

Cold War Politics in the Truman Years

1945–1953

Chapter Learning Objectives

1. How did U.S. foreign policy shift from the grand alliance to containment? What were the origins of the cold war, and what was Truman's initial response to it? How did the United States seek to build a national security state, and what were the effects of superpower rivalry on U.S. foreign policy?
2. What was President Truman's Fair Deal program? How were his policy recommendations shaped by postwar reconversion and economic concerns? Why did the Fair Deal flounder?
3. Why did the United States commit ground troops in Korea, and what were the consequences of the military implementation of containment? Describe the fate of U.S. efforts in Korea, and explain the war's influence on the presidential election of 1952. What were the costs of the Korean War?
3. At the war's end, Soviet leader Joseph Stalin wanted to make Germany pay for the rebuilding of the Soviet economy, decimated during the war, and to expand Soviet influence in the world.
4. In contrast, the United States emerged from the war with a vastly expanded productive capacity and a monopoly on atomic weapons, making it the most powerful nation on the planet.
5. Fearing a return of the depression, U.S. officials believed that a healthy economy depended on opportunities abroad.
6. Both leaders and citizens regarded their foreign policy not as a self-interested campaign to guarantee economic interests but as the means to preserve national security and bring freedom, democracy, and capitalism to the rest of the world.
7. Recent history also shaped postwar foreign policy; many Americans believed World War II might have been prevented had Hitler's initial aggression been resisted rather than appeased.
8. Harry S. Truman, the man with ultimate responsibility for U.S. foreign policy, was a keen student of history but came to the White House with little experience in international affairs.
9. Soviet and American interests clashed first in Eastern Europe.
10. Stalin considered U.S. officials hypocritical for demanding democratic elections in Eastern Europe while supporting

Annotated Chapter Outline

I. From the Grand Alliance to Containment

A. The Cold War Begins

1. Once the Allies had overcome a common enemy, the prewar mistrust and antagonism between the Soviet Union and the West resurfaced over their very different visions of the postwar world.
2. The Western Allies' delay in opening a second front in Western Europe aroused Soviet suspicions during the war.

- dictatorships friendly to U.S. interests in Cuba and other Latin American countries.
11. In 1946, the wartime Allies contended over Germany's future.
 12. The war of words escalated, and in March 1946, Truman traveled with Winston Churchill to Fulton, Missouri, where the former prime minister denounced Soviet suppression of the popular will in Eastern and central Europe and famously declared that an "iron curtain" had descended across the continent.
 13. In February 1946, career diplomat George F. Kennan wrote a comprehensive rationale for a hard-line foreign policy.
 14. Kennan predicted that the Soviet Union would retreat from efforts to expand its influence worldwide "in the face of superior force."
 15. Not all public figures accepted the toughening line, but those who criticized the administration's policy met stiff resistance from Truman's cabinet.
- B. The Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan
1. In 1947, the United States moved from tough words to action, implementing the policy of containment that would guide foreign policy for the next forty years.
 2. Crises in Greece and Turkey triggered the implementation of containment.
 3. Outlining what would later be called the domino theory, Truman warned that if Greece fell into the hands of leftist rebels who were challenging the government, "confusion and disorder" would spread throughout the entire Middle East and eventually would threaten Europe.
 4. According to what came to be called the Truman Doctrine, the United States would not only resist Soviet military power but also lend its support to countries resisting Soviet incursions.
 5. Congress authorized aid for Greece and Turkey and later followed with a much larger assistance program for Europe.
 6. In March 1948, Congress approved the European Recovery Program – the Marshall Plan – and over the next five years, the United States spent \$13 billion to restore the economies of Western Europe.
 7. While Congress debated the Marshall Plan, in February 1948, the Soviets staged a brutal coup against the government of Czechoslovakia, installing a Communist regime, and they blockaded Berlin.
 8. In 1949, Berlin was divided into East Berlin, under Soviet control, and West Berlin, which became part of West Germany.
- C. Building a National Security State
1. The new policy of containment quickly acquired a military capacity to back it up.
 2. After learning that the Soviets had successfully detonated an atomic bomb, thus ending the U.S. monopoly on nuclear weapons, Truman approved development of an even deadlier weapon, a hydrogen bomb.
 3. From the 1950s to the 1980s, deterrence formed the basis of American nuclear strategy.
 4. The United States also beefed up its conventional military power to deter Soviet threats that might not warrant nuclear retaliation.
 5. Collective security, the third prong of postwar military strategy and the sharpest break from America's past, also developed during the Berlin showdown.
 6. The fourth element of defense strategy involved foreign assistance programs to strengthen friendly countries.
 7. The fifth element of the national security state was development of the government's espionage capacities and the means to deter communism through covert activities.
 8. By 1950, the United States had abandoned age-old tenets of foreign policy.
- D. Superpower Rivalry around the Globe
1. Efforts to implement containment moved beyond Europe to Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.
 2. Leaders of many liberation movements, impressed with the rapid economic growth of Russia, adopted socialist or Communist ideas, although few had formal ties with the Soviet Union.
 3. In Asia, civil war raged in China, where Communists led by Mao Zedong fought the official Nationalist government of Chiang Kai-shek.
 4. The so-called China bloc, a lobby that included Republican members of Congress and religious groups with missionary ties to China, pressured the Truman administration to save that nation from the Communists.
 5. Truman's advisers believed the effort would prove fruitless, and in October 1949, Mao established the People's Republic of China.

