In the legends of nuclear strategy, NATO’s primal scene came at the end of 1954. The EDC had collapsed a few months earlier; two years of Republican rule had unnerved the allies who suspected the New Look was the work of a neo-isolationist ghost moving through the halls of Congress and the White House. And yet, by mid-1954 the formal integration of nuclear weapons into NATO war plans was under way. As the last chapter saw, pressure for a reevaluation of strategy came from many directions. The new JCS saw integration as a way of eliminating obstacles to a preemptive strategy they thought necessary to fight a nuclear war that might be induced by their “bold” plan to end the Cold War. John Foster Dulles demanded a NATO-wide affirmation of Massive Retaliation so America could rediscover its spiritual mission. First-use came out of the confluence of all these forces, but primarily from an inarticulate desire on the part of the United States to universalize its strategic culture in the new Atlantic community. This demanded a resocialized European identity, in which traditional national biases were displaced by an acceptance of the interest the United States had in holding a free hand over the decision to execute a war.

This interpretation is, naturally, at odds with the official version. There, causal weight is given to the strains of rearmament and the promise of cheaper nuclear weapons to offset Soviet conventional strength. Economic arguments were present throughout 1954, but not as much as NATO would like to believe. The alliance was not forced into first-use by political or economic limits, but was pulled toward first-use because for the
United States it resolved the decision-making tangle that came with NATO membership. The only way to overcome the will of the allies, pay homage to their autonomy, and avoid turning them into defiant satellites was to remake their interests. The recent literature on first-use pulls more rationality from these events than was there at the time, missing the contingent forces that made first-use seem so inevitable and coldly rational. It understates the strategic evasions of NATO’s largest members; it confuses the desire of NATO to economize as the Cold War stabilized after 1953 with the frantic priorities of the nuclear powers to embrace a weapon that offered unique emotional advantages to their position in relation to each other; and it fails tragically to understand how nuclear weapons contained their own justification, in which once accepted as possible, planning for a robust nuclear war becomes a necessity.

Dulles’s speech to the Council on Foreign Relations on January 12, 1954, was the clearest indication that the United States was leaning toward first-use. His clarification in *Foreign Affairs* a few months later tried to improve this credibility by arguing, “if an aggressor knew he could always prescribe the battle conditions that suited him and engage us in struggles mainly involving manpower, aggression might be encouraged.” While he stressed this as a way of preventing, not waging, war, the two had to be tied together credibly. If you lack the means or will to win, your threats are ineffective. In *Foreign Affairs* he backtracked, claiming “massive atomic and thermonuclear reaction is not the kind of power which could most usefully be evoked under all circumstances,” and that the United States would not turn “every local war into a world war.” Yet Dulles never specified how to climb the escalation ladder. The NSC never mentioned this when it reviewed NSC 162/2 in mid-1954. But Dulles was beginning to appreciate the inhibitions of NATO. Could the United States routinely threaten to escalate and retain the happiness of those nearer the Soviet periphery? For Lester Pearson, the only conclusion for NATO was that there should be even greater consultation (“being asked rather than told,” he said) than ever before. French theorist Raymond Aron thought that Dulles’s musings must have been intended for “propaganda purposes and would not be applied without consultation with allies.” He thought the speech was no more than an outgrowth of the bitterness of the Korean experience, a cathartic gesture that might have made sense when the United States held its atomic monopoly but could not be taken seriously now. This was optimistic, but Dulles’s personal foray into “instant retaliation” was indeed short-lived. He grew more cautious throughout 1954. “Our ‘tough policy,’ ” he conceded, “was becoming increasingly unpopular throughout the free world; whereas