

Two Cold War Leaders

The syllabus also asks how **different leaders from different regions affected the course and the development of the Cold War**. When 1953 had come to an end, we have the opportunity to assess two of the key figures in the Cold War, **Stalin and Truman**. The guide will present two summaries about their policies and contributions to the development of the Cold War:

Cold War Leader 1: Josef Stalin Secretary General and Soviet Leader, 1929–1953

The Soviet Union emerged from WWII as one of the two **superpowers**. It can of course be debated how much the USSR deserved this title, taking into account the enormous damage that had been caused by the war. But the USSR and the Red Army controlled Eastern Europe.

1945

At Yalta, in February 1945, Stalin committed himself to free elections in countries liberated from Nazi control. The **Declaration of Liberated Europe** was one achievement at Yalta. Others were that the USSR promised to join the UN and to help the US in defeating Japan. Agreements were also made about post-war Germany and the zonal division of the country. In July, when it was time for the Potsdam conference Western leaders accused the Soviets of violating the agreement made at Yalta over free elections and there were **sharp exchanges** over the development in countries controlled by the Red Army.

One major source of tension after the war was the future of Germany. While **Stalin feared a German recovery** and wanted to prevent this with all possible means, the US came to realise that a German recovery was vital for a working economy in Europe. Stalin also wanted control of countries in Eastern Europe, which traditionally had been used when the USSR had been attacked by Western powers.

1946

When Churchill delivered his Iron Curtain Speech in 1946, Stalin tightened his grip on Eastern Europe.

1947

The next year Truman issued his **Truman Doctrine** and **Marshall Aid**. Stalin saw this as an attempt to control countries economically, which would later lead to political control. The satellites in Eastern Europe were forced to reject American aid.

1948

In 1948, all states in Eastern Europe were under Soviet control except for Yugoslavia. Stalin could not allow this form of 'national communism' and withdrew his economic and military advisers and the country was expelled from Cominform, the international communist organisation, accused of 'bourgeois nationalism'. The Eastern Bloc now announced an economic blockade and broke off diplomatic relations, but Tito and his regime had considerable national support and didn't share a border with the USSR. The US offered considerable financial assistance. The outcome of this crisis led to the creation of a **non-aligned, non-Stalinist, communist state**. **Czechoslovakia** was another satellite. A coalition ruled the country including non-Communists. After disputes in the government over nationalisation of industries, the non-Communists resigned. When elections were held, the Communists won 237 of 300 seats in parliament and soon **all other parties were dissolved**. The only country in the Eastern Bloc with a genuine multi-party system had now been transformed to a communist single-party state.

The final crisis in 1948 was the Berlin Crisis. When it became obvious to Stalin that the Western powers were planning to form a separate West German state, and when a currency reform in the Western zone was announced, the Soviet Union closed off all land routes to West Berlin. The USSR needed to solve the Berlin problem where hundreds of thousands fled the Eastern zone every year. The US and Britain opened an airlift lasting 10 months which meant that Berlin and its 2.5 million inhabitants survived the blockade. Both the coup in Czechoslovakia and the **Berlin Blockade** were seen as proof of Soviet aggression.

in the West. The next year a separate West German state was formed and NATO, a full military alliance made up by Western powers, was formed.

1950

In 1950, North Korea attacked the South. We know today that Kim Il-sung pressed Stalin to finally approve the invasion. Kim had been armed by the USSR, and when the North attacked it was a major escalation, which Stalin, with his support and foreknowledge, was of course to some extent responsible for. Gromyko, the foreign minister, later admitted that the Soviet boycott of the UN was a trick to involve the US in a war in Asia while the USSR would remain neutral.

In conclusion: An **orthodox historian**, blaming Stalin and the USSR, would argue that Stalin and the USSR were responsible for the outbreak of the Cold War. Stalin had signed the Declaration of Liberated Europe, which he totally violated. All the states in Eastern Europe had communist single-party systems by 1948. It had also been impossible to co-operate with the Soviets in Germany and Stalin's aggressive policies had been seen in Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Berlin and Korea.

A **revisionist historian**, emphasising the responsibility of the US, would argue that the USSR had suffered enormously during WWII. 1,700 cities and 60,000 villages were in ruins and 25 million Russians had been killed while the US had increased industrial output during the war with 90% and they had a nuclear monopoly. In this situation, Stalin's desire to control Eastern Europe was mainly defensive. He wanted control of these states since they had been used for attacks on the USSR. In this situation, the US issued the Truman Doctrine where they gave themselves the right to intervene anywhere. With the Marshal Aid Programme they wanted to control countries in Europe economically, which would lead to political control. It was a new form of imperialism, which was described as 'dollar imperialism'. It was the US, and not Stalin, who must bear responsibility for causing the Cold War.

