

## The Cold War – Examination of American Power and a Test of American Ideals

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### Abstract

As the Iron Curtain dropped across Europe and Cold War began to shape, no one was sure to predict that freedom and openness would finally win.

The statesman of that time, nevertheless succeeded magnificently in formulating the doctrines, creating the alliances, and building the institutions that maintained freedom, contained the spread of communism.

Since victory of WWII, the Truman administration envisaged the essential principles of the nation's foreign and domestic policies in the postwar period.

Prompted by the technological reduction of the world and the emergence of the Cold War, Truman and Congress had obliged the United States to continuing international engagement, involving collective security and to diverse and development programs.

**Keywords:** Confrontation, Containment Doctrine, curtain, defense research, iron, Marshall Plan, national security, reconstruction

### Introduction

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How the U.S. foreign relations unfolded over the XX century, was greatly impacted by the legacy of America's founding ideals of securing individual rights and freedom. Like other countries functioning on the global stage, the United States has both played an active role in and been acted upon by international affairs – and periodically forced into a role not of its choosing. Many of these past events have been crucial in shaping the current U.S. response to the crises, chances, and manifold trade – offs of international relations.

In ordinary times, when existing ideas, institutions, and alliance are adequate to the challenges of the day, the purpose of statecraft is to manage and sustain the established international order. But in extraordinary times, when the very terrain of history shifts beneath our feet, the mission of statecraft is to transform our institutions and partnerships to release new purposes on the basis of enduring principles.

One such extraordinary moment began in 1945, in the wreckage of one of the greatest calamities in human history. Would World War II thoroughly consumed the old international system. And it fell to a group of American statesmen - President Harry Truman, Secretaries of State George C. Marshall (1945-1947) and Dean Acheson (1947-1953), and Senator Arthur Vandenberg – to assume the roles of architects and builders of a better world. The solutions to these past challenges seem perfectly clear now with half a century of hindsight. But it was anything but clear for the men and women who lived and worked in those times of unprecedented change (Condoleezza Rice).

In 1946, the reconstruction in Germany was failing and Germans were still starving. Japan lay prostrate. In 1947, there was a civil war in Greece. In 1948, Czechoslovakia was lost to a communist coup. In 1949, Germany was divided, the Soviet Union exploded a nuclear weapon, and the Chinese communists won the civil war. In 1950, a brutal war broke out on the Korean Peninsula.

There were not just tactical setbacks for the forward march of democracy. As the Iron Curtain descended across Europe and the Cold War began to take shape, it was far from evident that freedom and openness would ultimately triumph.

The statesmen of that era, however, succeeded brilliantly in conceiving the doctrine, creating the alliances and building the institutions that preserved freedom, contained the spread of communism, and ultimately resulted in the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Warsaw Pact, and the ideology of Marxism – Leninism (Rice, 2006, p. 4).

With the defeat of Germany in 1945 and the widespread wreckage the war had brought throughout Europe, the United States and the Soviet Union stood for contending and contradictory philosophies, objectives, and plans for rebuilding and recognizing the continent.

The Soviets acted from a synthesis of ideological obligation and geopolitical realism. It soon became evident, that Moscow would now demand communist regimes in Poland, Czechoslovakia (Now Czech Republic), Romania, Bulgaria and other East Europeans.

The outlook from Washington was very different. American leaders then believed that U.S. political isolation from Europe after the First World War had been a colossal mistake, that presumably contributed to the rise of Hitler and almost resulted in the continent's domination by a hostile power that could threaten U.S. national security. Now, with Soviet forces settled on half of the continent, and with communists strong in France, Italy, and most important of all, Germany, U.S. politicians had reason to be vigilant.

The distinction between a liberal, individualistic, United States and the centrally planned, politically repressive Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was absolutely extreme; as the two began to compete for the loyalty of Europe and the newly independent nations from colonial control (ibid, p.13).

## **The Emergence of the Cold War**

The immediate postwar years in foreign affairs were identified as the beginning of the Cold War. That confrontation subsequently cost the United States trillions of dollars, half a century of the scare of nuclear annihilation, the loss of thousands of lives in local war, the weakening of democratic institutions in the name of the need to maintain national security. Hot historical debate was generated identifying the responsibility for the origin of the Cold War – Stalin or Truman.

