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# Cooperation to Conflict: The United States, Russia & the Emergence of Bipolarism 1945 to 1952

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In 1947 the noted American journalist Walter Lippmann labeled the emerging United States-Soviet conflict a Cold War. That characterization succinctly captured the ideological, diplomatic, and economic warfare associated with East-West relations in the late 1940s and 1950s. Why it began is still the subject of considerable historical debate. The conclusion of World War II played a part, for it lessened the need for United States-Soviet cooperation. Joseph Stalin prophetically observed that "we shall have to find a new basis for our close relations in the future and that will not be easy." Different ideologies, national security goals, and economic objectives soon turned into formidable stumbling blocks. Such differences must be placed into the context of the aftermath of World War II, when traditional powers such as Germany, Japan, England, France, and China were destroyed or crippled, leaving the powerful United States and the Soviet Union to confront a power vacuum in the fashion, according to one historian, of "two scorpions in a bottle."

What blurs our understanding of the Cold War is the fact that documentation on Soviet intentions and objectives is so limited. Thus far no historian has had access to the Kremlin archives to study the memoranda of Soviet officials. While it is easier to comprehend what the United States sought in a postwar world, this is not to say that American leaders were consistent in their approaches or objectives. Confusion often characterized immediate postwar United States foreign policy.

A major change in that policy began on April 12, 1945, when a weary President Roosevelt suddenly succumbed to a cerebral hemorrhage at Warm Springs, Georgia. While the nation mourned the loss of perhaps its greatest twentieth-century president, the relatively unknown Vice-President Harry S Truman took the oath of office. The next day a stunned Truman remarked to reporters, "Boys, if you ever pray, pray for me now. I don't know whether you fellows ever had a load of hay fall on you, but when they told me yesterday what had happened, I felt like the moon, stars, and all the planets had fallen on me."

Truman had no ambitions to be president. Only after Roosevelt's insistence had he accepted the vice-presidential nomination in 1944. Truman preferred to remain in the

clubby confines of the U. S. Senate, where he had served Missouri since 1935. His record there as a loyal New Dealer was more than adequate, but critics deplored his dependence on Tom Pendergast, the notorious Jackson County boss. As vice-president, Truman's contact with Roosevelt was minimal because the President was either out of the country or vacationing at Warm Springs. For these reasons an uninformed Truman seemed ill-suited to assume the presidency. Particularly was this true in the foreign-policy area. Given the handicaps Truman faced, it is amazing that he performed so well.

At the beginning of Truman's presidency, allied forces had already initiated the final assault against Nazi Germany. The ending of the European war seemed only a matter of months. In the Far East, Japan's resistance, although still formidable, was nonetheless crumbling. Yet, as Truman would soon learn, the ending of the war would not automatically ensure peace and harmony. For example, differences existed among the allied powers over how national security could best be assured in the postwar period. Although the allies had committed themselves in 1943 to collective security through a United Nations organization, the truth is that even Franklin Roosevelt had been privately dubious about the efficacy of that commitment. After all, the cumbersome League of Nations had done little to preserve peace in the 1930s. Recognizing that American public opinion strongly favored participation in the UN, he grafted his four-armed policeman concept onto the proposed international organization. It was clear to him, however, that the United States, the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and China must assume the burden of policing the world. It was equally clear to Stalin and Churchill that there were yet other alternatives to national security. Despite obligating themselves to an international organization, the Russian and British premiers placed more faith on spheres of influence and favorable balances of power, respectively.

Believing that Soviet postwar cooperation was essential and that her power was already established in Eastern Europe, FDR made concessions to Stalin's security demands by acceding to a Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe. He did this by accepting several rather broad postwar agreements that Stalin could interpret to his own advantage. This was the real significance of the Yalta Conference attended by Roosevelt, Stalin, and Churchill in February, 1945. In return, Stalin reaffirmed his commitment to the Grand Alliance and the forthcoming United Nations organization. Roosevelt, for his part, hoped that Stalin's desire for influence in Eastern Europe would not lead to strict control there. Otherwise, total Soviet domination would trigger unfavorable public feeling in the United States that would endanger any American-Soviet accord. At his death, Roosevelt remained hopeful that the Eastern European problem would be resolved.

