

# Advise the President: HARRY S. TRUMAN

**TOP SECRET**



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WHAT SHOULD THE UNITED STATES  
DO ABOUT THE EMERGING THREAT  
POSED BY THE SOVIET UNION?



# Advise the President: HARRY S. TRUMAN



**Place:** The Oval Office, the White House

**Time:** March 1947

President Harry S. Truman is sitting at his desk in the Oval Office, thinking about a meeting that will begin in a few minutes. He has asked his senior foreign and defense policy advisers to review with him options for United States policy toward the Soviet Union. He has been President for almost two years, and he has become increasingly worried that Soviet actions threaten his vision of a peaceful postwar world in which freedom and democracy will spread throughout the liberated areas of Europe and Asia. He believes that important decisions must be made now about what to do to preserve freedom, democracy, and the American way of life.

Truman has been meeting with many people to discuss ideas for United States policy toward the Soviet Union, including members of Congress from both parties, administration officials, community leaders, various experts and advocates, and some trusted friends—all people who, in Truman's estimation, are able to offer ideas worthy of consideration. He has grouped their ideas into three options, which he looks forward to discussing with his senior foreign and defense policy advisers—with you!—in the meeting that is ready to begin.

STEP INTO THE OVAL OFFICE.  
THE PRESIDENT IS EXPECTING YOU.

## Background

**What has happened since**

**Harry S. Truman became President?**

Europe emerged from World War II fundamentally transformed. Many of its cities were destroyed, and much of its territory was scarred by the marks of battles fought and bombs dropped. Many of its prewar borders were in dispute, and large numbers of its people were effectively homeless. The British and other European empires were either greatly weakened or dismembered by war's end, and the international system over which Europe had presided for a very long time, was breaking down. The United States and the Soviet Union were the only two powers remaining after the war that were capable of filling the void left by Europe's decline. The Soviet Union, the United States' wartime ally, suffered about 15 million casualties and over 6 million deaths in the fight against Germany on the brutal Eastern front. President Truman, like President Franklin D. Roosevelt before him, wants United States relations with the Soviet Union to remain close and cooperative. If these two powers are not able to cooperate in creating a regime of peace and international law to replace the old world order destroyed in the war, the world's future could be as troubled and violent as its immediate past.

## Uneasy Relations

America's relations with the Soviet Union have not been amicable since Truman became president. On his first full day in office, April 13, 1945—President Roosevelt had been dead only about 24 hours—one of Truman's advisers entered the Oval Office to tell him about the agreements made by Roosevelt, Joseph Stalin, and Winston Churchill at a conference in the Soviet city of Yalta the prior February. One of the most important agreements concerned Poland. Truman understood that the Soviet Union had agreed at Yalta that a truly representative government would be put in place in Poland through free and fair elections. Instead, the Soviets imposed a communist government on Poland, one that was subservient to Moscow.

## THE WHITE HOUSE WASHINGTON

- **1945, February 4–11:**  
**Yalta Conference. Allies agree to reorganize the provisional government of Poland on a broader democratic basis.**
- **1945, April 12:**  
**Franklin D. Roosevelt dies. Truman becomes President.**
- **1945, April 23:**  
**Truman meets with Soviet foreign minister, complains that the Soviet Union has not kept the agreements it made at the Yalta Conference regarding Poland.**
- **1945, May 8:**  
**Germany surrenders.**
- **1945, July 17–August 2:**  
**Potsdam Conference. Resolutions of important questions regarding liberated areas of Europe, including Poland, are postponed.**
- **1945, August 14:**  
**Japan surrenders.**
- **1945, October:**  
**First meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers ends acrimoniously. No agreements are reached.**
- **1945–1946:**  
**The Soviet Union keeps troops in Iran past the agreed date for withdrawal and supports separatist movements in northern Iran.**
- **1946, February 9:**  
**Stalin gives a speech emphasizing the contrast between capitalism and communism, and saying the Soviet economy will focus on heavy industry and armaments production.**
- **1946, July–August:**  
**The Soviet Union pressures Turkey to agree to a joint defense of the Dardanelles. The U.S. supports Turkey's rejection of the Soviet request.**
- **1946–1947:**  
**Greek communist forces fight against the Greek government.**



Other Eastern and Southeastern European countries have also suffered from being geographically close to the Soviet Union. Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and Albania all established communist governments that answered to Moscow. Czechoslovakia had been able to maintain a tenuous hold on democracy, but its future, in early 1947, is highly doubtful. Greece is torn by a civil war between its internationally recognized government and communist insurgents. Iran and Turkey have both been threatened by Soviet actions or demands that would undermine their sovereignty and territorial integrity.

