

Truman at Home

In the domestic policy arena, Truman signed the National Security Act in 1947 to restructure America's defenses for the new Communist threat. The act reorganized the military under the new office of the secretary of defense and the new Joint Chiefs of Staff. It also created the National Security Council to advise the president on global affairs and the Central Intelligence Agency to conduct espionage. Truman's leadership in confronting the Soviet Union and rebuilding Europe convinced Democrats to nominate him again for the 1948 election. His Fair Deal domestic policies and support for civil rights, however, divided the Republican Party and nearly cost Truman the election.

Red Hunts

Developments in Eastern Europe, the fall of China to Communist revolutionaries in 1949, and the Soviet Union's development of nuclear weapons terrified Americans, who feared that Communists would try to infiltrate or attack the United States from within. Congressman Richard M. Nixon and the House Un-American Activities Committee led the earliest Red hunts for Communists in the government, which culminated with the prosecution of federal employee Alger Hiss and the executions of suspected spies Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. Truman initially supported these inquiries and even established a Loyalty Review Board to assist in the search. He eventually began to express concern, however, that the Red hunts were quickly devolving into witch hunts.

The Korean War

Cold War tensions between the United States and the USSR eventually exploded in Korea when Soviet-backed North Korea invaded South Korea in 1950. Determined not to let Communism spread in East Asia, Truman quadrupled military spending and ordered General MacArthur to retake the southern half of the peninsula. MacArthur succeeded and then pushed the North Koreans almost up to the Chinese border. Threatened, over a million soldiers from Communist China poured into Korea, forcing MacArthur to retreat back to the 38th parallel, which had originally divided North Korea from South Korea.

When MacArthur began to criticize Truman publicly for his unwillingness to use nuclear weapons in Korea, Truman was forced to fire his top general for insubordination. United States forces remained entrenched at the 38th parallel for two more years, at the cost of more than 50,000 American lives. Both sides declared a cease-fire only after the new U.S. president, Dwight D. Eisenhower, threatened to use nuclear weapons in 1953.

Postwar Prosperity

Eisenhower's election in 1952 ushered in an unprecedented era of economic growth and prosperity in the United States. The average national income doubled during the 1950s and then doubled again the following decade, primarily due to continued defense spending and to the 1944 Montgomery G.I. Bill, which helped returning veterans buy homes and go back to school. The postwar "baby boom" contributed to population growth, while the Great Migration of African-Americans to northern cities, "white flight" from the cities to the suburbs, and the rush to the Sun Belt altered population demographics. By 1960, most American families had a car, a television, and a refrigerator and owned their own home. Popular television sitcoms like *Leave It to Beaver* and *Ozzie and Harriet* glamorized suburbia and consumerism.

Creeping Socialism

"Ike" Eisenhower had entered the White House determined to block the creation of new social welfare programs, which he called "creeping socialism." He did not, however, cut federal funding from existing New Deal programs. In fact, he expanded Social Security and the Federal Housing

Administration and even set aside tens of millions of dollars for the creation of the first interstates under the Federal Highway Act. Still a conservative, though, Eisenhower refused to endorse the blossoming civil rights movement and signed the Landrum-Griffin Act, also known as the Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure Act, in the wake of numerous AFL-CIO labor union scandals in the mid-1950s.

McCarthyism

First-term Wisconsin Republican senator Joseph McCarthy, meanwhile, exploded onto the national political scene in 1950, when he accused more than 200 federal employees of being Communists. Even though McCarthy had no proof to support these claims, Americans supported his endeavors to find more “Soviet agents” hiding in Washington. Thousands of former New Dealers and Red-hunt critics from all walks of life were wrongfully persecuted. McCarthy’s influence eventually waned after he humiliated himself during the nationally televised Army-McCarthy hearings in 1954.

Ike’s New Look

In addition to halting “creeping socialism” at home, Eisenhower also wanted to “roll back” Communist advances abroad. Along with Vice President Richard M. Nixon and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, Eisenhower devised a New Look at foreign policy that emphasized the use of nuclear weapons, rather than conventional weapons and troops, to contain Communism. Eisenhower threatened the USSR with “massive retaliation,” or nuclear war, against Soviet aggression or the spread of Communism.

Eisenhower also made full use of the newly created CIA to help overthrow unfriendly governments in developing countries. He resolved the Suez crisis peacefully before it led to war and committed American funds to fighting Ho Chi Minh’s pro-Communist forces in Vietnam after the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. The Soviet launch of the Sputnik satellites in 1957 started the space race, prompting Eisenhower to create the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), and sign the National Defense Education Act. In his farewell address in 1961, he warned Americans of the growing military-industrial complex that threatened to restrict civil liberties and dominate American foreign policy making.

Kennedy and the New Frontier

Facing term limits, Eisenhower endorsed Vice President Richard Nixon for the Republican presidential nomination in 1960. Democrats countered with World War II hero and Massachusetts senator John F. Kennedy. After a close race, Kennedy defeated Nixon, thanks in large part to the African-American vote and Kennedy’s polished performance in the first-ever televised presidential debates.

As president, Kennedy pushed for a package of new social welfare spending programs that he called the New Frontier. Hoping to inspire a new generation of young Americans, he told them to “ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.” Republicans and conservative southern Democrats, however, blocked most New Frontier legislation in Congress.

Flexible Response

Because Eisenhower’s threat of “massive retaliation” had proved too stringent and binding, Kennedy and his foreign policy team devised a new doctrine of “flexible response” designed to give the president more options to fight Communism.

