

# PERIOD 8: 1945–1980

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In 1945, the United States emerged from World War II with the world’s largest and strongest economy. Despite fears of a return to an economic depression, Americans were happy to get back to civilian life. What no one could predict was how the fall of colonial empires, the spread of Communism, and changes in the global economy would impact American lives in the future.

**Overview** At home, Americans enjoyed a robust economic growth through the 1960s with little competition, as the rest of world’s economies recovered from the war. Democrats, expanding on the New Deal, enacted major domestic programs, such as Medicare, aid to education, and civil rights for African Americans and women. The Cold War against Communist governments dominated U.S. foreign policy. While the threat of the use of nuclear weapons kept the great powers from attacking each other, limited “hot” wars in Korea and Vietnam cost America more than 100,000 lives. By the late 1960s, frustration over the Vietnam War, and opposition to liberal domestic programs, such as civil rights, and increased civil unrest weakened the Democratic majority, which slowly gave way during the 1970s to a conservative resurgence in 1980.

**Alternate View** Historians debate when postwar prosperity and optimism gave way to pessimism and a declining standard of living for many Americans. Some identify 1968, a year of assassinations, riots, and intense conflict over the Vietnam War as a starting point. Others point to the mid-1970s, when wage growth stagnated for many average Americans.

## Key Concepts

**8.1:** The United States responded to an uncertain and unstable postwar world by asserting and attempting to defend a position of global leadership, with far-reaching domestic and international consequences.

**8.2:** Liberalism, based on anticommunism abroad and a firm belief in the efficacy of governmental and especially federal power to achieve social goals at home, reached its apex in the mid-1960s and generated a variety of political and cultural responses.

**8.3:** Postwar economic, demographic, and technological changes had a far-reaching impact on American society, politics, and the environment.

**Source:** AP United States History Curriculum Framework 2014–2015

# TRUMAN AND THE COLD WAR, 1945–1952

*Communism holds that the world is so deeply divided into opposing classes that war is inevitable. Democracy holds that free nations can settle differences justly and maintain lasting peace.*

President Harry S. Truman,  
Inaugural Address, January 20, 1949

**W**orld War II dramatically changed the United States from an isolationist country into a military superpower and a leader in world affairs. After the war, most of the Americans at home and the millions coming back from military service wished to return to normal domestic life and enjoy the revitalized national economy. However, during the Truman presidency, the growing conflict between the Communist Soviet Union and the United States—a conflict that came to be known as the Cold War—dampened the nation’s enjoyment of the postwar boom.

## **Postwar America**

The 15 million American soldiers, sailors, and marines returning to civilian life in 1945 and 1946 faced the problem of finding jobs and housing. Many feared that the end of the war might mean the return of economic hard times. Happily, the fears were not realized because the war years had increased the per-capita income of Americans. Much of that income was tucked away in savings accounts, since wartime shortages meant there had been few consumer goods to buy. Pent-up consumer demand for autos and housing combined with government road-building projects quickly overcame the economic uncertainty after the war and introduced an era of unprecedented prosperity and economic growth. By the 1950s, Americans enjoyed the highest standard of living achieved by any society in history.

## ***GI Bill—Help for Veterans***

The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, popularly known as the GI Bill of Rights, proved a powerful support during the transition of 15 million veterans to a peacetime economy. More than half the returning GIs (as the men and women in uniform were called) seized the opportunity afforded by the GI Bill to continue their education at government expense. Over 2 million GIs attended college,

which started a postwar boom in higher education. The veterans also received over \$16 billion in low-interest, government-backed loans to buy homes and farms and to start businesses. By focusing on a better educated workforce and also promoting new construction, the federal government stimulated the postwar economic expansion.

### ***Baby Boom***

One sign of the basic confidence of the postwar era was an explosion in marriages and births. Younger marriages and larger families resulted in 50 million babies entering the U.S. population between 1945 and 1960. As the *baby boom* generation gradually passed from childhood to adolescence to adulthood, it profoundly affected the nation's social institutions and economic life in the last half of the 20th century. Initially, the baby boom tended to focus women's attention on raising children and homemaking. Nevertheless, the trend of more women in the workplace continued. By 1960, one-third of all married women worked outside the home.

### ***Suburban Growth***

The high demand for housing after the war resulted in a construction boom. William J. Levitt led in the development of postwar suburbia with his building and promotion of Levittown, a project of 17,000 mass-produced, low-priced family homes on Long Island, New York. Low interest rates on mortgages that were both government-insured and tax deductible made the move from city to suburb affordable for even families of modest means. In a single generation, the majority of middle-class Americans became suburbanites. For many older inner cities, the effect of the mass movement to suburbia was disastrous. By the 1960s, cities from Boston to Los Angeles became increasingly poor and racially divided.

### ***Rise of the Sunbelt***

Uprooted by the war, millions of Americans made moving a habit in the postwar era. A warmer climate, lower taxes, and economic opportunities in defense-related industries attracted many GIs and their families to the Sunbelt states from Florida to California. By transferring tax dollars from the Northeast and Midwest to the South and West, military spending during the Cold War helped finance the shift of industry, people, and ultimately political power from one region to the other.

