The USA and containment of communism in Asia, 1945–1950

In this chapter we will look at America’s part in the reconstruction of Japan; US failure to prevent the ‘fall’ of China to communism in 1949 and the consequences of this failure. We will also explore US involvement in South Korea, the Defensive Perimeter Strategy and the effect of NSC 68 (a foreign policy document produced in 1950).

You will also have the chance to practise analysing and evaluating primary and secondary sources.

Key questions:
The main elements of the specification content dealt with in this chapter relate to the key issue of ‘How successfully did the USA seek to contain communism in Asia?’ Key questions for study include:

- How was the US policy of containment applied to Asia and where did this succeed and fail?
- What was the strategy of ‘model states’?
- What part did America play in the reconstruction of Japan, 1945–51?
- Why did the USA fail to prevent a communist victory in China in 1949?
- What was the ‘Defensive Perimeter Strategy’ of 1949 and why did the USA adopt it?
- Why and how did the USA support South Korea, 1945–50?
- How far did NSC 68 represent a change or a continuity of policy?

Japanese expansion in Asia

European colonial powers such as the British, French and Dutch had established control of Asian markets over centuries, exploiting resources and dominating trade in the area. The Japanese, with limited resources of their own, had been squeezed out. So, while European powers were distracted by the outbreak of the Second World War, Japan took the opportunity to seize these markets. The attack on Pearl Harbor not only brought the USA into the Second World War, but it focused public opinion on trade in South-East Asia. Japan tried to create a ‘Great East-Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere’ by establishing a self-sufficient bloc of Asian countries under Japanese control, with economies free from Western influence. Though its purpose was to serve the interests of an aggressive Japanese empire, it was presented in propaganda as ‘Asia for the Asians’.

At the height of Japan’s expansion (see Figure 2.1), it dominated the Pacific. Korea, Manchuria, Inner Mongolia, Taiwan, French Indochina, Burma, Thailand, Malaya, Borneo, the Dutch East Indies, the Philippines and parts of China all came under its control.

Japan expelled the European imperial powers, such as Britain, France and the Dutch, from their colonies. Japanese subjects were treated brutally. When the war turned against Japan, its troops stripped these countries bare of resources, and left behind devastated economies and strong national feeling. Poverty and devastation made these countries vulnerable to communist expansion. The Japanese left behind a dangerous power vacuum.
America soon filled this vacuum by becoming the dominant power in the Pacific, with control over Japan. A wartime song entitled ‘To Be Specific, It’s Our Pacific’ kept up morale amongst a confident American public, as US troops followed a policy of ‘island-hopping’, driving back Japanese forces with huge loss of life. The devastating impact of the atom bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in early August 1945 forced Japan to surrender unconditionally (see pages 27–28). This gave the USA a sense of invincibility as the only power with nuclear weapons.
How did the Truman administration apply containment policy to Asia and where did this succeed and fail?

A democratic Europe was the main priority of Truman, Marshall and Acheson. In Asia, American ‘containment’ was on a more limited scale between 1945 and 1950, as the USSR’s power base was at a further distance geographically and its armed forces were concentrated on its satellite states in Eastern Europe.

The USA sought to establish close relations with Asia and to reconstruct Japan and the Philippines as model states, exemplifying the success of democracy. It intended to uphold capitalism and develop strong economies based on free trade in South-East Asia. Their prosperous economies would help spread the costs of defence.
There was always the danger of ‘overstretch’ of military resources, but the US monopoly of nuclear weaponry gave a feeling of superiority in the face of Soviet ambitions in China, Japan and Korea. The Truman Doctrine risked provoking military confrontation with the USSR along the Pacific Rim (see also pages 47–48 on the Defensive Perimeter Strategy), because of his confidence in US military superiority, and the need to protect American markets and the vital resources in South-East Asia.

The main US strategies were:

- to make Japan into a satellite of the USA
- to extend economic aid to anti-communist forces in China and Indochina
- to establish and defend a ring of offshore Pacific islands as a barrier to the advance of communism and its encroachment on South-East Asian trade
- to prop up non-communist South Korea, though it was of limited US interest.

Truman was prepared to accept the return of the old European imperial powers to South-East Asia to reinforce democracy; Britain and France could then share the costs of strengthening the regimes to deter others from wavering towards communism. Ironically, though it claimed to be anti-imperialist and supported self-determination for free peoples, the USA had ruled its own South-East Asian colony in the Philippines. After the Second World War the USA used its ex-colony of the Philippines to create a ‘model state’ – a prosperous, democratic, capitalist nation – to encourage other national movements to copy its example of freedom and prosperity, so containing the spread of communism in South-East Asia. George Kennan, in his ‘Long Telegram’ (see pages 15–16) had said ‘world communism is like a malignant parasite that feeds on diseased tissue’. American aid would end poverty and halt its spread.

In Asia, containment policy followed similar lines to those adopted in Europe. Poor countries devastated by warfare and Japanese domination were given economic aid and a US military presence to help them stem the spread of Soviet-inspired communism. But in Asia, unlike Europe, many countries had been under Japanese domination for many years, and these were traditionally poor Third World countries, with no history of democracy or capitalism. Successive US administrations mistook Asian national movements for Soviet-inspired communism (see case study page 24).

**What was the strategy of ‘model states’?**

One fundamental strategy used by successive US administrations was to attempt to create model states in Asia, to show that democracy and capitalism would bring economic prosperity, freedom and happiness. The USA felt that their political system was the best in the world, and that no country would choose communism when they saw the benefits democracy had brought to these model states. They began with their own ex-colony of the Philippines. This artificial imposition of western culture onto another country is an example of cultural imperialism.

**Pre-1935 US colonial economic policy in the Philippines**

American companies bought up vast areas of land in the Philippines to open up the trade of South-East Asia to America. The country became dependent on US markets to sell its goods, which included rice, tobacco, sugar, coconuts, timber, rubber and pineapples. US capitalist practices were patchy, but the Filipino landed classes prospered from a boom in rice and sugar prices. They realised their wealth depended on US support.
However, there was a widening gap between rich and poor, which led to peasant unrest, and an independence movement began to develop.

**The Philippines national movement during the Second World War**

In 1935, when the Philippines became semi-independent after nearly 40 years of American colonial rule, its President asked General Douglas MacArthur to set up a Philippines army with himself as Field Marshall. However, he badly underestimated the strength of the advancing Japanese, and was defeated in a bitter Philippines campaign in 1941–42. Japan seized the Philippines forcing both the President and MacArthur to leave. MacArthur was famously reported as saying 'I shall return', and was given command of US forces in Asia. Japan established an authoritarian government in the Philippines, declared martial law and used the Filipino economy to support the needs of its advancing troops. Some Filipinos sided with the Japanese, but the **Hucks** harassed Japanese forces, led guerrilla raids and assassinated collaborators. They carved out 'liberated zones' north of Manila, mobilising peasants to maintain the agricultural estates abandoned by landlords. The Hucks also worked with the US forces against the Japanese, though on some occasions they clashed with US troops over scarce resources. Approximately one million Filipinos died in the four years of the Second World War.

The USA recognised the importance of the region to the stability of South-East Asia. It gave the Philippines independence on 4 July 1946, seeing the hypocrisy of keeping a colony in light of its anti-imperialist wartime policy against Germany and Japan.
**The Philippines as a model state**

President Truman used Filipino independence as a means of ensuring US dominance in the Pacific and so strengthening the Pacific Rim Defensive Perimeter Strategy. However, he resisted any suggestion that the USA was in fact treating it as a colony, in case this provoked a revival of European imperialism. Instead, he emphasised two features of the newly-independent state:

- Its measures to prevent European dominance of its markets and materials
- Its democratic values of freedom and liberty.

It was intended to be a shining example of capitalist prosperity and democracy to encourage other states in the area to resist the spread of communism.

**The Philippines economy**

The economic aim was to reinstate US ‘open door’ free trade policy in the region, to make the former colony:

- A market for US goods
- A source of raw materials for US military operations in the region
- A source of materials for a reconstructed Japan (see page 26–27)
- A strong political ally in the front line of defence of South-East Asia.

$620 million of US investment was injected into the Filipino economy to defend it from the poverty which might allow it to fall to communism. Some of this was used to restore the infrastructure: hospitals, factories, roads, bridges and residential areas. $100 million was given as surplus military property, but most went to individuals to re-distribute land and wealth. In practice, the groups dominant in pre-war Filipino society were restored to their previous status.

The Bell Trade Act of 1946 protected American domestic producers with preferential trade concessions, while quotas were imposed on Filipino products competing with US ones. Filipino market places were flooded with cheap US goods. This was widely seen as unfair, but a Republican senator wrote,

‘We have [our] interests to look after too. It is not that we do not desire to be helpful to the Philippine people. God knows, I would give them the shirt off my back, if I had another one to replace it. In other words, I would give them half. But we have certain obligations here and we can’t let our hearts run away with us altogether.’