## Failed Negotiations

Negotiations with the Soviets about postwar problems have seldom gone well. During three weeks of meetings in Potsdam, Germany, in July and August 1945, Truman, Stalin, and Churchill—and Clement Attlee, who succeeded Churchill as British prime minister late in the conference—were unable to resolve the serious problems gradually dividing east from west in Europe, or to reach satisfactory agreements regarding the future of Germany. These problems were passed on to a newly created body, the Council of Foreign Ministers. The Council's first meeting—in London

in September and October 1945—was disastrous, as the Soviet foreign minister seemed determined to prevent any agreements from being reached. The next three meetings—in Moscow, Paris, and New York—were more productive, but demonstrated the inability of the foreign ministers to solve the serious disagreement among the wartime allies with respect to Eastern Europe and occupied Germany.

## Partner, or Threat?

President Truman wants to establish a peaceful postwar world order, and he would like the Soviet Union to be a partner in this work. But Soviet actions since the end of the war in Europe have been contrary to what Truman wants for the postwar world. How is the United States to deal with such a difficult partner? Is it even possible any longer to regard the Soviet Union, only recently a close ally, as a partner? Has the Soviet Union become a threat to the security of the United States? If so, what is the United States to do about this threat?



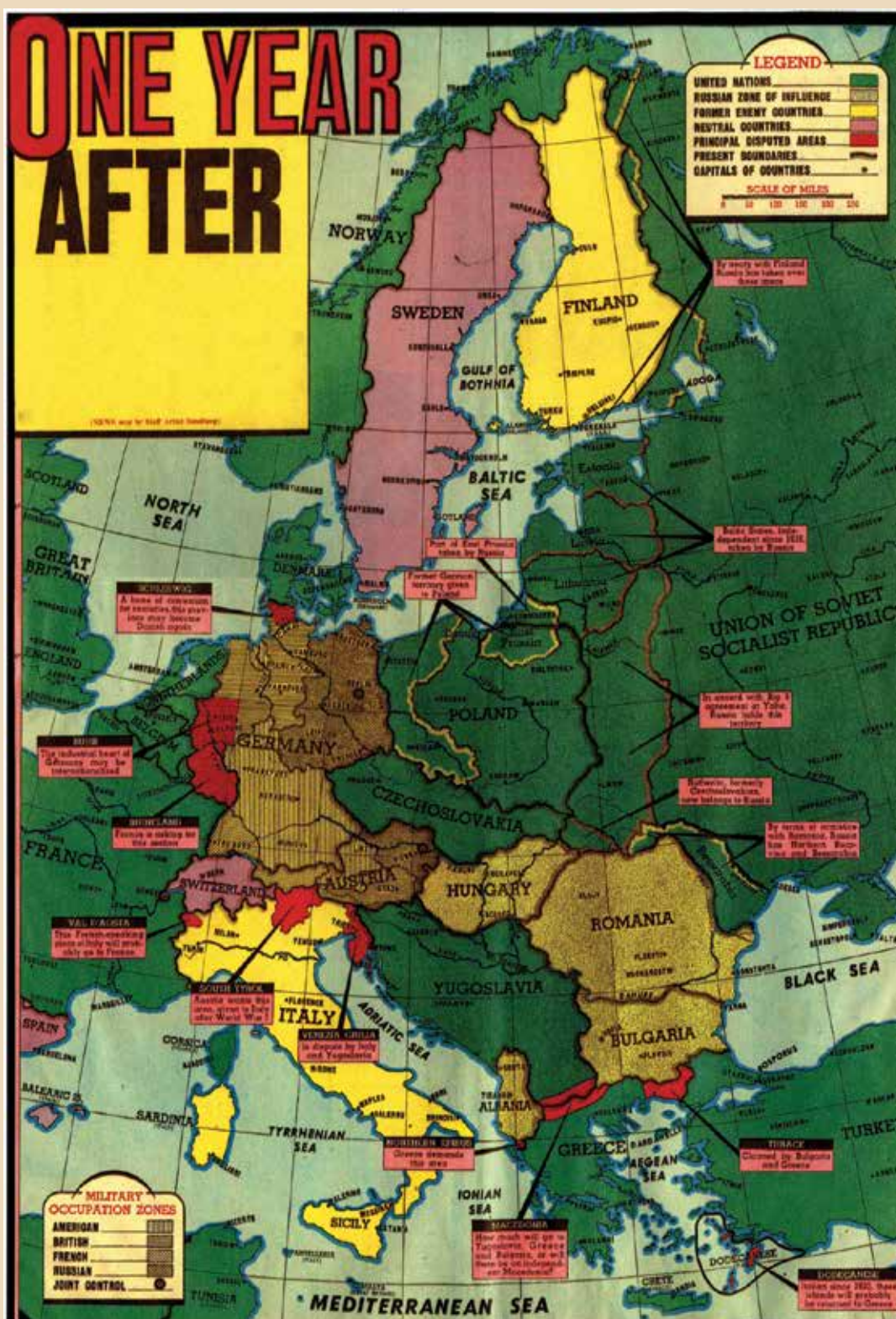
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**TOP SECRET URGENT**