Like his countrymen, Truman probably did not understand the complexity of Roosevelt's personal approach to foreign policy; he saw only its idealistic Wilsonian dimensions encompassing collective security, self-determination, and freedom of trade. Perhaps he saw only what he wanted to see, for Truman was a Wilsonian who, like the American people, deplored spheres of influence and a big-power peace. But he failed to realize that FDR had masked the big-power aspects of his foreign policy in order to satisfy domestic considerations.

Consequently, Truman's intention to continue the Rooseveltian policy could hardly be considered a carbon-copy approach. Truman not only ignored subtleties in foreign policy but also saw foreign problems more ethnocentrically, causing him to overlook traditional American and British spheres of influence in Latin America and the Middle East, respectively while condemning the emerging Soviet sphere in Eastern Europe. Truman, moreover, viewed the Soviet Union more suspiciously than had FDR, partly because he emphasized more the ideological dangers of communism. In late 1941, for example, at a time when FDR had drawn a distinction between Hitler and Stalin in aiding the latter, Senator Truman had expressed a cynical belief that the United States should permit the two dictators to bleed each other before assisting the one on the verge of defeat. Truman accepted the *Wall Street Journal*'s appraisal that "the principal difference between Mr.

bossed this whole meeting." The bomb appreciably affected United States-Soviet relations. It meant that the United States no longer had to depend on Russian military participation against Japan, lessening the need for Western-Soviet cooperation. Moreover, with such colossal power, the United States, American leaders believed, could dictate the terms in Eastern Europe. At the September Council of Foreign Ministers' meeting in London, Molotov in fact asked Truman's Secretary of State, James Byrnes, if he had an atomic bomb in his sidepocket. Political cartoonists frequently portrayed the bomb's presence at the negotiation table of such meetings. Far from making the Soviet Union "more manageable," as Byrnes had predicted, the bomb increased the Soviet Union's resistance and determination to create her own arsenal. If anything, the bomb heightened mutual distrust and fear, a prevailing characteristic of the emerging Cold War.

The Soviet Union also failed to react favorably to United States economic leverage, despite the fact that American economic influence was indeed formidable. No other power found its economy so strengthened as a consequence of the war. American factories, railroads, and farmhouses remained intact. Thus Americans were spared the enormous task of reconstruction for which so many countries sought assistance. In January, 1945, the Soviet Union had asked the United States for a $6 billion postwar reconstruction loan. Later that year the Truman administration made it possible for Moscow to obtain a $1 billion loan, provided that the latter adhered to United States objectives in Eastern Europe. The Soviet Union instead sought rehabilitation through reparations and war booty from East Germany and Eastern Europe. Moreover, Moscow's need for foodstuffs also impeded her Potsdam commitment to treat Germany as an economic unit. Even Averell Harriman admitted that Soviet cooperation might have been much improved had the United States extended economic assistance to Moscow for the postwar period.

The Cold War worsened in 1946. Attempts to internationalize atomic power through a UN Atomic Energy Commission failed. Continued United States denunciation of the Soviet sphere in Eastern Europe was met by Moscow's charge of an American sphere in Japan and Italy. Too, the Soviet Union refused to withdraw her troops from northern Iran as promised. Soviet pressure in Iran was designed to secure the sort of oil concessions won by English and American interests. Russia probably also sought a northern Iranian protectorate, causing a United States protest in the United Nations. The United States then opposed Russian attempts, first begun in the nineteenth century, to wrest from Turkey passage rights through the Dardanelles Straits, reversing a stance FDR had taken at Yalta. No longer did the Truman administration perceive the Soviet Union as merely attempting to secure her frontiers. Instead, an administration consensus emerged that the Soviets sought no less than the ultimate destruction of Western power. George Kennan, the respected American diplomat in Moscow, expressed that conclusion in his famous "Long Telegram" to Washington in January, 1946. Kennan contended that as a Marxist state, the Soviets were "committed fanatically to the belief that with the U. S. there can be no permanent *modus vivendi*, that it is desirable and necessary that the internal harmony of our society be disrupted, our traditional way of life destroyed, the international authority of our state be broken if Soviet power is to be secure." Kennan's analysis won wide acceptance because he had so articulately expressed the private feelings of Washington officialdom.