When Truman entered the White House, relations between the Western Allies and Stalin were already unfriendly. Truman's defenders underline that although like Roosevelt, from the beginning he was indisposed to be hostile with the Soviet Union, he was rightly angered by the spread of Soviet totalitarianism to Eastern Europe. He was also worried that Stalin's control of Eastern Europe would deny American industry access to the region that would damage the economies of both Central Europe and the United States. Truman's critics charged him for his determination to maintain the American atomic monopoly,

specifying that nuclear weapons would help the United States to keep the Russians in line. They blamed him for not understanding that the Soviet Union had legitimate national interests in Eastern Europe. Truman's hard position surprised Stalin. Stalin defined an agreement he had reached with Churchill in 1944 and perhaps the Yalta agreements as well as the acknowledgment of a Soviet Sphere of influence in Eastern Europe. He considered the states in the region, especially Poland, as the first line of defense against another invasion from the West. Truman's critics also dispute, that he postponed a response to urgent Soviet requests for \$6 billion in credits.

Misunderstandings on both sides contributed to the origins of the Cold War. But the United States and the Soviet Union were also divided by a clash of political, economic, and ideological interests that Truman could hardly disregard. Stalin endeavoring to suppress the impulse of independence in Poland, suppressed freedom of speech, the press and religion there. Truman was aware that conservatives were attacking the Yalta agreements as a "sellout" of Eastern Europe and that encroachment of pro-Soviet regimes in the region infuriated millions of Catholics and Americans of Eastern European origin, many of them Democratic voters.

In the beginning of 1946, Truman privately stated that he was "tired of babying the Soviets", while Winston Churchill gave a speech expressing fear about the "expansive tendencies" of the Soviet Union. "From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic (port in Italy), an iron curtain has descended across the Continent", Churchill declared. He added that from what he had seen of the Russians during the war, "I am convinced that there is nothing they admire so much as strength, and there is nothing for which they have less respect than weakness, especially military weakness" (Maier, Smith, Keyssar & Kevles, p. 859).

Truman showed strength. Stalin, his eye in Iranian oil, kept Soviet troops in Iran after they were supposed to pull out according the War agreements. They withdrew in May 1946 after the United States protested to the United Nations and were ready to confront the Soviets directly.

### **Division Over the Atom**

Whatever their contradiction toward the Soviets, Americans took delight in the knowledge, that the United States alone possessed the atomic bomb. American policymakers saw the bomb as a means of contending Soviet superiority in conventional military forces in Eastern Europe. In 1946, the army air force established the Strategic Air Command, whose mission was to deliver

nuclear bombs against the Soviet Union. With the aim of further developing the American atomic arsenal, the administration had submitted to Congress a proposal to create an Atomic Energy Commission (AEC). The agency would be empowered to foster research and development in nuclear energy, but it was evident, the chief object of the nuclear energy program would not be peaceful, but the military atom. Many scientists protested the subjugation of the AEC to much military influence.

Meanwhile, a number of atomic scientists believed that the Soviets, knowing that there could be no adequate defense against nuclear weapons, might bring about an agreement for international control of nuclear energy.

However, proposals for an international agreement on atomic energy failed on the United States' desire to maintain its nuclear monopoly and the Soviet determination to break it (after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Stalin entitled a crash program to build a Soviet Nuclear Weapon).

### **The Doctrine of Containment**

By 1946, some politicians in the Truman administration had begun debating for a consistent policy with the Soviet Union that was not subject to nuclear weapons. It was obvious, that only existence of the bomb would not impact actions in Eastern Europe and it would not force a change in the Polish government. The most evidently bomb would only stimulate tensions with the Soviets. Among the critics was George F. Kennan, the U.S. chief of mission in Moscow, a scholar-diplomat well-aware of Russian history. In 1946 in an 8000-word telegram to Washington informing about the Soviets' aggressiveness induced by a "traditional and instinctive Russian sense of insecurity" arising from Russia's longstanding vulnerability to invasion from the West and its sense of the archaic inferiority of its institutions. Soviet ambitions thus ought to be contained geographically and politically, with the expectation that over time the Soviet state would break up. In an article published two months later under the pseudonym "X", Keenan called the policy "containment". His analysis greatly influenced the Truman's administrations' views about how to respond to the Soviets (Maier, p. 863).

