The Early Cold War

MILESTONES: 1945–1952

1945–1952: The Early Cold War

The United States emerged from World War II as one of the foremost economic, political, and military powers in the world. Wartime production pulled the economy out of depression and propelled it to great profits. In the interest of avoiding another global war, for the first time the United States began to use economic assistance as a strategic element of its foreign policy and offered significant assistance to countries in Europe and Asia struggling to rebuild their shattered economies.

British Premier Winston Churchill and President Harry Truman at the famous “Iron Curtain” Speech

In contrast to American unwillingness to politically or militarily entangle itself in the League of Nations, the United States became one of the first members of the international organization designed to promote international security, commerce, and law, the United Nations. The United States also took an active interest in the fate of the colonies the European powers were having difficulty maintaining. In addition to these challenges, the United States faced increasing resistance from the Soviet Union which had rescinded on a number of wartime promises. As the Soviets demonstrated a keen interest in dominating Eastern Europe, the United States took the lead in forming a Western alliance to counterbalance the communist superpower to contain the spread of communism. At the same time, the United States restructured its military and intelligence forces, both of which would have a significant influence in U.S. Cold War policy.
Atomic Diplomacy

Atomic diplomacy refers to attempts to use the threat of nuclear warfare to achieve diplomatic goals. After the first successful test of the atomic bomb in 1945, U.S. officials immediately considered the potential non-military benefits that could be derived from the American nuclear monopoly. In the years that followed, there were several occasions in which government officials used or considered atomic diplomacy.

Atomic bombing of Nagasaki on August 9, 1945

During the Second World War, the United States, Britain, Germany and the U.S.S.R. were all engaged in scientific research to develop the atomic bomb. By mid-1945, however, only the United States had succeeded, and it used two atomic weapons on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to bring a rapid and conclusive end to the war with Japan. U.S. officials did not debate at length whether to use the atomic bomb against Japan, but argued that it was a means to a faster end to the Pacific conflict that would ensure fewer conventional war casualties. They did, however, consider the role that the bomb’s impressive power could play in postwar U.S. relations with the Soviet Union.

While presiding over the U.S. development of nuclear weapons, President Franklin Roosevelt made the decision not to inform the Soviet Union of the technological developments. After Roosevelt’s death, President Harry Truman had to decide whether to continue this policy of guarding nuclear information. Ultimately, Truman mentioned the existence of a particularly destructive bomb to Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin at the Allied meeting at Potsdam, but he did not provide specifics about the weapon or its uses. By mid-1945, it was clear the Soviet Union would enter into the war in the Pacific and thereby be in a position to influence the postwar balance of power in the region. U.S. officials recognized there was little chance of preventing this, although they preferred a U.S.-led occupation of Japan rather than a co-occupation as had been arranged for Germany. Some U.S. policymakers hoped that the U.S. monopoly on nuclear technology and the demonstration of its destructive power in Japan might influence the Soviets to make concessions, either in Asia or in Europe. Truman did not threaten Stalin with the bomb, recognizing instead that its existence alone would limit Soviet options and be considered a threat to Soviet security.

The Potsdam Conference

Scholars debate the extent to which Truman’s mention of the bomb at Potsdam and his use of the weapon in Japan represent atomic diplomacy. In 1965, historian Gar Alperovitz published a book which argued that the use of nuclear weapons on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was intended to gain a stronger position for postwar diplomatic bargaining with the Soviet Union, as the weapons themselves were not needed to force the Japanese surrender. Other scholars disagree, and suggest that Truman thought the bomb necessary to achieve the unconditional surrender of recalcitrant Japanese military leaders determined to fight to the death. Even if Truman did not intend to use the implied threat of the weapon to gain the upper hand over Stalin, the fact of the U.S. atomic monopoly following the successful atomic test at Alamogordo, New Mexico in July of 1945 seemed to have bolstered his
confidence at subsequent meetings, making him more determined to obtain compromises from the Soviet government. Even so, if U.S. officials hoped that the threat of the bomb would soften Soviet resistance to American proposals for free elections in Eastern Europe or reduced Soviet control over the Balkans, they were disappointed, as the security issues raised by the dawn of the atomic age likely made the Soviet Union even more anxious to protect its borders with a controlled buffer zone.

In the years that immediately followed the Second World War, the U.S. confidence in its nuclear monopoly had ramifications for its diplomatic agenda. The fact of the bomb was useful in ensuring that Western Europe would rely on the United States to guarantee its security rather than seeking an outside accommodation with the Soviet Union, because even if the United States did not station large numbers of troops on the continent, it could protect the region by placing it under the American “nuclear umbrella” of areas that the United States professed to be willing to use the bomb to defend. The U.S. insistence on hegemony in the occupation and rehabilitation of Japan stemmed in part from the confidence of being the sole nuclear power and in part from what that nuclear power had gained: Japan’s total surrender to U.S. forces. Though it inspired greater confidence in the immediate postwar years, the U.S. nuclear monopoly was not of long duration; the Soviet Union successfully exploded its first atomic bomb in 1949, the United Kingdom in 1952, France in 1960 and the People’s Republic of China in 1964.

**B-29 Bomber**

In the first two decades of the Cold War, there were a number of occasions during which a form of atomic diplomacy was employed by either side of the conflict. During the Berlin Blockade of 1948–49, President Truman transferred several B-29 bombers capable of delivering nuclear bombs to the region to signal to the Soviet Union that the United States was both capable of implementing a nuclear attack and willing to execute it if it became necessary. During the Korean War, President Truman once again deployed the B-29s to signal U.S. resolve. In 1953, President Dwight D. Eisenhower considered, but ultimately rejected the idea of using nuclear coercion to further negotiations on the cease fire agreement that ended the war in Korea. In an about face, in 1962, the Soviet deployment of nuclear missiles to Cuba in order to try to force U.S. concessions on Europe became another example of atomic diplomacy.

By the time the United States was attempting to disengage from the war in Vietnam, however, the idea of atomic diplomacy had lost credibility. By the mid-1960s, the United States and the Soviet Union had achieved approximate parity, and their security was based on the principle of mutually assured destruction. Because neither could make the first strike without the threat of a counterstrike, the benefits of using nuclear weapons in a conflict—even in a proxy war—were greatly diminished. So although President Nixon briefly considered using the threat of the bomb to help bring about an end to the war in Vietnam, he realized that that there remained the threat that the Soviet Union would retaliate against the United States on behalf of North Vietnam and that both international and domestic public opinion would never accept the use of the bomb.
In spite of the many threats made over the course of the Cold War, atomic weapons were not used in any conflict after the Second World War. Although the existence of nuclear weapons could continue to act as a deterrent, their diplomatic utility had its limits.
The Nuremberg Trial and the Tokyo War Crimes Trials

Following World War II, the victorious Allied governments established the first international criminal tribunals to prosecute high-level political officials and military authorities for war crimes and other wartime atrocities. The four major Allied powers—France, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States—set up the International Military Tribunal (IMT) in Nuremberg, Germany, to prosecute and punish “the major war criminals of the European Axis.” The IMT presided over a combined trial of senior Nazi political and military leaders, as well as several Nazi organizations. The lesser-known International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE) was created in Tokyo, Japan, pursuant to a 1946 proclamation by U.S. Army General Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers in occupied Japan. The IMTFE presided over a series of trials of senior Japanese political and military leaders pursuant to its authority “to try and punish Far Eastern war criminals.”

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The origins, composition, and jurisdiction of the Nuremberg and Tokyo tribunals differed in several important respects beyond their geographical differences and personalities. Plans to prosecute German political and military leaders were announced in the 1942 St. James Declaration. In the declaration, the United States joined Australia, Canada, China, India, New Zealand, the Union of South Africa, the Soviet Union, and nine exiled governments of German-occupied countries to condemn Germany’s “policy of aggression.” The Declaration stated that these governments “placed among their principal war aims the punishment, through the channel of organized justice, of those guilty of or responsible for these crimes, whether they have ordered them, perpetrated them or participated in them.”

In August 1945, the four major Allied powers therefore signed the 1945 London Agreement, which established the IMT. The following additional countries subsequently “adhered” to the agreement to show their support: Australia, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Ethiopia, Greece, Haiti, Honduras, India, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Panama, Paraguay, Poland, Uruguay, and Yugoslavia.

The Charter of the International Military Tribunal (or Nuremberg Charter) was annexed to the 1945 London Agreement and outlined the tribunal’s constitution, functions, and jurisdiction. The Nuremberg tribunal consisted of one judge from each of the Allied powers, which each also supplied a prosecution team. The Nuremberg Charter also provided that the IMT had the authority to try and punish persons who “committed any of the following crimes:"

- (a) Crimes Against Peace: namely, planning, preparation, initiation or waging of a war of aggression, or a war in violation of international treaties, agreements or assurances, or participation in a Common Plan or Conspiracy for the accomplishment of any of the foregoing;
- (b) War Crimes: namely, violations of the laws or customs of war. Such violations shall include, but not be limited to, murder, ill-treatment or deportation to slave labor or for any other purpose of civilian population of or in occupied territory, murder or ill-treatment of prisoners of
war or persons on the seas, killing of hostages, plunder of public or private property, wanton destruction of cities, towns, or villages, or devastation not justified by military necessity;

- (c) Crimes Against Humanity: namely, murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation, and other inhumane acts committed against any civilian population, before or during the war, or persecutions on political, racial, or religious grounds in execution of or in connection with any crime within the jurisdiction of the Tribunal, whether or not in violation of domestic law of the country where perpetrated.

The IMT prosecutors indicted twenty-two senior German political and military leaders, including Hermann Goering, Rudolph Hess, Joachim von Ribbentrop, Alfred Rosenberg, and Albert Speer. Nazi leader Adolf Hitler was not indicted because he had committed suicide in April 1945, in the final days before Germany’s surrender. Seven Nazi organizations also were indicted. The prosecutors sought to have the tribunal declare that these organizations were “criminal organizations” in order to facilitate the later prosecution of their members by other tribunals or courts.