For Truman early 1946 also became "the point of departure." In response to the emerging Iranian crisis in January, he exclaimed: "I'm tired [of] babying the Soviets." He ordered Secretary of State Byrnes to make no more concessions. Two months later he accompanied the former British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, to Fulton, Missouri, where the latter delivered his famous "Iron Curtain" speech which Truman had previously approved. Churchill's suggestion of a permanent military alliance between the United States and the British Commonwealth supported by atomic weaponry was one indication of a developing East-West polarization. That summer Truman also requested the resignation of Henry Wallace as Secretary of Commerce. Wallace was an outspoken opponent of the get-tough approach.

In 1947 a new, revolutionary foreign policy finally accompanied the rigid anti-Soviet ideology. Its guru perhaps was George Kennan, who had returned from Moscow to assume the headship of the State Department's planning staff. Using the byline of Mr. X, Kennan expounded the policy in the July issue of *Foreign Affairs*. Much of what he said in "The Sources of Soviet Conduct" was based on the "Red Peril" assumptions of his Long Telegram. Kennan now revealed an approach which the administration in fact had recently adopted: a policy of "firm containment, designed to confront the Russians with unalterable counter-force at every point where they show signs of encroaching upon the interests of a peaceful and stable world." In the process, the United States not only repudiated its isolationist tradition but also its reluctance to engage in power politics. The containment policy committed the United States to joining with other Western nations in establishing a favorable balance of power against the Soviet Union. It also assumed, as one American official expressed it, that "it is a mistake to believe that you can . . . sit down with the Russians and solve problems."

The first application of containment occurred when the British government informed the United States in February, 1947, that it could no longer provide economic and military assistance to Greece and Turkey. The Truman administration believed that these countries were in danger of Soviet domination. The Russians had already pressured the Turks regarding the Dardanelles. Civil war raged in Greece between an autocratic, British-backed government and a coalition of communist and liberal rebels. Communist Bulgaria and Yugoslavia assisted the rebels, but not Stalin, who warned the Yugoslavs that they were inviting American intervention.

On March 12 Truman went before a joint session of Congress, asking for $400 million for economic and military aid to Greece and Turkey. He also stated, in what was soon called the Truman Doctrine, that "it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures." Undersecretary of State Dean Acheson had already informed Congressional leaders that the real threat was Soviet Communism, which sought control over Europe, the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa. Acheson's concern, although overstated, was sincere. Such expressions nonetheless contributed to an anticommunist mood at home that eventually bordered on hysteria by the early 1950s. Meanwhile, the parsimonious Republican Eightieth Congress soon funded the appropriation, and the Truman Doctrine contributed to the quelling of the Greek revolution. The Doctrine would also have more far-ranging significance, for its ultimate application led to the American military presence in South Vietnam.

But was there a danger of Greece becoming a Soviet satellite? Scholars probably will never know. Quite possibly, however, a successful Greek revolution, even without Soviet assistance, might have meant an alignment with Moscow. The Doctrine nevertheless had its immediate critics, who believed that the administration had acted provocatively in sending military aid to autocratic governments bordering or nearly bordering the Soviet Union.

