

## POLSC302: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Cold War

### Background

During World War II, the United States and the Soviet Union fought together as allies against the Axis powers. However, the relationship between the two nations was a tense one. Americans had long been wary of Soviet Communism and concerned about Russian leader Joseph Stalin's tyrannical rule of his own country. For their part, the Soviets resented the Americans' decades-long refusal to treat the USSR as a legitimate part of the international community. After the war ended, these grievances ripened into an overwhelming sense of mutual distrust. Postwar Soviet expansionism in Eastern Europe fueled many Americans' fears of a Russian plan to control the world. Meanwhile, the USSR came to resent what it perceived as American officials' confrontational rhetoric, arms buildup, and interventionist approach to international relations.

Most American officials agreed that the best defense against the Soviet threat was a strategy called "containment." In 1946, the diplomat George Kennan explained this policy: The Soviet Union, he wrote, was "a political force committed fanatically to the belief that with the U.S. there can be no permanent agreement between parties that disagree"; as a result, America's only choice was the "long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies." President Harry Truman (1945–1953) agreed. "It must be the policy of the United States...to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation...by outside pressures." This way of thinking would shape American foreign policy for the next four decades.

### Related Resources

#### 5.1 The Rise of Communism in the USSR

- The Library of Economics and Liberty: Bryan Caplan's "[Communism](#)"
- iTunesU: Gutenberg College: Professor David Crabtree's "[Episode 5: The Rise of Communism—Critique of Capitalism](#)"

### Instructions

For this assessment, you will write answer essays of three or more paragraphs on questions related to American foreign policy during the tenure of seven U.S. presidents in the Cold War era (1946 to 1991). For each president, answer the following questions:

1. What was the president's general philosophy and/or foreign policy approach toward dealing with Communism?
2. What was the president's relationship with the leaders of Communist regimes?
3. What was the event or events related to the Cold War that helped to define the president's tenure in office? What was the result of the event(s)? Was there a "victor"?
4. Did the president's policies and actions either ease or exacerbate Cold War tensions?



To help you formulate answers, conduct an Internet search using the president's name and "Cold War" as keywords. You will find a wealth of websites on Cold War events and primary documents from each presidential administration. You will also find [The Cold War Museum](#) and the [Presidential Libraries](#) to be particularly helpful resources.

1. Dwight Eisenhower
2. John F. Kennedy
3. Lyndon Johnson
4. Richard Nixon
5. Gerald Ford
6. Jimmy Carter
7. Ronald Reagan

