

# Chapter 25: Cold War America, 1945-1963

## I. Containment in a Divided World

### A. The Cold War in Europe, 1945–1946

1. World War II set the basic conditions for Cold War rivalry. The Cold War would produce an arms race through the **military-industrial complex**, the interconnection of corporate influence of political policy in the interest of producing armaments for global warfare.
2. Because the Soviet Union had been a victim of German aggression in both world wars, Joseph Stalin was determined to prevent the rebuilding and re-arming of its traditional foe; he insisted on a security zone of friendly governments in Eastern Europe for protection.
3. At the Yalta Conference, America and Britain agreed to recognize this Soviet “sphere of influence,” with the proviso that “free and unfettered elections” would be held as soon as possible. After Yalta, the Soviets made no move to hold the elections and rebuffed Western attempts to reorganize the Soviet-installed governments.
4. Recalling Britain’s disastrous appeasement of Hitler in 1938, President Harry Truman decided that the United States had to take a hard line against Soviet expansion.
5. At the 1945 Potsdam Conference of the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union, Truman used what he called “tough methods.” Negotiations on critical postwar issues deadlocked, revealing serious cracks in the Grand Alliance.
6. At Potsdam, the Allies agreed to disarm Germany, dismantle its military production facilities, and permit the occupying powers to extract reparations.
7. Plans for future reunification of Germany stalled, and the foundation was laid for what would later become the division of Germany into East and West Germany.

### B. The Containment Strategy

1. As tensions mounted, the United States increasingly perceived Soviet expansionism as a threat to its own interests, and a new policy of **containment** began to take shape, the most influential proponent of whom was George F. Kennan.
2. The policy of containment crystallized in 1947 when suspected Soviet-backed Communist guerrillas launched a civil war against the Greek government, causing the West to worry that Soviet influence in Greece threatened its interests in the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East, especially Turkey.
3. American reaction resulted in the Truman Doctrine, which called for large-scale military and economic assistance in order to prevent communism from taking hold in Greece and Turkey, which in turn lessened the threat to the entire Middle East, making it an early version of the “domino theory.”
4. The resulting congressional appropriation reversed the postwar trend toward sharp cuts in foreign spending and marked a new level of commitment to the Cold War.
5. The Marshall Plan sent relief to devastated European countries and helped to make them less susceptible to communism; the plan required that foreign-aid dollars be spent on U.S. goods and services.
6. The Marshall Plan met with opposition in Congress, until a Communist coup occurred in Czechoslovakia in February 1948, after which Congress voted overwhelmingly to approve funds for the program.
7. Over the next four years, the United States contributed nearly \$13 billion to a highly successful recovery; Western European economies revived, opening new opportunities for international trade, while Eastern Europe was influenced not to participate by the Soviet Union.
8. The United States, France, and Britain initiated a program of economic reform in West Berlin, which alarmed the Soviets, who responded with a blockade of the city.
9. Truman countered the blockade with airlifts of food and fuel; the blockade, lifted in May 1949, made West Berlin a symbol of resistance to communism.
10. In April 1949, the United States entered into its first peacetime military alliance since the American revolution – the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) – in which twelve nations agreed that an armed attack against one of them would be considered an attack against all of them.
11. NATO also agreed to the creation of the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) in May 1949; in October, the Soviets created the German Democratic Republic (East Germany).
12. The Soviets organized the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance in 1949 and the military Warsaw Pact in 1955.

13. In September 1949, American military intelligence had proof that the Soviets had detonated an atomic bomb; this revelation called for a major reassessment of American foreign policy.
14. To devise a new diplomatic and military blueprint, Truman turned to the National Security Council (NSC), an advisory body established by the National Security Act of 1947 that also created the Department of Defense and Central Intelligence Agency.
15. 15. The National Security Council gave a report, known as NSC-68, recommending the development of a hydrogen bomb, increasing U.S. conventional forces, establishing a strong system of alliances, and increasing taxes in order to finance defense building.