(Senator Harold Knutson, Senator of Minnesota, 1946.)

**The imposition of democracy and the Huk rebellion**

America’s political intention was to establish democracy in the Philippines, and here it set a precedent by choosing a man rather than a national liberation movement – a flawed policy later followed in South Korea and South Vietnam. MacArthur’s support helped Manuel Roxas win the first presidential election, even though he was unpopular as a double agent and collaborator during the War. The literate upper classes of Filipino society dominated the voting. In 1946, Roxas corruptly secured the passing of the US preferential trade agreement, the Bell Trade Act, by silencing its critics.

Strategically placed US military bases were justified as a ‘stabilising’ influence. Their purpose was to maintain the Philippines within the US sphere of influence and to support the reinstated Filipino elites. Yet State Department officials accepted that the Philippines faced no outside threat. Roxas set up a Philippines Military Police under the control of the US Army. It was full of opponents of the Huks, and unleashed brutal repression of their reformers and peasant supporters. The USA saw Huks as a threat to their plans, as they were known to be a popular guerrilla movement with political organisations in the villages. The powerful pre-war landlords were restored. In 1949–51 the Huks led an armed rebellion to gain political rights, improve working conditions and remove unfair US trade restrictions. American troops crushed the rebellion; they disarmed the Huks and imprisoned their leaders. Cold War rhetoric was used to brand them ‘communist’ or ‘communist inspired’, to justify US actions.

The policy of the ‘model state’ applied to the Philippines was a pattern to be followed later in South Korea, with very limited success, and South Vietnam, where the outcome proved a disaster for the USA.
**ANALYSIS**

**Interpretations of US policy in the Philippines**

**Contradictions in US policy**
- The Philippines would have independence, but also a role in launching attacks.
- The USA wished morally to support Asian nationalist movements but needed to use Asian economies to support the rebuilding of Europe.
- Philippine independence was under US economic and political control.

**Criticisms of US policy**
- The French copied this model in Laos and Cambodia with disastrous results.
- In Indonesia, the Dutch used it to hand power to Sukarno, an unpopular dictator.
- The USA was hypocritical: a neo-colonial power which preached anti-imperialism.
- A similar policy proved disastrous for the USA in South Korea and South Vietnam.

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**Sources**

**A** The US High Commissioner to the Philippines states American strategy there.

A US presence in the islands is not merely for the protection of the Philippines, nor even for the defence of the United States. These bases are expected to be secondary, supporting installations for supply, repair and staging activities for all our armed forces in the Far East. Committed as we are to a long-time occupation of Japan, to a strong policy in Asia, the Philippines are designed to play a major role in US diplomacy in the Far East.

From a speech by Paul McNutt, 1946

**B** A group of leaders of the American armed forces advise the Truman administration on the importance of the Philippines to US foreign policy.

The United States bases in the Philippines should be considered, not merely as outposts, but as springboards from which the United States armed forces may be protected.

From a report by the US Joint Chiefs of Staff

**C** A modern US historian gives his view of US policy in the Philippines.

American leaders were not blind to the fact that their Filipino protégés were usually undemocratic and often corrupt, sometimes embarrassingly so. But while Washington remained convinced that communism posed a grave threat to the security of Asia and the peace of the world, the United States was willing to overlook such defects.

From: H. W. Brands, Bound to Empire: The United States and the Philippines, 1992

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**ACTIVITY**

Evaluate Sources A, B and C as evidence for US containment strategy in the Philippines and in Asia.
Stretch and challenge
What lessons might the USA have learned from the experience of creating a ‘model state’ in the Philippines?

First define what is meant by a ‘model state’. Then consider:

- attitudes towards landed elites and national movements
- political problems in imposing democracy successfully from above
- economic problems in creating a free market for trade in South-East Asia
- military problems in defending the Philippines
- the role played by MacArthur
- the Philippines’ role in US ‘Defensive Perimeter Strategy’.

Judgement: Assess the effectiveness of the US policy of the ‘model state’.

- Organise your ideas into political, economic, social and military aims.
- Draw up a list of facts relevant to these ideas.
- Judge whether the policy was ‘effective’ or ‘ineffective’.

What part did America play in the reconstruction of Japan, 1945–51?

Figure 2.2 A cartoon by David Low published on 28 August 1945 in the Evening Standard. The banner in the cartoon quoted Emperor Hirohito’s speech accepting surrender, two weeks before, in which he stated that war had ‘developed not necessarily to Japan’s advantage’. It reads, ‘Welcome to inhuman Americans who (by glorious efforts of undefeated imperial general staff) have agreed to postpone war which was developing not necessarily to Japan’s advantage’.
Japan was the biggest test of the US policy of creating ‘model’ democratic, prosperous, capitalist states in Asia. At Potsdam, Truman described the Japanese as ‘savages, ruthless, merciless and fanatic’. The Japanese feared the USA would adopt a severe line in reconstructing their devastated country. Yet, by 1951, the year in which a peace treaty finally ended the state of war between the USA and Japan, the ‘savage’ had been successfully turned into a democratic, business-orientated ally.

**ACTIVITY**

1. Explain the message of the cartoon entitled ‘Tokyo Reception’ (Figure 2.2).
2. Compare Sources A and B below as evidence for views on the Japanese situation towards the end of the Second World War.

   - How can you use their provenance (authorship; date; purpose; audience; nature and tone) to answer the question in the context of war events and propaganda?
   - How do their similarities and differences in content help you answer the question?
   - Supported by your answers to the questions above, which would you judge to be the more useful or reliable source in answering the question?

**Sources**

**A** In 1944, a secret US intelligence report to General MacArthur presented the former brutal Japanese enemy as weak.

*In every sense of the word the Japanese are little people. Some observers claim there would have been no Pearl Harbor had the Japanese been three inches taller. Japan is a land of diminutive distances. Japanese houses are artistic but flimsy and cramped. The people, tiny in stature, seem to play at living. To a Westerner, they and their country possess the strange charm of toyland. Centuries of isolation have accentuated their restrictive outlook on life. Being little people, the Japanese dreamed of power and glory, but lacked a realistic concept of the material requirements for a successful world war. Moreover, they were totally unable to envisage the massive scale of operations in which the United States is now able to indulge.*

**B** Emperor Hirohito’s Declaration accepting the armistice, nine days after the dropping of the first atom bomb on Hiroshima, August 1945.

*If we should continue to fight, it would not only result in an ultimate collapse and obliteration of the Japanese nation, but it would also lead to the extinction of human civilisation. We should atone ourselves before the hallowed spirits of our imperial ancestors. This is why we have ordered the acceptance of the provisions of the joint declaration of the powers. Let the entire nation continue as one family from generation to generation, ever firm in its faith that its divine land will never perish, and mindful of its heavy burden of responsibilities, and the long road before it. Unite your total strength to be devoted to the construction for the future. Cultivate the ways of rectitude, nobility of spirit, and work with resolution so that you may enhance the innate glory of the Imperial State and keep pace with the progress of the world.*

To the Japanese, unconditional surrender was so dishonourable and shocking that they would prefer to face death rather than such shame. Yet the Emperor was forced to agree to unconditional surrender on 2 September 1945. US atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki had caused the horrific deaths of 210,000 civilians from burns, radiation and related effects and there was therefore no other option.
How serious was the situation in Japan in 1945?

Japan was perhaps the prime target for the spread of communism in Asia because its post-war situation was very grave. The Emperor remained a symbol of continuity, but there was no political system and social ties had been broken. Japan had suffered widespread devastation and high casualties. Almost three million Japanese had been killed (3% of the 1939 population), including more than half a million civilians. The islands were already short of food before three million scattered troops began to be shipped home.

Economically, Japan had been one of the five powerhouses of global production and possessed a skilled workforce and industrial plant. Now there was low industrial and agricultural output, spiralling inflation, a black market and looting. The economy had been devastated. Just two million of Tokyo’s seven million population remained in the city. Japan was potentially an obvious target for Soviet expansion.

There were large numbers of poor, homeless and hungry people, but orphans, widows and single women were particularly badly hit. Some women were recruited as prostitutes by Japanese officials offering them food and shelter. This became known as the Recruitment and Amusement Association (RAA) and was set up to save other Japanese females from rape by occupation forces, and so preserve the purity of the Japanese nation (see Source below).

**Source**

Some women swore this oath to serve their country by building good relations with the occupations forces, and keeping them contented to lower their potential aggression.

We have been pierced with grief and endless sorrow and are about to sink to the depths of perilous, boundless desperation. We have been assigned the dangerous task of comforting the occupation army as part of the urgent national measures for post-war management. The order is heavy and immense, and success will be extremely difficult. We unite to sacrifice ourselves, to defend the purity of our race. We are not compromising our integrity or selling our souls. We are paying an inescapable courtesy, to contribute to the security of our society. We are offering ourselves to defend our nation.
Most of these women were extremely naïve and thought their role honourable. One of many who committed suicide was a typist who had been expected to entertain as many as 60 American GIs in one day.