The Nuremberg Trial lasted from November 1945 to October 1946. The tribunal found nineteen individual defendants guilty and sentenced them to punishments that ranged from death by hanging to fifteen years’ imprisonment. Three defendants were found not guilty, one committed suicide prior to trial, and one did not stand trial due to physical or mental illness. The Nuremberg Tribunal also concluded that three of the seven indicted Nazi organizations were “criminal organizations” under the terms of the Charter: the Leadership Corps of the Nazi party; the elite “SS” unit, which carried out the forced transfer, enslavement, and extermination of millions of persons in concentration camps; and the Nazi security police and the Nazi secret police, commonly known as the ‘SD’ and ‘Gestapo,’ respectively, which had instituted slave labor programs and deported Jews, political opponents, and other civilians to concentration camps.

Unlike the IMT, the IMTFE was not created by an international agreement, but it nonetheless emerged from international agreements to try Japanese war criminals. In July 1945, China, the United Kingdom, and the United States signed the Potsdam Declaration, in which they demanded Japan’s “unconditional surrender” and stated that “stern justice shall be meted out to all war criminals.” At the time that the Potsdam Declaration was signed, the war in Europe had ended but the war with Japan was continuing. The Soviet Union did not sign the declaration because it did not declare war on Japan until weeks later, on the same day that the United States dropped the second atomic bomb at Nagasaki. Japan surrendered six days later, on August 14, 1945.

At the subsequent Moscow Conference, held in December 1945, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States (with concurrence from China) agreed to a basic structure for the occupation of Japan. General MacArthur, as Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers, was granted authority to “issue all orders for the implementation of the Terms of Surrender, the occupation and control of Japan, and all directives supplementary thereto.”

In January 1946, acting pursuant to this authority, General MacArthur issued a special proclamation that established the IMTFE. The Charter for the International Military Tribunal for the Far East was annexed
to the proclamation. Like the Nuremberg Charter, it laid out the composition, jurisdiction, and functions of the tribunal.

The Charter provided for MacArthur to appoint judges to the IMTFE from the countries that had signed Japan’s instrument of surrender: Australia, Canada, China, France, India, the Netherlands, Philippines, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Each of these countries also had a prosecution team.

As with the IMT, the IMTFE had jurisdiction to try individuals for Crimes Against Peace, War Crimes, and Crimes Against Humanity, and the definitions were nearly verbatim to those contained in the Nuremberg Charter. The IMTFE nonetheless had jurisdiction over crimes that occurred over a greater period of time, from the 1931 Japanese invasion of Manchuria to Japan's 1945 surrender.

The IMTFE presided over the prosecution of nine senior Japanese political leaders and eighteen military leaders. A Japanese scholar also was indicted, but charges against him were dropped during the trial because he was declared unfit due to mental illness. Japanese Emperor Hirohito and other members of the imperial family were not indicted. In fact, the Allied powers permitted Hirohito to retain his position on the throne, albeit with diminished status.

The Tokyo War Crimes Trials took place from May 1946 to November 1948. The IMTFE found all remaining defendants guilty and sentenced them to punishments ranging from death to seven years’ imprisonment; two defendants died during the trial.

After the Nuremberg and Tokyo War Crimes trials, additional trials were held to try “minor” war criminals. These subsequent trials, however, were not held by international tribunals but instead by domestic courts or by tribunals operated by a single Allied power, such as military commissions. In Germany, for example, each of the Allied powers held trials for alleged war criminals found within their respective zones of occupation. The United States held twelve such trials from 1945 to 1949, each of which combined defendants who were accused of similar acts or had participated in related events. These trials also were held in Nuremberg and thus became known informally as the “subsequent Nuremberg trials.” In Japan, several additional trials were held in cities outside Tokyo.

The Nuremberg and Tokyo tribunals contributed significantly to the development of international criminal law, then in its infancy. For several decades, these tribunals stood as the only examples of international war crimes tribunals, but they ultimately served as models for a new series of international criminal tribunals that were established beginning in the 1990s. In addition, the Nuremberg Charter’s reference to “crimes against peace,” “war crimes,” and “crimes against humanity” represented the first time these terms were used and defined in an adopted international instrument. These terms and definitions were adopted nearly verbatim in the Charter of the IMTFE, but have been replicated and expanded in a succession of international legal instruments since that time.
Occupation and Reconstruction of Japan, 1945–52

After the defeat of Japan in World War II, the United States led the Allies in the occupation and rehabilitation of the Japanese state. Between 1945 and 1952, the U.S. occupying forces, led by General Douglas A. MacArthur, enacted widespread military, political, economic, and social reforms.

Allied Occupation in Japan after WWII

The groundwork for the Allied occupation of a defeated Japan was laid during the war. In a series of wartime conferences, the leaders of the Allied powers of Great Britain, the Soviet Union, the Republic of China, and the United States discussed how to disarm Japan, deal with its colonies (especially Korea and Taiwan), stabilize the Japanese economy, and prevent the remilitarization of the state in the future. In the Potsdam Declaration, they called for Japan’s unconditional surrender; by August of 1945, that objective had been achieved.

In September, 1945, General Douglas MacArthur took charge of the Supreme Command of Allied Powers (SCAP) and began the work of rebuilding Japan. Although Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the Republic of China had an advisory role as part of an “Allied Council,” MacArthur had the final authority to make all decisions. The occupation of Japan can be divided into three phases: the initial effort to punish and reform Japan, the work to revive the Japanese economy, and the conclusion of a formal peace treaty and alliance.

The first phase, roughly from the end of the war in 1945 through 1947, involved the most fundamental changes for the Japanese Government and society. The Allies punished Japan for its past militarism and expansion by convening war crimes trials in Tokyo. At the same time, SCAP dismantled the Japanese army and banned former military officers from taking roles of political leadership in the new government. In the economic field, SCAP introduced land reform, designed to benefit the majority tenant farmers and reduce the power of rich landowners, many of whom had advocated for war and supported Japanese expansionism in the 1930s. MacArthur also tried to break up the large Japanese business conglomerates, or zaibatsu, as part of the effort to transform the economy into a free market capitalist system. In 1947, Allied advisors essentially dictated a new constitution to Japan’s leaders. Some of the most profound changes in the document included downgrading the emperor’s status to that of a figurehead without political control and placing more power in the parliamentary system, promoting greater rights and privileges for women, and renouncing the right to wage war, which involved eliminating all non-defensive armed forces.

General MacArthur and Japanese Emperor Hirohito

By late 1947 and early 1948, the emergence of an economic crisis in Japan alongside concerns about the spread of communism sparked a reconsideration of occupation policies. This period is sometimes called the “reverse course.” In this stage of the occupation, which lasted until 1950, the economic rehabilitation of Japan took center stage. SCAP became concerned that a weak Japanese economy would increase the influence of the domestic communist movement, and with a communist victory in China’s civil war increasingly likely, the future of East Asia appeared to be at stake. Occupation policies
to address the weakening economy ranged from tax reforms to measures aimed at controlling inflation. However the most serious problem was the shortage of raw materials required to feed Japanese industries and markets for finished goods. The outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 provided SCAP with just the opportunity it needed to address this problem, prompting some occupation officials to suggest that, “Korea came along and saved us.” After the UN entered the Korean War, Japan became the principal supply depot for UN forces. The conflict also placed Japan firmly within the confines of the U.S. defense perimeter in Asia, assuring the Japanese leadership that whatever the state of its military, no real threat would be made against Japanese soil.

In the third phase of the occupation, beginning in 1950, SCAP deemed the political and economic future of Japan firmly established and set about securing a formal peace treaty to end both the war and the occupation. The U.S. perception of international threats had changed so profoundly in the years between 1945 and 1950 that the idea of a re-armed and militant Japan no longer alarmed U.S. officials; instead, the real threat appeared to be the creep of communism, particularly in Asia. The final agreement allowed the United States to maintain its bases in Okinawa and elsewhere in Japan, and the U.S. Government promised Japan a bilateral security pact. In September of 1951, fifty-two nations met in San Francisco to discuss the treaty, and ultimately, forty-nine of them signed it. Notable holdouts included the USSR, Poland and Czechoslovakia, all of which objected to the promise to support the Republic of China and not do business with the People’s Republic of China that was forced on Japan by U.S. politicians.
The Acheson-Lilienthal & Baruch Plans, 1946

On June 14, 1946, before a session of the United Nations Atomic Energy Commission (UNAEC), U.S. representative Bernard Baruch, presented a proposal for the creation of an international Atomic Development Authority. The presentation of the Baruch Plan marked the culmination of an effort to establish international oversight of the use of atomic energy in the hopes of avoiding unchecked proliferation of nuclear power in the post World War II period.

The immediate origins of this effort can be traced to the Conference of Foreign Ministers held in Moscow between December 16 and 26, 1945. There representatives from the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union created a United Nations commission to advise on the destruction of all existing atomic weapons and to work toward using atomic energy for peaceful purposes. The resulting body, the UNAEC, was created on January 24, 1946, with six permanent members (the United States, Britain, France, the Soviet Union, China, and Canada) and six rotating members.

That same month, U.S. Secretary of State James Byrnes created a special advisory committee, whose members included Under-Secretary of State Dean Acheson and the Chairman of the Tennessee Valley Authority David Lilienthal, to compose a report that the U.S. Government would present to the UNAEC. The committee presented their report to Secretary Byrnes in March.

The so-called Acheson-Lilienthal report, written in large part by the committee’s chief scientific consult, Robert Oppenheimer, called for the creation of the Atomic Development Authority to oversee the mining and use of fissile materials, the operation of all nuclear facilities that could produce weaponry, and the right to dispense licenses to those countries wishing to pursue peaceful nuclear research. The plan relied on Soviet-American cooperation, since its authors recognized that the Soviet Union was unlikely to cede its veto power in the United Nations Security Council over any matter. Moreover, it made no mention of when the United States should destroy its nuclear arsenal, though it did acknowledge that doing so was a necessity.

The day before the United States submitted the Acheson-Lilienthal report to the United Nations, President Truman appointed Bernard Baruch as the American delegate to the UNAEC. Truman considered Baruch to be a capable negotiator who would vigorously defend the interests of the United States. Given the cooling relationship between the Soviet Union and the United States, President Truman did not want to accept any international agreement that might force the United States to abolish its nuclear weapons program without assurances that the Soviet Union would be unable to produce its own atomic bomb.