### C. Containment in Asia

1. American policy in Asia was based as much on Asia's importance to the world economy as on the desire to contain communism.
2. After dismantling Japan's military forces and weaponry, American occupation forces drafted a democratic constitution and oversaw the rebuilding of the economy.
3. In China, a civil war had been raging since the 1930s between Communist forces, led by Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai, and conservative Nationalist forces, under Chiang Kai-shek.
4. For a time, the Truman administration attempted to help the Nationalists by providing more than \$2 billion in aid, but in August 1949 it cut off that aid when reform did not occur; in October 1949, the People's Republic of China was formally established under Mao, and Chiang Kaishek's forces fled to Taiwan.
5. The "China lobby" in Congress viewed Mao's success as a defeat for the United States; the China lobby's influence blocked U.S. recognition of "Red China," leading instead to U.S. recognition of the exiled Nationalist government in Taiwan.
6. The United States also prevented China's admission to the United Nations; for almost twenty years, U.S. administrations treated mainland China, the world's most populous country, as a diplomatic non-entity.
7. At the end of World War II, both the Soviet Union and the United States had troops in Korea and divided the country into competing spheres of influence at the thirty-eighth parallel.
8. The Soviets supported a Communist government, led by Kim Il Sung, in North Korea, and the United States backed a Korean nationalist, Syngman Rhee, in South Korea.
9. On June 25, 1950, North Koreans invaded across the thirty-eighth parallel; Truman asked the United Nations Security Council to authorize a "police action" against the invaders.
10. The Security Council voted to send a "peacekeeping" force to Korea; though fourteen non-Communist nations sent troops, the U.N. army in Korea was overwhelmingly American, and, by request of Truman to the Security Council, headed by General Douglas MacArthur.
11. Months of fighting resulted in stalemate; given this military stalemate, a drop in public support, and the fact that the United States did not want large numbers of troops tied down in Asia, Truman and his advisors decided to work toward a negotiated peace.
12. MacArthur, who believed that the future of the United States lay in Asia and not in Europe, tried to execute his own foreign policy involving Korea and Taiwan and was drawn into a Republican challenge of Truman's conduct of the war.
13. Truman relieved MacArthur of his command based on insubordination, though the decision to relieve him was highly unpopular.
14. Two years after truce talks began, an armistice was signed in July 1953; Korea was divided near the original border at the thirty-eighth parallel, with a demilitarized zone between the countries.
15. Truman committed troops to Korea without congressional approval, setting a precedent for other undeclared wars.
16. The war also expanded American involvement in Asia, transforming containment into a truly global policy.
17. During the war, American defense expenditures grew from \$13 billion in 1950 to \$50 billion in 1953, nearly two-thirds of the budget.
18. American foreign policy had become more global, more militarized, and more expensive; even in times of peace, the United States functioned in a state of permanent mobilization.
19. The Munich analogy – of appeasing Hitler by offering him part of Czechoslovakia in 1938 – guided U.S. thinking when it came to anticommunist influence on American foreign policy. This thinking often drove the United States into armed conflicts that supported right-wing repressive regimes.

## II. Cold War Liberalism

### A. Truman and the End of Reform

1. Truman and the Democratic Party after the war forged what historians call “Cold War liberalism.” They preserved the core programs of the New Deal welfare state, developed the containment policy to oppose Soviet influence throughout the world, and fought so-called “subversives” at home.
2. Organized labor was a key force in Cold War liberalism.
3. Union membership increased to over 14 million by 1945; workers mounted crippling strikes in the automobile, steel, and coal industries.
4. Trade unions strongly supported the Democratic Party.
5. In 1946, Republicans gained control of both houses of Congress and set about undoing New Deal social welfare measures, especially targeting labor legislation.
6. In 1947, the Republican-controlled Congress passed the Taft-Hartley Act, a rollback of several pro-union provisions of the 1935 National Labor Relations Act. The secondary boycott and the union shop, labor rights that workers had fought hard for, were eventually dismantled by the Republican Party.
7. Truman’s veto of the Taft-Hartley Act countered some workers’ hostility to his earlier antistrike activity and kept labor in the Democratic fold.
8. In the election of 1948, the Republicans again nominated Thomas E. Dewey for president.
9. Democratic left and right wings split off: the Progressive Party nominated Henry A. Wallace for president; the States’ Rights Party (Dixiecrats) nominated Strom Thurmond.
10. To the nation’s surprise, Truman won the election handily, and the Democrats regained control of both houses of Congress.
11. The Fair Deal was an extension of the New Deal’s liberalism, but it gave attention to civil rights, reflecting the growing importance of African Americans to the Democratic coalition. It also extended the possibilities for a higher standard of living and benefits to a greater number of citizens, reflecting a new liberal vision of the role of the state.
12. Congress adopted only parts of the Fair Deal: a higher minimum wage, an extension of and increase in Social Security, and the National Housing Act of 1949.

