main
“bulwark of opposition to Soviet expansion.”

Thus the scene was set. NSC 68 moved to analyse four courses of action: 1) a
continuation of the current containment policy, which worked predominantly through political and
economic means; 2) a policy of isolation and thus an abandonment of America’s global role; 3) a
preventive war with the Soviet Union and the communist world; 4) an expansion of US political,
economic and military strength requiring a massive influx of funds allocated to the national
defence. The authors quickly dismissed the first three options and strongly recommended the
fourth by which the containment doctrine would become truly militarized given the proposed build-
up of in both nuclear and conventional armaments. In the document’s conclusion, the gravity of the
situation was emphasized: “The whole success of the proposed program hangs ultimately on the
recognition by this Government, the American people, and all free peoples, that the cold war is in
fact a real war in which the survival of the free world is at stake.”

The issues
There have been many different readings of NSC 68 and its historiography is broad and large. The
amount of volumes that mention the document include nearly every historical analysis of the Cold
War, at least those that treat the early period, because the document has become thoroughly
embedded in the foundational history of one of the defining conflicts of the 20th century.

A significant part of the scholarship dedicated to an in-depth treatment of NSC 68
looks at language. An early critic was Samuel F. Wells whose 1979 article “Sounding the Tocsin”
attacked what he found to be emotional overstatements. He argued that the document to some extent
was guilty of inflating the threat and of using hyperbolic language to induce a sense of fear that
would allow for easy adoption of its recommendations. In support of his argument, he marshalled
an oft-quoted passage from the memoirs of former Secretary of State Dean Acheson, who stated
that the “purpose of NSC-68 was to so bludgeon the mass mind of ‘top government’ that not only

17 Ibid., pp. 5-6
18 Ibid., p. 44
19 Ibid., p. 65
20 An early exception is the seminal work of political scientist Paul Y. Hammond, whose in-depth analysis of NSC 68
and its genesis was written before the document was declassified. Hammond worked on the basis of interviews with
participants. See his “NSC 68: Prologue to Rearmament” in Warner R. Schilling, Paul Y. Hammond and Glenn Snyder,
could the President make a decision but that decision could be carried out.”

Acheson’s sentence seemed to provide proof that not only was the language hyperbolic it was also designed to convince (or manipulate) the president into decisive action. British historian Ken Young, however, argues that Wells (and the many who have followed in his footsteps) is guilty of over-interpreting Acheson’s comments, because not only was Acheson no critic of the linguistic expressions found in the document, he was also not proposing to end-run the President, but merely suggested that forceful rhetoric would clarify a serious issue in a serious way, which would enable Truman and his advisors to create and implement a viable policy.

Language and rhetoric thus became important parts of the historiography, but often seen as hyperbole designed to promote an early adoption of the document’s recommendations from either a national security or a political economy imperative. Here I propose, somewhat following Young’s intervention, that we challenge the claims of hyperbole and consider that the language reflects genuine emotions, or at least that genuine emotions were at the heart of the possible hyperbole.

The emotional community of key players
Here we employ Barbara Rosenwein’s notion of emotional communities to better understand how emotions played a role in the drafting of NSC 68. The emotional community in question included the authors and sponsors of NSC 68: Paul Nitze and the Policy Planning Staff at the State Department, most notably John Paton Davies, Robert Tufts (who was the major drafter), Robert Hooker, Carlton Savage, George Butler and Harry Schwartz, and to some extent Secretary of State Dean Acheson, who was continuously briefed on the progress of the drafting.

Nitze was by far the most important member of this emotional community. He was a former Wall Street investment banker, who came to Washington in 1940 and worked for every presidential administration from Roosevelt to Reagan (except Carter’s) in foreign or defence policy. Nitze was a numbers man; he liked and needed a quantitative perspective on policy. Additionally, Nitze was in favour of emphasizing the military dimension of US foreign policy. He was fearful and

23 For the former see e.g. John Lewis Gaddis, Strategies of Containment (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), for the latter see Curt Cardwell, NSC -68 and the Political Economy of the Cold War (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011)
24 Paul Nitze, From Hiroshima to Glasnost: At the Center of Decision – A Memoir (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1989), p. 94
distrusting of the Soviet Union, which he saw as a threatening, expansionist force. Due to his service with the United States Strategic Bombing Survey during the final years of World War II, he had a different view of the ramifications of nuclear weapons and thus had fewer qualms about contemplating a strategy that might increase the likelihood of their use.²⁵

Nitze is the only member of the emotional community that I am looking at here. This choice can be justifiably criticized on the grounds that if no one else is examined, how can there be much of a community at all? This is a fair criticism and the only real excuse is that this paper is only suggestive and that it serves as a pre-study awaiting someone to conduct a full archival-based investigation. But we can assume that the members of the group both thought and felt alike to a large degree. This assumption is based on the fact that the end result was in fact a team effort and that the staff – unlike in Kennan’s days as chairman – was actually substantially involved in drafting the report. Additionally, no staff member later felt the need to distance themselves from the end product or to make clear that they did in fact disagree at the time.²⁶ Both of these elements point in the direction of common thoughts and emotions within the group.

The intellectual and emotional properties of this group in relation to NSC 68 included at least the following: 1) fear of Soviet expansionism and the belief that the USSR had sinister intentions of world domination; 2) pride of American political institutions; and 3) reduced fear of contemplating the use of nuclear weapons.

