

## **During the period 1945-1989, what was the importance for US foreign policy of one or more of the following: Berlin; Korea; Cuba? (2015)**

After WWII, two superpowers emerged; Russia and America. Hostility began to develop after their wartime alliance ended because of their huge ideological differences. The USSR had a communist regime, while the USA had a capitalist and democratic regime. This hostility led to a series of events that nearly brought the world into a third world war and are known collectively today as the Cold War. The Berlin Blockade, the Korean War and the Cuban missile crisis were each a huge test on US foreign policy and major parts of the Cold War.

Truman and his administration adopted a policy of containment. This meant America would have a more active foreign policy than in the years before WWII. It committed the US to financially and militarily supporting countries being threatened by communism. They would do their best to ensure communism was not allowed to spread outside of its existing boundaries. This was the main aspect of what became known as the Truman doctrine, which became the center of US foreign policy in this period.

The Marshall Plan was also put into action. It was an aid program for war torn Europe to promote economic recovery. The Soviets, however, saw it as an attempt to buy control of Europe and stop communism. US foreign policy changed a lot in the years before and throughout the Cold War and became increasingly more important.

After WWII, Germany and Berlin were both divided and split into four zones. A zone was then given to each of the victorious allies: France; USA; Russia; Britain. However, Truman realized that Germany needed to recover economically to allow a European wide recovery, and this in turn meant unification. Stalin disagreed, he wanted to keep Germany weak and divided. The other three allies joined their zones. As a part of the Marshall Plan comma and new currency was being introduced to the western areas of Germany. Stalin warned against it being introduced to West Berlin, as this would add even more to what he saw as West Berlin acting as an island of democracy and capitalism in his Soviet sea. The Western powers ignored him. On June 27<sup>th</sup>, he ordered the blockade of the rail and road routes into Berlin. The only way in was a 30km wide air

corridor. West Berlin was under siege and to starve. Truman, however, was determined not to lose West Berlin and to keep in with his policy of containment.

Operation Vittles was deemed the only diplomatic, yet effective, solution. Supplies would be airlifted into the city. B-29 bomber planes were also moved to bases in Britain. These planes were capable of carrying nuclear bombs and were intended to send a clear message to Stalin.

The airlift supported the city for 320 days, until May 1949, when Stalin admitted defeat and reopened the land routes. It was a major win for both Truman and the USA. They were praised highly both at home and in Europe and became strong allies with Germany as a result.

Containment had worked. It led to the formation of NATO, an alliance of countries against Stalin and his regime. In response, the Warsaw pact was formed. These two forces set the new American foreign policy in stone. The success in Berlin and formation of NATO were both major successes for US foreign policy.

As events in Berlin settled, a crisis in Korea emerged. The former French Colony, turned Japanese colony was divided along the 38th parallel. After WWII, the southern half was given to the USA and the north to the USSR. Relations were worsening between the two superpowers and they couldn't come to an agreement on what to do with Korea. Both countries supported a mirroring regime to their own in their zone; the USSR supported the communist north under Kim Il Sung, and the Americans supported the south under the regime of Syngman Rhee. In 1949, a UN agreement meant both countries pulled their troops from Korea. However, in June 1950, the North invaded the South in an attempt to unify as one communist state. The USA were sure the USSR were behind it and due to their policy of containment, they felt obliged to act. The USA enlisted the UN and condemned the invasion. Troops were sent in, led by General MacArthur.

The UN troops, mostly made up of Americans, forced the North Koreans back over the 38th parallel. When they had almost reached the Yalu River, China launched a counterattack. There was bitter fighting until they eventually stabilised near the original border. However, a stalemate developed. Truman controversially ruled out the use of nuclear weapons. Eventually, in 1953, a treaty was agreed on, mostly due to the fact that was new leadership in both the USA and USSR. Despite being unpopular at home, it was a success and containment had once again worked. The Cold War was no longer confined to Europe.

The most dangerous episode of the Cold War was in Cuba in 1962. In 1959, Fidel Castro established a communist government in Cuba and nationalised all the American companies there. A trade embargo was enforced on Cuba and all diplomatic relations were caught off. There

was a failed American-backed invasion at the Bay of Pigs. Castro turned to Khrushchev for help. He gave them medium range nuclear missiles that could reach Washington DC in under 10 minutes from Havana. They planned to keep the missiles a secret until the bases were operational.

On October 16<sup>th</sup>, a U-2 spy plane spotted the bases. JFK formed the ExComm, a special advisory committee. They had intense debates behind closed doors for a week. Initially, they decided to 'quarantine' or blockade Cuba. He also moved troops to Florida and placed all US troops on high alert. On the 22<sup>nd</sup>, JFK told the world what Cuba and the USSR were doing. The world had never been more terrified nor tense.

On October 26<sup>th</sup>, the Americans received a letter from Russia offering to withdraw if they promised to never invade Cuba. The following day, known as Black Saturday, a second and more aggressive letter was received. It added an extra condition; they must publicly remove their missiles from Turkey. That same day, a U-2 spy plane was shot down over the US. Bobby Kennedy met with the Soviet ambassador and they reached a compromise. The most dangerous moment in history was over. It was a triumph and a relief for Kennedy and the US. Slowly, relations began to improve. The test ban treaty limited the arms race and the role of nuclear bombs in foreign policy. Although Cuba had not been saved from communism, it was still a victory.

All of these events tested US foreign policy greatly. The Truman doctrine and containment were mostly successful and upheld throughout these events. South Korea and West Berlin were saved from communism, although Cuba was not. Unfortunately, just as the crisis in Cuba was wrapping up, huge problems in Vietnam were only beginning.