**The US occupation of Japan under General MacArthur**

The threat of confrontation made Stalin back down on his request to accept the surrender of Japanese forces in northern Japan. Truman firmly refused to divide Japan into multinational zones like those in Germany. Though a four-power allied Joint Council was set up, Stalin agreed that all decisions concerning Japan should be made by **General Douglas MacArthur**, Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers of occupation. Perhaps Stalin felt the USA might in turn accept Soviet control of Eastern Europe.

Truman kept the promise made to Stalin at Yalta and allowed Soviet occupation of the Kuril Islands. This caused bitter protests by Republicans in Congress. The American press believed the decision threatened the security of the USA and its future role in Japan. The US Ambassador to China, Patrick Hurley, resigned his post and accused the US State Department of being subverted by ‘communists’ and ‘imperialists’.

**BIOGRAPHY**

**General Douglas MacArthur** (1880–1964)

Douglas MacArthur became the US army’s youngest general and Chief of Staff in 1930. In 1935 Roosevelt granted him $10 million to mobilise the Philippine Army to defend the Philippines. The day after Pearl Harbor, Japanese air strikes on the Philippines destroyed half MacArthur’s air force. He was appointed Supreme Commander of the US forces in the Southwest Pacific Area, and developed his ‘island hopping’ tactics to defeat the Japanese, who surrendered to him in 1945. On the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, MacArthur was appointed commander of the United Nations forces. Truman and Dean Acheson told MacArthur to limit the war to Korea. MacArthur disagreed and was removed from his command.

### ACTIVITY

Draw a mind map of MacArthur’s objectives for Japan using the Source below.

#### Source

**As the US forces move into Japan, MacArthur is issued with this directive from the Truman administration.**

Your ultimate objectives are to:

- ensure that Japan will never again be a threat to global peace and security
- bring about a peaceful and responsible government, which will respect the rights of other states and the principles of the United Nations Charter.

Your means of achieving these objectives:

- limit Japan’s sovereignty to the islands of Honshu, Hokkaido, Kyushu, Shikoku
- completely disarm and demilitarise Japan
- encourage the Japanese people to desire individual liberties and respect for fundamental human rights, particularly freedom of religion, assembly, speech and the press.
- encourage the Japanese people to form democratic and representative organisations
- afford the Japanese the right to develop for themselves an economy which will meet their peacetime requirements.

From: US Post-surrender Directive on Japan, August 1945
Which strategies guided US reconstruction of Japan?

US policy went through four stages.

Stage 1: 1945 punish and reform – remove Japan’s military forces, introduce democracy.


Stage 4: 1951 ‘integrated’ Cold War policy – when treaties recognised the official status of Japan at the centre of a US defensive strategy.

These treaties put a remilitarised and economically-strong Japan at the heart of a triangle of US South-East Asian bases and trading links. This stage was a response to the Korean War (see Chapter 3, page 51).

Stage 1: 1945 punish and reform – remove Japan’s military forces, introduce democracy

During this period, US feelings of fear and hatred of the Japanese lingered, after horrific stories of torture and mistreatment of US prisoners of war. However, in the light of the UN emphasis on human rights, MacArthur adopted a cautious policy in punishing the previous regime. War crimes trials took place over a period of two years, from May 1946 to November 1948, being gradually phased out after 1947. The Japanese were surprisingly supportive of the trials. They agreed to co-operate as long as MacArthur kept his promise to exempt Emperor Hirohito from trial. He symbolised the independent survival of the Japanese nation; their main priority. Many defendants were found not guilty and some were granted immunity, including those who had taken part in bacteriological experiments. This was a far cry from the Nuremberg trials (see Source below).

Source


Former members of Unit 731, which specialised in germ warfare, have been confessing crimes. Chinese researchers say they keep uncovering new sites where anthrax, typhoid, plague and other diseases were spread, wiping out perhaps hundreds of thousands of Chinese. Another 10,000 or more Chinese, Russians and perhaps some American prisoners of war as well, researchers say, were killed in ghoulisle experiments. Japanese officials insist they lack proof, although by other accounts they have sealed wartime archives returned to them by the American authorities in the 1950s.


ACTIVITY

How useful is this Source as evidence for US weakness in imposing their policy of retribution?

How was Japan demilitarised and disarmed?

MacArthur ordered the dismantling of the Japanese army, destruction of its weapons and the exclusion of former military officers from leading political roles in the new government. Two hundred thousand alleged ‘militarists’ were purged from public life. Many rich landlords, who had supported war and aggressive expansion, now lost their power to tenant farmers.

In November 1945, MacArthur ordered a tax on Japanese wartime profits and ended the payment of compensation. His aim was to keep inflation in check and allow more control over the economy. These policies were openly opposed by the Finance Minister, Ishibashi Tanzan, former editor of a pacifist journal, The Oriental Economist. MacArthur extended the purges to those previously involved in media and local government and Ishibashi was forced to resign.
The repatriation of prisoners of war was in itself a success, though defeated veterans were unpopular and treated as outcasts (see Source below). Some had been indoctrinated by communist propaganda and felt bitter towards their officers and commanders. However, of the 400,000 Japanese prisoners thought to be still held by the USSR, by the end of 1949 only 94,000 had been located, while another 300,000 or so remained unaccounted for. Not until 40 years later did the USSR publish the names of 46,000 prisoners buried in Siberia. On the other hand, there was also bitterness among US prisoners of war, who claimed to have suffered torture and starvation at Japanese hands. This gave the occupation forces a very negative view of the Japanese.

**Source**

An anonymous letter from a Japanese ex-soldier, published in the *Asahi Shimbun*, a Japanese newspaper on 9 June 1946. It stated:

I returned to Japan from the southern regions on 20 May. My house was burned, my wife and children missing. What little money I had was quickly consumed by the high prices, and I was a pitiful figure. Not a single person gave me a kind word. Instead, they cast hostile glances my way. Tormented and without work, I became possessed by a devil*. From an anonymous letter published in the *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper on 9 June 1946

* The ‘devil’ he referred to was the compulsion to turn to crime, and this man was typical of the many who became involved in robbery and murder.

How was Japan given democracy?

In 1946, MacArthur’s officials drafted a new constitution, renouncing war. The Japanese were able to agree to it only because they had the protection of the US nuclear shield. This is what it stated:

‘Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as a means of settling international disputes. To achieve this aim, there will never be any land, sea or air forces maintained. The right of the state to declare war will not be recognised.

(Japanese constitution. Article 93 November 1946.)
The new democratic Japanese constitution, which came into effect in 1947, imposed major changes from the previous rigid authoritarian system. It guaranteed basic freedoms and civil liberties:

- Political parties, including the Communists, were allowed to exist and political prisoners were released.
- Women were to gain equal rights, more equality than US women had.
- Noble status was abolished and Christianity was tolerated alongside Shinto, giving religious freedom.
- Emperor Hirohito was removed from politics to become a patriotic symbol of Japan.

However, MacArthur himself became the new ‘god-like’ figure for the Japanese. US analysts recognised that the Japanese culture had a tendency to worship those who had power and strength. This attitude was hardly a basis for democracy.

### Sources

**A** An anonymous Japanese citizen gives his views on the plan for Japanese democracy

*Your Excellency General MacArthur;*

Having received Your Excellency’s overall support, this progressive constitution clarifies Japan’s future. The American form of democracy under the emperor system seems to me a Japanese-style democracy. I express my full support and the support of the Japanese people. This will mean an end to debates on the emperor system, the rejection of communism, and the importing of American-style democracy. This is natural, since the United States sacrificed the most during the war against Japan. The question of whether Japan should follow American or Soviet lines has been resolved. Japan will benefit from American culture in general and movies will likely be imported in large numbers.

From a letter to General MacArthur on 11 March 1946

**B** The organisers of the May Day left-wing rally express their gratitude to the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers and the Allied Powers for their Japanese reconstruction policy.

We express our sincerest appreciation for the measures taken by the Allied Powers to liberate the people, grant freedom, and extend the rights to labour and agricultural groups. Inspired by this, we hope to:

- uproot feudalistic and despotic oppression
- establish a popular government, based on the true will of the people never to break the peace of the world again
- achieve political, economic and social conditions which will not jeopardise the livelihood of the people
- and be recognised internationally as a peaceful and democratic nation.

May Day Committee, letter, May 1946

### Activity

**Stage 2: ‘soft’ Cold war policy – making Japan prosperous to keep it out of the Soviet sphere of influence**

The American guiding principle of Japanese economic reconstruction was to integrate Japan and South-East Asia into a ‘great crescent’ of anti-communist capitalist states to contain communism in the Far East. Japan was to be a shining example of the power of democracy and a free market. However, it seemed to some observers that the USA was dusting off Japan’s plans for a ‘co-prosperity sphere’, which had brought defeat in the Second World War, and applying it themselves.