### B. Red Scare: The Hunt for Communists

1. During the administration of FDR, several high-ranking government officials acted as spies for the Soviet Union. After World War II, the spying ceased for the most part. Many Americans at the time, however, felt that Communist influence predominated within the government. In 1947, President Truman created the Loyalty-Security Program to permit officials to investigate any employee of the federal government.
2. In 1938, a group of conservatives had launched the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) to investigate Communist influence in labor unions and New Deal agencies.
3. In 1947, HUAC held widely publicized hearings on alleged Communist activity in the film industry. Those accused of subversion found themselves on an unofficial **blacklist** that made it impossible to find future work in the industry.
4. The meteoric rise of Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin marked the finale of the Red Scare.
5. McCarthy dropped a bombshell on the nation in February of 1950: Communist Party members were active in shaping policy in the State Department.
6. In early 1954, McCarthy overreached by launching an investigation into subversive activity in the U.S. Army.
7. In December of 1954, the Senate voted 67 to 22 to censure McCarthy for unbecoming conduct. He died from an alcohol-related illness three years later.
8. The Politics of Cold War Liberalism
9. In 1952, Dwight D. Eisenhower secured the Republican nomination.
10. The Eisenhower administration set the tone for “modern Republicanism,” an updated party philosophy that emphasized a slowdown in, rather than a dismantling of, the New Deal state.
11. For eight years, between 1952 and 1960, Eisenhower steered a precarious course from the middle of the party. He signed bills increasing federal outlays for veterans’ benefits, housing, highway construction, and Social Security.
12. Eisenhower’s “New Look” in foreign policy continued America’s commitment to producing nuclear weapons to project U.S. dominance in the Cold War struggle against international communism.
13. Eisenhower then turned his attention to Europe and the Soviet Union; Stalin died in 1953, and after a

power struggle, Nikita S. Khrushchev emerged as his successor in 1956.

14. Soviet repression of the 1956 Hungarian revolt showed that American policymakers had few options for rolling back Soviet power in Europe, short of going to war with the Soviet Union.
15. By 1958, both the United States and the Soviet Union possessed intercontinental ballistic missiles.

### III. Containment in the Postcolonial World

#### A. The Cold War and Colonial Independence

1. The American policy of containment soon extended to new nations emerging in the **Third World**.
2. The United States often failed to recognize that indigenous or nationalist movements in emerging nations had their own goals and were not necessarily under the control of Communists.
3. U.S. policymakers tended to support stable governments, as long as they were not Communist; some American allies were governed by dictatorships or repressive right-wing regimes.
4. The Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) was created in 1954 to complement the NATO alliance in Europe.
5. The Central Intelligence Agency moved beyond intelligence gathering into active, albeit covert, involvement in the internal affairs of foreign countries.
6. In 1953, the CIA helped to overthrow Iran's premier after he seized control of British oil properties; in 1954, it supported a coup against the duly elected government of Jacobo Arbenz Guzman in Guatemala after he expropriated land held by the United Fruit Company and accepted arms from Communist Czechoslovakia.
7. In Southeast Asia, Truman mismanaged a golden opportunity to bring the Vietnamese nationalist leader Ho Chi Minh into the American camp through domestic and military support against the French attempt after World War II to re-take the colony it had maintained since the mid-1800s. Truman incorrectly viewed Ho Chi Minh as an ardent Communist pledged against American interests.
8. Eisenhower also failed to understand the importance of embracing a united Vietnam. If the French failed to regain control, Eisenhower argued, the domino theory would lead to the collapse of all non-Communist governments in the region.
9. Although the United States eventually provided most of the financing, the French still failed to defeat the tenacious Viet-minh. After a fifty-six-day siege in early 1954, the French went down to stunning defeat at the huge fortress of Dien bien phu.
10. The result was the 1954 Geneva Accords, which partitioned Vietnam temporarily at the seventeenth parallel, committed France to withdraw from north of that line, and called for elections within two years that would lead to a unified Vietnam.
11. The United States rejected the Geneva Accords and immediately set about undermining them. With the help of the CIA, a pro-American government took power in South Vietnam in June 1954.
12. As the last French soldiers left in 1956, the United States took over, with South Vietnam now the front line in the American battle to contain communism in Southeast Asia.
13. The oil-rich Middle East was playing an increasingly central role in the strategic planning of the United States and the Soviet Union, which presented one of the most complicated foreign policy challenges.
14. On May 14, 1948, Zionist leaders proclaimed the state of Israel; Truman quickly recognized the new state, alienating the Arabs but winning crucial support from Jewish voters.
15. When Gamal Abdel Nasser came to power in Egypt in 1954, he pledged to lead not just his country but the entire Middle East out of its dependent, colonial relationship through a form of pan-Arab socialism and declared Egypt's neutrality in the Cold War.
16. Unwilling to accept this stance of non-alignment, John Foster Dulles abruptly withdrew his offer of U.S. financial aid to Egypt in 1957; in retaliation, Nasser seized and nationalized the Suez Canal, through which three-quarters of Western Europe's oil was transported.
17. After months of negotiation, Britain and France, in alliance with Israel, attacked Egypt and retook the canal. Eisenhower and the United Nations forced France and Britain to pull back; Egypt retook the Suez Canal and built the Aswan Dam with Soviet support.
18. The Suez crisis increased Soviet influence in the Third World, intensified anti-Western sentiment in Arab countries, and produced dissension among leading members of NATO.
19. After the Suez Canal crisis, the Eisenhower Doctrine stated that American forces would assist any nation in the Middle East requiring aid against communism.
20. Eisenhower invoked the doctrine when he sent troops to aid King Hussein of Jordan against a Nasser-