Baruch presented a slightly different plan to the UNEAC. Under the Baruch Plan the Atomic Development Authority would oversee the development and use of atomic energy, manage any nuclear installation with the ability to produce nuclear weapons, and inspect any nuclear facility conducting research for peaceful purposes. The plan also prohibited the illegal possession of an atomic bomb, the seizure of facilities administered by the Atomic Development Authority, and punished violators who interfered with inspections. The Atomic Development Authority would answer only to the Security
Council, which was charged with punishing those nations that violated the terms of the plan by imposing sanctions. Most importantly, the Baruch Plan would have stripped all members of the United Nations Security Council of their veto power concerning the issue of United Nations sanctions against nations that engaged in prohibited activities. Once the plan was fully implemented, the United States was to begin the process of destroying its nuclear arsenal.

The Soviets strongly opposed any plan that allowed the United States to retain its nuclear monopoly, not to mention international inspections of Soviet domestic nuclear facilities. The Soviets also rejected the idea of surrendering their Security Council veto over any issue as they argued that the council was already stacked in favor the United States.

By September 17, Baruch confessed to President Truman that he feared there was no possibility of reaching an agreement before the end of the year, at which point there would be a rotation of the non-permanent members of the UNAEC. Nevertheless, Baruch worried that delaying a vote until after the rotation of the members would destroy any chance of passing a resolution to create an Atomic Development Authority. As such, Baruch pushed for a formal vote before the end of the year in the hopes that, even if it did not pass, it would demonstrate the unreasonableness of the Soviet Union’s objections to a proposal that would spare the world a nuclear arms race. The vote was held on December 30, with 10 of the UNAEC’s 12 members in favor, while the other two members (the Soviet Union and Poland) abstained. The vote required unanimity to pass. As such, the Polish and Soviet abstentions thwarted the adoption of the Baruch Plan.
The Truman Doctrine, 1947

With the Truman Doctrine, President Harry S. Truman established that the United States would provide political, military and economic assistance to all democratic nations under threat from external or internal authoritarian forces. The Truman Doctrine effectively reoriented U.S. foreign policy, away from its usual stance of withdrawal from regional conflicts not directly involving the United States, to one of possible intervention in far away conflicts.

President Harry Truman

The Truman Doctrine arose from a speech delivered by President Truman before a joint session of Congress on March 12, 1947. The immediate cause for the speech was a recent announcement by the British Government that, as of March 31, it would no longer provide military and economic assistance to the Greek Government in its civil war against the Greek Communist Party. Truman asked Congress to support the Greek Government against the Communists. He also asked Congress to provide assistance for Turkey, since that nation, too, had previously been dependent on British aid.

At the time, the U.S. Government believed that the Soviet Union supported the Greek Communist war effort and worried that if the Communists prevailed in the Greek civil war, the Soviets would ultimately influence Greek policy. In fact, Soviet leader Joseph Stalin had deliberately refrained from providing any support to the Greek Communists and had forced Yugoslav Prime Minister Josip Tito to follow suit, much to the detriment of Soviet-Yugoslav relations. However, a number of other foreign policy problems also influenced President Truman’s decision to actively aid Greece and Turkey. In 1946, four setbacks, in particular, had served to effectively torpedo any chance of achieving a durable post-war rapprochement with the Soviet Union: the Soviets’ failure to withdraw their troops from northern Iran in early 1946 (as per the terms of the Tehran Declaration of 1943); Soviet attempts to pressure the Iranian Government into granting them oil concessions while supposedly fomenting irredentism by Azerbaijani separatists in northern Iran; Soviet efforts to force the Turkish Government into granting them base and transit rights through the Turkish Straits; and, the Soviet Government’s rejection of the Baruch plan for international control over nuclear energy and weapons in June 1946.

In light of the deteriorating relationship with the Soviet Union and the appearance of Soviet meddling in Greek and Turkish affairs, the withdrawal of British assistance to Greece provided the necessary catalyst for the Truman Administration to reorient American foreign policy. Accordingly, in his speech, President Truman requested that Congress provide $400,000,000 worth of aid to both the Greek and Turkish Governments and support the dispatch of American civilian and military personnel and equipment to the region.

Truman justified his request on two grounds. He argued that a Communist victory in the Greek Civil War would endanger the political stability of Turkey, which would undermine the political stability of the Middle East. This could not be allowed in light of the region’s immense strategic importance to U.S. national security. Truman also argued that the United States was compelled to assist “free peoples” in their struggles against “totalitarian regimes,” because the spread of authoritarianism would “undermine
the foundations of international peace and hence the security of the United States.” In the words of the Truman Doctrine, it became “the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.”

Truman argued that the United States could no longer stand by and allow the forcible expansion of Soviet totalitarianism into free, independent nations, because American national security now depended upon more than just the physical security of American territory. Rather, in a sharp break with its traditional avoidance of extensive foreign commitments beyond the Western Hemisphere during peacetime, the Truman Doctrine committed the United States to actively offering assistance to preserve the political integrity of democratic nations when such an offer was deemed to be in the best interest of the United States.
National Security Act of 1947

The National Security Act of 1947 mandated a major reorganization of the foreign policy and military establishments of the U.S. Government. The act created many of the institutions that Presidents found useful when formulating and implementing foreign policy, including the National Security Council (NSC).

President signing the National Security Act into Law

The Council itself included the President, Vice President, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, and other members (such as the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency), who met at the White House to discuss both long-term problems and more immediate national security crises. A small NSC staff was hired to coordinate foreign policy materials from other agencies for the President. Beginning in 1953 the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs directed this staff. Each President has accorded the NSC with different degrees of importance and has given the NSC staff varying levels of autonomy and influence over other agencies such as the Departments of State and Defense. President Dwight D. Eisenhower, for example, used the NSC meetings to make key foreign policy decisions, while John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson preferred to work more informally through trusted associates. Under President Richard M. Nixon, the NSC staff, then headed by Henry A. Kissinger, was transformed from a coordinating body into an organization that actively engaged in negotiations with foreign leaders and implementing the President’s decisions. The NSC meetings themselves, however, were infrequent and merely confirmed decisions already agreed upon by Nixon and Kissinger.

The act also established the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), which grew out of World War II era Office of Strategic Services and small post-war intelligence organizations. The CIA served as the primary civilian intelligence-gathering organization in the government. Later, the Defense Intelligence Agency became the main military intelligence body. The 1947 law also caused far-reaching changes in the military establishment. The War Department and Navy Department merged into a single Department of Defense under the Secretary of Defense, who also directed the newly created Department of the Air Force. However, each of the three branches maintained their own service secretaries. In 1949 the act was amended to give the Secretary of Defense more power over the individual services and their secretaries.
Kennan and Containment, 1947

George F. Kennan, a career Foreign Service Officer, formulated the policy of “containment,” the basic United States strategy for fighting the cold war (1947–1989) with the Soviet Union.

Kennan’s ideas, which became the basis of the Truman administration’s foreign policy, first came to public attention in 1947 in the form of an anonymous contribution to the journal *Foreign Affairs*, the so-called “X-Article.” “The main element of any United States policy toward the Soviet Union,” Kennan wrote, “must be that of a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies.” To that end, he called for countering “Soviet pressure against the free institutions of the Western world” through the “adroit and vigilant application of counter-force at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points, corresponding to the shifts and maneuvers of Soviet policy.” Such a policy, Kennan predicted, would “promote tendencies which must eventually find their outlet in either the break-up or the gradual mellowing of Soviet power.”

Kennan’s policy was controversial from the very beginning. Columnist Walter Lippmann attacked the X-Article for failing to differentiate between vital and peripheral interests. The United States, Kennan’s article implied, should face down the Soviet Union and its Communist allies whenever and wherever they posed a risk of gaining influence. In fact, Kennan advocated defending above all else the world’s major centers of industrial power against Soviet expansion: Western Europe, Japan, and the United States. Others criticized Kennan’s policy for being too defensive. Most notably, John Foster Dulles declared during the 1952 election campaign that the United States’ policy should not be containment, but the “rollback” of Soviet power and the eventual “liberation” of Eastern Europe. Even within the Truman administration there was a rift over containment between Kennan and Paul Nitze, Kennan’s successor as director of the Policy Planning Staff. Nitze, who saw the Soviet threat primarily in military terms, interpreted Kennan’s call for “the adroit and vigilant application of counter-force” to mean the use of military power. In contrast, Kennan, who considered the Soviet threat to be primarily political, advocated above all else economic assistance (e.g., the Marshall Plan) and “psychological warfare” (overt propaganda and covert operations) to counter the spread of Soviet influence. In 1950, Nitze’s conception of containment won out over Kennan’s. NSC 68, a policy document prepared by the National Security Council and signed by Truman, called for a drastic expansion of the U.S. military budget. The paper also expanded containment’s scope beyond the defense of major centers of industrial power to encompass the entire world. “In the context of the present polarization of power,” it read, “a defeat of free institutions anywhere is a defeat everywhere.”

Despite all the criticisms and the various policy defeats that Kennan suffered in the early 1950’s, containment in the more general sense of blocking the expansion of Soviet influence remained the basic strategy of the United States throughout the cold war. On the one hand, the United States did not withdraw into isolationism; on the other, it did not move to “roll back” Soviet power, as John Foster Dulles briefly advocated. It is possible to say that each succeeding administration after Truman’s, until the collapse of communism in 1989, adopted a variation of Kennan’s containment policy and made it their own.
Marshall Plan, 1948

In the immediate post-World War II period, Europe remained ravaged by war and thus susceptible to exploitation by an internal and external Communist threat. In a June 5, 1947, speech to the graduating class at Harvard University, Secretary of State George C. Marshall issued a call for a comprehensive program to rebuild Europe. Fanned by the fear of Communist expansion and the rapid deterioration of European economies in the winter of 1946–1947, Congress passed the Economic Cooperation Act in March 1948 and approved funding that would eventually rise to over $12 billion for the rebuilding of Western Europe.