6. As it became clear that China would not be a stable capitalist ally in Asia, the administration reconsidered its plans for postwar Japan.
 7. By 1948, U.S. policy had shifted to focus on economic recovery.
 8. The one area where cold war considerations did not control American policy was Palestine.
 9. Truman's foreign policy experts saw American-Arab friendship as a critical barrier against Soviet influence in the Middle East and a means to secure access to Arabian oil, but Truman flouted their advice in favor of supporting the Jewish state of Israel.
- II. Truman and the Fair Deal at Home
- A. Reconversion and the Postwar Economic Boom
1. Despite deprivations during World War II, most Americans had enjoyed a higher standard of living than ever before.
 2. Worried about both sustaining that standard and providing jobs for millions of returning soldiers, Truman asked Congress to enact a twenty-one-point program of social and economic reforms.
 3. Congress approved only one of Truman's key proposals – full-employment legislation – and even that was watered down.
 4. Inflation, not unemployment, turned out to be the most severe problem in the early postwar years.
 5. Labor relations were another thorn in Truman's side as workers saw their wartime wages decline.
 6. Unions sought to preserve wartime gains with the one weapon they had relinquished during the war – the strike.
 7. Although most Americans approved of unions in principle, they became fed up with labor stoppages, blamed unions for rising prices and shortages of consumer goods, and called for more government restrictions on organized labor.
 8. Despite these problems, by 1947 the nation had survived the strains of reconversion and avoided a postwar depression.
 9. The nation's gratitude to its returning soldiers provided yet another economic boost, resulting in the only large welfare measure passed after the New Deal, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act.
- B. Black and Mexican American Protest and the Politics of Civil Rights
1. Black men and women filled 16 percent of military positions in World War II; they as well as civilians resolved that the return to peace would not be a return to the racial injustices of prewar America.
 2. In the postwar years, individual African Americans broke through the color barrier, achieving several "firsts."
 3. Still, in most respects little had changed, especially in the South, where violence greeted African Americans' attempts to assert their rights.
 4. The cold war heightened American leaders' sensitivity to racial issues, as the United States and Society Union competed for the allegiance of new nations with non-white populations emerging in Asia and Africa.
 5. Wrestling with the Democrats' need for northern black and liberal votes as well as white southern votes, Truman acted more boldly on civil rights than had any previous president.
 6. As with much of his domestic program, the president failed to follow up aggressively on his bold words that all Americans should have equal rights to housing, education, employment, and the ballot.
 7. Nonetheless, Truman broke sharply with the past and used his office to set a moral agenda for the nation's longest unfulfilled promise.
 8. Although discussions of race and civil rights initiatives were usually linked to African Americans, Mexican Americans endured similar injustices, and they too raised their voices after World War II.
 9. The routine segregation of children in the public schools energized Mexican Americans.
- C. The Fair Deal Flounders
1. Republicans capitalized on public frustrations with economic reconversion in the 1946 congressional elections.
 2. The Republican-dominated Eightieth Congress weakened some reform programs and enacted tax cuts favoring higher-income groups over Truman's veto.
 3. Organized labor took the most severe attack, when Congress passed the Taft-Hartley Act, which reduced the power of unions and made it more difficult to organize workers, over Truman's veto in 1947.
 4. As the 1948 elections approached, Truman faced not only a resurgent Republican Party headed by its nominee Thomas