### ***Postwar Politics***

Harry S. Truman, a moderate Democratic senator from Missouri, replaced the more liberal Henry Wallace as FDR's vice president in the 1944 election. Thrust into the presidency after Roosevelt's death in April 1945, Truman matured into a decisive leader whose basic honesty and unpretentious style appealed to average citizens. Truman attempted to continue in the New Deal tradition of his predecessor.

## ***Economic Program and Civil Rights***

Truman's proposals for full employment and for civil rights for African Americans ran into opposition from conservatives in Congress.

**Employment Act of 1946** In September 1945, during the same week that Japan formally surrendered, Truman urged Congress to enact a series of progressive measures, including national health insurance, an increase in the minimum wage, and a bill to commit the U.S. government to maintaining full employment. After much debate, the watered-down version of the full-employment bill was enacted as the Employment Act of 1946. It created the Council of Economic Advisers to counsel both the president and Congress on means of promoting national economic welfare. Over the next seven years, a coalition between Republicans and conservative Southern Democrats, combined with the beginning of the Cold War, hindered passage of most of Truman's domestic program.

**Inflation and Strikes** Truman urged Congress to continue the price controls of wartime in order to hold inflation in check. Instead, southern Democrats joined with Republicans to relax the controls of the Office of Price Administration. The result was an inflation rate of almost 25 percent during the first year and a half of peace.

Workers and unions wanted wages to catch up after years of wage controls. Over 4.5 million workers went on strike in 1946. Strikes by railroad and mine workers threatened the national safety. Truman took a tough approach to this challenge, seizing the mines and using soldiers to keep them operating until the United Mine Workers finally called off its strike.

**Civil Rights** Truman was the first modern president to use the powers of his office to challenge racial discrimination. Bypassing southern Democrats who controlled key committees in Congress, the president used his executive powers to establish the Committee on Civil Rights in 1946. He also strengthened the civil rights division of the Justice Department, which aided the efforts of black leaders to end segregation in schools. Most importantly, in 1948 he ordered the end of racial discrimination throughout the federal government, including the armed forces. The end of segregation changed life on military bases, many of which were in the South.

Recognizing the odds against passage of civil rights legislation, Truman nevertheless urged Congress to create a Fair Employment Practices Commission that would prevent employers from discriminating against the hiring of African Americans. Southern Democrats blocked the legislation.

## ***Republican Control of the Eightieth Congress***

Unhappy with inflation and strikes, voters were in a conservative mood in the fall of 1946 when they elected Republican majorities in both houses of Congress. Under Republican control, the Eightieth Congress attempted to pass two tax cuts for upper-income Americans, but Truman vetoed both measures. More successful were Republican efforts to amend the Constitution and roll back some of the New Deal gains for labor.

**Twenty-second Amendment (1951)** Reacting against the election of Roosevelt as president four times, the Republican-dominated Congress proposed a constitutional amendment to limit a president to a maximum of two full terms in office. The 22nd Amendment was ratified by the states in 1951.

**Taft-Hartley Act (1947)** In 1947, Congress passed the probusiness Taft-Hartley Act. Truman vetoed the measure as a “slave-labor” bill, but Congress overrode his veto. The one purpose of the Republican-sponsored law was to check the growing power of unions. Its provisions included

- outlawing the closed shop (contract requiring workers to join a union *before* being hired)
- permitting states to pass “right to work” laws outlawing the union shop (contract requiring workers to join a union *after* being hired)
- outlawing secondary boycotts (the practice of several unions supporting a striking union by joining a boycott of a company’s products)
- giving the president the power to invoke an 80-day cooling-off period before a strike endangering the national safety could be called

For years afterward, unions sought unsuccessfully to repeal the Taft-Hartley Act. The act became a major issue dividing Republicans and Democrats in the 1950s.

### ***The Election of 1948***

As measured by opinion polls, Truman’s popularity was at a low point as the 1948 campaign for the presidency began. Republicans were confident of victory, especially after both a liberal faction and a conservative faction in the Democratic party abandoned Truman to organize their own third parties. Liberal Democrats, who thought Truman’s aggressive foreign policy threatened world peace, formed a new Progressive party that nominated former vice president Henry Wallace. Southern Democrats also bolted the party in reaction to Truman’s support for civil rights. Their States’ Rights party, better known as the Dixiecrats, chose Governor J. Strom Thurmond of South Carolina as its presidential candidate.

The Republicans once again nominated New York Governor Thomas E. Dewey, who looked so much like a winner from the outset that he conducted an overly cautious and unexciting campaign. Meanwhile, the man without a chance toured the nation by rail, attacking the “do-nothing” Republican Eightieth Congress with “give-’em-hell” speeches. The feisty Truman confounded the polling experts with a decisive victory over Dewey, winning the popular vote by 2 million votes and winning the electoral vote 303 to 189. The president had succeeded in reuniting Roosevelt’s New Deal coalition, except for four southern states that went to Thurmond and the Dixiecrats.

## PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, 1948



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census. *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*

### ***The Fair Deal***

Fresh from victory, Truman launched an ambitious reform program, which he called the *Fair Deal*. In 1949, he urged Congress to enact national health care insurance, federal aid to education, civil rights legislation, funds for public housing, and a new farm program. Conservatives in Congress blocked most of the proposed reforms, except for an increase in the minimum wage (from 40 to 75 cents an hour) and the inclusion of more workers under Social Security.

Most of the Fair Deal bills were defeated for two reasons: (1) Truman's political conflicts with Congress, and (2) the pressing foreign policy concerns of the Cold War. Nevertheless, liberal defenders of Truman praised him for at least maintaining the New Deal reforms of his predecessor and making civil rights part of the liberal agenda.

### **Origins of the Cold War**

The Cold War dominated international relations from the late 1940s to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The conflict centered around the intense rivalry between two superpowers: the Communist empire of the Soviet Union and the leading Western democracy, the United States. Superpower competition usually was through diplomacy rather than armed conflict, but, in several instances, the Cold War took the world dangerously close to a nuclear war.

Among historians there is intense debate over how and why the Cold War began. Many analysts see Truman's policies as a reasonable response to Soviet efforts to increase their influence in the world. However, some critics argue that Truman misunderstood and overreacted to Russia's historic need to secure its borders. Other critics have attacked his administration as being weak or "soft" on communism.

### ***U.S.-Soviet Relations to 1945***

The wartime alliance between the United States and the Soviet Union against the Axis powers was actually a temporary halt in their generally poor relations of the past. Since the Bolshevik Revolution that established a Communist

government in Russia in 1917, Americans had viewed the Soviets as a threat to all capitalistic countries. In the United States, it led to the Red Scare of 1919. The United States refused to recognize the Soviet Union until 1933. Even then, after a brief honeymoon period of less than a year, Roosevelt's advisers concluded that Joseph Stalin and the Communists could not be trusted. Confirming their view was the notorious Nonaggression Pact of 1939, in which Stalin and Hitler agreed to divide up Eastern Europe.

**Allies in World War II** In 1941, Hitler's surprise invasion of the Soviet Union and Japan's surprise attack on Pearl Harbor led to a U.S.–Soviet alliance of convenience—but not of mutual trust. Stalin bitterly complained that the British and Americans waited until 1944 to open a second front in France. Because of this wait, the Soviets bore the brunt of fighting the Nazis. By some estimates, half of all deaths in World War II were Soviets. The postwar conflicts over Central and Eastern Europe were already evident in the negotiations between Britain, the Soviet Union, and the U.S. at Yalta and Potsdam in 1945. Roosevelt hoped that personal diplomacy might keep Stalin in check, but when Truman came to power, he quickly became suspicious of the Soviets.

**Postwar Cooperation and the U.N.** The founding of the United Nations in the fall of 1945 provided one hopeful sign for the future. The General Assembly of the United Nations was created to provide representation to all member nations, while the 15-member Security Council was given the primary responsibility within the U.N. for maintaining international security and authorizing peacekeeping missions. The five major allies of wartime—the United States, Great Britain, France, China, and the Soviet Union—were granted permanent seats and veto power in the U.N. Security Council. Optimists hoped that these nations would be able to reach agreement on international issues. In addition, the Soviets went along with a U.S. proposal to establish an Atomic Energy Commission in the United Nations. They rejected, however, a plan proposed by Bernard Baruch for regulating nuclear energy and eliminating atomic weapons. Rejection of the Baruch Plan was interpreted by some American leaders as proof that Moscow did not have peaceful intentions.

The United States also offered the Soviets participation in the new International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank) created at the Bretton Woods Conference in 1944. The bank's initial purpose was to fund rebuilding of a war-torn world. The Soviets, however, declined to participate because they viewed the bank as an instrument of capitalism. The Soviets did join the other Allies in the 1945–1946 Nuremberg trials of 22 top Nazi leaders for war crimes and violations of human rights.

**Satellite States in Eastern Europe** Distrust turned into hostility beginning in 1946, as Soviet forces remained in occupation of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Elections were held by the Soviets—as promised by Stalin at Yalta—but the results were manipulated in favor of Communist candidates. One by one, from 1946 to 1948, Communist dictators, most of them loyal to Moscow, came to power in Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia. Apologists for the Soviets argued that Russia needed buffer

states or satellites (nations under the control of a great power), as a protection against another Hitler-like invasion from the West.

The U.S. and British governments were alarmed by the Soviet takeover of Eastern Europe. They regarded Soviet actions in this region as a flagrant violation of self-determination, genuine democracy, and open markets. The British especially wanted free elections in Poland, whose independence had been the issue that started World War II.