First page of the Marshall Plan

The Marshall Plan generated a resurgence of European industrialization and brought extensive investment into the region. It was also a stimulant to the U.S. economy by establishing markets for American goods. Although the participation of the Soviet Union and East European nations was an initial possibility, Soviet concern over potential U.S. economic domination of its Eastern European satellites and Stalin’s unwillingness to open up his secret society to westerners doomed the idea. Furthermore, it is unlikely that the U.S. Congress would have been willing to fund the plan as generously as it did if aid also went to Soviet Bloc Communist nations.

Thus the Marshall Plan was applied solely to Western Europe, precluding any measure of Soviet Bloc cooperation. Increasingly, the economic revival of Western Europe, especially West Germany, was viewed suspiciously in Moscow. Economic historians have debated the precise impact of the Marshall Plan on Western Europe, but these differing opinions do not detract from the fact that the Marshall Plan has been recognized as a great humanitarian effort. Secretary of State Marshall became the only general ever to receive a Nobel Prize for peace. The Marshall Plan also institutionalized and legitimized the concept of U.S. foreign aid programs, which have become an integral part of U.S. foreign policy.
The Berlin Airlift, 1948–1949

At the end of the Second World War, U.S., British, and Soviet military forces divided and occupied Germany. Also divided into occupation zones, Berlin was located far inside Soviet-controlled eastern Germany. The United States, United Kingdom, and France controlled western portions of the city, while Soviet troops controlled the eastern sector. As the wartime alliance between the Western Allies and the Soviet Union ended and friendly relations turned hostile, the question of whether the western occupation zones in Berlin would remain under Western Allied control or whether the city would be absorbed into Soviet-controlled eastern Germany led to the first Berlin crisis of the Cold War. The crisis started on June 24, 1948, when Soviet forces blockaded rail, road, and water access to Allied-controlled areas of Berlin. The United States and United Kingdom responded by airlifting food and fuel to Berlin from Allied airbases in western Germany. The crisis ended on May 12, 1949, when Soviet forces lifted the blockade on land access to western Berlin.

The crisis was a result of competing occupation policies and rising tensions between Western powers and the Soviet Union. After the end of the Second World War, the future of postwar Germany was plagued by the divisions within and between Allied powers. The only decision of significance that emerged from wartime planning was the agreement of zones of occupation. Even after the end of hostilities, the problem of what to do about Germany was not successfully addressed at the July 1945 Potsdam Conference. Not only was there a lack of consistency in the political leadership and policymaking among the British and the Americans, occupation policy on the ground also confronted unforeseen challenges. Two and a half million Berliners, spread between four zones of occupation, faced profound privations: Allied bombing had reduced the city to rubble, shelter and warmth were scarce, the black market dominated the city’s economic life, and starvation loomed. While mired in such conditions, Berlin emerged as a forward salient in the Western struggle against the Soviet Union.

The year 1947 saw major shifts in occupation policy in Germany. On January 1, the United States and United Kingdom unified their respective zones and formed Bizonia, which caused tensions between East and West to escalate. In March, the breakdown of the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers and the enunciation of the Truman Doctrine served to harden the lines of an increasingly bipolar international order. In June, Secretary of State George Marshall announced the European Recovery Program. The purpose of the Marshall Plan—as the program came to be called—was not only to support economic recovery in Western Europe, but also to create a bulwark against Communism by drawing participating states into the United States’ economic orbit.

In early 1948, the United States, United Kingdom, and France secretly began to plan the creation of a new German state made up of the Western Allies’ occupation zones. In March, when the Soviets discovered these designs, they withdrew from the Allied Control Council, which had met regularly since the end of the war in order to coordinate occupation policy between zones. In June, without informing the Soviets, U.S. and British policymakers introduced the new Deutschmark to Bizonia and West Berlin. The purpose of the currency reform was to wrest economic control of the city from the Soviets, enable the introduction of Marshall Plan aid, and curb the city’s black market. Soviet authorities responded with similar moves in their zone. Besides issuing their own currency, the Ostmark, the Soviets blocked all
major road, rail, and canal links to West Berlin, thus starving it of electricity, as well as a steady supply of essential food and coal

The United States and United Kingdom had few immediate options if hostilities broke out. Because of the drawdown in U.S. and British combat forces since the end of the Second World War, the Red Army stationed in and around Berlin dwarfed the Western Allied military presence. On June 13, 1948, the administrator of U.S.-occupied Germany General Lucius Clay reported to Washington that “There is no practicability in maintaining our position in Berlin and it must not be evaluated on that basis.... We are convinced that our remaining in Berlin is essential to our prestige in Germany and in Europe. Whether for good or bad, it has become a symbol of the American intent.” The Truman administration agreed. Based upon written agreements with the Soviet Union in 1945, the only connections to Berlin left to the Western Allies were air corridors from West Germany used to supply Berlin by air. The administration calculated that if the Soviets opposed the airlift with force, it would be an act of aggression against an unarmed humanitarian mission and the violation of an explicit agreement. Thus, the onus of igniting a conflict between the former allies would be on the aggressor. The United States launched “Operation Vittles” on June 26, with the United Kingdom following suit two days later with “Operation Plainfare.” Despite the desire for a peaceful resolution to the standoff, the United States also sent to the United Kingdom B-29 bombers, which were capable of carrying nuclear weapons. The beginning of the airlift proved difficult and Western diplomats asked the Soviets to seek a diplomatic solution to the impasse. The Soviets offered to drop the blockade if the Western Allies withdrew the Deutschmark from West Berlin.

Even though the Allies rebuffed the Soviet offer, West Berlin’s position remained precarious, and the standoff had political consequences on the ground. In September 1948, the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED), the German Communist Party of the Soviet zone of occupation, marched on the Berlin City Council and forced it to adjourn. Fearing that the Western Allies might halt the airlift and cede West Berlin to the Soviets, 300,000 West Berliners gathered at the Reichstag to show their opposition to Soviet domination. The turnout convinced the West to keep the airlift and the Deutschmark.

In time, the airlift became ever more efficient and the number of aircraft increased. At the height of the campaign, one plane landed every 45 seconds at Tempelhof Airport. By spring 1949, the Berlin Airlift proved successful. The Western Allies showed that they could sustain the operation indefinitely. At the same time, the Allied counter-blockade on eastern Germany was causing severe shortages, which, Moscow feared, might lead to political upheaval.

On May 11, 1949, Moscow lifted the blockade of West Berlin. The Berlin Crisis of 1948–1949 solidified the division of Europe. Shortly before the end of the blockade, the Western Allies created the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Two weeks after the end of the blockade, the state of West Germany was established, soon followed by the creation of East Germany. The incident solidified the demarcation between East and West in Europe; it was one of the few places on earth that U.S. and Soviet armed forces stood face-to-face. It also transformed Berlin, once equated with Prussian militarism and Nazism, into a symbol of democracy and freedom in the fight against Communism.
Creation of Israel, 1948

On May 14, 1948, David Ben-Gurion, the head of the Jewish Agency, proclaimed the establishment of the State of Israel. U.S. President Harry S. Truman recognized the new nation on the same day.

Eliahu Elath presenting ark to President Truman

Although the United States supported the Balfour Declaration of 1917, which favored the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine, President Franklin D. Roosevelt had assured the Arabs in 1945 that the United States would not intervene without consulting both the Jews and the Arabs in that region. The British, who held a colonial mandate for Palestine until May 1948, opposed both the creation of a Jewish state and an Arab state in Palestine as well as unlimited immigration of Jewish refugees to the region. Great Britain wanted to preserve good relations with the Arabs to protect its vital political and economic interests in Palestine.

Soon after President Truman took office, he appointed several experts to study the Palestinian issue. In the summer of 1946, Truman established a special cabinet committee under the chairmanship of Dr. Henry F. Grady, an Assistant Secretary of State, who entered into negotiations with a parallel British committee to discuss the future of Palestine. In May 1946, Truman announced his approval of a recommendation to admit 100,000 displaced persons into Palestine and in October publicly declared his support for the creation of a Jewish state. Throughout 1947, the United Nations Special Commission on Palestine examined the Palestinian question and recommended the partition of Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab state. On November 29, 1947 the United Nations adopted Resolution 181 (also known as the Partition Resolution) that would divide Great Britain’s former Palestinian mandate into Jewish and Arab states in May 1948 when the British mandate was scheduled to end. Under the resolution, the area of religious significance surrounding Jerusalem would remain a corpus separatum under international control administered by the United Nations.

Although the United States backed Resolution 181, the U.S. Department of State recommended the creation of a United Nations trusteeship with limits on Jewish immigration and a division of Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab provinces but not states. The State Department, concerned about the possibility of an increasing Soviet role in the Arab world and the potential for restriction by Arab oil producing nations of oil supplies to the United States, advised against U.S. intervention on behalf of the Jews. Later, as the date for British departure from Palestine drew near, the Department of State grew concerned about the possibility of an all-out war in Palestine as Arab states threatened to attack almost as soon as the UN passed the partition resolution.

Despite growing conflict between Palestinian Arabs and Palestinian Jews and despite the Department of State’s endorsement of a trusteeship, Truman ultimately decided to recognize the state Israel.
The Arab-Israeli War of 1948

The Arab-Israeli War of 1948 broke out when five Arab nations invaded territory in the former Palestinian mandate immediately following the announcement of the independence of the state of Israel on May 14, 1948. In 1947, and again on May 14, 1948, the United States had offered de facto recognition of the Israeli Provisional Government, but during the war, the United States maintained an arms embargo against all belligerents.

On November 29, 1947, the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 181 (also known as the Partition Resolution) that would divide Great Britain’s former Palestinian mandate into Jewish and Arab states in May 1948. Under the resolution, the area of religious significance surrounding Jerusalem would remain under international control administered by the United Nations. The Palestinian Arabs refused to recognize this arrangement, which they regarded as favorable to the Jews and unfair to the Arab population that would remain in Jewish territory under the partition. The United States sought a middle way by supporting the United Nations resolution, but also encouraging negotiations between Arabs and Jews in the Middle East.

