dead. On the approval of Colin Powell, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, U.S. Army Rangers and Delta Force soldiers were sent in to help the UN. On October 3, 1993, eighteen U.S. Army Rangers died in Mogadishu during an attempt to capture Aidid. In a scene broadcast on television that set off outrage at home, an American soldier's body was dragged through the streets and stoned. The experience left Clinton hesitant to commit American troops to overseas conflicts.

During the Bush administration, unrest had broken out in multiethnic Yugoslavia as republics broke away and constituent ethnic and religious groups fought for power. Civil war in Bosnia erupted when the Bosnian Serbs fought for control against the Croats and Bosnian Muslims. President Clinton favored air strikes against the Serbs, which the United States conducted as part of NATO, whereas Powell was against them. After the tide turned with heavier NATO bombing, a ceasefire was declared in October 1995. President Clinton arranged a peace summit in Dayton, Ohio, which led to the Paris Peace Accord in December 1995. In 1996, at the urging of UN Envoy Madeleine Albright, Clinton sent 20,000 U.S. troops to Bosnia as part of the UN peacekeeping force.

The shadow of terrorism loomed over the administration for eight years. In June 1993 President Clinton authorized a cruise missile attack against Iraqi intelligence headquarters in retaliation for an Iraqi assassination plot against former president Bush. In August 1998, 250 people were killed when two American embassies in Africa were bombed by terrorists. At the direction of President Clinton, the United States executed an air strike on a terrorist camp in Afghanistan and a factory in Sudan where chemical weapons were allegedly being made. The factory turned out to be harmless, and the bombing drew criticism. The timing of the retaliation, in the midst of a sex scandal, also drew fire from Clinton’s opponents. In a statement soon after the bombing, Clinton said, “terrorists must have no doubt that in the face of their threats, America will protect its citizens and will continue to lead the world’s fight for peace, freedom, and security.”

One of Clinton’s most concerted foreign policy efforts was to negotiate peace in the Middle East. Throughout his presidency, he worked closely with both the Israeli government and representatives of the Palestinians. In a ceremonial event in September 1993, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin of Israel and Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasir Arafat signed an agreement and shook hands on the White House lawn. Rabin was assassinated two years later. A few months before he left office, Clinton held a summit at Camp David, but Arafat rejected the provisions for a Palestinian state as set out in the Clinton plan. At this time violence by Palestinians against Israel spiked.

In 1999, another crisis in the Balkans erupted with the forced removal of hundreds of thousands of people from Kosovo. The plight of these people, dramatized in the media, moved popular opinion to support President Clinton’s decision to intervene militarily with the aid of NATO. Both Clinton’s responses to interethnic violence in Europe and the inability of the United States and the UN to stop the slaughter of nearly a million people in Rwanda have contributed to the debate among Americans on the role the nation should play as an international peacekeeper, nation builder, mediator, and combatant in the war against terrorism.

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COLD WAR MOBILIZATION

Between 1946 and 1991, America’s rivalry with the Soviet Union spurred the longest continuous wartime mobilization—or state of military readiness—in U.S. history. Over the course of four decades of U.S. resolve to “contain” Communism abroad, Americans spent nearly $13 trillion on defense. Military readiness touched all aspects of American society and culture.

Previous wartime mobilizations entailed domestic deprivations in order to maximize war output. Civilian companies retooled their production lines to churn out military hardware. Americans contributed to the World War II effort, for instance, by planting “victory gardens,” collecting scrap metal, rationing food, and postponing the acquisition of nonessential luxuries such as automobiles or home appliances. These effects, however, were relatively short-lived: full U.S. mobilization for the Second
World War began in early 1942 and ended shortly after the Japanese surrender in August 1945.

Not so with the Cold War, which lasted more than forty years and led to the creation of a semi-permanent military-industrial complex fed by federal dollars. In spending so much money to create a large defense sector of the economy and to improve the nation’s infrastructure, Washington contributed to a long period of economic expansion. Many, but not all, Americans enjoyed a rising standard of living and benefited from a host of government programs. Created to meet immediate Cold War challenges, these programs had lasting consequences for domestic society.

Most scholars agree that the Cold War began in earnest in 1947, in both a political/economic and military sense, with the development of the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan. Post–World War II demobilization was reversed in 1948 as military spending spiked in response to the Czech coup that put Communists in power and to the Soviet blockade of Berlin, which resulted in a massive U.S.-led airlift to supply the city. But 1950 was a watershed year—both because of North Korea’s surprise attack against South Korea and fears of a Soviet invasion of Western Europe. NSC #68, a national security policy directive responding to the threat of war on two distant fronts, moved American defense output much closer to a full wartime footing. “Our military strength is becoming dangerously inadequate,” explained Paul Nitze, a principal architect of NSC #68. “It is imperative that this trend be reversed by a much more rapid and concentrated buildup. . . . Budgetary considerations will need to be subordinated to the stark fact that our very independence as a nation may be at stake.” Between 1950 and 1952, U.S. defense spending soared from $13 billion to more than $60 billion annually.

Federal defense expenditures dropped from a peak of 18 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 1951–1952 to a steady 10 percent during the Dwight Eisenhower administration. A fiscal conservative, Eisenhower sought to cap military spending while increasing American striking power—a policy dubbed “more bang for the buck.” Money flowed to produce more nuclear weapons, aircraft, and missiles. The chief beneficiaries were aerospace corporations (General Dynamics, Lockheed, Grumman, and others) which were funded by federal dollars to produce strategic bombers and intercontinental missiles which could deliver U.S. nuclear weapons.