As in Europe, Americans worried about the attraction of communism to a defeated and demoralised people. Japan, with its large population, had depended on overseas imports of food and raw materials. In 1945, these had dried up and Japanese trade had collapsed. Until
1947 there was little improvement. Industrial production was low, exports weak and food costly due to shortages.

Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida (see also page 35) saw the vital importance of economic development and was determined to retain Japan’s national identity. At first the Zaibatsu remained in control of business. Japanese civil servants continued to plan the reconstruction of the economy. They advised producing high-grade machine tools and ultra short-wave communications as a priority.

What economic changes made Japan a fortress of capitalism during this stage?

In 1947, the Chairman of Chrysler and a group of American businessmen ended Zaibatsu privileges and helped set up a Japanese car industry. In 1949, Congress authorised $500 million per annum in aid to Japan, to allow the purchase of the foodstuffs and raw materials essential to Japanese economic growth.

Approximately 5.8 million acres, about 38 per cent of Japan’s cultivated land, were purchased from the landlords under the government’s reform program, and resold at extremely low prices to the farmers who worked them. By 1950, three million peasants had their own land, breaking the domination of landlords over centuries.

George Kennan suggested restoring the influence of former Japanese politicians and businessmen. The USA and Japan co-operated to build up foreign trade, excluding the communists from involvement in this. The Ministry of Trade and Industry built on previous successes, and the Americans fixed the exchange rate to boost exports. The Japanese economy began to prosper (see Table 2.1).

What was the social impact of US occupation?

The Japanese embraced defeat and welcomed change. They quickly recognised the superior strength of the USA and respected it. Most Japanese did not understand ‘democracy’ after centuries of repressive all-powerful regimes. They thought it meant ‘freedom’, and that was enthusiastically welcomed, far preferred to Soviet communism. Many young people became quite extreme in their political, social and sexual behaviour. They blatantly chewed gum as a sign of their freedom. Women happily gave up drab baggy trousers for US-style skirts, stockings and perms. Men wore brash American casuals. The Japanese became Westernised, but only superficially. At a fundamental level, the flood of letters to MacArthur (see Source A opposite) showed that they had exchanged one ‘god’, the Emperor, for their American ‘god’, MacArthur. Japan had not discovered the independent thought necessary to create its own democracy, though democracy did seem to have been successfully imposed on it. Some might argue, of course, that it is a contradiction of terms to suggest that democracy can be imposed from above.

Stage 3: ‘hard’ Cold War policy – an active role for Japan in the US containment policy

The CIA saw Japan’s role as crucial for the Cold War balance of power in the Far East. If the communists controlled a rearmed Japan they could use its location and industry to:

- protect communist-controlled lands in Asia
- break through US defences in the western Pacific
- strengthen Soviet control of Pacific shipping and sea-power
- launch an aggressive policy in South and South-East Asia
- free up communist forces for use elsewhere.

![Co-prosperity sphere](Co-prosperity sphere.png)

In theory, the Greater East Asia co-prosperity sphere reflected the desire for a self-sufficient bloc of Asian nations, led by the Japanese and free of Western powers. In practice, it was propaganda to justify the manipulation of local populations and economies by aggressive puppet governments for the benefit of Imperial Japan.

Zaibatsu

Large, powerful companies in industry and banking which had dominated the economy before and during the war; for example, Sony, Toyota and Honda.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Values (in million yen)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>$174 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>$258 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>$510 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>$827 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1 Japanese export values, 1947–1950
If the Western democracies allied with a rearmed Japan, they would gain:

- industrial and military resources
- a potential military base in north-east Asia
- protection for US defensive outposts in the western Pacific
- a shining example to encourage other non-communist countries to fight against communism.

In March 1948, George Kennan visited Japan to discuss with MacArthur the means of reaching a peace treaty with Japan to give it independence. MacArthur’s hold on policy began to loosen. Truman had been unexpectedly re-elected in 1948, despite Republican pressure and McCarthyist attacks on his foreign policy. He feared tight occupation controls might damage Japanese goodwill and drive them into the arms of the USSR. The Japanese Communist Party was gaining support, encouraged by the Soviet mission in Tokyo.

By 1949, there was a ‘Red Scare’ in the USA. In Japan, the year opened with a series of industrial strikes. The Japanese Communists polled three million votes in the elections. The US State Department increased its control of Japan. Government workers were forbidden to strike and US occupation authorities started arresting communist sympathisers in the Japanese trade union movement. A ‘Red Purge’ began, eroding the democracy that MacArthur had imposed. Containment of communism was necessary before the Americans could start giving the Japanese more responsibility for day-to-day government. Only then would there be a basis for a Japanese peace treaty.

Removing Japan’s armed forces caused problems for the USA in preparing Japan for independence. To defend Japan, Kennan recommended long-term control of Okinawa, expansion of the naval base at Yokosuka and the creation of a ‘National Police Reserve’ of 75,000 men – in fact they were a lightly-equipped army. The USA were also back-tracking on their disarmament policy for Japan.

The final stage of Japanese reconstruction happened after 1950 and was a response to the Korean War.

**Stage 4: integrated Cold War policy – when treaties recognised the official status of Japan at the centre of a US defensive strategy**

When the Korean War broke out, in June 1950, Japanese rearmament became essential, making the USA look hypocritical for having disarmed it in the first place. Yoshida called the Korean War ‘a gift from the gods’, as it gave a huge boost to the Japanese economy. The US government bought war supplies worth $500,000,000 from Japan. By 1952 the Japanese forces had tanks and artillery, and by 1954, a 130,000-strong army. China’s involvement in the Korean War led to the full enforcement of a Japanese trade embargo with China, preventing Japan from trading with China. The war also brought forward the signing of the *San Francisco Peace Treaty* marking the end of the Allied occupation and the start of Japanese independence.

**How much independence did Japan gain?**

The terms of the *San Francisco Peace Treaty*, 8 September 1951, were as follows:

- full sovereignty
- reparations by negotiation
loss of all land surrendered at the armistice to the USA, including Korea, Taiwan, the Kuril Islands and South Sakhalin (perhaps if Korea had been retained by a US-dominated Japan, there might have been no Korean War)

- Taiwan not to return to communist China nor South Sakhalin to the USSR
- US occupation forces to withdraw no later than 90 days after the treaty.

In fact, on the same day, another treaty allowed US land, air and sea forces to be stationed in and about Japan ‘to defend against outside attack and internal riots started by a foreign power’. Japan promised not to allow any other country to station troops on its territory without the permission of the USA. Japan also signed a trade treaty with Taiwan, not communist China.

**What was the importance of Shigeru Yoshida?**

Right-wing Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida showed patience and caution in dealing with MacArthur and the Americans. He astutely pointed out that the US had once been a colony of Great Britain and was now the more powerful of the two. The same could happen to if Japan became a colony of the US.

Yoshida wore a kimono and white oriental ‘toed socks’, smoked expensive cigars, travelled in a Rolls Royce and sent flowers and fruits to MacArthur’s wife. He had firm control of the Japanese government despite his easygoing outward appearance. As a trained diplomat, he realised Japan had no choice but to co-operate with the US occupiers, but he spoke his mind and played their factions off against each other.

**BIOGRAPHY**

**Shigeru Yoshida (1878–1967)**

Shigeru Yoshida became the 45th prime minister of Japan on 22 May 1946. His pro-American and pro-British ideals and his knowledge of Western societies, gained through education and political work abroad, made him the perfect candidate in the eyes of the post-war Allied occupiers. After being defeated in the election one year later, he returned to the post as the 48th prime minister on 15 October 1948. Under Yoshida’s rule, Japan began to rebuild its lost industrial infrastructure and emphasised unrestrained economic growth. Many of these concepts of Japan’s political and economic policies still continue today. His administration openly encouraged a ‘3-S’ policy: ‘sports, screen and sex’. This was a change from strict pre-war censorship. He was retained in three succeeding elections and was finally ousted on 10 December 1954. He retired from politics in 1955 and died in 1967, aged 89. Yoshida’s grandson is a Japanese politician and the current Prime Minister of Japan.

Yoshida’s reputation and career had its ups and downs, but he is now seen as a national symbol of Japan’s transformation into a successful modern state.

**Positive interpretations of Yoshida**

- He represented the recovery of the ‘civilian old guard’.
- He made patriotic democracy the basis for the new Japan.
- He restored Japan’s reputation, respect and security among non-communists.
- He resisted US pressures for rapid Japanese rearmament and rearmed slowly.
- He maintained neutrality in the Cold War as far as was possible.
Negative interpretations of Yoshida

- General MacArthur said he was ‘monumentally lazy and politically inept’. Many westerners found him puzzling and exasperating.
- International respect for Japan was limited; it was seen as a lackey of the USA.
- He failed to exploit Anglo-American disagreements on recognition of Communist China to benefit Japan.
- He tried to avoid a Japanese revolution by stifling ‘dangerous thoughts’ like McCarthyism in the USA.