**Occupation Zones in Germany** At the end of the war, the division of Germany and Austria into Soviet, French, British, and U.S. zones of occupation was meant to be only temporary. In Germany, however, the eastern zone under Soviet occupation gradually evolved into a new Communist state, the German Democratic Republic. The conflict over Germany was at least in part a conflict over differing views of national security and economic needs. The Soviets wanted a weak Germany for security reasons and large war reparations for economic reasons. The United States and Great Britain refused to allow reparations from their western zones because both viewed the economic recovery of Germany as important to the stability of Central Europe. The Soviets, fearing a restored Germany, tightened their control over East Germany. Also, since Berlin lay within their zone, they attempted to force the Americans, British, and French to give up their assigned sectors of the city.

**Iron Curtain** “I’m tired of babying the Soviets,” Truman told Secretary of State James Byrnes in January 1946. News of a Canadian spy ring stealing atomic secrets for the Soviets and continued Soviet occupation of northern Iran further encouraged a get-tough policy in Washington.

In March 1946, in Fulton, Missouri, Truman was present on the speaker’s platform as former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill declared: “An iron curtain has descended across the continent” of Europe. The iron curtain metaphor was later used throughout the Cold War to refer to the Soviet satellite states of Eastern Europe. Churchill’s “iron curtain” speech called for a partnership between Western democracies to halt the expansion of communism. Did the speech anticipate the Cold War—or help to cause it? Historians still debate this question.

## Containment in Europe

Early in 1947, Truman adopted the advice of three top advisers in deciding to “contain” Soviet aggression. His containment policy, which was to govern U.S. foreign policy for decades, was formulated by the secretary of state, General George Marshall; the undersecretary of state, Dean Acheson; and an expert on Soviet affairs, George F. Kennan. In an influential article, Kennan had written that only “a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies” would eventually cause the Soviets to back off their Communist ideology of world domination and live in peace with other nations.

Did the containment policy attempt to do too much? Among the critics who argued that it did was journalist Walter Lippmann, who had coined the term “Cold War.” Lippmann argued that some areas were vital to U.S. security, while others were merely peripheral; some governments deserved U.S. support, but others did



not. American leaders, however, had learned the lesson of Munich (when leaders had given into demands by Hitler for land in 1938) and appeasement well and felt that Communist aggression, wherever it occurred, must be challenged.

### ***The Truman Doctrine***

Truman first implemented the containment policy in response to two threats: (1) a Communist-led uprising against the government in Greece, and (2) Soviet demands for some control of a water route in Turkey, the Dardanelles. In what became known as the Truman Doctrine, the president asked Congress in March 1947 for \$400 million in economic and military aid to assist the “free people” of Greece and Turkey against “totalitarian” regimes. While Truman’s alarmist speech may have oversimplified the situation in Greece and Turkey, it gained bipartisan support from Republicans and Democrats in Congress.

### ***The Marshall Plan***

After the war, Europe lay in ruins, short of food and deep in debt. The harsh winter of 1946–1947 further demoralized Europeans, who had already suffered through years of depression and war. Discontent encouraged the growth of the Communist party, especially in France and Italy. The Truman administration feared that the western democracies might vote the Communists into power.

In June 1947, George Marshall outlined an extensive program of U.S. economic aid to help European nations revive their economies and strengthen democratic governments. In December, Truman submitted to Congress a \$17 billion European Recovery Program, better known as the Marshall Plan. In 1948, \$12 billion in aid was approved for distribution to the countries of Western Europe over a four-year period. The United States offered Marshall Plan aid to the Soviet Union and its Eastern European satellites, but the Soviets refused it, fearing that it would lead to dependence on the United States.

**Effects** The Marshall Plan worked exactly as Marshall and Truman had hoped. The massive infusion of U.S. dollars helped Western Europe achieve self-sustaining growth by the 1950s and ended any real threat of Communist political successes in that region. It also bolstered U.S. prosperity by greatly increasing U.S. exports to Europe. At the same time, however, it deepened the rift between the non-Communist West and the Communist East.