Truman first spoke about the doctrine of containment early in 1947, in a policy initiative impelling by the situation in Greece. Since the end of the war, Britain had been providing aid to the Greek government fight a civil war against pro-Communist insurgents, who it was presumed, had been supported by the Soviets, actually getting help from Yugoslavia, not from Stalin. In February 1947, Britain informed the United States that it could

no longer supply such assistance and would pull its troops out of the country. Secretary of State Dean Acheson, a strong advocate of containment, advised Truman that a Communists assuming of control in Greece would make Turkey susceptible to the Soviets and might open the Near East and Africa as well as Italy and France to Soviet penetration. In March, Truman addressed both houses of Congress warning that the fall of Greece would lead to losses to freedom elsewhere. "I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressure," Truman declared, enunciating the commitment that came to be known as the Truman Doctrine. In mid-May, by sizable majorities in both houses, Congress allotted \$40 million, mainly for military aid, for Greece and Turkey over the succeeding fifteen months – thus enabling U.S. intervention in a foreign civil conflict for the first time in the postwar era. Conservatives such as Senator Robert Taft questioned whether the policy of containment was practical or wise for the United States. Henry Wallace spoke for critics on the left, who questioned the policy as unnecessarily aggressive.

### The Marshall Plan

In the spring of 1947, George C. Marshall, Secretary of State was greatly worried about Europe, much of it depleted and still destroyed buildings. Communist Parties in Italy and France were acquiring strength. Furthermore, America's blossoming prosperity depended in part on a prodigious export trade, largely with Europe, but Europe's amount of dollars was expiring to pay for its purchases. In a graduation address at Harvard in June, Marshall warned that if the United States did not help restore Europe's economy, "economic, social, and political deterioration of a very grave character" would result (ibid, p. 864). Under the Marshall Plan, European governments would get grants of American goods that they could sell, using money derived from this venture for investing in their economics. Truman thought of the two programs as complementary, "two halves of the same walnut". Senator Arthur Vandenberg backed it, calling it a "calculated risk" to "help stop World War III before it starts".

In February of 1948, Communists seized control of the government in Czechoslovakia, bringing that country into the trajectory of Soviet control and sending shocking news through the West. Congress enacted the Marshall Plan before the end of the month, primarily entitling \$4 billion and adding another \$8.5 billion over the next three years. By 1951, the European recipients of the funds had increased their industrial output by 40 percent in comparison with the last prewar years.

### In Defense of Europe

In 1947, the Soviet Union, aiming to strengthen its control on Eastern and Central Europe, announced an economic revitalization program of its own – the "Molotov Plan", which was inaugurated with bilateral trade agreements with countries in the Eastern bloc. Stalin also began destroying political dissidence in Eastern Europe, restoring show trials, forced concessions, and executions. In August, the Soviets moved out all left-wing anti-Communists from the Hungarian leadership and then rigged the elections to bring in a pro-Soviet regime, initiatives that predicted the coup the following February.

The United States, Berlin, and with some hesitation, France saw the restoration of the German economy as a means of stimulating stability and resistance to the Soviets in Western Europe. In Spring of 1948 they pushed the plan to unite the three Western zones of occupation into a West German state that would include the Western zone of Berlin and be integrated into the European economy. Defeating the Soviet decision to keep Germany weak, the effort would put the industrially rich Ruhr Valley perpetually out of reach to the Soviets and develop a dynamic Western sector of Berlin deep in Soviet-held territory.

In June, the Soviets cut off the flow of supplies by rail and truck from the Western zones of Germany into Berlin. Stalin's aim was to force the Western powers either to abstain from the creation of a West German state or abandon West Berlin.

Truman, persistent to maintain West Berlin without violent confrontation, ordered an ongoing airlift of food and medical supplies into the city. American C-54 cargo planes began flying from the Western zones to West Berlin, landing about every three minutes around the clock and delivering 13,000 tons of goods a day. In July, Truman sent two groups of nuclear-capable B-29s to England, hidden warning to the Soviets that they should not interfere with the Berlin-bound planes. The Soviets cancelled the Berlin blockade on May 12, 1949, 321 days after the airlift began. That month, the United States, Britain, and France ended their occupation of the Western zones and approved their union into the Federal Republic of Germany. The Soviets turned their zones into the German Democratic Republic, thus confirming the division of postwar Germany into East and West.

The blockade, which practically transformed the image of Berlin in American eyes from Hitler's capital to a heroic outpost of freedom, generated increased support for a strategy of toughness towards Russia. Congress, reviewing the peacetime military draft, in April 1949, the United States joined in creating the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), an alliance of the

North Atlantic Nations, each of which pledged, in the language of the treaty's Article 5, to consider "an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe, or North America... an attack against them all". For the United States, the formed obligation to the defense of Europe marked a historic break from its tradition of avoiding peacetime alliances (ibid, p. 865).