The United Nations resolution sparked conflict between Jewish and Arab groups within Palestine. Fighting began with attacks by irregular bands of Palestinian Arabs attached to local units of the Arab Liberation Army composed of volunteers from Palestine and neighboring Arab countries. These groups launched their attacks against Jewish cities, settlements, and armed forces. The Jewish forces were composed of the Haganah, the underground militia of the Jewish community in Palestine, and two small irregular groups, the Irgun, and LEHI. The goal of the Arabs was initially to block the Partition Resolution and to prevent the establishment of the Jewish state. The Jews, on the other hand, hoped to gain control over the territory allotted to them under the Partition Plan.

After Israel declared its independence on May 14, 1948, the fighting intensified with other Arab forces joining the Palestinian Arabs in attacking territory in the former Palestinian mandate. On the eve of May 14, the Arabs launched an air attack on Tel Aviv, which the Israelis resisted. This action was followed by the invasion of the former Palestinian mandate by Arab armies from Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Egypt. Saudi Arabia sent a formation that fought under the Egyptian command. British trained forces from Transjordan eventually intervened in the conflict, but only in areas that had been designated as part of the Arab state under the United Nations Partition Plan and the corpus separatum of Jerusalem. After tense early fighting, Israeli forces, now under joint command, were able to gain the offensive.

Though the United Nations brokered two cease-fires during the conflict, fighting continued into 1949. Israel and the Arab states did not reach any formal armistice agreements until February. Under separate agreements between Israel and the neighboring states of Egypt, Lebanon, Transjordan, and Syria, these bordering nations agreed to formal armistice lines. Israel gained some territory formerly granted to Palestinian Arabs under the United Nations resolution in 1947. Egypt and Jordan retained control over the Gaza Strip and the West Bank respectively. These armistice lines held until 1967. The United States did not become directly involved with the armistice negotiations, but hoped that instability in the
Middle East would not interfere with the international balance of power between the Soviet Union and the United States.
North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), 1949

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization was created in 1949 by the United States, Canada, and several Western European nations to provide collective security against the Soviet Union.

NATO was the first peacetime military alliance the United States entered into outside of the Western Hemisphere. After the destruction of the Second World War, the nations of Europe struggled to rebuild their economies and ensure their security. The former required a massive influx of aid to help the war-torn landscapes re-establish industries and produce food, and the latter required assurances against a resurgent Germany or incursions from the Soviet Union. The United States viewed an economically strong, rearmmed, and integrated Europe as vital to the prevention of communist expansion across the continent. As a result, Secretary of State George Marshall proposed a program of large-scale economic aid to Europe. The resulting European Recovery Program, or Marshall Plan, not only facilitated European economic integration but promoted the idea of shared interests and cooperation between the United States and Europe. Soviet refusal either to participate in the Marshall Plan or to allow its satellite states in Eastern Europe to accept the economic assistance helped to reinforce the growing division between east and west in Europe.

In 1947–1948, a series of events caused the nations of Western Europe to become concerned about their physical and political security and the United States to become more closely involved with European affairs. The ongoing civil war in Greece, along with tensions in Turkey, led President Harry S. Truman to assert that the United States would provide economic and military aid to both countries, as well as to any other nation struggling against an attempt at subjugation. A Soviet-sponsored coup in Czechoslovakia resulted in a communist government coming to power on the borders of Germany. Attention also focused on elections in Italy as the communist party had made significant gains among Italian voters. Furthermore, events in Germany also caused concern. The occupation and governance of Germany after the war had long been disputed, and in mid-1948, Soviet premier Joseph Stalin chose to test Western resolve by implementing a blockade against West Berlin, which was then under joint U.S., British, and French control but surrounded by Soviet-controlled East Germany. This Berlin Crisis brought the United States and the Soviet Union to the brink of conflict, although a massive airlift to resupply the city for the duration of the blockade helped to prevent an outright confrontation. These events caused U.S. officials to grow increasingly wary of the possibility that the countries of Western Europe might deal with their security concerns by negotiating with the Soviets. To counter this possible turn of events, the Truman Administration considered the possibility of forming a European-American alliance that would commit the United States to bolstering the security of Western Europe.

The Western European countries were willing to consider a collective security solution. In response to increasing tensions and security concerns, representatives of several countries of Western Europe gathered together to create a military alliance. Great Britain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg signed the Brussels Treaty in March, 1948. Their treaty provided collective defense; if any one of these nations was attacked, the others were bound to help defend it. At the same time, the Truman Administration instituted a peacetime draft, increased military spending, and called upon the historically isolationist Republican Congress to consider a military alliance with Europe. In May of 1948,
Republican Senator Arthur H. Vandenburg proposed a resolution suggesting that the President seek a security treaty with Western Europe that would adhere to the United Nations charter but exist outside of the Security Council where the Soviet Union held veto power. The Vandenburg Resolution passed, and negotiations began for the North Atlantic Treaty.

In spite of general agreement on the concept behind the treaty, it took several months to work out the exact terms. The U.S. Congress had embraced the pursuit of the international alliance, but it remained concerned about the wording of the treaty. The nations of Western Europe wanted assurances that the United States would intervene automatically in the event of an attack, but under the U.S. Constitution the power to declare war rested with Congress. Negotiations worked toward finding language that would reassure the European states but not obligate the United States to act in a way that violated its own laws. Additionally, European contributions to collective security would require large-scale military assistance from the United States to help rebuild Western Europe’s defense capabilities. While the European nations argued for individual grants and aid, the United States wanted to make aid conditional on regional coordination. A third issue was the question of scope. The Brussels Treaty signatories preferred that membership in the alliance be restricted to the members of that treaty plus the United States. The U.S. negotiators felt there was more to be gained from enlarging the new treaty to include the countries of the North Atlantic, including Canada, Iceland, Denmark, Norway, Ireland, and Portugal. Together, these countries held territory that formed a bridge between the opposite shores of the

The result of these extensive negotiations was the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty in 1949. In this agreement, the United States, Canada, Belgium, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, and the United Kingdom agreed to consider attack against one an attack against all, along with consultations about threats and defense matters. This collective defense arrangement only formally applied to attacks against the signatories that occurred in Europe or North America; it did not include conflicts in colonial territories. After the treaty was signed, a number of the signatories made requests to the United States for military aid. Later in 1949, President Truman proposed a military assistance program, and the Mutual Defense Assistance Program passed the U.S. Congress in October, appropriating some $1.4 billion dollars for the purpose of building Western European defenses.

Soon after the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the outbreak of the Korean War led the members to move quickly to integrate and coordinate their defense forces through a centralized headquarters. The North Korean attack on South Korea was widely viewed at the time to be an example of communist aggression directed by Moscow, so the United States bolstered its troop commitments to Europe to provide assurances against Soviet aggression on the European continent. In 1952, the members agreed to admit Greece and Turkey to NATO and added the Federal Republic of Germany in 1955. West German entry led the Soviet Union to retaliate with its own regional alliance, which took the form of the Warsaw Treaty Organization and included the Soviet satellite states of Eastern Europe as members.

The collective defense arrangements in NATO served to place the whole of Western Europe under the American “nuclear umbrella.” In the 1950s, one of the first military doctrines of NATO emerged in the
form of “massive retaliation,” or the idea that if any member was attacked, the United States would respond with a large-scale nuclear attack. The threat of this form of response was meant to serve as a deterrent against Soviet aggression on the continent. Although formed in response to the exigencies of the developing Cold War, NATO has lasted beyond the end of that conflict, with membership even expanding to include some former Soviet states. It remains the largest peacetime military alliance in the world.
The Chinese Revolution of 1949

On October 1, 1949, Chinese Communist leader Mao Zedong declared the creation of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). The announcement ended the costly full-scale civil war between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Nationalist Party, or Kuomintang (KMT), which broke out immediately following World War II and had been preceded by on and off conflict between the two sides since the 1920’s. The creation of the PRC also completed the long process of governmental upheaval in China begun by the Chinese Revolution of 1911. The “fall” of mainland China to communism in 1949 led the United States to suspend diplomatic ties with the PRC for decades.

The Chinese Communist Party, founded in 1921 in Shanghai, originally existed as a study group working within the confines of the First United Front with the Nationalist Party. Chinese Communists joined with the Nationalist Army in the Northern Expedition of 1926–27 to rid the nation of the warlords that prevented the formation of a strong central government. This collaboration lasted until the “White Terror” of 1927, when the Nationalists turned on the Communists, killing them or purging them from the party.

After the Japanese invaded Manchuria in 1931, the Government of the Republic of China (ROC) faced the triple threat of Japanese invasion, Communist uprising, and warlord insurrections. Frustrated by the focus of the Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek on internal threats instead of the Japanese assault, a group of generals abducted Chiang in 1937 and forced him to reconsider cooperation with the Communist army. As with the first effort at cooperation between the Nationalist government and the CCP, this Second United Front was short-lived. The Nationalists expended needed resources on containing the Communists, rather than focusing entirely on Japan, while the Communists worked to strengthen their influence in rural society.

During World War II, popular support for the Communists increased. U.S. officials in China reported a dictatorial suppression of dissent in Nationalist-controlled areas. These undemocratic polices combined with wartime corruption made the Republic of China Government vulnerable to the Communist threat. The CCP, for its part, experienced success in its early efforts at land reform and was lauded by peasants for its unflagging efforts to fight against the Japanese invaders.

Japanese surrender set the stage for the resurgence of civil war in China. Though only nominally democratic, the Nationalist Government of Chiang Kai-shek continued to receive U.S. support both as its former war ally and as the sole option for preventing Communist control of China. U.S. forces flew tens of thousands of Nationalist Chinese troops into Japanese-controlled territory and allowed them to accept the Japanese surrender. The Soviet Union, meanwhile, occupied Manchuria and only pulled out when Chinese Communist forces were in place to claim that territory.

In 1945, the leaders of the Nationalist and Communist parties, Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Zedong, met for a series of talks on the formation of a post-war government. Both agreed on the importance of democracy, a unified military, and equality for all Chinese political parties. The truce was tenuous, however, and, in spite of repeated efforts by U.S. General George Marshall to broker an agreement, by
1946 the two sides were fighting an all-out civil war. Years of mistrust between the two sides thwarted efforts to form a coalition government.