### ***The Berlin Airlift***

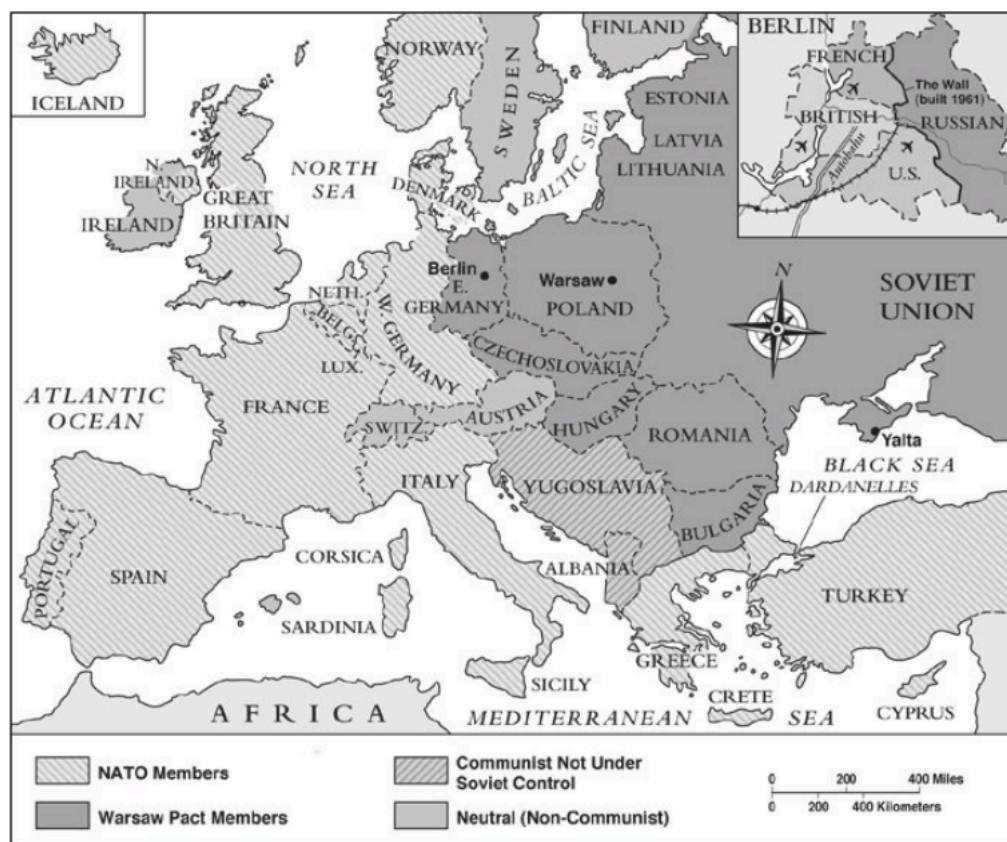
A major crisis of the Cold War focused on Berlin. In June 1948, the Soviets cut off all access by land to the German city. Truman dismissed any plans to withdraw from Berlin, but he also rejected using force to open up the roads through the Soviet-controlled eastern zone. Instead, he ordered U.S. planes to fly in supplies to the people of West Berlin. Day after day, week after week, the massive airlift continued. At the same time, Truman sent 60 bombers capable of carrying atomic bombs to bases in England. The world waited nervously for the outbreak of war, but Stalin decided not to challenge the airlift. (Truman’s stand on Berlin was partly responsible for his victory in the 1948 election.)

By May 1949, the Soviets finally opened up the highways to Berlin, thus bringing their 11-month blockade to an end. A major long-term consequence of the Berlin crisis was the creation of two Germanies: the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany, a U.S. ally) and the German Democratic Republic (East Germany, a Soviet satellite).

### **NATO and National Security**

Ever since Washington's farewell address of 1796, the United States had avoided permanent alliances with European nations. Truman broke with this tradition in 1949 by recommending that the United States join a military defense pact to protect Western Europe. The Senate readily gave its consent. Ten European nations joined the United States and Canada in creating the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), a military alliance for defending all members from outside attack. Truman selected General Eisenhower as NATO's first Supreme Commander and stationed U.S. troops in Western Europe as a deterrent against a Soviet invasion. Thus, the containment policy led to a military buildup and major commitments abroad. The Soviet Union countered in 1955 by forming the Warsaw Pact, a military alliance for the defense of the Communist states of Eastern Europe.

EUROPE AFTER WORLD WAR II: THE COLD WAR



**National Security Act (1947)** The United States had begun to modernize its military capability in 1947 by passing the National Security Act. It provided for (1) a centralized Department of Defense (replacing the War Department) to coordinate the operations of the army, navy, and air force; (2) the creation of the National Security Council (NSC) to coordinate the making of foreign policy in the Cold War; and (3) the creation of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to employ spies to gather information on foreign governments. In 1948, the Selective Service System and a peacetime draft were instituted.

**Atomic Weapons** After the Berlin crisis, teams of scientists in both the Soviet Union and the United States were engaged in an intense competition—or *arms race*—to develop superior weapons systems. For a period of just four years (1945–1949), the United States was the only nation to have the atomic bomb. It also developed in this period a new generation of long-range bombers for delivering nuclear weapons.

The Soviets tested their first atomic bomb in the fall of 1949. Truman then approved the development of a bomb a thousand times more powerful than the A-bomb that had destroyed Hiroshima. In 1952, this hydrogen bomb (or H-bomb) was added to the U.S. arsenal. Earlier, in 1950, the National Security Council had recommended, in a secret report known as NSC-68, that the following measures were necessary for fighting the Cold War:

- quadruple U.S. government defense spending to 20 percent of GNP
- form alliances with non-Communist countries around the world
- convince the American public that a costly arms buildup was imperative for the nation's defense

**Evaluating U.S. Policy** Critics of NATO and the defense buildup argued that the Truman administration intensified Russian fears and started an unnecessary arms race. Regardless, NATO became one of the most successful military alliances in history. In combination with the deterrent power of nuclear weapons, NATO effectively checked Soviet expansion in Europe and thereby maintained an uneasy peace until the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991.

## Cold War in Asia

The successful containment policy in Europe could not be duplicated in Asia. Following World War II, the old imperialist system in India and Southeast Asia crumbled, as former colonies became new nations. Because these nations had different cultural and political traditions and bitter memories of Western colonialism, they resisted U.S. influence. Ironically, the Asian nation that became most closely tied to the U.S. defense system was its former enemy, Japan.

