

# Nsc-68: the blueprint for cold war militarization

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



Though a policy statement and not a law, NSC 68 which was issued by the National Security Council in 1950 had far-reaching effects, not only during the cold war, but into the 21st Century. Basically, NSC 68 outlined the threat of Russian communist world domination, because after World War II the Asian and European powers that had previously kept Russian hegemony in the region under control had been decimated or nearly so. Prior to the Wars, the United States had followed basically an isolationist policy with regards to other nations, but with the threat of Russia, the members of the National Security Council sought to inform President Truman, and through him the people of the United States, of the importance of containing the communist threat as well as maintaining a strong military even in peace time. The document states: " Thus unwillingly our free society finds itself mortally challenged by the Soviet system". Although not as well-known as the Truman Doctrine, the statement declared unequivocally that either the United States or Russia would be the world's number one power and that the US could not afford to fail. This statement had wide-ranging implications but was particularly important with regards to the space race and the wars in Southeast Asia.

As stated above, the world was a very different place after the World Wars. New weaponry, specifically chemical and nuclear, made it much easier to kill vast numbers of people, including civilians, than had ever been so in the past. Likewise, these weapons could often be utilized with little or no repercussions on the users. Additionally, with the break up of major empires, such as the vast colonies of Great Britain, many newly liberated countries were viewed as being susceptible to communism. Thus, as NSC 68 points

out, a very real war was declared, although not a traditional war. Russia and the United States did not aim conventional weapons at one another but fought the Cold War psychologically, using the media and political propaganda instead of guns and missiles. NSC 68 definitively describes the US as freedom-loving, “wholly irreconcilable” to the tenets of communism. Communism had to be shown as inherently evil and inferior in every way to democracy.

Because of advances made in rocketry and other technology during the War, the idea of space as the ‘final frontier’ became important. Both countries entered what has been called the space race to determine which would be the first to conquer gravity and send craft to the moon and other celestial bodies. Space would become a new arena from which to launch weapons, and NSC 68 stated that the Kremlin would use any means available to make a military strike against democracy. Therefore, it was essential that the US government fund space technology and develop ways in which to exceed Russia’s advances. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) was organized and President Kennedy was able to secure federal funding for an eventual moon landing because of successes in space by the Russians and the fears that NSC 68 had outlined regarding potential Soviet domination of space.

Likewise, NSC 68 made it clear that Russia would stop at nothing to spread communism across the globe. The rise of Soviet communism in Korea, Vietnam and China was seen as strategy that could cause a ‘domino effect’ and propelled the US into wars in both Korea and Vietnam. The “logic of

militarized containment” that had been explained by NSC 68 required that the US eradicate communism wherever it arose. Because the document positioned US democracy in direct opposition with Soviet communism, the US was able to draft soldiers and launch wars against countries that were of no direct threat to American soil. American Cold War strategy was dictated by NSC 68 and the defeat of communism. Foreign policy, military policy, and civilian policy in the US were “ consumed with thwarting Russian power”. Although it became increasingly clear that many liberation movements across the globe had no connection with Soviet Russia, merely the words ‘ communist threat’ sent US troops across the globe. NSC 68 had been so successful in conflating any political regime that was not a copy of American democracy with communism and reacting with a military presence that, increasingly, moderate thinkers in the country began to protest.

In conclusion, NSC 68 is a major work of successful political rhetoric and propaganda that set the tone for the Cold War for Americans. Although repercussions of the report bled through nearly every aspect of American life, both the space race and the US involvement in Asian wars have had effects that continue to be felt in the country. Without the definitive focus of the document, American leadership and citizens might have looked more closely at military spending that continues to be a problem today. Likewise, without the determination by NSC 68 that the communist threat is a real danger to the American way of life, young men might not have been sent to Southeast Asia in attempts to win unwinnable wars. Without NSC 68 there might have been no Apollo 13 or fall of Saigon in modern memory..