"I like Stalin. He is straightforward. Knows what he wants and will compromise when he can't get it."

— Harry S. Truman, from a letter to his wife, Bess Truman, July 29, 1945





This map, drawn most likely in mid to late 1946, shows the geopolitical confusion left in the wake of six years of war—Germany partially dismembered and the remainder occupied; Poland shifted about 100 miles west, incorporating parts of defeated Germany and losing eastern areas to the Soviet Union; and territorial disputes, transfers, and seizures from Italy to Finland to Romania and Greece. A weak and vulnerable Europe faced an uncertain future, one likely to be shaped by the two great powers on its eastern and western flanks.



### What Joseph Stalin Believes and Wants

- Communist ideology is universally true and will eventually spread throughout the world.
- The Soviet Union is endangered by encirclement by hostile capitalist countries, but it must survive if the international communist revolution is to succeed.
- The more territory a country has, the safer it is.
- The territory of the Soviet Union should be extended westward to include areas that were once part of imperial Russia.
- The countries along the Soviet Union's European border should be communist states largely subservient to Moscow.
- Germany should be either neutral and weak, or a communist state subservient to Moscow.
- The Soviet Union should build up its heavy industry and military forces so it can be the dominant power on the Eurasian continent.
- The Soviet Union should maintain good relations with the United States in order to gain international recognition of its expanded western border and of its sphere of influence in Eastern and Central Europe.

### What Harry Truman Believes and Wants

- America's founding documents—the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights—express aspirations for freedom and democracy that are shared by everyone, everywhere.
- All people possess the right to determine their own beliefs, institutions, and form of government.
- The Soviet Union must keep the agreements it has made to allow democratic institutions to be established in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.
- All people yearn for peace, and the maintenance of world peace is the most important objective of American policy.
- The United Nations cannot become an effective peacekeeping organization without the cooperative involvement of the Soviet Union.
- The Soviet Union understands only international relationships that are based on the realities of force and counterforce.
- Traditional American values and beliefs must be preserved, including limited government, civilian control of military institutions, and economic freedom.



THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

# THE OPTIONS

President Truman wants his advisers to consider the three options he has identified. All three options have strengths, but also pose uncertainties and dangers. Truman must choose the option that will give the United States its best chance of achieving a world order in which freedom, democracy, and the American way of life can be preserved without an outbreak of general war. He asks you to help him make the right choice.