To what extent did the US policy of Japanese reconstruction live up to its objectives?

Japan seemed to be the only area in South-East Asia where the USA could rightly claim success. In April 1952, the US occupation of Japan formally ended and it regained its independence as the key ally of the US in Asia. Japan lay at the heart of a linked economic network of friendly states with front-line military posts in the Pacific.

**Source**

General MacArthur’s address to the United States Congress, five months before the signing of the San Francisco Peace Treaty giving independence to Japan.

Since the war, the Japanese people have undergone the greatest reformation recorded in modern history. From the ashes left in the aftermath of war, they have erected in Japan a system dedicated to the supremacy of individual liberty and personal dignity. They have done this with commendable will, eagerness to learn, and marked capacity to understand. In the process a truly representative government has been created, committed to the advance of political morality, freedom of economic enterprise, and social justice.

From a speech by General Douglas MacArthur, 19 April 1951

**ACTIVITY**

How reliable and useful is the Source above as evidence for the success of America’s reconstruction of Japan between 1945 and 1951?

The ‘free world’ view

Even before the Truman administration was over, it was commonly accepted that Japan was the one area in Asia where US post-war foreign policy was a success. The USA had made Japan a model democratic state (see also pages 22–26), given it stability and then reversed its removal of armed forces to make it a valuable Cold War ally. The USA had established a conservative, strongly anti-communist government by mutual co-operation, and made public opinion friendly towards the USA. In contrast to China, Korea and South-East Asia, it was a beacon of enlightened ‘free world’ policies. The US government claimed to have reversed its disarmament policy in Japan only as a response to a communist threat to Japan, Korea and the rest of Asia.

The Japan-centred view

Recent historians emphasise the part played by Japan itself in its reconstruction, both positive and negative. Their views are that previous Japanese policies continued, Japanese businessmen played a major part, and that US bases and forces were there before the Korean War began, allowing the USA to draw troops from them for use in that war. Japan itself is now seen to have played a major part in US strategies for the Pacific region.
**The US imperialist view**

Some recent research emphasises American repression in Japan, recorded by Japanese sources at the time. US bases are now sometimes seen as the cause of rising Cold War tensions in 1949, rather than a response to them. Many countries that had suffered under Japanese imperialist rule feared that the USA was building up their oppressor to impose a new US-backed imperialism on them. Preventing Japan from trading with China and using it as a ‘workshop’ for the economy of the whole of South-East Asia made Japan the greatest ‘domino’ in the US Defensive Perimeter Strategy. If it fell to communism, it would cause the collapse of the whole strategy.

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**ACTIVITY**

1. Which of the following interpretations is most convincing?
   - The ‘free world’ view
   - The Japan-centred view
   - The US imperialist view

   Form your own judgement and support it in debate.

2. In groups, argue which of the following views best describes US policy towards Japan between 1945 and 1950.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Severity</td>
<td>Human rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuity</td>
<td>Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy</td>
<td>Military dictatorship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom</td>
<td>Imposed control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An ‘open door’</td>
<td>A closed economy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Why did the USA fail to prevent a communist victory in China in 1949?**

**The Chinese Civil War**

Estimates suggest China’s population in 1945 to have been more than 500 million. Authoritarian emperors had ruled it from the Forbidden City in Beijing (Peking) for centuries, holding back its progress. However, a history of Western influence in China provided the backdrop for rapid political change in the early 1900s. Western traders had established settlements in Shanghai and other major ports. They lived apart from the Chinese and enjoyed a privileged lifestyle. In 1911, Sun Yat-sen (Yixian) led a nationalist revolution and made the country into a Republic. But despite his efforts, war lords ravaged and divided the country.

In 1925, on Sun’s death, a young army officer named Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) assumed the leadership of the National People’s Party (the Kuomintang). The Russians offered money and weapons to an emerging Chinese Communist party, the CCP, in return for their acceptance into the Nationalist party (Kuomintang). Jiang allied with the CCP to crush the war lords and drive out the Westerners who were draining the Chinese economy. As he approached Shanghai the Westerners rushed in reinforcements, so he decided to make an alliance with them to strengthen the Chinese economy. The CCP refused to accept

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**Forbidden City**

Lying at the centre of Beijing, the Forbidden City, called Gu Gong in Chinese, was the imperial palace during the Ming and Qing dynasties. Now known as the Palace Museum, it is located to the north of Tiananmen Square.

**The Kuomintang, or National People’s Party**

A highly centralised, hierarchical, and authoritarian party/government, the Kuomintang, led by Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, ruled China from the 1930s through the Second World War. Defeated by the Chinese Communists led by Mao Zedong in the civil war which ended in 1949, the vestiges of the Kuomintang withdrew to the island of Taiwan and there re-established the government of the Republic of China.

**CCP**

The Chinese Communist Party.
this, and so began the prolonged Chinese Civil War between 1927 and 1949. Jiang’s Nationalists (the Kuomintang) set out to destroy the CCP.

The CCP

A political party founded in China in 1921 by Chen Duxiu, Li Dazhao, Mao Zedong, and others. It grew directly from the reform-oriented May Fourth Movement and was aided from the start by Russian organisers. Under Russian guidance, the CCP held its First Congress in 1921; the Russians also invited many members to the Soviet Union for study and encouraged co-operation with the Chinese National Party. This co-operation lasted until 1927, when the communists were expelled. War with the Japanese broke out in 1937 and led to a temporary alliance between the CCP and the Nationalists. After the Second World War, the CCP participated in US-mediated talks with the Nationalists, but in 1947 the talks were abandoned and civil war resumed. The CCP increased its already strong rural base through land redistribution, and in 1949, under Mao, it took control of mainland China. After Mao’s death in 1976, the party moved steadily toward a free market economy.

League of Nations

The League of Nations was an inter-governmental peace-keeping organisation founded as a result of the Treaty of Versailles (1919). From 28 September 1934 to 23 February 1935, it had 58 members, but the USA never joined. The League’s goals included upholding the new found Rights of Man, disarmament, preventing war through collective security, settling disputes between countries through negotiation, diplomacy and improving global quality of life.

In 1931, Japan annexed Manchuria, an industrial province in northern China, and set up the state of Manchukuo under a puppet head of state. He was the last Chinese emperor of the Quin dynasty, an insult to the new Chinese nationalist government.

In 1936, Mao Zedong (Mao Tse Tung) rallied the Chinese to form a united front against Japan, giving the CCP a reputation as freedom fighters. However, Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) did nothing and lost support, enabling the Communists to capture him. He was forced to promise to end the civil war and form a united front, but he saw this only as a breathing space before the civil war began again.

In 1937, a full-scale Japanese invasion of China was launched from Manchukuo and various points along the coast. This caused the Nationalists and the CCP to become allies. Japan bombarded and captured Shanghai, Nanking and other cities. Japanese occupation inflicted great suffering on the Chinese people, and Jiang, his wife and government were forced to retreat to Chungking, further inland. The League of Nations was powerless, as Japan had left it in 1933 after complaints over its annexation of Manchuria. The West was sympathetic, but did nothing to help as they did not wish to risk war with Japan over China.

Jiang’s American-educated wife visited the USA and gained public support by her eloquence on China’s behalf. She drew attention to the brutality of the Japanese. Roosevelt gave loans to the Nationalist Chinese to buy modern weapons, delivered by sea to Burma and then via the Burma Road to Chungking. The Lend-Lease Act meant US munitions could be sent direct to China. Jiang pressurised the Communists to such an extent that they were forced to retreat to north-west China. This retreat was led by Mao and known as the Long March.

The USA enters the Second World War

Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 allowed both Britain and the USA to give open aid to the Chinese. However, the rapid advance of the Japanese through the Pacific drew Western forces away from mainland China. General Joseph Stilwell (head of the US army forces in China, Burma and India) was sent to advise Jiang’s government. He had long experience of the country and his task was to defend the Burma Road. Chinese Communists received no US aid and had to fend for themselves. Then, in 1944, for the first time, the Americans made contact with Mao’s forces and were impressed. However, in the
Jiang Jieshi (1887–1975)

Jiang Jieshi (also known as Chiang Kai-shek) joined the army and became a supporter of Sun Yat-sen, the leader of the Nationalist Party. When Sun Yat-sen died in 1925, Jiang became the Nationalist leader. He defeated the communist army and forced the survivors to make the famous Long March to Shensi in north-west China. Jiang lost control of the coastal regions and most of the major cities to Japan. To beat the Japanese he collaborated with Mao Zedong and his communist army. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Jiang and his government received considerable financial support from the United States. As soon as the Japanese surrendered, the Chinese civil war began again. Jiang fled to Taiwan in 1949 when China became the People’s Republic of China. He died on 5 April 1975.