backed revolt and when he sent troops to back a pro-U.S. government in Lebanon.

21. The attention that the Eisenhower administration paid to developments in the Middle East in the 1950s demonstrated how the access to a steady supply of oil increasingly affected foreign policy.

## **B. John F. Kennedy and the Cold War**

1. Poised to become the youngest man ever elected to the presidency and the nation's first Catholic chief executive, Kennedy practiced what became known as the "new politics," an approach that emphasized youthful charisma, style, and personality more than issues and platforms.
2. A series of four televised debates between Kennedy and Nixon showed how important television was becoming to political life; voters who listened to the 1960 presidential debates on the radio concluded that Nixon had won, and those who watched it on TV felt that Kennedy had won.
3. Kennedy won only the narrowest of electoral victories, receiving 49.7 percent of the popular vote to Nixon's 49.5 percent; a shift of a few thousand votes in key states would have reversed the outcome.
4. A resolute cold warrior, Kennedy brought to Washington a cadre of young ambitious newcomers, including Robert McNamara, a former head of Ford Motor Company, who would serve as secretary of defense. A host of academics also flocked to Washington to join the New Frontier, including Robert Kennedy, the president's brother, who served as attorney general.
5. Fidel Castro overthrew Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista in 1959; Cuban relations with Washington deteriorated after Castro nationalized American-owned banks and industries and the United States declared an embargo on Cuban exports.
6. Isolated by the United States, Cuba turned to the Soviet Union for economic and military support.
7. In early 1961, Kennedy attempted to foment an anti-Castro uprising; the CIA-trained invaders were crushed by Castro's troops after landing at Cuba's Bay of Pigs on April 17.
8. U.S.-Soviet relations further deteriorated in June 1961 when the Soviets built the Berlin Wall in order to stop the exodus of East Germans; the Berlin Wall remained a symbol of the Cold War until 1989.
9. The climactic confrontation of the Cold War, the Cuban missile crisis, occurred in October 1962, when American reconnaissance planes flying over Cuba photographed Soviet-built bases for ICBMs, which could reach U.S. targets as far as 2,200 miles away.
10. In a televised address, Kennedy confronted the Soviet Union and announced that the United States would impose a "quarantine on all offensive military equipment" intended for Cuba.
11. After a week of tense negotiations, both Kennedy and Khrushchev made concessions: the United States would not invade Cuba, and the Soviets would dismantle the missile bases. Kennedy also secretly ordered U.S. missiles to be removed from Turkey, at the insistence of Khrushchev.
12. Exhibiting the idealism of the early 1960s, the Peace Corps was a low-cost Cold War weapon intended to show the developing world that there was an alternative to communism.
13. Wanting to compete with the Soviet Union and land a man on the moon, Kennedy also increased funding for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). This ambition was later realized when the United States successfully landed a man on the moon in 1969.

## **C. Making a Commitment in Vietnam**

1. When Kennedy became president, he inherited Eisenhower's involvement in Vietnam. Kennedy saw Vietnam in very much the same Cold War terms.
2. The Army was training U.S. Special Forces, called Green Berets for their distinctive headgear, to engage in unconventional, small-group warfare. Kennedy and his advisors wanted to try out the Green Berets in the Vietnamese jungles.
3. Despite American aid, the corrupt and repressive Diem regime installed by Eisenhower in 1954 in South Vietnam was losing ground to domestic critics and North Vietnamese insurgents.
4. Losing patience with Diem, Kennedy let it be known in Saigon that the United States would support a military coup. On November 1, 1963, Diem was overthrown and assassinated – a result evidently not anticipated by Kennedy. At that point, there were about 16,000 American "advisors" in Vietnam.
5. Kennedy himself was assassinated in late November of 1963.