A logical extension of Greek-Turkish aid was an economic assistance program for Western and Central Europe. Such a commitment was needed, for most European countries had devastated economies. The war had not only ravaged physical property, but it had also deprived Europe of technical skills and had exhausted her spirit. The summer droughts of 1946 and 1947 and the blizzard-filled winter between only made matters worse. Starvation conditions existed throughout much of Europe, and a terrible inflation swept France and West Germany, where the cigarette became a unit of currency. European economic prostration also led to a sizable dollar gap with the United States. In 1947, for example, Europe imported almost seven times more goods from the United States than Europe exported. The latter could hardly afford to purchase more without first increasing exports. Under the circumstances, economic interests as much as humanitarian considerations dictated that the United States financially assist European recovery. By helping Europe, the United States would be ensuring prosperity at home. The economic aid program was also

part and parcel of Truman's containment policy, the other half of the same walnut, as the President described its relationship to the Truman Doctrine. The administration hoped that by initiating economic revitalization, it would prevent Soviet expansion in countries like France and Italy, where the Communist party already had considerable influence without much Soviet encouragement. The initial failure of capitalism to institute recovery was enough incentive for workers to vote Communist.

On June 5, 1947, the newly appointed Secretary of State, George Marshall, announced the Marshall Plan in a Harvard commencement address. He called upon European nations to present a plan of recovery based upon economic cooperation, leading, it was hoped, to the integration of European economies. Long-range European prosperity, American policy-makers believed, was dependent on the breakdown of tariff barriers, quotas, and other impediments that restricted economic intercourse among European states. The United States would finance whatever program the European nations devised. At Kennan's suggestion, the United States included the Soviet Union and bloc countries like Poland in its invitation so that Americans could not be blamed for further dividing Europe into two camps. Truman officials, however, made it virtually impossible for Moscow to participate. If the administration had done otherwise, Congress would have refused the appropriation request that ultimately totaled $17 billion. Moreover, the Truman administration remained committed to battling Communists rather than feeding them.

For the next five years, Marshall Plan assistance proved crucial to the economic recovery of Western Europe. Some seventeen nations profited from that transfusion. As a result, by 1950 Western Europe was exceeding its prewar production by twenty-five percent. And because the dollar gap was reduced from $12 billion to $2 billion, American economic interests also benefited. As importantly, the Communist threat in Italy and France receded. Nonetheless, the Marshall Plan had contributed to the division of Europe. *Pravda* called it a Truman Doctrine with dollars, a device to isolate and cripple the Soviet Union. The Soviet reaction took several forms. Moscow established the Cominform to direct Communist party activities in bloc countries and in France and Italy. The so-called Molotov Plan, which followed, tied the Soviet Union closer to bloc countries through a series of bilateral agreements. The Soviets soon developed a centralized agency to stimulate and control bloc economies. Also in 1947, Hungary fell into the Soviet camp as did Czechoslovakia the following winter, after that country had agreed to participate in the Marshall Plan. Defensive considerations probably motivated Moscow's intrusion, for fear of Western encirclement increased appreciably in 1947. The distrust was mutual.

Following the Czech coup, a shocked Truman concluded that the Marshall Plan was not enough. But the impetus for greater American participation actually came from Great Britain and France, who, with the Benelux nations (Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxemburg), established the Brussels Pact of collective defense in March, 1948. From the beginning, the Europeans felt the pact could not succeed without American membership. Truman favored participation, for he equated the Soviet threat with that of Hitler in 1939. Besides, he had long felt that Western Europe could not be entrusted to the United Nations. In June he secured the endorsement of the United States Senate after Republican Senator Arthur Vandenburg of Michigan had assured him of continued bipartisan support. For the first time since 1800, when it terminated the French alliance, the United States was about to join a formal military alliance. Nothing more clearly illustrated the revolutionary nature of United States foreign policy in the Truman era.

Two weeks after the United States Senate resolution, the Soviet Union closed all surface traffic into West Berlin, located 100 miles within the Soviet zone. The Allies had occupation rights there, but the Western right of access was never put into writing. What undoubtedly triggered the Soviet blockade was a United States decision to provide West Germany with a separate currency, a prelude to a planned West German republic. The United States, Great Britain, and France had already integrated their occupation zones upon

concluding that German unification was an immediate impossibility. Big Four cooperation in Germany had clearly broken down over such issues as reparations and control of the industrialized Ruhr Valley.