Mao Zedong (1893–1976)

Mao led the Chinese Communist Party to victory in the Chinese Civil War, and was the leader of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) from its establishment in 1949 until his death in 1976. He won the leadership of his party and wide peasant support during the Long March of 1934–35, a military retreat from the Chinese Nationalist army, in which the Communists covered 12,500 kilometres in 370 days and only one-tenth survived. The route passed through some of the most difficult terrain of western China. ‘Chairman Mao’ is officially held in high regard in China where he is known as a great revolutionary, political strategist, and military mastermind who, through his policies, transformed the country into a major world power. Additionally, Mao is viewed by many as a poet, philosopher, and visionary. However, Mao’s ‘Great Leap Forward’ and the ‘Cultural Revolution’, are seen to have caused severe damage to the culture, society, economy and foreign relations of China, as well as a probable death toll in the tens of millions.

The Lend-Lease Act

On 11 March 1941, Congress passed the Lend-Lease Act. This gave President Roosevelt the powers to sell, transfer, exchange and lend equipment to any country to help it defend itself against the Axis powers. A sum of $50 billion was granted by Congress for Lend-Lease. The money went to 38 different countries.
USA there was reluctance to equip communist Mao’s forces, especially because Jiang mistrusted him.

**The effect of the Yalta conference on China**

At the Yalta conference in February 1945, Stalin made a deal with Roosevelt to get revenge for Russia’s humiliating defeat by Japan in 1905 (the Russo–Japanese war). In return for Soviet help to share the costs of ending the war against Japan, Roosevelt gave the USSR:

- the islands of South Sakhalin and the Kurils
- control of Outer Mongolia
- two ice-free Pacific ports
- control of two railways in Chinese-owned Manchuria.

Roosevelt appeared to be encouraging Soviet expansion in Asia. Truman confirmed the deal at the Potsdam conference, but it turned out that buying Stalin’s support was unnecessary. The US bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki ended the war just days before the USSR ‘liberated’ Manchuria and took control of the industrial powerhouse of China. Mao’s CCP forces joined in Stalin’s invasion of Manchuria and began to receive Japanese weapons and ammunition from the USSR, as they stripped the industrial province of its resources.

Republicans blamed the Democrat administration for a ‘shameful betrayal’ at Yalta and Potsdam. Right-wing US politicians looked for communists inside Truman’s Democrat administration. The seeds of McCarthyism were sown, and anti-communism was soon to become the dominant theme of American politics.

**China’s civil war resumes**

After the surrender of Japan on 10 August 1945, Jiang’s Nationalist China was admitted to the UN as a permanent member of the Security Council. Patrick Hurley, US ambassador to China, managed to get Mao and Jiang to meet in August 1945, but there was no chance of the two sides reaching a compromise and the fighting resumed in 11 of China’s 28 provinces.

The USA still hoped to maintain Nationalist China as an ally to stop the advance of communism. Truman wished to avoid a renewal of the Chinese civil war. US forces were over-stretched in Europe and Asia. Furthermore, in 1945, although the USSR was prepared to recognise the Nationalist government of China, it was likely to support the CCP if fighting resumed. The USSR might also take advantage of a renewed civil war to take more territory.

General George Marshall was sent to persuade Mao and Jiang to form a government of national unity. The USA offered massive financial aid to repair the devastation of the previous eight years and more. Marshall described this as ‘pouring sand down a rat-hole’. The terms Mao requested would take away Jiang’s ‘trump card’, the strong Nationalist army which alone had kept him in power, whereas Jiang wanted nothing less than total submission to him by the Communists. Neither side would give in, so in 1946 the Chinese civil war broke out again. US relations with the USSR declined and Mao expressed his hostility towards what he considered to be a weak and reactionary USA (see Source opposite).
Mao Zedong comments on the atom bomb in a newspaper interview with Anna Louise Strong, an American journalist working in China.

The Soviet Union defends world peace and is a powerful factor in preventing the domination of the world by US reactionaries. The existence of the Soviet Union makes it absolutely impossible for the reactionaries in the United States and the world to realise their ambitions. That is why the US reactionaries rabidly hate the Soviet Union and actually dream of destroying this socialist state. The atom bomb is a paper tiger which the US reactionaries use to scare people. It looks terrible, but in fact it isn’t. Of course, the atom bomb is a weapon of mass slaughter, but the outcome of a war is decided by the people, not by one or two new types of weapon.

All reactionaries are paper tigers. In appearance, reactionaries are terrifying, but in reality they are not so powerful. From the long-term point of view, it is not the reactionaries but the people who are really powerful.

From a newspaper report, August 1946

The USA soon realised that Mao was right to think that the ‘bomb’ was a ‘paper tiger’. The impact of nuclear weapons was too devastating to make them usable, while military cutbacks and concessions to Stalin had made the USA appear as weak as the appeasers of Hitler.

Should the Truman administration have continued supporting the corrupt Nationalist government?

Truman always considered Japan to be his priority, and did not wish to become embroiled in wars on mainland Asia. However, there was now a serious threat of Soviet expansion into China. Though the two warring sides signed a military truce, the main problem lay in communist control of Manchuria. Stalin dismantled Manchuria’s industry and transported its machinery back to the USSR. This undermined the Chinese economy.

Galloping inflation hit the rest of China. Between 1946 and 1948, prices doubled 67 times, encouraging a black market and widespread corruption amongst officials. Jiang had already alienated the businessmen who had supported him. Though the USA were well aware of the corruption of Jiang’s administration, they wished to contain communism (see page 21). They therefore increased their aid to the Nationalists, supplying aircraft and sending teams to Taiwan to train their troops. However, Jiang’s armies lost 45 per cent of their men in four and a half months. Of the American equipment on loan to Nationalist forces, 80 per cent was lost, with 75 per cent of this falling into communist hands. Jiang’s troops often turned and fled rather than facing the enemy.

His army also had a reputation for arrogance and cowardice, and were accused of looting and stealing. He was so unpopular that he had to use force to retain areas he had previously controlled, imprisoning suspects without trial. He chose his generals for their personal loyalty rather than their ability. Jiang failed to defend the Yangtze River in his attempt to open a route to Manchuria from the south. He tended to interfere in the chain of military command, breaking up his forces to target towns rather than meeting his communist enemies in battle in their rural base.

On the other hand, Mao gained control of Manchuria by maintaining his forces at 2.7 million. The CCP showed few openly Marxist principles. They were a powerful force among the peasants and seemed to stand for democracy, freedom and individual liberty. As a party based in the countryside, they used moderate reform policies in areas under their control,
lowering interest rates and reducing rents rather than seizing land for the peasants. They also allowed all groups to take part in local government in the areas they controlled, though they did approve CCP candidates.

In areas which Jiang had alienated, the CCP gained at least the neutrality or indifference of local people, even if they did not offer them active support.

Jiang’s reputation was much higher in the USA than among Americans in China, who had first-hand knowledge of his limitations as a leader. Even the anti-communist US General Stilwell described the Nationalist government as ‘corruption, chaos, neglect, taxes, words and no deeds’, and acknowledged that, in comparison, the Communists ‘raise production and standards of living. They practise what they preach’. Regretfully, but realistically, by mid-1949, the American government realised that in supporting Jiang they had backed a lame duck, and that the imminent communist victory was beyond American control.

Mao’s tactics changed from guerrilla warfare to open confrontation with Nationalist forces. In decisive campaigns, Mao gained control of Beijing, Nanking and Shanghai, capturing more than 320,000 Nationalist troops. On 1 October 1949, Mao declared the People’s Republic of China (PRC). In December, Jiang retreated with his remaining forces to the island of Taiwan, 100 miles off the Chinese coast, taking China’s art treasures and all the funds of the Chinese Central Bank with him. He declared the Republic of Taiwan, set up forward bases on islands just off the coast and vowed to win back China by overthrowing the Communists. On the other hand, Mao’s victory inspired other communist national movements in Malay and Indochina.
The Premier and Foreign Secretary of Communist China comments to the Chinese News Agency in Beijing on US policy in the Far East.

The whole world knows that the US government, in an attempt to annex China, has supported Jiang Jieshi in waging large scale civil war, denying the Chinese people any opportunity to live in independence and peace. The US government is supplying the Jiang Jieshi bandits with aircraft to bomb the mainland of China. Acheson says to the Chinese people ‘Why don’t you ask for American aid?’ But from their personal experience the Chinese people have realised what American so-called ‘aid’ means. It means death for millions; it means the loss of national freedom and rights. Since the Chinese rid themselves of American ‘aid’ things have gone well for China, and she has become really independent. The affairs of the Asian peoples will be settled by the Asian peoples themselves, and must never be interfered with by such American imperialists as Acheson and company on the other side of the Pacific.