The fear of the Soviet Union, its intentions and capabilities had several dimensions for the PPS. The first seems to have been a distinct fear of the idea of the Soviet Union as a sort of anti-American entity, with roots going back to the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917.²⁷ The early communists had, after all, promised to fight the very existence of capitalism and traditional nation-states, and this new social, political and economic approach to society was attracting a significant following in Europe. An American fear of communism, therefore, was a concern for survival of the American way of life. After the early post-war experience had shown that cooperation with the Soviet Union would be difficult if not impossible, this feeling that communism was out to destroy the West and its values, grew exponentially and it can very well be argued that it was this feeling – a wide-spread one, nearly omnipresent in the entire country – that the PPS was channelling when writing NSC 68.

²⁵ For a good biographic account of Nitze see e.g. Strobe Talbott, The Master of the Game (New York: Knopf, 1988) and David Callahan, Dangerous Capabilities: Paul Nitze and the Cold War (New York: HarperCollins, 1990)
²⁶ See e.g. Nitze, From Hiroshima to Glasnost; Cardwell, NSC-68; and Young, “Revisiting NSC 68”
²⁷ See Robert D. Schulzinger, American Diplomacy since 1900 (New York, Oxford University Press, 2008 6th ed.), pp. 68-71
An additional dimension is related to the process in which a lack of knowledge can lead to fear. Nitze and most of the members of the PPS were not experts on the Soviet Union. While studying and theorizing about Soviet capabilities, they equated it with intentions, which drove their policy recommendations to a certain degree. Nitze and the PPS quite simply believed that the Soviets had offensive and aggressive intentions and they were sure that by 1954 – to their mind, the year of maximum danger – Soviet capabilities would match its intentions. Critics of this way of thinking and feeling were not invited to participate in the discussion at a stage when regular changes could be made. This, it can be argued, is where the notion of groupfeel can be taken into consideration.

Groupfeel is – as noted above – the suggested further development of Irving Janis’s idea on groupthink: the closed system of group deliberation that can create unhealthy decisions. As I have argued above, I do not see groupfeel as a pathological state of affairs in the same vein that Janis viewed groupthink. Instead my argument is that it can be a normal state of group behaviour, but that it can nevertheless lead to closed decision-making and that we can use the notion of groupfeel to better understand group decision-making and group behaviour. When looking at the composition of this particular emotional community, for example, it is also necessary to examine who was not included: George F. Kennan, Nitze’s predecessor as chairman of the PPS, did not agree with Nitze on the nature of the Soviet threat and neither did Charles Bohlen, a fellow Kremlinologist, and both were kept out of the drafting process. While this does not prove groupfeel (or groupthink) it does suggest that the conditions were there for this type of emotional and intellectual activity.

Our second detectible emotional property of the PPS as an emotional community in relation to the production of NSC 68 was pride in American institutions. This notion is part of what historian Bruce Kuklick has called “belief in the spiritual potency of American ideas” and does seem strongly connected to the fear of subversion. The pride in the American way of life, as a wide-spread feeling, dates back at least to the late 18th century, when society became democratic and free, and ultimately “American” after independence was won and granted in the early 1780s. The pride in American institutions and in the American way of life was heavily present in NSC 68 as we saw above, and there were several reasons to fight for it: first, because it was the foundation for the continued functioning of the United States as a country, and second, because it was seen as a

28 Young, “Revisiting NSC 68”, pp. 15-17
beacon of light on a global mission, due to its inherent, universal values. The ultimate fear, then, would be to see your way of life subverted and destroyed by outside forces and to see the downfall of American Manifest Destiny.

Our third category of analysis was the reduced fear of nuclear weapons that was especially exhibited by Paul Nitze. Nitze was much less fearful than others, such as George Kennan and Charles Bohlen, because of what he had seen during and after the war. As a member of the United States Strategic Bombing Survey, he went to Japan and Germany on fact-finding missions. In Japan, he had witnessed the quick rise after the nuclear attacks of August 1945 that ended the Pacific War. In Germany, however, he had seen the devastation that firebombings by conventional means had done to his ancestral homeland, and seemed especially touched by the destructions of Darmstadt, a town south of Frankfurt.\(^{30}\) For our purposes, this suggests two points. First, perhaps Nitze saw nuclear weapons as were merely another type of weapons in the American arsenal – powerful weapons, yes, but not the end of humanity, unless of course the other side had the advantage. Second, because nuclear weapons could be used, they needed a place in American strategic documents. Superiority was important, just like with any other type of weapon and that was what Nitze and the PPS proposed in NSC 68. Kennan, on the other hand, was genuinely afraid of the potential destructive capability of a nuclear arms race and these different feelings might provide a part of the explanation as to why he was not included in the policy-making process.\(^{31}\)

**Conclusions**

This working paper has looked at the emotional aspects of the history of US foreign policy. The central argument is that the link between emotion and cognition is vital and if we are looking to examine the nature of historical thought, we must also look at historical emotions. This can be done by investigating emotions individually or by analysing emotional communities at either the systemic or individual/small group level. A test case tracing key aspects of the Cold War strategy document, NSC 68 (1950), showed that several emotions were in play, such as fear, reduced fear and pride and suggested avenues for future study. When dealing with emotions, as with any analytical category in history, we must avoid the trap of overemphasizing the chosen analytical perspective and resorting to mono-causal explanations of events and driving forces. But

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\(^{30}\) Callahan, *Dangerous Capabilities*, p. 46

nevertheless, the emotional aspect certainly can open up new perspectives for the study of US foreign policy history.