There was little more that Stalin feared than a rejuvenated, independent former enemy tied to the West economically and politically. The Berlin blockade was designed to force a reconsideration. If that failed, Stalin sought at the very least the Western abandonment of Berlin. The West no longer had rights there, he contended, now that the Allied Control Commission ceased to function.

As in other crises, the Truman administration responded immediately and imaginatively. Its objective was to preserve Western interests in West Berlin. To do otherwise would have weakened West German confidence in American resolve and undermined the emerging Western alliance. Yet Truman stopped short of employing American troops, which might have led to war. Instead, the United States and Great Britain airlifted supplies to the West Berliners. That July the United States also based sixty B-29s—atomic bombers, they were called—in England as a deterrent. The airlift lasted for 324 days and ultimately delivered 13,000 tons of goods daily. The West Berliners soon ate better than they had prior to the blockade. To many Americans, the airlift represented another manifestation of the administration's successful containment policy. It unquestionably contributed to Truman's election victory that fall.

In May, 1949, the Soviet Union ended the blockade. It had only succeeded in trumpeting American ingenuity and strengthening Western unity. That April the United States had joined Canada, Great Britain, France, and seven other Western European nations in creating the North Atlantic Treaty Organization alliance, committing the signatories to one another's defense. Even though the Truman administration believed an immediate Soviet military attack unlikely, NATO, together with United States atomic power, it was thought, would serve as an effective deterrent against future aggression. More than anything else, it enabled the United States to effect a unity in Western Europe, preventing neutralism or appeasement. According to Dean Acheson, Truman's new Secretary of State and the architect of the alliance, NATO ensured a "preponderance of strength" in dealing with the Russians.

By September, 1949, the Soviet Union challenged that preponderance by exploding the atomic bomb, causing Arthur Vandenburg to comment aptly, "this is now a different world." Truman consequently ordered the acceleration of the hydrogen bomb project. Administration officials also considered ways to strengthen NATO by giving it a military structure to which combat troops would be assigned. The start of the Korean War the following June only reinforced that inclination as the United States became mired in an Asian war, exposing Europe to a possible Soviet penetration. Thus a beefed-up NATO came into being as containment increasingly took on a military dimension. Truman now assigned General Dwight David Eisenhower to be Supreme Allied Commander in Europe. Eisenhower began the process of persuading NATO nations to increase their conventional military strength in order to establish a combined army capable of stopping a Soviet advance into West Germany. Due to the still fragile Western European economies, however, the commitments Eisenhower secured were disappointing. For this reason the United States sent additional combat divisions to West Germany and pushed for German rearmament, something Acheson had promised Congress the United States would never do. In its final two years, the administration found it difficult to win the acceptance of France and England, which were understandably suspicious of a rearmed Germany. It would not be until 1955 that West Germany joined NATO. That action virtually guaranteed the perpetuation of the Cold War.

The Truman administration had concentrated much of its foreign policy in Europe, where it believed the United States' vital interests lay. In Asia China had represented its major concern. Adopting a policy inherited from Roosevelt, Truman hoped that China would assume a leadership role in the Far East. After World War II China was in no position

to do so. A civil war between the increasingly reactionary Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist government and the Communists again flared after a wartime abatement. The initial advantage appeared to lay with Chiang. Not only did his army outnumber the Communists by 2.7 million to 1.1 million, but he also received United States military and economic assistance which eventually amounted to nearly $3 billion. From the beginning, the Truman administration believed that a Communist victory meant a loss of American influence in China.