Zhou Enlai (Chou En-lai), 18 March 1950

Secretary of State Dean Acheson’s statement on the Communist victory in China, 1949.

The reasons for the failures of the Chinese National Government do not stem from any inadequacy of American aid. Our military observers on the spot have reported that the Nationalist armies did not lose a single battle during the crucial year of 1948 through lack of arms or ammunition. The fact was that the decay, which our observers had detected in Chongqing early in the war, fatally weakened the resistance of the Nationalists. Its leaders proved incapable of confronting the Communists, its troops lost the will to fight, and its Government lost popular support. The Communists, on the other hand, through ruthless discipline and fanatical zeal, portrayed themselves as liberators of the people. The Nationalist armies did not have to be defeated; they disintegrated. History has proved again and again that a regime without faith in itself and an army without morale cannot survive the test of battle.

Dean Acheson, in Dept of State records, US relations with China, August 1950

**SUMMARY ACTIVITY**

1 Why did the USA fail to prevent the fall of China to communism? Which of these ideas can you find in Sources A and B?

- Insufficient military aid from the USA.
- Support for an unpopular and corrupt Chinese Nationalist government.
- Poor morale in Jiang’s armies; communist propaganda.
- US priorities placing Europe above Asia.
- A strong Chinese independence movement which opposed US imperialism.
- Soviet military support for the CCP.
- Communists within the US administration undermining containment policy.

2 Which of these ideas have been left out of the Sources? Can you find evidence for them in the text of this chapter?

3 Can you think of any reasons not on this list, and can you find evidence for them?

4 Now place all the reasons in order of importance in answering the question.
Stretch and challenge

Compare Sources A and B as evidence for the reasons why the USA failed to prevent the fall of China to communism.

First use the historical context to help you analyse the Sources.

- Truman’s administration, especially Acheson, came under attack by McCarthy.
- The USSR successfully tested its own atom bomb in August 1949.
- Mao declared the People’s Republic of China in October 1949.
- Mao gained $300 million worth of aid from Stalin in December 1949.
- NSC 68 secretly proposed tripling the US armed forces budget in April 1950.
- Communist North Korea invaded democratic South Korea in June 1950.
- Truman approved NSC 68; tripling spending on US armed forces in April 1950.
- North Korean Communist forces quickly overran South Korea by August 1950.

Then use the provenance to help you analyse the similarities and differences of the points made in the Sources.

How realistic were other policies that the Truman administration might have followed to prevent the ‘fall’ of Communist China in 1949?

There were some factors which might have had an effect, for example:

- placing more US commanders in control of Nationalist forces
- committing US land, sea and air forces to fight in China
- making an even larger financial commitment than the $2 billion given to the Nationalists in grants and credits.

None of these options were realistic. The US armed forces had been scaled down and American public opinion was firmly against fighting a war in China. Giving more US funds to the corrupt Nationalists would have been a huge waste of money. However, Senator Joseph McCarthy suggested another reason for the failure of the Truman administration to prevent the fall of China to communism:

‘In my opinion, the State Department is thoroughly infested with communists. I have here in my hand a list of 57 cases of individuals who would appear to be either card-carrying members or certainly loyal to the Communist Party. Nevertheless, they are still helping to shape our foreign policy. This fact is known to the Secretary of State, a pompous diplomat in striped pants, with a phony British accent.’

(Joseph McCarthy, speaking to the Women’s Republican Club, expresses his fears concerning communist infiltrators within the US government in February 1950.)

What was the significance of the ‘fall’ of China for US foreign policy?

The USA continued to recognise the Chinese Nationalists as the government. Acheson feared that Taiwan would fall to the Communist forces before the end of 1950. If the CCP were to take Taiwan, communists could dominate the sea lanes linking Japan to Malaya which supplied it with tin and rubber. They could also dominate the Philippines, Okinawa and eventually Japan itself. Taiwan’s strategic position made it essential to the whole US defensive position in Asia, but Mao considered it to be part of China’s territory. However, there was a US consensus not to send in troops to defend Taiwan, due to overstretch. US
military strength was too low to deal with emergencies in other spheres of influence. Then, in August 1949, the USSR successfully tested the atomic bomb and the US nuclear monopoly was over. They had lost their nuclear supremacy and now faced potential confrontation with the combined forces of the Soviet Union and Communist China.

Figure 2.6 David Low cartoon published in the *Evening Standard*, 3 January 1950, showing Truman and MacArthur with another US general stationed on the island of Taiwan (Formosa) trying not to recognise the existence of Communist China, which wishes to take its seat on the UN Security Council. They are having a sneak look at the fact that Mao is phoning for support from Stalin. The caption on the cartoon suggests that their attitude in support of Nationalist Jiang Jieshi has alienated Mao and the people of China, so that Mao will not wish to recognise Nationalist control of Taiwan. Taiwan becomes part of the US defensive perimeter of offshore islands, though it is really part of Chinese territory, and Mao is likely to ask for Soviet help to recover it.

Acheson suggested the withdrawal of US support from Nationalist China and recognition of Communist China as a gesture of friendship. He felt it was only a matter of time before Mao and Stalin clashed, as the USSR soon began to absorb the northern provinces of China. Mao was unlikely to want to link his new regime with unpopular foreign control, and would almost certainly be independent of the USSR. Acheson argued that the USA must break its ties with Taiwan to allow the PRC to build better relations with America.

However, Truman refused to accept this advice, in case it confirmed Republican views that his policies were pro-communist. Congress therefore sent further funding to Jiang. When Mao met with Stalin in Moscow (see Sources A and B on page 46) in December 1949, they felt they had been in the right.

*The Soviet–Chinese Treaty, 1950*

By February 1950, less than five months after the successful Soviet atomic bomb test, Mao signed a *Soviet-Chinese Treaty* giving him $300 million of Soviet aid. The treaty contained a veiled threat to the USA: the promise of mutual military assistance against any aggression by (US occupied) Japan. Mao realised that China could not stand alone, and that the USSR was its only real choice of ally. He said that China would ‘lean towards’ the USSR and against capitalist imperialism.

What was the significance of Truman ignoring Korea?

One country that the USA had not seriously considered in all its defensive strategies was Korea:

- they had failed to keep it for their Japanese satellite
- they had allowed Stalin to liberate its northern industrial area
- they had not included it in their ‘Defensive Perimeter Strategy’ (see page 47).
From the start, Truman’s administration had wished to use financial aid rather than military force to defend mainland Asia and the Pacific from Soviet expansion. Korea bordered the vast new state of Communist China as well as the tip of the USSR. It was in a prime geographical situation to threaten Taiwan and there was only a token US presence in South Korea. In June 1950 the Cold War became a ‘hot war’ when the Korean War broke out. This was partly because the Truman administration had omitted Korea from its ‘Defensive Perimeter Strategy’.

**Sources**

**A** Stalin met Mao Zedong in December 1949 and arranged a $300 million Soviet aid package for Communist China.

COMRADE STALIN: Soviet troops currently stationed in China will withdraw upon your request.

COMRADE MAO: Soviet presence corresponds well with Chinese interests, as Chinese forces are inadequate to fight effectively against imperialist aggression and you provide a training school for Chinese activists in railroad and industry.

COMRADE STALIN: The withdrawal of troops does not mean that the Soviet Union refuses to assist China, if such assistance is needed. We can stay for as long as 20 years.

COMRADE MAO: You should not rush to withdraw troops. We would like to draw up a credit agreement for $300,000,000 between the governments of the USSR and China. We believe we must first bring order, strengthen our country and then we can talk to foreign imperialists.

**B** Mao Zedong and Joseph Stalin are shown here at the Soviet leader’s birthday celebrations in 1950. Together with Kim Il Sung they may have plotted to invade Japan that year.

**ACTIVITY**

Assess Sources A and B as evidence for the effect of US foreign policy on the Sino–Soviet relationship from December 1949.

**What was the ‘Defensive Perimeter Strategy’ of 1949 and why did the Truman administration adopt it?**

In March 1948, Kennan (see page 15, Chapter 1) warned that ‘we are operating without any overall strategic concept for the entire western Pacific area’. The area had geographical importance as the economic crossroads of the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Asian markets provided the world with 90 per cent of its rubber, 60 per cent of its tin, and essential raw materials such as petrol and timber. The USA saw Asian national movements as ‘communist inspired’ and feared an expansion of Soviet influence in the area.

**The US ‘Defensive Perimeter’**

Kennan’s supporters persuaded MacArthur, in Tokyo, to accept a plan to construct a defensive line of military bases including the Aleutians, Midway, the former Japanese mandated islands, Okinawa in the Ryukyus, the Philippines, Australia, New Zealand, and the British and Dutch islands in the south-west Pacific (Figure 2.7).
Kennan saw Okinawa as the strong point for control of the ports of north-east Asia from which an amphibious attack could be launched. Military, air and naval bases would be set up on the offshore island chain. The policy took the pessimistic view that the USA would not be able to influence events on the Asian mainland, based partly on the success of Mao Zedong’s communist guerrillas in the Chinese Civil War.