**Option One:**

***Reach Out to the Soviet Union*** – The Soviet Union fears being surrounded by hostile capitalist states. The United States should recognize this fear and the resulting insecurity chronically felt by Soviet leaders. We should also deemphasize military might in dealings with the Soviet Union. We should show a willingness to negotiate differences and make clear our sincere commitment to working with the Soviet Union in creating a peaceful world. If we do these things, the Soviet Union can be our ally in peacetime as it was during the war.

**Option Two:**

***Resist Soviet Expansionism*** – The Soviet Union is bent on expansion across the world. The United States should frustrate these expansionist ambitions. We should employ superior counterforce wherever the Soviet Union tries to advance into a new area and maintain reserve military forces capable of fighting the Soviet Union in the event of general war. We should enter into mutual security agreements with our allies and help them to be strong economically and militarily. If we continually frustrate the Soviet Union's expansionist ambitions, we may be able to change its behavior and even, in time, its character as a nation.

**Option Three:**

***Keep America Strong at Home*** – The security of the United States is based on its geographical isolation from Europe and Asia, its traditional political and social institutions, and its strong economy. We should base our national defense on maintaining these strengths at home. The United States can preserve traditional liberties and economic vitality by limiting the growth of government power, adopting conservative fiscal and monetary policies to keep expenditures and debt low, limiting the size of the military, and avoiding involvement in international affairs to the degree that national security allows. Strength at home is our surest defense against Soviet activities far from our borders.

## Option One: Reach Out to the Soviet Union

According to this option, the Soviet Union wants peace in the postwar world as much as the United States does. It suffered terrible losses during World War II—worse but not different in kind from losses suffered when its homeland was invaded from the West during World War I and the Napoleonic Wars. It now wants to achieve security from a new invasion and to recover from the wounds of war.

The United States should recognize that the Soviet Union's seemingly obsessive desire for security in its immense homeland is understandable and legitimate, given its historical experiences. This means that the United States should agree to the creation of a Soviet sphere of influence along its western border. This would be similar to America's sphere of influence in the Caribbean and the North Atlantic regions. Such areas are an unfortunate necessity in what will hopefully turn out to be a transitional period leading to world peace based on international law.

The United States must also recognize that Soviet ideology holds that capitalist nations want to encircle the Soviet Union and do it harm, and that some of the actions of the United States and its allies in recent months have sharpened this fear. The United States should make clear that it has no intention of harming the Soviet Union, and that the two nations can live peacefully together and, in time, become friends.

Most importantly, the United States should avoid the assumption that peace can be built on a foundation of military might. The build-up of armaments can create conflicts between peoples that escalate unpredictably and expose the world to the risk of a new general war. U.S. foreign aid should not build up the military forces of its allies, but should be used to create prosperity throughout the world. The United States should even offer economic and technical assistance to the Soviet Union, partly to alleviate Soviet fears regarding the United States and partly to strengthen the Soviet economy. Prosperity is the most effective deterrent to communism. Even where communism is well established, prosperity will bring about an amelioration of its harshest features and perhaps, in time, result in its disappearance.

When not directly opposed by American actions, Joseph Stalin has seemed willing to negotiate solutions to difficult problems in a practical way. The United States should recognize this apparent willingness to work toward peace and take actions that would turn the Soviet Union from a wartime ally into a partner. When the mutual fears and suspicions of the United States and the Soviet Union have been overcome, the two nations will be able to join together to make the United Nations an effective peacemaking organization, capable of giving the world a regime of peace and order based on international law. In the age of atomic weapons, close cooperation between the United States and the Soviet Union in building an enduring peace is essential if we are to avoid a catastrophically destructive war.



*Russia has historically been vulnerable to attack from the west. Napoleon (left) invaded in 1812 and Hitler (right) in 1941. General Paul von Hindenburg (center), Chief of the German General Staff, oversaw the attack of German troops on Russia during World War I.*



## What We Could Do

Option One argues that the United States should recognize the Soviet Union's security needs and take steps to allay its fears of encirclement by hostile capitalist states. We should work to earn the Soviet Union's trust, and then cooperate with the Soviets in building a peaceful world.

### The United States should:

- ***Allow the Soviet Union to have a sphere of influence along its European border in which it can be assured that countries will be friendly to it.***

**But . . .** the United States will be abandoning tens of millions of people to a totalitarianism imposed by the Soviet Union.