Although Truman applied containment to China, its application and results were different in that part of the world. Unlike in Greece, for example, the Truman administration sought a coalition government, one that Chiang could dominate, at least until a liberal replaced him. Truman officials had perceived that Chiang could not win a military victory even with American economic assistance. Consequently, a coalition regime represented the only hope for a friendly, united China. In early 1946 General George Marshall nearly effected a coalition agreement in his mission to China. He later placed most of the blame for its failure on Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, who attempted to crush Mao Tse-tung's forces in northern China in 1946. Thus began one of the great disasters of the postwar era. Because of poor military leadership and a refusal to accept American advice, Chiang's army deteriorated in the next three years as the Nationalists lost battle after battle. Not once was this due to the failure of the United States to furnish the requisite matériel. In late 1949 Chiang, in fact, would abandon eighty percent of that equipment as his forces fled to Formosa.

Chiang's political shortcomings compounded the military reverses. His failure to combat inflation, institute land reform, and eradicate governmental corruption cost him the support of the peasants, businessmen, and intellectuals. He so disappointed Truman that the latter privately labeled Chiang and his clique a bunch of grafters and crooks. Secretary of State Acheson tempered his remarks in the administration's official explanation for the "loss" of China: "The unfortunate but inescapable fact is that the ominous result . . . was beyond the control of the government of the United States."

The administration's 1,054-page "White Paper" on China did little to convince critics. By now most Republicans had already rejected the bipartisan foreign policy approach. Their defeat in the 1948 elections precipitated the departure. The loss of China made it overwhelming. Republicans and the influential China lobby now shared the same assumptions: By its feeble support, the Truman administration had sold out Chiang Kai-shek to the Communists. Republican Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin even blamed that alleged betrayal on Communist sympathizers in the State Department. The attacks intensified after the Truman administration initially refused to aid Chiang in Formosa. In part because of domestic politics, the administration hesitated to extend diplomatic recognition to the new Chinese Communist government. however, even though Truman officials hoped to encourage a historical antagonism between China and Russia. Mao's expected seizure of Formosa, it was believed, might even lead to a United States-China rapprochement.

The Korean War not only ended the Truman China strategy, but it also eventually increased the political vulnerability of Truman's foreign policy. Bordered on the north by Manchurian China and separated from Japan on the east by the Sea of Japan, the Korean peninsula had been liberated in 1945 after forty years of Japanese control. During World War II, the United States and the Soviets had agreed to Korean independence, but they failed to agree on the nature of Korea's government. Korea soon became a victim of the Cold War. By 1948 the Soviet Union, occupying the peninsula north of the thirty-eighth parallel, established a northern communist government headed by Kim Il Sung. In South Korea, meanwhile, the United States sponsored elections which enabled the autocratic Syngman Rhee to become president. Both Cold War powers extended economic assistance to their respective Koreas and then withdrew their forces. In a January, 1950, speech, Secretary of State Acheson remarked that the United States' defense perimeter did

not encompass South Korea, although that country could expect United States support through UN action. Whether Acheson's statements encouraged a North Korean attack upon South Korea on June 25 may never be known. The Soviet role in that decision also remains unclear.

Truman officials nonetheless assumed that the Soviet Union engineered that invasion. If it had succeeded, Truman believed, the Soviets would have extended their aggression in Asia, then swallowed up the Near East and Europe. He invoked the "lessons" of the immediate past in arguing that the United Nations must not fail as the League of Nations had done in response to the 1931 Japanese invasion of Manchuria.

Truman's focus upon the Manchurian and Munich analogies of the 1930s obscured other historical analogies equally as relevant. A case in point is Bismarck's application of force to effect German unification in the 1870s. In that vein, the North Korean Kim, an ardent nationalist, might have initiated a war of unification independently of the U.S.S.R. as he had threatened to do. The evidence is circumstantial but formidable. If the Soviets had indeed "ordered" the invasion, why were the Russians boycotting the UN Security Council at the time of attack? The Soviet absence enabled the United Nations to condemn the North Korean aggression and paved the way for a military response. Too, why did the Soviets fail to supply the North Koreans adequately prior to the invasion? Years later, Nikita Khrushchev, no defender of Stalin, insisted that "the war wasn't Stalin's idea, but Kim Il Sung's. Kim was the initiator." Moreover, both Kim and Rhee of South Korea had called for national liberation. But in the spring of 1950, South Koreans had repudiated Syngman Rhee's regime at the polls, making him even more vulnerable to attack. Also, for the first time since World War II, a bumper rice crop existed in the South as added temptation. If the Truman administration had interpreted the Korean conflict as a civil war, which it probably was, then the United States' response might have been different.