### *Japan*

Unlike Germany, Japan was solely under the control of the United States. General Douglas MacArthur took firm charge of the reconstruction of Japan. Seven

Japanese generals, including Premier Hideki Tojo, were tried for war crimes and executed. Under MacArthur's guidance, the new constitution adopted in May 1947 set up a parliamentary democracy. It retained Emperor Hirohito as the ceremonial head of state, but the emperor gave up his claims to divinity. The new constitution also renounced war as an instrument of national policy and provided for only limited military capability. As a result, Japan depended on the military protection of the United States.

**U.S.-Japanese Security Treaties** With the signing of two treaties in 1951, Japan surrendered its claims to Korea and islands in the Pacific, and the United States ended formal occupation of Japan. One of the treaties also provided for U.S. troops to remain in military bases in Japan for that country's protection against external enemies, particularly Communists. Japan became a strong ally and prospered under the American shield.

### ***The Philippines and the Pacific***

On July 4, 1946, in accordance with the act passed by Congress in 1934, the Philippines became an independent republic, but the United States retained important naval and air bases there throughout the Cold War. This, together with U.S. control of the United Nations trustee islands taken from Japan at the end of the war, began to make the Pacific Ocean look like an American lake.

### ***China***

Since coming to power in the late 1920s, Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jie-shi) had used his command of the Nationalist, or Kuomintang, party to control China's central government. During World War II, the United States had given massive military aid to Chiang to prevent all of China from being conquered by Japan. As soon as the war ended, a civil war dating back to the 1930s was renewed between Chiang's Nationalists and the Chinese Communists led by Mao Zedong. The Nationalists were losing the loyalty of millions of Chinese because of runaway inflation and widespread corruption, while the well-organized Communists successfully appealed to the poor landless peasants.

**U.S. Policy** The Truman administration sent George Marshall in 1946 to China to negotiate an end to the civil war, but his compromise fell apart in a few months. By 1947, Chiang's armies were in retreat. Truman seemed unsure of what to do, after ruling out a large-scale American invasion to rescue Chiang. In 1948, Congress voted to give the Nationalist government \$400 million in aid, but 80 percent of the U.S. military supplies ended up in Communist hands because of corruption and the collapse of the Nationalist armies.

**Two Chinas** By the end of 1949, all of mainland China was controlled by the Communists. Chiang and the Nationalists had retreated to an island once under Japanese rule, Formosa (Taiwan). From there, Chiang still claimed to be the legitimate government for all of China. The United States continued to support Chiang and refused to recognize Mao Zedong's regime in Beijing (the People's Republic of China) until 30 years later, in 1979.

In the United States, Republicans blamed the Democrats for the “loss of China” to the Communists. In 1950, the two Communist dictators, Stalin and Mao, signed a Sino-Soviet pact, which seemed to provide further proof of a worldwide Communist conspiracy.

### ***The Korean War***

After the defeat of Japan, its former colony Korea was divided along the 38th parallel by the victors. Soviet armies occupied Korean territory north of the line, while U.S. forces occupied territory to the south. By 1949 both armies were withdrawn, leaving the North in the hands of the Communist leader Kim Il Sung and the South under the conservative nationalist Syngman Rhee.

**Invasion** On June 25, 1950, the North Korean army surprised the world, possibly even Moscow, by invading South Korea. Truman took immediate action, applying his containment policy to this latest crisis in Asia. He called for a special session of the U.N. Security Council. Taking advantage of a temporary boycott by the Soviet delegation, the Security Council under U.S. leadership authorized a U.N. force to defend South Korea against the invaders. Although other nations participated in this force, U.S. troops made up most of the U.N. forces sent to help the South Korean army. Commanding the expedition was General Douglas MacArthur. Congress supported the use of U.S. troops in the Korean crisis but failed to declare war, accepting Truman’s characterization of U.S. intervention as merely a “police action.”

**Counterattack** At first the war in Korea went badly, as the North Koreans pushed the combined South Korean and American forces to the tip of the peninsula. However, General MacArthur reversed the war with a brilliant amphibious assault at Inchon behind the North Korean lines. U.N. forces then proceeded to destroy much of the North Korean army, advancing northward almost as far as the Chinese border. MacArthur failed to heed China’s warnings that it would resist threats to its security. In November 1950, masses of Chinese troops crossed the border into Korea, overwhelmed U.N. forces in one of the worst defeats in U.S. military history, and drove them out of North Korea.

**Truman Versus MacArthur** MacArthur stabilized the fighting near the 38th parallel. At the same time, he called for expanding the war, including bombing and invading mainland China. As commander in chief, Truman cautioned MacArthur about making public statements that suggested criticism of official U.S. policy. The general spoke out anyway. In April 1951, Truman, with the support of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, recalled MacArthur for insubordination.

MacArthur returned home as a hero. Most Americans understood his statement, “There is no substitute for victory,” better than the president’s containment policy and concept of “limited war.” Critics attacked Truman and the Democrats as appeasers for not trying to destroy communism in Asia.