- ***Maintain an open dialog with the Soviet Union.***

**But . . .** the United States could be seen as going along with Soviet actions when it doesn't agree with them and doesn't want to be associated with them in the eyes of the world.

- ***Avoid rhetoric which inflames Soviet fears of capitalist encirclement.***

**But . . .** if the United States doesn't publicly oppose aggressive and subversive actions by the Soviet Union, it may lose the support of the American people and the trust of its allies.

- ***Focus foreign aid on economic development, not on building up the military forces of its allies.***

**But . . .** those allies may not be able to defend themselves against communist aggression and subversion, and may have to make deals with the Soviet Union that the United States won't like.

- ***Join with the Soviet Union and other nations to make the United Nations an effective peacekeeping organization.***

**But . . .** the United States may surrender too much of its ability to control world events to a new and untested organization—the United Nations—which may not be able to maintain peace in the world.

## FOR THE PRESIDENT

***"The real peace treaty we need is between the United States and Russia. . . . We should recognize that we have no more business in the political affairs of Eastern Europe than Russia has in the political affairs of Latin America, Western Europe and the United States. . . . Russian ideas of social-economic justice are going to govern much of the rest. The two ideas will endeavor to prove which can deliver the most satisfaction to the common man. . . . But by mutual agreement, this competition should be put on a friendly basis and the Russians should stop conniving against us in certain areas of the world just as we should stop scheming against them in other parts of the world. Let the results of the two systems speak for themselves."***

From a speech by Henry A. Wallace,  
Secretary of Commerce, New York City,  
September 12, 1946

## Option Two: Resist Soviet Expansionism

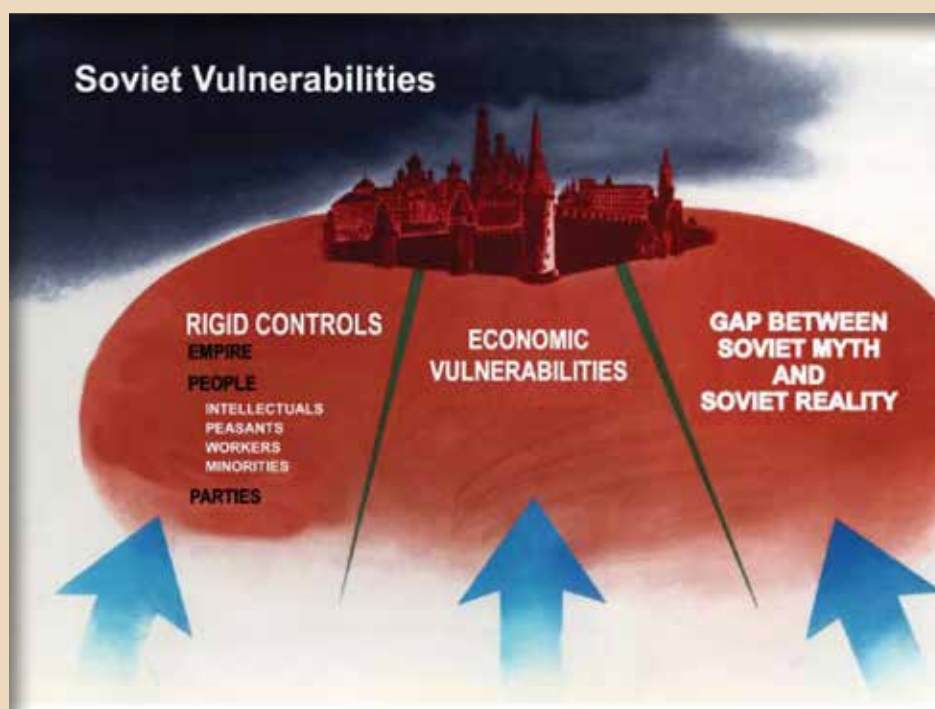
The United States and its allies must be persistent in opposing every Soviet attempt to expand by committing superior counterforce—military, economic, diplomatic, and any other that is effective—at every point on the map where the Soviet Union tries to move into a new area. The Soviet Union has demonstrated in the months since the end of World War II that it will expand its control of and influence over countries and territories wherever it is not effectively opposed.

