

Cold war era presidents

[History](#)



Response Essay II Cold War era Presidents were faced with a number of issues unique to that time period, particularly the sense that the general specter of Soviet-style communism was the single most important issue confronting the United States. Because of this, all other issues were influenced by this larger more supposedly fundamental concern. Issues that we consider to be at the core of the United States democratic experiment, like individual freedom, were trumped by the political realities of the Cold War whenever the two came into conflict. Sadly, they came into conflict more than we might like. On the one hand, we can accept the idea that Soviet-style communism was not a source of or way of providing real freedom. The Soviets were authoritarian and controlling, and the centrally-planned structure of the Soviet system was often enforced with violence, as well as with harsh, politically motivated punishments. In this sense, the fight against communism, whether it involved funding Afghani fighters resisting Soviet occupation, or fighting the North Koreans, or embargoing Cuba, can all be seen as effort to promote freedom abroad by curtailing and containing the spread of such a vicious and draconian form of communism. On the other hand, Cold War Presidents tended to make decisions that were so committed to fighting the spread of communism that they often sacrificed the freedom of many to do so. This happened both domestically and in foreign policy. On the domestic front, many core civil rights issues were left to droop, creating an uncomfortable proximity between the message America was trying to transmit abroad and the reality of freedom and equality at home. In many ways, this disconnect mirrored the problems that existed more obviously when slavery was still considered an acceptable practice. African Americans still suffered overt discrimination, especially in the rural South and Midwest,

<https://assignbuster.com/cold-war-era-presidents/>

and women were often considered beneath men in their capacity to reason and to accomplish particular types of work. Non-Protestant religious denominations were often viewed with suspicion (even John F. Kennedy, for example, was considered suspect by many because of his Catholicism). Cold War Presidents spent so much time and effort concentrating on the “red” menace that they seemed reluctant to upset the political balance at home on these sorts of domestic issues. Or, perhaps they had little interest in addressing them for their own reasons. In terms of foreign policy, the United States made a series of deals with dictators who would oppress their own people with support (financial and military) from the United States in exchange for thwarting communist influence in their country. When Iran, to note perhaps the most famous example of all, looked like it might nationalize its oil fields and embrace more communist ideologies, the United States orchestrated a coup that put the Shah into power, who then brutally oppressed his own people. We armed the rebels in Afghanistan so long as they fought the Soviets who were occupying Afghani territory, and then all but abandoned them to their fate in a country savaged by war as soon as the Soviets withdrew. We sent the military into countries like the Dominican Republic when civil unrest there made it seem like there was a chance it might go red alongside Cuba. In addition, we engaged in a series of bloody wars and “police conflicts” that cost people their lives, their homes, and their country all in an effort to contain the spread of communism. In the end, winning the Cold War probably was a big boon to freedom the world over, compared to the Soviet-style alternative. But winning that war involved many opportunity costs, and much freedom was sacrificed on the road to victory. American Presidents chose to pay that price because they believed

<https://assignbuster.com/cold-war-era-presidents/>

in the larger strategic vision, and perhaps in their own propaganda about the glory of American liberty and equality. It remains a shame that they maintained such beliefs despite the lack of liberty and equality that still continues today.