THE NUCLEAR ARMS RACE

The nuclear arms race that developed between Washington and Moscow reinforced for Americans the vulnerability of the homeland to devastating surprise attacks. U.S. rhetoric of “massive retaliation”—full-scale nuclear reprisal for Communist aggression—heightened those fears. Civil defense, the safeguarding of the populace from foreign attack, was a primary concern in the nuclear age. In 1951 the Truman administration created the Federal Civil Defense Administration, which initiated a public fallout shelter program. Educational films and drills taught Americans to “duck and cover” in the event of a nuclear attack. The explosion of the first hydrogen (thermonuclear) bombs in the early 1950s stoked fears of a nuclear holocaust and spurred the construction of personal, backyard fallout shelters, which peaked during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. The Office of Civil Defense Mobilization, established in 1958, dispensed advice to families on how to prepare for and survive nuclear war. U.S. officials, concerned with dispersing key industries, encouraged military contractors to set up shop in rural areas, thus contributing to the development of a new industrial zone, the “Gun Belt,” which stretched from Texas to California. Many key postwar military installations also were located in remote, western states.

CHANGING THE AMERICAN LANDSCAPE AND LIFESTYLE

The need to move material and people quickly across vast stretches of the nation provided momentum for legislative programs that reshaped the American landscape. In 1956 Congress passed the Federal Highway Act, allocating $31 billion for the development of 42,500 miles of the National System of Interstate and Defense Highways. The creation of the modern U.S. road network, first proposed during World War II, came to fruition, in part, to facilitate rapid evacuation of urban areas in the event of a nuclear exchange with Russia. It revolutionized American living patterns. More and better roadways spurred suburban development and enabled waves of middle-class families to relocate away from city centers to more affordable, homogenous neighborhoods in the coming decades. The highway act also contributed to America’s unique dependency on the automobile. A concurrent revenue bill established a Highway Trust Fund to finance the interstate program by levying tolls on highway users and new taxes on gasoline, tires, and permits for large vehicles. The federal government picked up 90 percent of the tab.

THE SPACE RACE

Russia’s surprise October 1957 launch of Sputnik, the first man-made satellite to orbit the earth, sparked concerns that the U.S. was lagging behind its Communist rivals and marked the opening of a superpower “space race.” In July 1958 Congress passed the National Aeronautics and Space Act that created the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to integrate and manage
the civilian functions of U.S. scientific programs pertaining to outer space. NASA swiftly developed the Mercury Program for manned orbital space flight to keep pace with Soviet advances. In 1961 President Kennedy announced Project Apollo, a program to land a manned spacecraft on the moon by 1970. The U.S. aerospace industry provided a boost with technology gleaned from the arms race.

Lofty national ambitions required an infusion of engineers and physicists, who were in short supply. To encourage more young Americans to choose a career in science, Congress passed the 1958 National Defense Education Act (NDEA). It authorized a seven-year, $1 billion program of federal grants and loans to encourage the study and teaching of mathematics, the sciences, and foreign languages at the college level. The NDEA also contained a provision—the precursor to the modern-day federal student loan programs—that provided money to help needy students pay for college costs. Cold War mobilization had its most direct impact on higher education through the allocation of large sums of money to university laboratories conducting research and development on projects with military applications.

FROM THE VIETNAM ERA TO THE POST-SOVIET ERA

Mobilization levels fluctuated. During the Vietnam War, spending on conventional weapons and a nearly half-million troop commitment in South Vietnam sapped money from Great Society programs and led to rising inflation. Defense cuts in the post-Vietnam era and temporary détente with the Soviet Union shrank defense spending to less than 5 percent of the GDP by the late-1970s. In 1980 Ronald Reagan captured the presidency in large part by stumping for a reininvigorated defense establishment. Military outlays, which had begun to increase late in the Carter administration, climbed swiftly during Reagan’s two terms, from $158 billion in 1981 to $304 billion in 1989—occasioning great debate about defense spending. The massive buildup included conventional weapons such as tanks and helicopters. New carrier battle groups were launched to project U.S. power overseas.

In March 1983 President Reagan also proposed a satellite-based missile defense system, which he hoped would make nuclear weapons “impotent and obsolete.” Reagan’s Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI)—which critics dubbed “Star Wars” after the science-fiction film—was criticized as fiscally irresponsible, technologically far-fetched, and potentially destabilizing to the system of nuclear deterrence that had developed between the two superpowers. Part of the SDI legacy has been to shape the post-Cold War debate about missile defense against “rogue” nations.

Only after the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 did the costs of four decades of mobilization become clearer: massive federal debts, urban blight, environmental neglect, and a public education system lagging behind those of other leading industrialized nations. By the Center for Defense Information’s estimate (adjusted to reflect the cost in 1990s dollars), U.S. taxpayers spent more than $13 trillion to wage the Cold War—or an average of $291 billion per year, every year from 1947 to 1991. Although the defense budget shrank to less than 4 percent of GDP in the late 1990s, the fruits of Cold War mobilization affected the American economy. Information technologies invented originally for military purposes, such as the Internet, entered the civilian marketplace, accelerating a communications revolution driven largely by the availability of the computer.

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COLD WAR NOVELS AND MOVIES

Beyond their value as artistic expression or entertainment, novels and movies are cultural records that reflect a society’s views and values. During the Cold War (1946–1991), novels and films reflected the anxieties and