

Politics After WWII and Cold War Tensions

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TOP and MAPS: Courtesy of Creative Commons. BELOW: In 1962, students at a Brooklyn middle school have a "duck and cover" practice drill in case of a nuclear attack. From the New York World-Telegram archive. Courtesy of Getty Images.

World War II ended on September 2, 1945. America was now the strongest country in the world. American soldiers had defeated the German and Japanese armies. American science and technology was the best in the world. Above all, the U.S. was able to produce more goods than the rest of the world combined. At the war's end, American farmers were selling enough food to feed people around the globe.

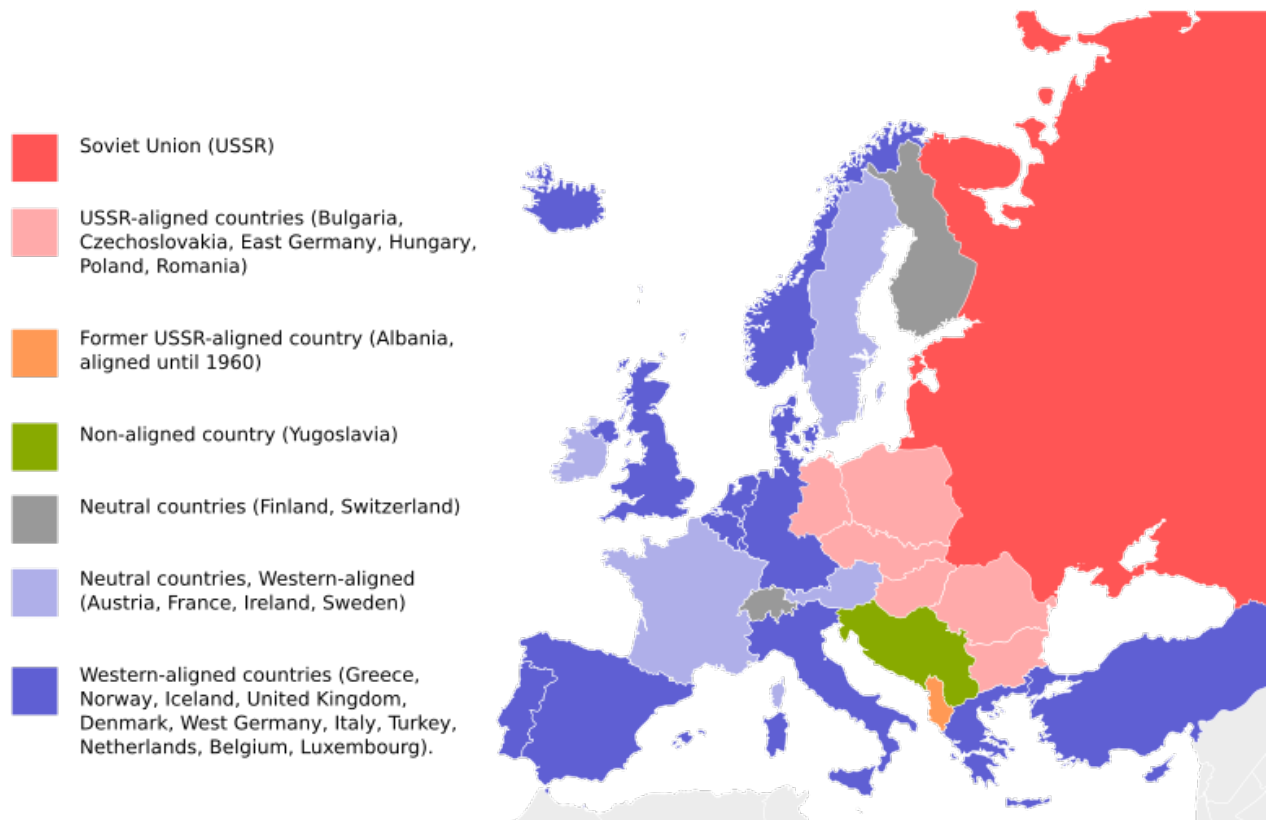
After the war, there were street parades and family reunions, as soldiers came home from Europe and Asia. At the same time, the world was dangerous, difficult and violent. In 1945, the U.S. dropped atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Americans began to worry that other countries, especially the Soviet Union, would get and use the atomic bomb. The U.S. and Soviet Union were allies during World War II. However, the Soviet Union was communist and tried to spread communism around the world. Under Soviet communism, the government owned everything and people had few rights. The two

countries began competing for power in Europe and Asia. The next 40 or so years were called the "Cold War." Although the U.S. and the Soviet Union were opposed to each other, they didn't fight each other directly with "hot" weapons. It was really a cold war of threats.

Eastern and Western halves

After World War II, Europe was divided into Eastern and Western halves. American soldiers mainly held the Western half and Soviet forces held the Eastern half. The United States controlled the entire country of Japan. The U.S. held the southern part of Korea and the Soviet Union held the northern part.

Americans had many worries. The war caused much destruction. The U.S. was paying billions of dollars to rebuild its allies and its enemies, Germany and Japan. People wondered how much would the country have to pay. Would this affect Americans at home? They also worried about their new enemy, the Soviet Union.