## **The Far East**

The Truman administration also enlisted Japan in the objective of containment. At the end of the war, General Douglas MacArthur had been appointed head of the occupation forces in Japan to reconstitute the Japanese system of government. In continuing with U.S. policy, he inflicted on Japan a new democratic constitution that included everlasting rejection of war. The country appeared largely to be a stable, anti-Communist power in the Pacific, one that could oppose to Soviet ambitions in the region, as the United States hoped Germany would do in Europe. In 1947-48, as U.S.-Soviet relations worsened, the United States decided to rebuild Japanese industry, backtracking its earlier postwar policy, and to expand its military bases in Japan.

## **Vigorous Strength of National Security**

Despite the fact, that defense allotment continued to fall the defense budget in 1949 was about \$14 billion, much higher than after arrangement for inflation than it had been in 1939. Considering the lessons of the war, policy-makers presumed, that the mechanism of national security needed to be better organized, more efficient, and well informed about developments elsewhere in the world. In 1947, Congress passed the National Security Act, which established an independent air force as a coequal branch of the military and unified all three-armed services in a single military establishment named the Department of Defense (DOD). The act also created a National Security Council for better coordination between the military services and the State Department, and it established a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to coordinate foreign intelligence gathering. The first, secretary defense was James Forrestal, an ambitious man who had been secretary of the navy and was an anti-Soviet hard-liner.

## **The CIA**

The CIA had its roots in the wartime Office of Strategic Service, which had not only gathered intelligence, but also sponsored

covert activities. Although the CIA was initially limited to gathering and analyzing intelligence, after the Czech coup Truman allowed it to engage in covert operations. Among the First, the CIA influenced an Italian election by passing several million dollars to the Christian Democrats, helping them defeat the Communists.

## **Defense Research and Development**

The onset of the Cold War reinforced the notion that federal support of scientific research and development (R&D) made up a key element in the nation's defense. The armed services, willing to improve on the innovations in wartime military technology propelled technological programs in areas such as nuclear weapons and nuclear-powered ships, long-range bombers and rockets, and systems of microwave detection, control, and communication. It was obvious that achieving these goals would require firm course of knowledge and more trained technical personnel, particularly physicists – scientists who had been in short supply during the war.

After the war the military strengthened its existing technical bureaus and in 1946 established an important new one – the Office of Naval Research, whose aim was to lay the technical basis for radical new weapons. The armed services also designed a system of links with the civilian scientific community. Meanwhile the Atomic Energy Commission called on a distinguished adversary group, chaired by J. Robert Oppenheimer. The AEC took over the great atomic research installations constructed during the war, but both the AEC and the military bureaus also awarded grants and contracts for R & D to industrial and academic laboratories for the government, e.g. the University of California managed the nuclear weapons facility at Los Alamos for the AEC.

The substantial majority of the military's support of research went for investigations in subjects tightly related to the technologies of national security – e.g. jet-powered air-craft, the newest innovation in flight. The Strategic Air Command (SAC) helped develop a jet bomber that could carry nuclear weapons from remote bases – Spain, North Africa, Iceland, and the Azores – to targets in the Soviet Union. The successful design was the Boeing Corporation's B-47, a bomber that carried its jet engines in pods under its swept-back wings and that flew twice as fast as the B-29 over 20,000 feet than virtually any current fighter (ibid, p. 866).

The Office of Naval Research introduced important support for the development of a new technological innovation – electronic computers – promise for a number of fields. Such

computers were created as a result of the desire of some scientists and engineers to find a means to calculate artillery – firing tables better than hundreds of people were doing the necessary arithmetic with handoperated adding machines. The first electronic computer, called ENIAC was completed at about the end of 1945 under a military contract at the University of Pennsylvania by J. Presper Eckert, a twenty-four-year-old electronics engineer, and John W. Mauchly, a young physicist. The computer would perform 5,000 operations per second. Promptly utilized to do a complicated nuclear weapons calculation that would have taken one person 100 years at a desk calculator, it finished the job in six weeks. ENIAC lacked crucial elements in this design – e.g. a capacious physical memory and an operating program – but during next few years projects developed electronic computers, containing all the von Neumann elements, thus laying the foundations of the American computer industry. Market was created for computers by military contractors longing to employ them in R & D for aeronautics and rockets. The development of digital computers was part of the larger trend – what some analysts called “Pentagon Capitalism”, technological development through military expenditures. Maintaining military superiority in peacetime required innovation in every sector of the scientific enterprise, including basic research – investigating basic laws and phenomena of nature, regardless their practical value. So, while focusing on the development of nuclear weapons, the AEC sponsored research around a broad range of subjects, including high-energy particle physics, nuclear physics, nuclear medicine, and genetics. The Office of Naval Research became the major sponsor of the country’s nonnuclear basic research.