As the civil war gained strength from 1947 to 1949, eventual Communist victory seemed more and more likely. Although the Communists did not hold any major cities after World War II, they had strong grassroots support, superior military organization and morale, and large stocks of weapons seized from Japanese supplies in Manchuria. Years of corruption and mismanagement had eroded popular support for the Nationalist Government. Early in 1947, the ROC Government was already looking to the island province of Taiwan, off the coast of Fujian Province, as a potential point of retreat. Although officials in the Truman Administration were not convinced of the strategic importance to the United States of maintaining relations with Nationalist China, no one in the U.S. Government wanted to be charged with facilitating the “loss” of China to communism. Military and financial aid to the floundering Nationalists continued, though not at the level that Chiang Kai-shek would have liked. In October of 1949, after a string of military victories, Mao Zedong proclaimed the establishment of the PRC; Chiang and his forces fled to Taiwan to regroup and plan for their efforts to retake the mainland.

The ability of the PRC and the United States to find common ground in the wake of the establishment of the new Chinese state was hampered by both domestic politics and global tensions. In August of 1949, the Truman administration published the “China White Paper,” which explained past U.S. policy toward China based upon the principle that only Chinese forces could determine the outcome of their civil war. Unfortunately for Truman, this step failed to protect his administration from charges of having “lost” China. The unfinished nature of the revolution, leaving a broken and exiled but still vocal Nationalist Government and army on Taiwan, only heightened the sense among U.S. anti-communists that the outcome of the struggle could be reversed. The outbreak of the Korean War, which pitted the PRC and the United States on opposite sides of an international conflict, ended any opportunity for accommodation between the PRC and the United States. Truman’s desire to prevent the Korean conflict from spreading south led to the U.S. policy of protecting the Chiang Kai-shek government on Taiwan.

For more than twenty years after the Chinese revolution of 1949, there were few contacts, limited trade and no diplomatic ties between the two countries. Until the 1970s, the United States continued to recognize the Republic of China, located on Taiwan, as China’s true government and supported that government’s holding the Chinese seat in the United Nations.
NSC-68, 1950

National Security Council Paper NSC-68 (entitled “United States Objectives and Programs for National Security” and frequently referred to as NSC-68) was a Top-Secret report completed by the U.S. Department of State’s Policy Planning Staff on April 7, 1950. The 58-page memorandum is among the most influential documents composed by the U.S. Government during the Cold War, and was not declassified until 1975. Its authors argued that one of the most pressing threats confronting the United States was the “hostile design” of the Soviet Union. The authors concluded that the Soviet threat would soon be greatly augmented by the addition of more weapons, including nuclear weapons, to the Soviet arsenal. They argued that the best course of action was to respond in kind with a massive build-up of the U.S. military and its weaponry.

Reeling from the recent victory of Communist forces in the Chinese Civil War and the successful detonation of an atomic weapon by the Soviet Union, Secretary of State Dean Acheson asked the Policy Planning Staff, led by Paul Nitze, to undertake a comprehensive review of U.S. national security strategy. Building upon the conclusions of an earlier National Security Council paper (NSC-20/4), the authors of NSC-68 based their conclusions on the theory that the decline of the Western European powers and Japan following World War II had left the United States and the Soviet Union as the two dominant powers. Nitze’s group argued that the Soviet Union was “animated by a new fanatic faith” antithetical to that of the United States, and was driven “to impose its absolute authority over the rest of the world.” Furthermore, they concluded that “violent and non-violent” conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union had become “endemic.”

NSC-68 outlined a variety of possible courses of action, including a return to isolationism; war; continued diplomatic efforts to negotiate with the Soviets; or “the rapid building up of the political, economic, and military strength of the free world.” This last approach would allow the United States to attain sufficient strength to deter Soviet aggression. In the event that an armed conflict with the Communist bloc did arise, the United States could then successfully defend its territory and overseas interests.

The authors of NSC-68 rejected a renewal of U.S. isolationism, fearing that this would lead to the Soviet domination of Eurasia, and leave the United States marooned on the Western Hemisphere, cut off from the allies and resources it needed to fend off further Soviet encroachments. The report also ruled out a preventive strike against the Soviet Union, because its authors reckoned that such action would not destroy the Soviet military’s offensive capacities, and would instead invite retaliatory strikes that would devastate Western Europe. Moreover, U.S. experts did not believe that American public opinion would support measures that might lead to a protracted war. NSC-68 did not rule out the prospect of negotiating with the Soviet Union when it suited the objectives of the United States and its allies; however, the report’s authors argued that such an approach would only succeed if the United States could create “political and economic conditions in the free world” sufficient to deter the Soviet Union from pursuing a military solution to the Cold War rivalry.
NSC-68 concluded that the only plausible way to deter the Soviet Union was for President Harry Truman to support a massive build-up of both conventional and nuclear arms. More specifically, such a program should seek to protect the United States and its allies from Soviet land and air attacks, maintain lines of communications, and enhance the technical superiority of the United States through “an accelerated exploitation of [its] scientific potential.” In order to fund the substantial increase in military spending this conclusion demanded, the report suggested that the Government increase taxes and reduce other expenditures.

Initially, a number of U.S. officials strongly opposed NSC-68’s recommendations. Critics such as Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson, and senior diplomats such as Soviet experts and former ambassadors to the Soviet Union George Kennan and Charles Bohlen, argued that the United States already had a substantial military advantage over the Soviet Union. Kennan, in particular, disagreed with Nitze’s assertion that the Soviet Union was bent on achieving domination through force of arms, and argued that the United States could contain the Soviet Union through political and economic measures, rather than purely military ones. However, the invasion of South Korea by Soviet and Chinese-backed North Korean forces in June 1950, and continuing charges by Congressional critics that the Administration was soft on Communism, quickly settled matters in favor of the report’s recommendations. NSC 68’s recommendations thereby became policy, and the United States Government began a massive military build-up. While NSC-68 did not make any specific recommendations regarding the proposed increase in defense expenditures, the Truman Administration almost tripled defense spending as a percentage of the gross domestic product between 1950 and 1953 (from 5 to 14.2 percent).
Decolonization of Asia and Africa, 1945–1960

Between 1945 and 1960, three dozen new states in Asia and Africa achieved autonomy or outright independence from their European colonial rulers.

There was no one process of decolonization. In some areas, it was peaceful, and orderly. In many others, independence was achieved only after a protracted revolution. A few newly independent countries acquired stable governments almost immediately; others were ruled by dictators or military juntas for decades, or endured long civil wars. Some European governments welcomed a new relationship with their former colonies; others contested decolonization militarily. The process of decolonization coincided with the new Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States, and with the early development of the new United Nations. Decolonization was often affected by superpower competition, and had a definite impact on the evolution of that competition. It also significantly changed the pattern of international relations in a more general sense.

The creation of so many new countries, some of which occupied strategic locations, others of which possessed significant natural resources, and most of which were desperately poor, altered the composition of the United Nations and political complexity of every region of the globe. In the mid to late 19th century, the European powers colonized much of Africa and Southeast Asia. During the decades of imperialism, the industrializing powers of Europe viewed the African and Asian continents as reservoirs of raw materials, labor, and territory for future settlement. In most cases, however, significant development and European settlement in these colonies was sporadic. However, the colonies were exploited, sometimes brutally, for natural and labor resources, and sometimes even for military conscripts. In addition, the introduction of colonial rule drew arbitrary natural boundaries where none had existed before, dividing ethnic and linguistic groups and natural features, and laying the foundation for the creation of numerous states lacking geographic, linguistic, ethnic, or political affinity.

During World War II Japan, itself a significant imperial power, drove the European powers out of Asia. After the Japanese surrender in 1945, local nationalist movements in the former Asian colonies campaigned for independence rather than a return to European colonial rule. In many cases, as in Indonesia and French Indochina, these nationalists had been guerrillas fighting the Japanese after European surrenders, or were former members of colonial military establishments. These independence movements often appealed to the United States Government for support.

While the United States generally supported the concept of national self-determination, it also had strong ties to its European allies, who had imperial claims on their former colonies. The Cold War only served to complicate the U.S. position, as U.S. support for decolonization was offset by American concern over communist expansion and Soviet strategic ambitions in Europe. Several of the NATO allies asserted that their colonial possessions provided them with economic and military strength that would otherwise be lost to the alliance. Nearly all of the United States’ European allies believed that after their recovery from World War II their colonies would finally provide the combination of raw materials and protected markets for finished goods that would cement the colonies to Europe. Whether or not this was the case, the alternative of allowing the colonies to slip away, perhaps into the United States’
economic sphere or that of another power, was unappealing to every European government interested in postwar stability. Although the U.S. Government did not force the issue, it encouraged the European imperial powers to negotiate an early withdrawal from their overseas colonies. The United States granted independence to the Philippines in 1946.

However, as the Cold War competition with the Soviet Union came to dominate U.S. foreign policy concerns in the late 1940s and 1950s, the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations grew increasingly concerned that as the European powers lost their colonies or granted them independence, Soviet-supported communist parties might achieve power in the new states. This might serve to shift the international balance of power in favor of the Soviet Union and remove access to economic resources from U.S. allies. Events such as the Indonesian struggle for independence from the Netherlands (1945–50), the Vietnamese war against France (1945–54), and the nationalist and professed socialist takeovers of Egypt (1952) and Iran (1951) served to reinforce such fears, even if new governments did not directly link themselves to the Soviet Union. Thus, the United States used aid packages, technical assistance and sometimes even military intervention to encourage newly independent nations in the Third World to adopt governments that aligned with the West. The Soviet Union deployed similar tactics in an effort to encourage new nations to join the communist bloc, and attempted to convince newly decolonized countries that communism was an intrinsically non-imperialist economic and political ideology. Many of the new nations resisted the pressure to be drawn into the Cold War, joined in the “nonaligned movement,” which formed after the Bandung conference of 1955, and focused on internal development.