**Armistice** In Korea, the war was stalemated along a front just north of the 38th parallel. At Panmunjom, peace talks began in July 1951. The police action dragged on for another two years, however, until an armistice was finally

## THE KOREAN WAR



signed in 1953 during the first year of Eisenhower's presidency. More than 2.5 million people died in the Korean conflict, including 54,000 Americans.

**Political Consequences** From the perspective of the grand strategy of the Cold War, Truman's containment policy in Korea worked. It stopped Communist aggression without allowing the conflict to develop into a world war. The Truman administration used the Korean War as justification for dramatically expanding the military, funding a new jet bomber (the B-52), and stationing more U.S. troops in overseas bases.

However, Republicans were far from satisfied. The stalemate in Korea and the loss of China led Republicans to characterize Truman and the Democrats as "soft on communism." They attacked leading Democrats as members of "Dean Acheson's Cowardly College of Communist Containment." (In 1949, Acheson had replaced George Marshall as secretary of state.)

## The Second Red Scare

Just as a Red Scare had followed U.S. victory in World War I, a second Red Scare followed U.S. victory in World War II. The Truman administration's

tendency to see a Communist conspiracy behind civil wars in Europe and Asia contributed to the belief that Communist conspirators and spies had infiltrated American society, including the U.S. State Department and the U.S. military.

### ***Security and Civil Rights***

In 1947, the Truman administration—under pressure from Republican critics—set up a Loyalty Review Board to investigate the background of more than 3 million federal employees. Thousands of officials and civil service employees either resigned or lost their jobs in a probe that went on for four years (1947–1951).

**Prosecutions Under the Smith Act** In addition, the leaders of the American Communist party were jailed for advocating the overthrow of the U.S. government. In the case of *Dennis et al. v. United States* (1951), the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the Smith Act of 1940, which made it illegal to advocate or teach the overthrow of the government by force or to belong to an organization with this objective.

**McCarran Internal Security Act (1950)** Over Truman’s veto, Congress passed the McCarran Internal Security Act, which (1) made it unlawful to advocate or support the establishment of a totalitarian government, (2) restricted the employment and travel of those joining Communist-front organizations, and (3) authorized the creation of detention camps for subversives.

**Un-American Activities** In the House of Representatives, the Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), originally established in 1939 to seek out Nazis, was reactivated in the postwar years to find Communists. The committee not only investigated government officials but also looked for Communist influence in such organizations as the Boy Scouts and in the Hollywood film industry. Actors, directors, and writers were called before the committee to testify. Those who refused to testify were tried for contempt of Congress. Others were blacklisted from the industry.

**Cultural Impact** The Second Red Scare had a chilling effect on freedom of expression. Creators of the gritty crime dramas in the film noir style, and playwrights, such as Arthur Miller (*Death of a Salesman*, 1949) came under attacks as anti-American. Rodgers and Hammerstein’s musical, *South Pacific* (1949), was criticized, especially by southern politicians, as a communistic assault on racial segregation. Loyalty oaths were commonly required of writers and teachers as a condition of employment. The American Civil Liberties Union and other opponents of these security measures argued that the 1st Amendment protected the free expression of unpopular political views and membership in political groups, including the Communist party.

### ***Espionage Cases***

The fear of a Communist conspiracy bent on world conquest was supported by a series of actual cases of Communist espionage in Great Britain, Canada, and

the United States. The methods used to identify Communist spies, however, raised serious questions about whether the government was going too far and violating civil liberties in the process.

**Hiss Case** Whittaker Chambers, a confessed Communist, became a star witness for the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1948. His testimony, along with the investigative work of a young member of Congress from California named Richard Nixon, led to the trial of Alger Hiss, a prominent official in the State Department who had assisted Roosevelt at the Yalta Conference. Hiss denied the accusations that he was a Communist and had given secret documents to Chambers. In 1950, however, he was convicted of perjury and sent to prison. Many Americans could not help wondering whether the highest levels of government were infiltrated by Communist spies.

**Rosenberg Case** When the Soviets tested their first atomic bomb in 1949, many Americans were convinced that spies had helped them to steal the technology from the United States. Klaus Fuchs, a British scientist who had worked on the Manhattan Project, admitted giving A-bomb secrets to the Russians. An FBI investigation traced another spy ring to Julius and Ethel Rosenberg in New York. After a controversial trial in 1951, the Rosenbergs were found guilty of treason and executed in 1953. Civil rights groups charged that anticommunist hysteria was responsible for the conviction and punishment of the Rosenbergs.

### ***The Rise of Joseph McCarthy***

Joseph McCarthy, a Republican senator from Wisconsin, used the growing concern over communism in his reelection campaign. In a speech in 1950, he charged that 205 Communists were still working for the State Department. This sensational accusation was widely publicized in the American press. McCarthy then rode the wave of anticommunist feelings to make himself one of the most powerful men in America. His power was based entirely on people's fear of the damage McCarthy could do if his accusing finger pointed their way.