Cold War Leader 2: Harry S. Truman US President, 1945–1953

1945

Harry S. Truman became president of the US on 12 April 1945, when President Roosevelt passed away. He had hardly any experience of foreign policy and one of his first major undertakings was to participate in the **Potsdam Conference** in July 1945. The conference is normally considered as a failure and some have even described it as the start of the Cold War. There were heated arguments over Soviet policies in Eastern Europe. Some would argue that Truman was responsible for this. In 1946, he wrote to his Secretary of State James Byrnes: *"Unless Russia is faced with an iron fist and strong language another war is in the making. Only one language do they understand—'How many divisions have you?' I do not think we should play compromise any longer."*³⁰

During the conference Truman was informed that the **A-bomb** would work, but decided not to inform Stalin in spite of the fact that the Soviets had promised to support the Americans in defeating Japan. The dropping of the bomb has been seen as *"the last attack of World War II [and] the first attack in the Cold War."*³¹

1947

Truman's most important contribution to the Cold War was the introduction of the Truman Doctrine in 1947. In February 1946, George **Kennan**, a diplomat at the US Embassy in Moscow, had written his **Long Telegram**. It was a report written for the State Department and it was widely circulated within US bureaucracy and provided the intellectual basis for the '**doctrine of containment**'. Kennan stated that no long-term co-operation was possible with the Soviet regime and that communism must be contained within its present borders. His ideas provided the intellectual basis for the Truman Doctrine. With the introduction of the Truman Doctrine the US policy of **isolationism** was replaced by an **active world role**. **This is the most important turning point in US foreign policy in the 20th century**. Initially his request for money was only intended for Greece and Turkey but it was soon extended globally and would lead to both **Korea and Vietnam**. It is normally considered as the official start of the Cold War.

³⁰ See <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/letter-to-james-byrnes/> <Accessed 4 January 2017>

³¹ McWilliams, W. C. and Piotrowski, H., *The World Since 1945: A History of International Relations* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993) p. 20.

1947

In June the same year, the Secretary of State George Marshall announced his **Marshall Plan**. This massive economic help for European reconstruction was initially offered to most European countries, even the communist states. But it was soon rejected by the USSR and her satellites. From a Soviet perspective this was seen as a type of new economic imperialism and dependence, which had to be turned down. Marshall however stated in his speech: *"Our policy is directed not against any country or doctrine, but against hunger, poverty, desperation and chaos."*³²

1948

When the problems with the divided Germany emerged after 1945, the Truman administration came to realise that it was necessary to **build up Germany** as a bulwark against communism. This was first announced by the Secretary of State James Byrnes in his Stuttgart speech in 1946. In March 1948, the US, Britain and France announced their willingness to establish a new currency in the Western zones and to form a West German government. In June, the Soviets cut off all land routes to West Berlin.

A total of 2.5 million inhabitants, fearing the Soviets, had to rely on US and British support through an airlift. For ten months to come, the **Berlin Airlift** provided the population in the Western zones of Berlin with necessary supplies. It became a propaganda success for the US. The Blockade convinced the West that a West German state had to be created.

1949

This took place in 1949. The same year NATO was formed. It was a full military alliance between a number of West European states including the US. The Berlin Airlift is normally considered as the **conflict which drew the line in the Cold War in Europe** and it led to a massive military build up.

1950

National Security Council Report 68 (NSC-68) was a top secret policy paper presented to Truman in April 1950. It recommended a substantial US military build up to handle the USSR. Today it is considered as a key strategic document outlining US policy during the Cold War. Truman was initially against it but with the North Korean attack on the South in June, Truman implemented the plan. This included the decision to develop the hydrogen bomb and became a key policy of the US. Truman signed it in September 1950.

1950

When **North Korea** attacked the South in June 1950 Truman and the US were able to get UN support to fight back the attack. The reason was that the USSR were boycotting the Security Council when the decision was taken. After having fought back the attack in the South the US led forces crossed the 38th Parallel to 'liberate' the North. In December 1950, China decided to intervene and China and the US were now involved in direct fighting. This is normally considered as one of the most dangerous escalations which took place during the Cold War, but it might be noted that after a while Truman **limited his aims**. It was enough to liberate the South.

If the Berlin Airlift had drawn the line concerning the Cold War in Europe, the Korean war did the same in Asia. US defence spending trebled during the last years with Truman as President. From 1950 to 1954, the Americans gradually increased their economic support to the French and in 1954, when France pulled out, the **Americans were paying** more than 70% of France's cost for the war. Japan was considered as a key ally in the region and the US committed itself to guarantee support for Taiwan in the event of an attack from 'red China'.

In conclusion: An **orthodox historian** would describe Truman's policies between 1945 and 1953 as an attempt to defend the free world. He was responding to Soviet aggression. A **revisionist historian** would argue that Truman took advantage of US strength and nuclear monopoly **and** Soviet weakness, and with the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall plan he tried to establish the economic dependence of various countries, which would ultimately lead to political control. It was Truman's 'dollar-imperialism' which created the Cold War.



Key Point

It's interesting to study Truman, Stalin and the outbreak of the Cold War. Both of them would argue that they only responded to aggression from the other side.

³² McCauley, M., *Origins of the Cold War 1941–1949*, p. 137.