The newly independent nations that emerged in the 1950s and the 1960s became an important factor in changing the balance of power within the United Nations. In 1946, there were 35 member states in the United Nations; as the newly independent nations of the “third world” joined the organization, by 1970 membership had swelled to 127. These new member states had a few characteristics in common; they were non-white, with developing economies, facing internal problems that were the result of their colonial past, which sometimes put them at odds with European countries and made them suspicious of European-style governmental structures, political ideas, and economic institutions. These countries also became vocal advocates of continuing decolonization, with the result that the UN Assembly was often ahead of the Security Council on issues of self-governance and decolonization. The new nations pushed the UN toward accepting resolutions for independence for colonial states and creating a special committee on colonialism, demonstrating that even though some nations continued to struggle for independence, in the eyes of the international community, the colonial era was ending.
The Korean War, 1950–1953

The Korean War began as a civil war between North and South Korea, but the conflict soon became international when, under U.S. leadership, the United Nations joined to support South Korea and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) entered to aid North Korea. The war left Korea divided and brought the Cold War to Asia.

Despite its long national history and unique cultural and linguistic identity, Korea suffered from frequent interference by its neighbors. China treated the Kingdom of Korea as a tributary state for centuries and fought Japan for influence on the Korean Peninsula in 1894–95. In 1904–05, the Russo-Japanese War was also fought largely on Korean territory. After the Japanese victory in that conflict, Japan consolidated its growing influence in Korea and in 1910, formally annexed it as a colony. Japan ruled Korea from 1910 until the end of World War II.

During World War II, the Allies discussed the future of Korea in the postwar period. The United States, Great Britain, and the Republic of China had met at Cairo in 1943, where they agreed that after its defeat, Japan would be stripped of all of its colonies, including Korea. As the war drew to a close in August of 1945, two U.S. army colonels (one of whom, Dean Rusk, would later become Secretary of State) proposed that the Soviet Union take responsibility for accepting the surrender of Japanese troops in the part of the Korean peninsula north of the 38th parallel, whereas U.S. troops would receive the surrender south of that line. This decision resulted in the division and separation of many villages along the 38th parallel and families with ties across that line.

The postwar planners had intended that the division between North and South Korea would be a temporary administrative solution. After the war, the United Nations agreed to oversee elections in the North and South in 1947 in the hopes that it would lead to the reunification of Korea under a democratically elected government. However, the Soviet Union blocked the elections in its section and instead, supported Kim Il Sung as leader of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK). In the South, the United States supported Syngman Rhee as the elected leader of the newly founded Republic of Korea (ROK). Both Kim and Rhee were nationalists dedicated to the idea of reunification, although each ruled with a different ideological vision. In 1949, under a UN agreement, both the Soviet Union and the United States withdrew their military forces from Korea, but both left large numbers of advisors on the peninsula. The two sides were to continue negotiations over elections to reunify the country, and although the United States preferred that the resulting government not be communist, in 1949 it was still not prepared to commit militarily to preventing that outcome.

Both sides periodically instigated skirmishes across the 38th parallel, but the war formally began when the DPRK crossed the demarcation line and attacked the ROK on June 25, 1950. Both Korean governments had been adamant about reunifying the peninsula, and the Soviet-supported DPRK saw an opportunity to do so with a swift strike. The DPRK army quickly pushed into South Korea, and by September, it had engulfed almost the entire peninsula and had forced the ROK army into a small area around Pusan. Upon hearing news of the attack, the United States immediately called for a meeting of the United Nations Security Council, which the Soviet Union was then boycotting over the issue of
Chinese representation. With the Soviets absent, the Security Council was able to pass a resolution condemning the actions of the DPRK and demanding that the Northern armies withdraw from the South. The United States viewed the attack on the South as evidence that communism would actively challenge the free world and revised its security perimeter to include maintaining a non-communist South Korea. The UN sent forces composed of troops from 15 nations to the peninsula to stop the communist advance.

The UN entry into the conflict led to a swift internationalization of what had been an internal struggle. Though the United States dedicated the greatest number of troops, soldiers from Australia, Belgium, Canada, Colombia, Ethiopia, France, Greece, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the Philippines, South Africa, Thailand, Turkey and the United Kingdom also sent troops. U.S. officials emphasized that this joint military action was imperative to prevent the conflict from spreading outside Korea.

The Truman Administration remained concerned that recent communist successes in Korea would encourage the People’s Republic of China (PRC) to take action. After the communist forces triumphed on the Chinese mainland, China’s Nationalist Government had retreated to the island of Taiwan, and the threat had persisted that the PRC might cross the strait to consolidate its power over all of China. President Harry Truman had proclaimed in early 1950 that he would not defend the Nationalists from a Communist attack, but after the outbreak of hostilities in Korea he moved the U.S. Seventh Fleet into the Taiwan Strait to discourage the spread of military conflict in the region. The PRC considered this U.S. action as interference in China’s internal affairs.

In September of 1950, UN forces led by U.S. General Douglas A. MacArthur managed to regain lost ground in South Korea and push north, forcing a reaction from the Chinese. After landing at Incheon, near Seoul, MacArthur’s troops quickly moved to cut off the advancing DPRK army from its North Korean supply lines. By the end of the month, UN forces were approaching the 38th parallel, had liberated Seoul, and had restored the status quo that existed before the war. The new question was whether to take this newfound success a step further and attempt to liberate the North from the rule of the DPRK. The leadership of the U.S. and UN forces believed that an attempt to “rollback” the communist forces and unite the country under non-communist rule was well within the parameters of the mission. Chinese leaders had warned the international community that they would intervene in the conflict if UN forces pushed north of the 38th parallel, but MacArthur and other members of the UN command did not believe that either the PRC or Soviet Union would attempt to halt UN forces. With authorization from Washington, UN forces pressed north, and by October 1950 had nearly reached the Yalu River, which marks the border between China and North Korea. Chinese officials viewed the UN forces approaching the Chinese border as a genuine threat to its security, and late in 1950 they sent Chinese forces into North Korea. The U.S. and UN had also grossly underestimated the size, strength, and determination of the Chinese forces. As a result, MacArthur’s troops were quickly forced to retreat behind the 38th parallel.

In early 1951, the territory around Seoul and central Korea changed hands several times as the UN and Communist forces advanced and retreated. MacArthur insisted on the extension of the conflict into
China, and on April 11, 1951, he was removed from his command on the charge of insubordination and replaced by General Matthew Ridgeway. By July 1951, the conflict had reached a stalemate, with the two sides fighting limited engagements, but with neither side in a position to force the other’s surrender. Both the United States and China had, at this point, achieved the short-term goal of maintaining the demarcation line at the 38th parallel, while the North and South Koreans had failed in the larger goal of uniting the country under their preferred political systems. Representatives of all the parties began to discuss peace.

For the next two years, small-scale skirmishes continued to break out, while the various representatives argued over the peace terms. After agreeing on the demarcation line and the settlement of airfields, the main issue blocking progress in the talks was the repatriation of prisoners of war. On July 27, 1953, the DPRK, PRC and UN signed an armistice (the ROK abstained) agreeing to a new border near the 38th parallel as the demarcation line between North and South Korea. Both sides would maintain and patrol a demilitarized zone (DMZ) surrounding that boundary line. The armistice also established a commission of neutral nations to oversee the voluntary repatriation of POWs. According to the agreement, each side would have to repatriate willing POWs within sixty days and send unwilling repatriates to the commission to oversee their departure to their preferred destinations. Under the supervision of the commission, some 14,227 Chinese and 7,582 North Koreans opted against repatriation; the Chinese were sent to Taiwan rather than the Chinese mainland. A handful of U.S. and British POWs in North Korea opted against repatriation as well, choosing instead to live in Communist China or North Korea.

The armistice was only a ceasefire agreement, not a formal peace treaty ending the war. A final peace treaty was supposed to be on the agenda at the Geneva Conference of 1954, but by the time that conference began, the French colonial war in Indochina took precedence. Ultimately, the United States and the ROK signed a mutual defense treaty, and U.S. troops became a part of the DMZ patrols on a semi-permanent basis.

The Korean War had long-lasting consequences for the entire region. Though it failed to unify the country, the United States achieved its larger goals, including preserving and promoting NATO interests and defending Japan. The war also resulted in a divided Korea and complicated any possibility for accommodation between the United States and China. The Korean War served to encourage the U.S. Cold War policies of containment and militarization, setting the stage for the further enlargement of the U.S. defense perimeter in Asia. These Cold War policies would eventually lead the United States to regional actions that included its attempts at preventing the fall of Vietnam to communism.
The Australia, New Zealand and United States Security Treaty (ANZUS Treaty), 1951

The Australia, New Zealand and United States Security Treaty, or ANZUS Treaty, was an agreement signed in 1951 to protect the security of the Pacific. Although the agreement has not been formally abrogated, the United States and New Zealand no longer maintain the security relationship between their countries.

At the onset of the Second World War, both Australia and New Zealand were members of the British Empire, so when Britain entered the conflict they did as well. During the course of the war, these two geographically isolated nations faced the threat of direct attack for the first time in their histories as modern states. As the Japanese expanded south into the Pacific Ocean, mainland Australia and especially the city of Darwin suffered frequent Japanese air raids in 1942 and 1943. After the sudden fall of the strategically important British colony of Singapore to the Japanese on February 15, 1942, the Antipodean nations expressed concern that the British Government was too focused on the war in Europe to protect its colonies properly and they began for the first time to look to the United States to help ensure their security.

As the other Allied powers turned their attention to the reconstruction of postwar Europe and Japan in the post World War II era, the governments of Australia and New Zealand remained concerned about the possibility of future Japanese expansionism and grew apprehensive about the rise of communism, particularly in East Asia. Even before the war ended, Australia and New Zealand signed an agreement stating that they had common goals and would work together in the international arena; at the time, the agreement was for both nations the first treaty negotiated independently, and it reflected the concern that the major powers of the United States and the United Kingdom may not take Australian and New Zealander issues into account in their postwar planning. The signing of the North Atlantic Treaty in 1949, in which the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States alongside the Western European powers committed to a mutual defense arrangement, further prompted the geographically distant countries of Australia and New Zealand to seek their own security guarantee and means of integration in the international system in the postwar order.