- E. Dewey but also two revolts within his own party.
5. Nearly alone in believing he could win, Truman crisscrossed the country by train and gained supporters, stunning the country with his election victory.
 6. Truman failed to turn his victory into success for his Fair Deal agenda, however.
 7. With southern Democrats often joining the Republicans, Congress rejected Truman's civil rights measures and proposals for a federal health care program, federal aid to education, and a new agricultural program to benefit small farmers and consumers.
 8. Although Truman blamed political opponents for defeating his Fair Deal, in fact the president chose to devote much more energy to foreign policy than to his domestic proposals.
- D. The Domestic Chill: A Second Red Scare
1. Truman's domestic program also suffered from a wave of anti-Communist hysteria that weakened left and liberal forces.
 2. Warnings about subversion and attacks on Communists and other radicals went back to the 1920s, but the cold war greatly intensified them.
 3. Records opened in the 1990s showed that the Soviet Union did receive secret documents from Americans, but at most, such information may have marginally hastened Soviet development of nuclear weapons.
 4. Senator Joseph McCarthy's influence as a "red-baiter" was so great that McCarthyism became a term synonymous with the anti-Communist crusade.
 5. Not all Republicans joined McCarthy, nor did the party have a monopoly on the politics of anticommunism.
 6. In March 1947, President Truman issued Executive Order 9835 requiring investigation of every federal employee.
 7. The administration also went directly after the Communist Party, prosecuting its leaders under the Smith Act, passed in 1940, which made it a crime to "advocate the overthrow and destruction of the Government of the United States by force and violence."
 8. The domestic cold war spread beyond the nation's capital to state and local governments, which took on investigations, demanded loyalty oaths, fired individuals suspected of disloyalty, banned books from public libraries, and more.
9. McCarthyism caused untold economic and psychological harm to individuals innocent of breaking any law.
- III. The Cold War Becomes Hot: Korea
- A. Korea and the Military Implementation of Containment
1. The war grew out of the artificial division of Korea at the thirty-eighth parallel after World War II into two occupation zones: the north, supported by the Soviet Union, and the south, supported by the United States.
 2. Skirmishes between North and South Korean troops had occurred since 1948, with both sides crossing the thirty-eighth parallel.
 3. In June 1950, however, ninety thousand North Koreans swept into South Korea.
 4. On June 30, six days after learning of the attack, Truman decided to commit ground troops, believing that Korea was "the Greece of the East" and that the United States must fight communism.
 5. Sixteen nations, including many NATO allies, sent troops to Korea, but the United States furnished most of the personnel and weapons, deploying almost 1.8 million troops and essentially dictating military strategy.
 6. By mid-October, UN forces had pushed the North Koreans back to the thirty-eighth parallel; the United States now had to decide whether to invade North Korea and seek to unify Korea under UN supervision.
- B. From Containment to Rollback to Containment
1. Popular sentiment and wisdom in the State Department favored transforming the military objective from containment to elimination of the enemy and unification of Korea.
 2. With UN approval, U.S. forces moved beyond the thirty-eighth parallel.
 3. With Chinese help, by December 1950, the North Koreans had recaptured Seoul.
 4. Under the leadership of General Matthew B. Ridgway, the Eighth Army turned the tide again, pushing North Korean forces back to the thirty-eighth parallel.
 5. Truman favored a negotiated settlement, but General Douglas MacArthur,

commander of the UN forces, challenged his plan.

6. MacArthur took his plan to the public, in effect challenging the president's authority to make foreign policy and violating the principle of civilian control over the military.
 7. Fed up with MacArthur's insubordination, Truman fired him in April 1951.
 8. Many Americans sided with MacArthur, however, reflecting American frustration with containment.
- C. Korea, Containment, and the 1952 Election
1. Popular discontent with Truman's war gave the Republicans a decided edge in the election battles of 1952.
 2. Eisenhower defeated Robert Taft for the Republican Party's nomination, but the old conservative guard prevailed on the party platform.
 3. Eisenhower's choice of Richard M. Nixon for his running mate helped to appease the Republican right wing and ensure that anticommunism would be a major theme of the campaign.
 4. Having decided not to run for another term, Truman persuaded Adlai E. Stevenson, governor of Illinois, to seek the Democratic nomination.
 5. The Republican Party stumbled just once during the campaign, when a newspaper reported that Nixon had accepted \$18,000 from supporters in California.
 6. Nixon saved himself by exploiting the new medium of television, making an emotional appeal to the American people.
 7. With the issue of corruption neutralized, the Republicans harped on communism at home and failure to achieve victory in Korea.
- D. An Armistice and the War's Costs
1. Eisenhower made good on his pledge to end the Korean War.
 2. The war took the lives of 36,000 Americans and wounded more than 100,000.
 3. The nature of the war and the unpopularity of the South Korean government made it difficult for soldiers to distinguish between friends and enemies, since civilian populations sometimes harbored North Korean agents.
 4. The Truman administration judged the war a success for its containment, since the United States had supported its

promise to help nations that were resisting communism.

5. The war had an enormous effect on defense policy and spending.
6. The Korean War induced the Truman administration to expand its role in Asia by increasing aid to the French, who were fighting to hang on to their colonial empire in Indochina.

LECTURE 1

The Policy of Containment