**McCarthy's Tactics** Senator McCarthy used a steady stream of unsupported accusations about Communists in government to keep the media focus on himself and to discredit the Truman administration. Working-class Americans at first loved his "take the gloves off" hard-hitting remarks, which were often aimed at the wealthy and privileged in society. While many Republicans disliked McCarthy's ruthless tactics, he was primarily hurting the Democrats before the election of Eisenhower in 1952. He became so popular, however, that even President Eisenhower would not dare to defend his old friend, George Marshall, against McCarthy's untruths.

**Army-McCarthy Hearings** Finally, in 1954, McCarthy's "reckless cruelty" was exposed on television. A Senate committee held televised hearings on Communist infiltration in the army, and McCarthy was seen as a bully by millions of viewers. In December, Republicans joined Democrats in a Senate censure of McCarthy. The "witch hunt" for Communists (McCarthyism) had played itself out. Three years later, McCarthy died a broken man.



## ***Truman in Retirement***

The second Red Scare, the stalemate in Korea, the loss of China, and scandals surrounding several of Truman's advisers made his prospects of reelection unlikely. Truman decided to return to private life in Missouri—a move that he jokingly called his “promotion.” In the election of 1952, Republicans blamed Truman for “the mess in Washington.” In time, however, even Truman's critics came to respect his many tough decisions and admire his direct, frank character.

### **HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES: WHO STARTED THE COLD WAR?**

Among U.S. historians, the traditional, or orthodox, view of the origins of the Cold War is that the Soviet government under Stalin started the conflict by subjugating the countries of Eastern Europe in the late 1940s. Historians who share this view criticize FDR for failing to understand the Soviets' aggressive intentions and for the agreement at Yalta. The traditional view holds that the Truman Doctrine, Marshall Plan, and NATO finally checked Soviet expansion in Europe. The United States in the Cold War (as in both world wars) was viewed as the defender of the “free world.”

In the 1960s, during the time of public unhappiness over the Vietnam War, revisionist historians began to argue that the United States contributed to starting the Cold War. These historians praised Roosevelt for understanding Russia's historical needs for security on its eastern borders. On the other hand, they blamed Truman for antagonizing the Soviets with his blunt challenge of their actions in Poland and the Balkans. Gar Alperovitz (*The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb*, 1995) concluded that Truman had dropped atomic bombs on Japan primarily to warn Stalin to remove his troops from Eastern Europe. Other revisionists have also argued that U.S. capitalism's need for open markets in Europe and Asia was the main reason for the U.S. government's anti-communist policies.

In the 21st century, John L. Gaddis (*The Cold War: A New History*, 2005), recognized by some as “the dean of Cold War historians,” argued that the causes of the Cold War were rooted in the Big Three's failure “to reconcile divergent political objectives even as they pursued a common military task” during World War II. Gaddis suggested that objective observers would not have expected a different outcome given that great power rivalries are the normal pattern in history. However, he credits both Truman and Stalin for recognizing how atomic weapons changed the context of war and making decisions that avoided a nuclear war. Gaddis concluded that the most important aspect of the Cold War is what did not happen—a nuclear holocaust.

**KEY TERMS BY THEME****Postwar Society (WXT, CUL)**

Servicemen's Readjustment Act (GI Bill) (1944)  
early marriages  
baby boom  
suburban growth  
Levittown  
Sunbelt  
Harry Truman  
Employment Act of 1946  
Council of Economic Advisers  
inflation and labor unions  
Committee on Civil Rights  
racial integration of military  
22nd Amendment  
Taft-Hartley Act (1947)

**Election of 1948 (POL)**

Progressive party  
Henry Wallace  
States-Rights party (Dixiecrats)  
J. Strom Thurmond  
Thomas Dewey  
Fair Deal

**Origins of the Cold War (WOR)**

Cold War  
Soviet Union  
Joseph Stalin  
United Nations  
Security Council  
World Bank  
Communist satellites  
Occupation zones  
Iron Curtain  
Winston Churchill  
historians: traditionalists vs. revisionists

**Containment in Europe (WOR)**

George Kennan  
Dean Acheson  
containment policy  
Truman Doctrine  
Marshall Plan  
Berlin airlift  
East Germany  
West Germany  
North Atlantic Treaty Organization  
National Security Act (1947)  
Nuclear arms race  
NSC-68

**Cold War in Asia (WOR)**

U.S.-Japanese Security Treaty  
Douglas MacArthur  
Chinese civil war  
Chiang Kai-shek  
Taiwan  
Mao Zedong  
People's Republic of China  
Korean War  
Kim Il Sung  
Syngman Rhee  
U.N. police action  
38th parallel  
"soft on communism"

**Second Red Scare (POL, CUL)**

Loyalty Review Board  
Smith Act (1940)  
*Dennis et al. v. United States*  
McCarran Internal Security Act (1950)  
House Un-American Activities Committee  
Hollywood blacklists  
freedom of expression in arts  
Alger Hiss  
Whittaker Chambers  
Rosenberg case  
Joseph McCarthy  
McCarthyism