President Harry Truman felt strongly that the United States had to keep other countries from becoming communist. Yet, he also wanted to create new opportunities, especially for returning soldiers.

The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act, also known as the “GI Bill,” became a law in 1944. It helped eight million veterans get an education. More than two million of them attended colleges and universities paid for by the government. It also gave more than two million military veterans loans to buy new houses.

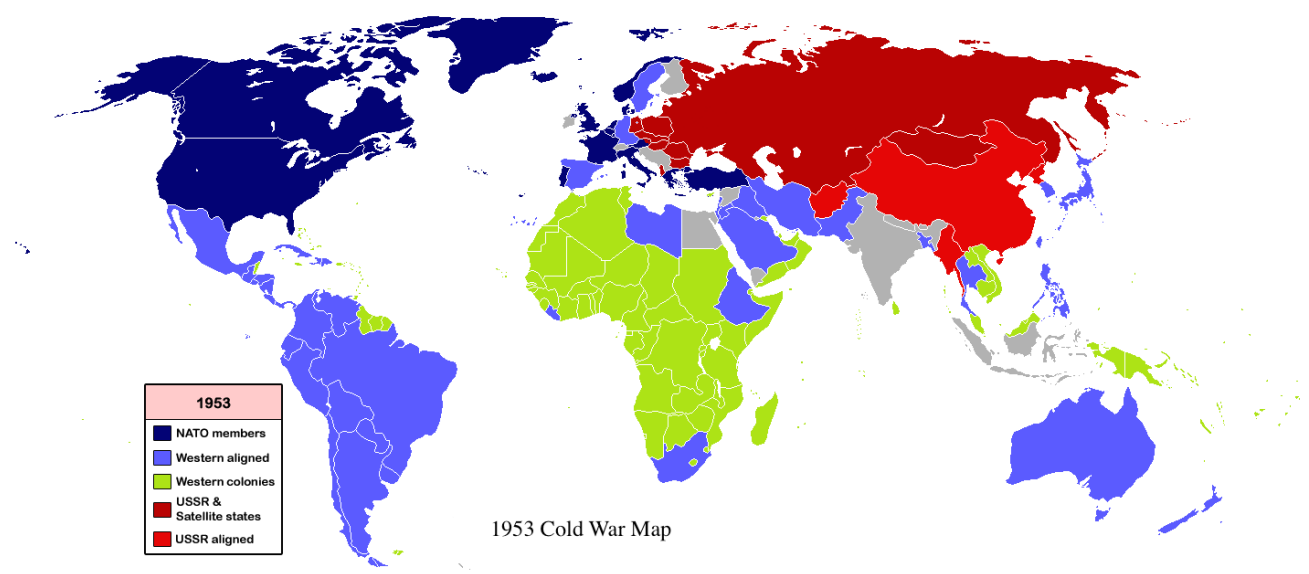
Racism and prejudice

There was much racism and prejudice in postwar America.

Truman supported equal rights. He did not want to move too quickly, because he was worried that white people would not vote for him.

Truman knew that he needed African-American votes if he wanted to be re-elected president. On July 26, 1948, he signed Executive Order 9881. It said that African-American soldiers had to be treated equally. At the time, the military was segregated, and blacks and whites did not serve together.

In 1947, Truman announced what became known as the "Truman Doctrine." The United States would give money and military help to stop communism around the world.



In 1948, Soviet-supported communists took over Czechoslovakia. In 1949, communists in China took over the government. By the end of the 1940s, many important government decisions were about the Cold War.

America against communism

On June 25, 1950, the communist North Korean army attacked South Korea. Truman sent American forces to fight in the Korean War. At home, many Americans became obsessed with the threat of communism. They were worried it was seeping into the U.S. Many American actors, scientists, politicians and writers were accused of supporting communism.

Through this all, President Truman remained steady about protecting American power and wealth. The Cold War lasted for more than 40 years.

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Quiz

- 1 Which detail from the article BEST shows Truman's desire to stop the spread of communism?
- (A) In 1945, the U.S. dropped atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
 - (B) The U.S. was paying billions of dollars to rebuild its allies and its enemies, Germany and Japan.
 - (C) On July 26, 1948, he signed Executive Order 9881.
 - (D) The United States would give money and military help to stop communism around the world.
- 2 Select the sentence from the introduction [paragraphs 1-2] that explains why the U.S. and the Soviet Union were opposed to each other.
- (A) At the same time, the world was dangerous, difficult and violent.
 - (B) In 1945, the U.S. dropped atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
 - (C) However, the Soviet Union was communist and tried to spread communism around the world.
 - (D) Above all, the U.S. was able to produce more goods than the rest of the world combined.
- 3 What was the political situation of the world after World War II?
- (A) America had power over Western Europe and Japan.
 - (B) America controlled all of Europe and Asia.
 - (C) The Soviet Union controlled Western Europe and North Korea.
 - (D) The Soviet Union controlled Japan and China.
- 4 According to the article, why did President Roosevelt sign the "GI Bill"?
- (A) Because he was afraid that veterans would be upset if they could not buy a home.
 - (B) Because he wanted to provide opportunities for veterans to create good lives for themselves.
 - (C) Because he wanted to increase the number of people attending U.S. universities.
 - (D) Because he wanted the veterans to be willing to fight if there was another war.

Answer Key

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