United States intensively led the world in science, because, on the one hand, a lot of great centers of European research were deteriorated, on the other hand, the U.S. greatly developed capabilities in the public and private sectors.

By the middle of the century, the AEC and the military between them esteemed 90 percent of all federal dollars going into scientific research and training, “calling the tune for U.S. universities and signing up the best scientists for work mainly at military results” (ibid, p. 867). In 1950, a civilian National Science Foundation (NSF) was established to take responsibility for the basic science. By that time federal R & D (research and development expenditures summed up to \$1 billion, about 50 percent more than they had been in 1946. About half came from the Defense Department, another 40 percent from the AEC.

## **Prosperity and Tolerance**

### **A Flourishing Economy**

The increased level of defense spending helped to boost the post-war economy. The federal budget, falling after the war, reached \$billion in 1950, more than four times what it had been 1939. An encouraging signal came from the birthrate, during the Depression the number of live births per 1.000 Americans had averaged around 19. By 1947, it had risen 40 percent to 26.6, the highest since 1921. Marking the beginning of a baby boom, it would remain 24 or higher until the end of the fifties.

The United States led all other nations combined in the production of steel, oil, and automobiles, providing its citizens with higher incomes on average than their counterparts elsewhere. People had money in the bank, the accumulated savings of the war years and they went ahead of buying electric clothes dryers, Polaroid cameras, and cars with automatic transmissions. The gross national product, \$200 billion in 1946, reached \$318 billion by 1950. Fewer veterans than predicted immediately entered the labor market, as thousands of them, almost half, got G.I. Bill to start businesses or get an education. Unemployment stayed down, slightly more than 4 percent.

### **Subversion and Security**

The creation of the Soviet atomic bomb impelled a number of Americans to assign Communist victories abroad to subversion at home. Soon, after the war, Canadian authorities had exposed a Soviet atomic spy ring operating out of their country with connections to the United States; early in February 1950, a few days after the administration’s decision to progress with the H-bomb, the British reported that Klaus Fuchs, a Communist and a key physicist at Los Alamos during the war, had been turning over atomic secrets to the Soviet Union since 1943. Professional authorities said that Fuchs’s espionage had accelerated the Soviet nuclear weapons program by a year or two.

Communists and Communist sympathizers were to be found in different layers of American life, involving universities, science, government, entertainment, and the media. Many had come to like Communism during the thirties, thinking it the response to the Great Depression. Whatever their motives, they were subverting American Democracy, as the Communist Party, distinct from ordinary parties, usually followed the Soviet line. Disclosure of espionage was enough to make not only Communists but non-Communists on the political left vulnerable to accusation of disloyalty.

In 1947, to retaliate Republican charges that he was soft on Communism, president Truman issued an executive order establishing a program to check the loyalty of the 2.5 million people who worked for the federal government. Among the criteria for suspicion of disloyalty would be past or present membership in totalitarian, fascist, or subversive organizations on a list to be drawn up by the attorney general (ibid, p. 876).

### The House Un-American Activities

In 1938 the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) was established. During the war, its chair, Congressman Martin Dies of Texas requested to find Communist influence in labor union, government bureau, and among African Americans who rioted in Detroit; and now his successors made clear that they intended to continue the search for saboteurs in American life. In 1949, the National Education Association – public-school teachers' body, voted unanimously that Communists were "unfit" to teach in the schools; the President of Columbia University announced that the same criterion should apply to university professors. Loyalty oaths were enacted by fifteen states by 1953, the total would reach thirty-four.

In 1950, the committee produced National Security Council Memorandum Number 68 (NSC-68), which stated that the Soviet Union was a threat "not only to this Republic but to civilization itself" and that in few years it would be capable of mounting a surprise atomic attack of potentially devastating proportions.

### Conclusion

Since the day of victory of WWII, the Truman administration had molded the essential elements of the nations' foreign and domestic policies in the postwar era. It had successfully managed transformation of a peacetime economy, advanced the Fair Deal version of the welfare state. Prompted by the technological contraction of the world and the emergence of the Cold War, Truman and the Congress had committed the United States to continuing international engagement, including collective security and to diverse programs, research and development among them, to boost national defense. Arming the country for Cold War had made the military amazingly powerful force in already a peacetime life.

Due to rapid technological, military, social, cultural changes, American embarked on a glorious road to economic and political progress, reaching the top of global power.

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