

A comparative study between the roles of truman and stalin in the development of ...

[War](#), [Cold War](#)



Compare and contrast the roles of Truman and Stalin in the course and development of the Cold War

The Cold War was a period of political conflict and military tension which persisted for several decades, from 1947 to 1990. During this period, there was no direct fighting between the two superpowers, the United States of America and the Soviet Union. When the Cold War started, America and USSR were being led by President Harry S. Truman and Joseph Stalin respectively. Truman's Presidency, 1945-52, and Stalin's dictatorial rule, 1924-1953, contributed largely to the development of the Cold War. With their policies and decisions, they shaped the course of the Cold War and ultimately decided the extent of the conflict. The significance of Truman's and Stalin's roles can be demonstrated through the foreign policies they introduced and the events in which the nations were involved under their leadership.

Foreign Policy in the United States of America was highly influenced by their desire to contain the spread of Communism and encourage capitalism. The four main policies introduced by Truman during the cold war was: The Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, NATO and involvement in local struggles. In 1947, President Truman introduced the Truman Doctrine, whereby America offered military and economic aid to help the countries which were threatened by Communism. The following year, the Marshall Plan was instituted which pledged over \$12 billion in economic support to rebuild European nations which were affected by the Second World War. This included countries such as Greece and Turkey where communist threat was

imminent and the formation of a non-democratic government was probable if no help was provided. The Truman Doctrine exemplified the path that US diplomacy was going to follow for the next four decades. These two policies were an extension of the US concept of 'Containment in Asia', and demonstrated Western dislike of Communism thereby deepening the conflict between the USSR and USA. The relationship between these two superpowers further deteriorated after the introduction of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in April 1949, with Truman's administration as a key founder. This was an intergovernmental military alliance which formulated a system of collective defence for member states in case of attacks by external powers. The Soviet Union was not a part of this alliance and it was seen as the joining of capitalist nations to stand against communist ideals. NATO also deterred the possibility of war between the two superpowers since America now had the support of several nations. Lastly, Truman expressed US economic and military support for South Korea during the Korean War, 1950-1953, and Vietnam to fight against forces which were attempting to establish a communist government. In regard to foreign policy, Truman was the first to introduce a piece of legislation which evidently demonstrated America's stance against Communism, thereby deciding the future of US-Soviet relations from 1947 onwards. This is a view commonly promoted by historians such as Gabriel Kolko who argue that it was Truman's aggressive policies that deteriorated the relationship between USA and USSR. Furthermore, these Revisionist historians believe that most of Stalin's policies from 1945 onwards were a defensive response to the tough policies that America introduced.

However, the Traditionalist school of historians, such as Michael Hart, believe Stalin's actions provoked Truman to introduce more aggressive policies and therefore believe he played a bigger role in the escalation of the Cold War. In contrast to the anti-communist foundation that American foreign policy was based on, all Soviet foreign policy revolved around the establishment of Communism and supremacy over the capitalist west. Unlike Truman who wanted to curb the 'Red-scare', Stalin wanted to spread it and all his policies were reflections of this desire. This clash of ideologies is now recognized as one of the main causes of the war. On October 5th, 1947, the Comintern was replaced by another pro-communist agency called Cominform. After the dissolution of Comintern, this was the first official platform for the international communist movement and its sole purpose was to coordinate the actions of communist states under the direction of the Soviet Union and Stalin. This not only strengthened USSR's position internationally but also oversaw the formation of the Eastern Bloc. The Cominform was often seen as Soviet response to the Truman Doctrine by Revisionist historians, in which case Truman would be to blame for starting the conflict between America and USSR. The hostility between USA and USSR was further worsened when Stalin authorized the Berlin Blockade, 1948-1949, which is seen as the first direct clash between the two countries. This limited access to West Berlin and provoked an expensive airlift mission, approved by Truman, to West Berlin to provide supplies. In 1950, Stalin signed the Sino-Soviet Friendship treaty, and USSR agreed to provide technical and economic assistance to China. This was a treaty of mutual assistance and defence, much like NATO, and significantly strengthened the Soviet Union's position since they were

now allied with the one of the largest communist nations. In the same year, Stalin expressed support for North Korea in the Korean War. This meant that USA and USSR were supporting opposite sides of a local struggle and this was the closest that the superpowers had come to open hostile conflict with each other.