Australia initially considered the idea of a regional pact in the Pacific in the 1930s, and in 1946, at a meeting of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers, it suggested that the major powers of the British Commonwealth form a regional defense system. If such an organization were created, the members could then invite the United States and other countries with strong interests in the Pacific to join. At that time, however, the United States was not yet prepared to commit itself to formal security arrangements in the Pacific. During the late 1940s, the United States was heavily engaged in the rebuilding of Japan, but the United States did not extend its defense interests far beyond Japanese territory before the Korean War. In response to Australian suggestions for a regional coalition, U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson stated that formal treaties with the South Pacific nations were unnecessary, as any real attack on Australia or New Zealand would elicit a U.S. response even without formal treaties in place to guarantee it. Moreover, the situations in the Atlantic and the Pacific were quite different, so there was
no question of simply creating a “Pacific Treaty Organization” to parallel NATO. The Pacific Ocean was much larger, and the nations that bordered it were far more culturally and linguistically diverse than the nations of the North Atlantic. Other considerations led the United States to hesitate to commit to a regional organization in the Pacific as well. A number of the countries in Southeast Asia were still under colonial rule, or in the process of developing as independent states, and therefore neither they nor their colonial governments were in a position to make regional security commitments. At this time, the United States was also faced with the critical situation in Europe, including the occupation and support of West Germany and West Berlin and facing what it saw as the Soviet threat on that continent. There were fewer immediate economic or political threats to force equal attention to the security of the Southwest Pacific.

Several developments in Asia between 1949 and 1951 helped to change U.S. perceptions about the utility of a formal security arrangement. The communist victory in the Chinese Revolution in 1949 seemed to confirm fears that communism was spreading in East Asia as well as in Europe. In 1950s, the outbreak of the Korean War led Australia and New Zealand to commit troops through the United Nations and alongside the NATO allies, demonstrating both their concern over the threat of communism and their commitment to doing their part to help contain it in the region. Most importantly, the U.S. decision to end the occupation of Japan and seek a peace treaty was met with great suspicion and disapproval from officials in the South Pacific, and that made the United States more willing to develop a security treaty to gain Antipodean support for the final peace agreement. In April of 1951, U.S. President Harry Truman announced that negotiations on a tripartite security treaty between the United States, Australia and New Zealand would occur concurrently with the negotiations for a final peace treaty with Japan. Both treaties were concluded in mid-1951, and the ANZUS Treaty was ratified by the United States and entered into force in 1952.

Although Britain also maintained an obligation to help defend Australian and New Zealander security as the leader of the Commonwealth, it was not invited to join the agreement. There were several reasons for the omission. One important concern was that extending the invitation to Britain would have required the signatories to open the opportunity to other European powers with colonial interests in the region. Another was the fact that British forces were already engaged in Europe and the Middle East, not to mention committed to the rest of the Commonwealth, making their actual intervention in the South Pacific in the event of a security crisis unlikely. Britain was also dealing with internal instability in its Asian colonies, including Malaya and Hong Kong, and that made the United States reluctant to sign an agreement that might obligate it to step in to resolve British colonial concerns. In any case, the British were already committed to U.S. security via NATO and to Australia and New Zealand via the Commonwealth, so its participation in a Pacific security arrangement with the United States, Australia, and New Zealand would have been somewhat redundant. All parties assumed that if the ANZUS Treaty was eventually extended to include other powers, however, the United Kingdom would be among the first to join.

Although ANZUS was never expanded, the 1954 creation of the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) included all of the ANZUS powers, as well as Britain, France, and several other Asian powers, eliminating the impetus to change the foundation of the ANZUS Treaty. Over the course of the decades
that followed the signing of the ANZUS Treaty, the members met annually to discuss their shared interests and concerns. These concerns increasingly focused on the spread of communism rather than the potential for Japanese militarization. Both Australia and New Zealand sent forces to support the U.S. effort in Vietnam, though without formally invoking the treaty.

In 1984, the ANZUS Treaty began to unravel when New Zealand declared its country a nuclear-free zone and refused to allow U.S. nuclear-powered submarines to visit its ports. Two years later, U.S. Secretary of State George P. Shultz and Australian Foreign Minister Bill Hayden concluded a series of bilateral talks by confirming that their countries would continue to honor their obligations to one another under the ANZUS Treaty, in spite of the fact that the trilateral aspects of the Treaty had been halted. On September 17, 1986, the United States suspended its treaty obligations toward New Zealand.
The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 (The McCarran-Walter Act)

The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 upheld the national origins quota system established by the Immigration Act of 1924, reinforcing this controversial system of immigrant selection.

It also ended Asian exclusion from immigrating to the United States and introduced a system of preferences based on skill sets and family reunification. Situated in the early years of the Cold War, the debate over the revision of U.S. immigration law demonstrated a division between those interested in the relationship between immigration and foreign policy, and those linking immigration to concerns over national security. The former group, led by individuals like Democrat Congressman from New York Emanuel Cellar, favored the liberalization of immigration laws. Cellar expressed concerns that the restrictive quota system heavily favored immigration from Northern and Western Europe and therefore created resentment against the United States in other parts of the world. He felt the law created the sense that Americans thought people from Eastern Europe as less desirable and people from Asia inferior to those of European descent. The latter group, led by Republican Senator from Nevada Pat McCarran and Democrat Congressman from Pennsylvania Francis Walter, expressed concerns that the United States could face communist infiltration through immigration and that unassimilated aliens could threaten the foundations of American life. To these individuals, limited and selective immigration was the best way to ensure the preservation of national security and national interests.

Remarkably, economic factors were relatively unimportant in the debate over the new immigration provisions. Although past arguments in favor of restrictionism focused on the needs of the American economy and labor force, in 1952, the Cold War seemed to take precedent in the discussion. Notably, the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations took opposite sides in the debate, demonstrating that there was not one, clear pro-labor position.

At the basis of the Act was the continuation and codification of the National Origins Quota System. It revised the 1924 system to allow for national quotas at a rate of one-sixth of one percent of each nationality’s population in the United States in 1920. As a result, 85 percent of the 154,277 visas available annually were allotted to individuals of northern and western European lineage. The Act continued the practice of not including countries in the Western Hemisphere in the quota system, though it did introduce new length of residency requirements to qualify for quota-free entry.

The 1952 Act created symbolic opportunities for Asian immigration, though in reality it continued to discriminate against them. The law repealed the last of the existing measures to exclude Asian immigration, allotted each Asian nation a minimum quota of 100 visas each year, and eliminated laws preventing Asians from becoming naturalized American citizens. Breaking down the “Asiatic Barred Zone” was a step toward improving U.S. relations with Asian nations. At the same time, however, the new law only allotted new Asian quotas based on race, instead of nationality. An individual with one or more Asian parent, born anywhere in the world and possessing the citizenship of any nation, would be counted under the national quota of the Asian nation of his or her ethnicity or against a generic quota for the “Asian Pacific Triangle.” Low quota numbers and a uniquely racial construction for how to apply them ensured that total Asian immigration after 1952 would remain very limited.
There were other positive changes to the implementation of immigration policy in the 1952 Act. One was the creation of a system of preferences which served to help American consuls abroad prioritize visa applicants in countries with heavily oversubscribed quotas. Under the preference system, individuals with special skills or families already resident in the United States received precedence, a policy still in use today. Moreover, the Act gave non-quota status to alien husbands of American citizens (wives had been entering outside of the quota system for several years by 1952) and created a labor certification system, designed to prevent new immigrants from becoming unwanted competition for American laborers.

President Truman was concerned about the decisions to maintain the national origins quota system and to establish racially constructed quotas for Asian nations. He thought the new law was discriminatory, and he vetoed it, but the law had enough support in Congress to pass over his veto.
Korean War and Japan’s Recovery

As the Cold War came to dominate U.S. foreign policy, America extended security commitments to two nations in Northeast Asia—the Republic of Korea and Japan. The Department of State under Secretary Dean Acheson forged a series of agreements to build a permanent American presence in the region and support these two nations, creating alliances that have lasted to today.

After Japan’s unconditional surrender to the Allied Powers in August 1945, the United States military occupied the defeated nation and began a series of far-reaching reforms designed to build a peaceful and democratic Japan by reducing the power of the military and breaking up the largest Japanese business conglomerates. However, growing concern over Communist power in East Asia, particularly the success of the Chinese Communist Party in its struggle against Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist forces, led the United States to halt reforms in 1947 and 1948 in order to focus on the economic recovery and political rehabilitation of Japan. In this “Reverse Course,” Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers, General Douglas MacArthur, focused on strengthening, not punishing, what would become a key cold war ally.

The growing concern over Japanese security related directly to war in Korea. During World War II the United States and the Soviet Union agreed to temporarily divide Korea at the 38th parallel in order oversee the removal of Japanese forces. It soon became clear, however, that neither of the cold war antagonists would permit its Korea ally to be threatened by unification. The Soviets supported Kim Il Song in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea in the north; the United States backed Syngman Rhee in the Republic of Korea in the south. Nevertheless the United States did not make Korea a key part of its defensive strategy for East Asia, and American forces withdrew from the south in the late 1940s. Assuming that the United States did not consider South Korea of vital interest, Kim’s army attacked the South in June 1950 almost conquering the entire peninsula. The U.S. military returned, leading a United Nations-authorized force to push the North’s army back above the 38th parallel and beyond. After the People’s Republic of China entered the war in late 1950, the Department of State worked to isolate Peking and maintain the unity of the U.S.-led coalition. Only in 1953 did the two sides reach an uneasy truce, thus crystallizing the division between North and South that exists today. In 1953 the United States and South Korea signed a mutual security treaty designed to protect this new nation from its neighbor to the north.

U.S. efforts to save South Korea from Communist invasion accelerated Department of State attempts to restore Japan to a respected international position, and make that country a prosperous ally of the United States. Negotiated primarily by John Foster Dulles in 1950 and 1951, the Treaty of San Francisco ended the state of war between Japan and 47 of the Allies (most nations allied with the Soviet Union refused to sign), concluded the American Occupation, and excused the Japanese from reparations for the war. Acheson signed the San Francisco Treaty on September 8, 1951, the same day he and Japanese Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru signed the United States-Japanese Security Treaty. The treaty allowed the United States to station troops in Japan, and made the Japanese islands into an important facet of America’s global containment structure. To American leaders, Japan has transformed from World War II enemy to vital ally, and Korea went from a peripheral region to a key battle ground in the Cold War.