This ‘Defensive Perimeter Strategy’ became a widely-accepted policy by the summer of 1949. The CIA stressed the importance of keeping the offshore islands out of hostile hands, to allow access to the strategic raw materials of India and South-East Asia, especially if the Suez Canal route were to be closed. The Pentagon concluded that ‘our position is not directly jeopardised by the loss of China as long as we retain the security of the islands.’ This included Japan, Taiwan and the Philippines.

Source

A Democrat senator representing a Republican state, well known for his isolationism and consistently voting against America’s military involvement in foreign wars, gives his views on the USA in the role of ‘world policeman’.

With the strategic location of airfields from the Philippines to Alaska, on the coast of Asia, from Alaska to the Azores in the South Atlantic, we can drop, at a moment’s notice, atomic bombs on any spot on the world’s surface and return to our base. With vision and guts and plenty of bombs, ultra-modern planes and strategically located airbases, the United States can outlaw wars of aggression. The world organisation which I am thinking of, is one designed to stop war with the atomic bomb in the hands of the United States as the club behind the door, to be used only when the bandit goes berserk.

From a speech to the US Senate by Senator Edwin Johnson, 28 November 1945
ACTIVITY

1 Discuss these interpretations of the US defensive perimeter strategy. Which is most convincing and why?

- It was a response to potential Soviet or Chinese communist closure of the economic ‘open door’.
- The USA was hypocritically pursuing its own imperialist policies while calling on the European powers to decolonise.
- The USA had a global objective to construct a system of societies open to free private enterprise in order to counter the poverty which bred support for communist insurgents. Marshall Aid followed similar strategies in Europe.
- The USA was acting provocatively in expanding Western influence in Asia, so upsetting the Cold War balance of power.

2 Use the Sources on pages 27, 29, 36, 43, and 47 to discuss how far US policy could be seen as divided in the period 1945–1950.

How did differing expectations of the US Defensive Perimeter Strategy contribute to conflict in Asia?

The State Department, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and MacArthur supported the strategy for different reasons:

- The State Department saw the offshore island chain as a detached position from which to encourage Asian national movements.
- The Chiefs of Staff saw it as a low-cost defensive line in the event of war, by relying on it instead of requesting higher funding for adequate forces.
- MacArthur saw it as a series of bases for offensive attacks to regain mainland China.

These differences in expectations were painfully exposed when the Truman administration tried to fit the strategy to Taiwan, Indochina and Korea. The Defensive Perimeter Strategy was similar to the Soviet construction of a defensive buffer against the capitalist West in Eastern Europe. The USA aimed to avoid having to deploy troops on mainland Asia by constructing a ‘defensive wall’ against Soviet aggression in the Pacific. However, at the heart of the strategy stood a US satellite, the newly-reconstructed Japan, causing outrage among countries which had been brutalised by Japanese annexation and occupation during the Second World War.

Why and how did the Truman administration support South Korea, 1945-50?

In August 1945, Korea was liberated from Japanese control by Soviet troops from the north and American troops from the south. The country was temporarily divided at the 38th parallel of latitude. However, each occupying force developed its sector in accordance with its own political principles and each wished to rule a united and independent Korea.

In 1948, a Soviet-sponsored communist regime under Kim Il Sung was set up in North Korea. It won support through carrying out land reform. A US-backed right-wing government led by Syngman Rhee was elected under UN supervision in the South, but was corrupt and brutally suppressed left-wing opponents. A Joint Commission, set up by the United Nations, failed to establish a ‘trusteeship’ government to unite the country.
In 1949 both the Soviet and US occupying forces withdrew from Korea, but while Stalin left Soviet military advisers and armed forces in the North, the US refused to equip the South with troops for fear of a civil war breaking out. Clashes occurred along the 38th parallel, in which many Koreans were killed. Rhee’s government lost the propaganda war against the Communists, and its brutal police methods led to a heavy defeat in elections of May 1950. The USA knew that, in order to contain communist expansion and prevent Soviet influence encroaching on Japan, they would have to help prop up Rhee’s government.

The Defensive Perimeter Strategy was deliberately constructed to defend Japan, the Philippines and South-East Asian resources and trade, so that the USA would not have to make costly interventions in mainland Asia. It was a half-measure designed to protect US interests and ‘free world’ democracy in a time of military overstretch, when the main priority was Europe. Unfortunately, once China fell to the Communists and the USSR developed its own atomic bomb, the USA was forced to change its policy and triple its military spending (NSC 68) to hold back communist expansion in Asia.

How far did NSC 68 represent a change or a continuity of policy?

On 14 April 1950, a joint State-Defence Department Group issued NSC 68 (see pages 66–67, Chapter 3). It suggested the tripling of America’s defence budget to build up a massive US military presence to combat the advance of the USSR. The annual cost was estimated in the region of $50 billion. Though its suggestions were remarkably similar to Kennan’s ‘Long Telegram’, NSC 68 became one of the most critical planning documents of US Cold War strategy. In his memoirs, published in 1969, Dean Acheson called NSC 68 ‘a blunt but effective propaganda tool’ to manipulate public opinion into agreeing to military funding, as there was no tradition in the USA of raising tax for military spending in peacetime. Unfortunately, its propaganda impact on the USSR was limited by its secrecy and by Truman’s delay in seeking its approval in Congress. If Kim Il Sung and Stalin had known of its existence, South Korea might not have been invaded by the Communist North in June 1950.

Conclusion

1945 began with the USA and USSR allied against common enemies, but Cold War ideological tensions soon emerged and American foreign policy changed. Between 1945 and 1950, the USA prioritised the containment of Soviet Communism in Europe, the heart of established democracy. However, they perceived a global communist threat, and hoped that blocking opportunities for Soviet expansion might lead the USSR to collapse. Conciliatory policies at the conferences of Yalta and Potsdam had allowed Stalin a presence in Asia. From 1947, US policy shifted to Cold War containment of communism in Asia by giving economic aid to Japan, the Philippines and Jiang Jieshi’s Chinese Nationalists. Korea was the exception, as it contained no resources valuable to the West. But Truman was slow to realise which Asian national movements had only remote links to Soviet influence. In China, US economic aid failed, powerless to prevent Mao’s victory in the Civil War.

Right-wing opponents accused Truman’s administration of being ‘soft’ on communism, leading him to harden policy by accepting NSC 68. The USA refused to recognise Communist China and continued their economic aid to the Nationalists in Taiwan. It joined the Philippines, Okinawa and the Aleutians in a chain of offshore Pacific islands with US front-line military and naval bases. At the heart of this ‘defensive perimeter’ lay the US

NSC 68

A US National Security Council review document that proposed the tripling of America’s defence budget to build up a massive US military presence to combat the advance of the USSR.

Dean Acheson (1893–1971)

From an East Coast élite background, Acheson trained as a lawyer before entering politics. He helped consolidate the Truman Doctrine, Marshall Aid and NATO. He was blamed by some for the Truman administration’s weakness over China and Korea. He retired in 1953 but continued to advise Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon as one of the Wise Men. (See also page 14.)
satellite of Japan, which was by 1950 newly reconstructed as a shining model of capitalist economic prosperity and democracy. The USA hoped this would deter other states from falling to communism, but it only managed to alienate Asian countries devastated by Japanese imperialism. The USA was oblivious to this fact, but it did begin to realise that, in Asia, the popularity of communism within national movements was due to circumstances beyond the control of either itself or the USSR. No amount of American resources and willpower would be able to contain it.

The USA made the mistake of not including Korea in its strategies, due to the pessimistic view that the USA would be unable to influence events on mainland Asia. US military cutbacks after the Second World War meant that a presence in Korea would have caused overstretch, because the bulk of their remaining troops were concentrated in Europe. This message was not lost on Stalin, Mao and the leader of North Korea, Kim Il Sung, who all realised that America was not in a position to contain communism in Asia. Now there was a Soviet nuclear capability, concentrating on Japan proved to be a rather short-sighted policy. When the Korean War began in June 1950, US troops found themselves suddenly propelled from their comfortable roles in Tokyo into the harsh realities of warfare less than five years after the end of the Second World War. From 1950, the USA embarked on a policy of full-scale military intervention in Asia.

Skills practised
In this chapter you have:

- learned and practised the skills of source analysis, comparison and evaluation
- had to link sources to a question in order to answer it
- studied the contextual information to understand these sources and their provenances
- gained knowledge of continuity and change in US Cold War strategies in Asia.

Exam café (pages 174–190) will help you further in revising the content and practising the skills of source interpretation against exam-style questions.

Bibliography