Another factor which demonstrates the influence of the leaders on the development of the Cold War is the key events that the respective nations participated in under their governance. Three key events that the United States of America were involved in during Truman's presidency are: the bombing of Japan, the Korean War and the Vietnam War. Firstly, in August 1945, Truman's Administration approved the use of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, thereby forcing Japan to surrender and bringing an end to the Second World War. However, Stalin saw this as an attempt to deprive the Soviets of their strategic desires in East Asia. Moreover, the bombings led to post-war 'atomic diplomacy' which allowed America the upper hand in all negotiations or settlement meetings and also limited Soviet expansionism. Secondly, Truman agreed to defend South Korea from the North Korean forces during the Korean War in 1950. With the Soviets supporting North Korea and possessing atomic bombs of their own, the Korean war brought the threat of escalation of a nuclear war. As a result, total victory wasn't possible for either side. There was not much gained from the war since Korea remained divided and this augmented the hostility between USSR and USA who were both dissatisfied by the outcome at Korea. And thirdly, Truman promised economic aid to France to fight against Ho Chi

Minh, a communist leader in Vietnam. Truman's decision to interfere in this local struggle paved way for deepened US involvement in the Vietnam War, labelled " America's longest war". Since USSR was supporting communist forces in Vietnam, it led to another indirect hostile conflict between the superpowers, marking one of the highest levels of tension to exist between the two nations.

The key events that the USSR was involved in from 1945 to 1953 were: the testing of Soviet atomic bombs, the Yalta conference and the Potsdam conference. Firstly, after the bombing of the Japanese islands in 1945, Stalin was concerned with the dominant position that America held thanks to their newly enhanced weaponry. In August 1949, the Soviet Union detonated its own atomic bombs to demonstrate that they were now in possession of the weapon. Stalin's approval to test bombs started an arms race between the superpowers where both were constantly trying to better their own defence and offense mechanisms. Due to the testing of the Soviet atomic bombs, Truman approved development of the H-bomb in 1950. Secondly, the Yalta Conference, 1945, tension started to emerge between Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin. Stalin agreed to join the war against Japan on the condition that the border of USSR would move west and further into Poland. This clarified Stalin's expansionist ambitions and both Roosevelt as well as Churchill had to accept these terms because the Soviets had control over Poland and East Germany. In return for their approval, Stalin agreed not to interfere in Greece where British forces were trying to put down communist forces and promised to hold free elections in Eastern Europe. However, even though

Stalin liberated Eastern Europe from German rule, his troops remained stationed there and denied free elections in countries like Poland. This concerned America and Britain who protested yet Stalin claimed it was a defensive measure. This tension that arose during this conference foreshadowed the future relations between USA and USSR. Thirdly, the Potsdam Conference, 1945, was dominated by suspicion and subtle hostility between Stalin and Truman. Stalin demanded compensation from Germany for all the Soviets who had died during the Second World War but Truman disagreed. Moreover, Truman refused to agree with the terms decided upon at the previous conference regarding the setting up of Soviet administrations in Eastern Europe. Stalin's attitude towards US-Soviet relations was finalized by his deep dislike of Truman and his outlooks. It was following Stalin's establishment of control in Eastern Europe that he set up Cominform, which made Truman very concerned and forced him to adopt a tougher approach.

Both Truman and Stalin played highly influential roles in deciding the course of the Cold War, and through their policies and actions, they determined the future of US-Soviet relations. On one hand, traditionalists argue that the Soviets and Stalin were accountable for intensifying the war. And on the other hand, revisionists argue that it was actually Truman who was to blame for starting the Cold War through his aggressive policies. However, it is difficult to determine which is true since the leaders were very different in terms of beliefs and their methods. Despite their differences, both leaders were attempting to establish either Capitalism, for Truman, or Communism, for Stalin, as more supreme than the other.