Instead, the United States reacted strongly to the North Korean attack of June 25. The next day an American resolution in the Security Council branded the North Koreans as aggressors. On June 27, Truman ordered air and naval units into action without consulting the United States Congress. Because of the apparent Soviet threat, Congress hardly complained, thereby contributing to the emerging "imperial presidency" which so characterized the Vietnam era. That same day, the United Nations recommended that member nations provide military assistance to South Korea. Sixteen nations eventually contributed to the UN "police action," with the United States providing most of the forces and ultimately suffering 142,000 casualties.

Initially, under the direction of General Douglas MacArthur, UN Supreme Commander, the United States-directed operation resulted in military successes, particularly after MacArthur's brilliant amphibious landing in September at Inchon, 150 miles behind North Korean lines. By now the North Korean army was in retreat. Later that month the Truman administration's objectives changed from containment to liberation. No longer would UN forces stop at the thirty-eighth parallel. In early October the United Nations endorsed Truman's decision to move troops into North Korea. At a Wake Island meeting on October 15, 1950, General MacArthur, discounting any Chinese intervention, assured the President that the war would be over by Thanksgiving. But if Chinese forces moved south across the Yalu River, MacArthur promised, "there would be the greatest slaughter." As UN forces continued to move northward in November, threatening China's national security, that country, after repeated warnings, finally intervened militarily, causing the longest American retreat ever. By mid-December UN forces were once again in South Korea. The administration had clearly misjudged and underestimated China.

Truman officials soon returned to the containment policy in Korea. By the spring of 1951, as the war hovered around the thirty-eighth parallel, the administration explored the possibilities of a political settlement. This placed Truman in conflict with MacArthur, who remained committed to the liberation of Korea. MacArthur advocated the bombing of military and industrial targets in China, a naval blockade of that country, and the deploy-

President Truman and General MacArthur meet on Wake Island, October, 1950. *(U.S. Department of State, courtesy of Harry S Truman Library)*

ment of Chiang Kai-shek's forces in Korea. The expansion of the Asian war, Truman believed, would cost this country dearly in manpower and weaken the American commitment to Europe where the United States' vital interests lay. The Soviet Union, China's new ally and America's principal enemy, most certainly would exploit any United States weakness there. For this reason the United States' NATO allies strongly opposed escalation. According to General Omar Bradley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, MacArthur's strategy would involve the United States in the wrong war, at the wrong place, at the wrong time, and with the wrong enemy.

MacArthur's public criticism of the Truman administration challenged the President's role as chief spokesman of American foreign policy. Such questioning not only caused confusion abroad, but it also embarrassed Truman. Moreover, in criticizing his commander-in-chief, MacArthur was insubordinate, leaving Truman no alternative but to dismiss him. The firing of MacArthur caused public opinion to turn even more against the Truman administration. Initially strongly in support of Truman's decisive action against the North Korean attack, public sentiment shifted after the Chinese intervention. Frustrated by that reversal and convinced of American omnipotence, most Americans failed to understand why the United States sought merely a political solution. Consequently, it is not difficult to

comprehend why many readily accepted Senator McCarthy's assertions that Red sympathizers in the State Department prevented a military victory.

When negotiations, begun in the summer of 1951, failed to provide a settlement, frustration and criticism increased. Korea became the Democrats' most vulnerable issue in the 1952 presidential campaign. By focusing on Korea, Republicans capitalized on the growing disenchantment over containment, now described as "immoral" because it did not seek the eradication of communism. This approach also enabled Republicans to combat Truman's strong response to Soviet power in Europe and in the Middle East. The result was the Eisenhower presidency.

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