In addition, Kennedy committed thousands of American troops to South Vietnam to support Ngo Dinh Diem’s corrupt regime but claimed the troops were merely “military advisors.” In Latin America, Kennedy took a different approach, funneling millions of dollars into the Alliance for Progress to thwart Communists by ending poverty. Despite the new doctrine, Kennedy was unable

worldwide. Policy makers tied it closely with the domino theory. Kennan's idea eventually developed into the single most important tenet of American foreign policy through the Cold War until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Cuban Missile Crisis

The crisis that occurred when Cuban leader Fidel Castro sought economic and military assistance from the Soviet Union after the United States' failed 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion. The Soviet premier, Nikita Khrushchev, capitalized on the failed invasion, allied with Castro, and secured from Castro the right to place nuclear missiles in Cuba. Upon learning of the missiles, President John F. Kennedy ordered a naval blockade of the island in 1962 and demanded that Khrushchev remove them. Nuclear war seemed imminent until Khrushchev finally backed down, promising to remove the missiles if Kennedy ended the blockade. The United States complied and also agreed to remove from Turkey nuclear missiles aimed at the USSR. The Communist Party leadership in the USSR removed Khrushchev from power in 1964 for having backed down in the standoff.

Dien Bien Phu

A site in Vietnam where an important French outpost fell to Ho Chi Minh's pro-Communist forces in 1954. After this defeat, an international conference in Geneva split Vietnam into two nations—North Vietnam and South Vietnam—with the dividing line at the 17th parallel. Ho Chi Minh established a government in the city of Hanoi in North Vietnam, while U.S.-backed Ngo Dinh Diem took control of the South Vietnamese government in Saigon.

Domino Theory

The belief that if the United States allowed one country to fall to Communism, then many more would follow suit, like a row of dominoes. Many foreign policy thinkers subscribed to this theory at the height of the Cold War, and this led the United States to support anti-Communist regimes throughout the world, whether or not they upheld democratic ideals. The domino theory also provided the primary rationale behind Lyndon Johnson's massive escalation of the conflict in Vietnam to full-scale war.

Flexible Response

A doctrine of containment that provided for a variety of military and political strategies that the president could use to stem the spread of Communism. The flexible response plan was developed by Defense and State Department officials in the Kennedy administration who felt that Eisenhower's "massive retaliation" doctrine restricted the president's options too much.

House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC)

A committee established in 1938 by the House of Representatives to investigate individual Americans or organizations who might be linked to the Nazis or the Ku Klux Klan. After World War II, as fear of the Soviet Union spread, HUAC was used to investigate those suspected of having ties to Communism or of being Soviet agents. Congressman Richard M. Nixon played a key role on the committee and used his power to prosecute many, including federal employee Alger Hiss in 1950.

Marshall Plan

A plan devised by President Harry S Truman and Secretary of State George C. Marshall that committed over \$10 billion to rebuilding Western Europe after World War II. Although the Soviet Union fiercely opposed the plan, Truman knew that rebuilding the region would provide stability and prevent another world war. The Marshall Plan was highly successful and enabled British,

Disaster at the Yalu River

MacArthur's crossing of the 38th parallel troubled the Soviet Union and Communist China, especially considering that Truman had entered the war vowing to restore peace and the status quo—not to conquer the entire peninsula. China therefore warned the United States not to approach the Chinese–North Korean border at the Yalu River. However, MacArthur ignored the warning and pursued the North Koreans farther up the peninsula. Interpreting this move as an act of war, the Chinese sent hundreds of thousands of soldiers across the Yalu to meet MacArthur's men in North Korea. Overwhelmed, MacArthur and his forces retreated back to the 38th parallel.

MacArthur's Dismissal

Stalemated once again at the 38th parallel, MacArthur pressured Truman to drop nuclear bombs on mainland China. Doing so, MacArthur reasoned, would not only allow his forces to take the entire Korean Peninsula but would also topple the Communist regime in Beijing. Truman and U.S. military officials, however, knew they lacked the resources to fight a war with China, defend Western Europe, contain the Soviet Union, occupy Japan, and hold Korea at the same time. They also wanted to keep the war limited and knew that the deployment of nuclear weapons would bring the Soviet Union into what could quickly devolve into World War III. MacArthur rebuffed these arguments and instead tried to turn the American people against Truman by criticizing him in public. Truman removed MacArthur from command in April 1951, for insubordination.

The Election of 1952

Even though MacArthur had disobeyed orders and publicly rebuked the commander in chief, blame fell on Truman for “losing” Korea to the Communists. Since Truman had little chance of being reelected, Democrats instead nominated Illinois governor Adlai E. Stevenson for the presidency in 1952. Republicans, meanwhile, nominated former World War II general and NATO supreme commander Dwight D. Eisenhower for president, with former Red Hunter Richard M. Nixon as his running mate. Eisenhower's status as a war hero and Nixon's reputation for being tough on Communists gave the Republicans an easy victory. They won the popular vote by a 7 million-vote margin and also won a landslide in the electoral college, with 442 electoral votes to Stevenson's 89.

The End of the Korean War

By the time Eisenhower took the oath of office in 1953, American soldiers had been entrenched in Korea for nearly three years. In the time since MacArthur's final retreat to the 38th parallel, thousands more Americans had died without any territorial loss or gain. Eisenhower eventually brought about an armistice with North Korea, in part by making it known that he, unlike Truman, would consider the use of nuclear weapons in Korea. Despite the armistice, however, the border between North and South Korea has remained one of the most heavily fortified Cold War “hot spots” in the world for more than fifty years.

7. Postwar Prosperity at Home: 1945–1960:

Events

1944 Congress passes Montgomery G.I. Bill

1946 Congress passes Employment Act