The Soviet Union believes that its society is the only one based on truth, and that it is encircled by hostile capitalist nations that want to prevent its communist system from spreading through the entire world. These capitalist nations, Soviet leaders believe, must be either transformed into communist societies or greatly weakened or even destroyed. Until one of these eventualities occurs, the Soviets will fear a repetition of the instability and warfare that have comprised so much of Russian history.

Soviet leaders, according to this option, will not listen to reasoned arguments presented by the United States and its allies that in any way

challenge their plans to expand Soviet control and influence. They will act rationally, though, when making calculations based on force. If they are opposed by superior forces, they will order a retreat. Partly because they believe communism will inevitably triumph in the end, they will be cautious and risk-averse when confronted by a determined counterforce.

If the United States is internally strong, spiritually vital, and firmly committed to its ideals and its institutions, it can show the world that the Soviet Union is sterile and without worthy purpose. The United States believes that Soviet ideology is self-deluding; its ruling class is small, largely detached from the Soviet people, and constantly endangered by problems involving the transfer of power; its economic development is extremely uneven and unbalanced; and its people suffer under a burden of chronic fear and totalitarian control. As the failures of the Soviet way of life become clear, it will lose its attraction, and support for Soviet policies around the world will wane. By relentlessly opposing Soviet expansionism, the United States will have helped free people maintain their freedom, and eventually,



*A State Department report prepared for President Truman concluded that "systematic exploitation [of Soviet vulnerabilities] through external pressure might bring about a weakening in the Soviet power position and possibly a reversal in Soviet policies."*



will help captive people to regain the freedom that the Soviet Union has taken from them.

If Soviet ambitions are constantly frustrated, the Soviet Union will be forced to change, or perhaps to break up and become something new altogether. This strategy will require great patience and great expense before the Soviet Union changes dramatically for the better. But the goal of a peaceful world is worth this great effort.

## What We Could Do

Option Two argues that the United States should employ superior counterforce wherever the Soviet Union attempts to advance by means of aggression or subversion into a new area. In order to be able to do this, the United States should maintain a strong military force, one that would be capable of waging war against the Soviet Union should general war break out. The United States should also help its allies to be strong enough to contribute to the defense of the free world against Soviet aggression and subversion.

### The United States should:

- ***Use military force to counter Soviet expansionism wherever it occurs.***

**But . . .** this could draw the United States into conflicts in parts of the world that are not vital to its interests and would also increase the risk of general war.

- ***Provide economic and military aid to the free and democratic countries of Europe to help give them the security they need to remain independent of the Soviet Union.***

**But . . .** the Soviet Union could respond by tightening its grip on European countries under its power and building up the military power in these countries, thus increasing the risk of general war. Furthermore, providing aid to many countries over a long period of time may well result in a serious drain on America's economic resources.

- ***Provide military aid to countries threatened with or fighting communist insurgencies.***

**But . . .** this might strengthen some regimes which, though anticommunist, are opposed to American values or interests.

- ***Conduct secret operations to weaken or overthrow communist governments or governments tending toward communism.***

**But . . .** such operations are potentially damaging to America's democratic institutions and, if discovered, could weaken the moral position of the United States in the world.

- ***Create an air force that is capable of delivering atomic weapons to destroy much of the Soviet Union if general war breaks out.***

**But . . .** this will almost certainly cause the Soviet Union to build up its military forces to match or exceed those of the United States, thus threatening the world with catastrophic nuclear war.

***"There can never be on Moscow's side any sincere assumption of a community of aims between the Soviet Union and powers which are regarded as capitalist. . . . This means that we are going to continue for a long time to find the Russians difficult to deal with. . . . The Soviet pressure against the free institutions of the western world is something that can be contained by the adroit and vigilant application of counter-force at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points, corresponding to the shifts and maneuvers of Soviet policy."***

From "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," by X [George F. Kennan, director of the Policy Planning Staff, Department of State], Foreign Affairs, July 1947.

## Option Three: Keep America Strong at Home

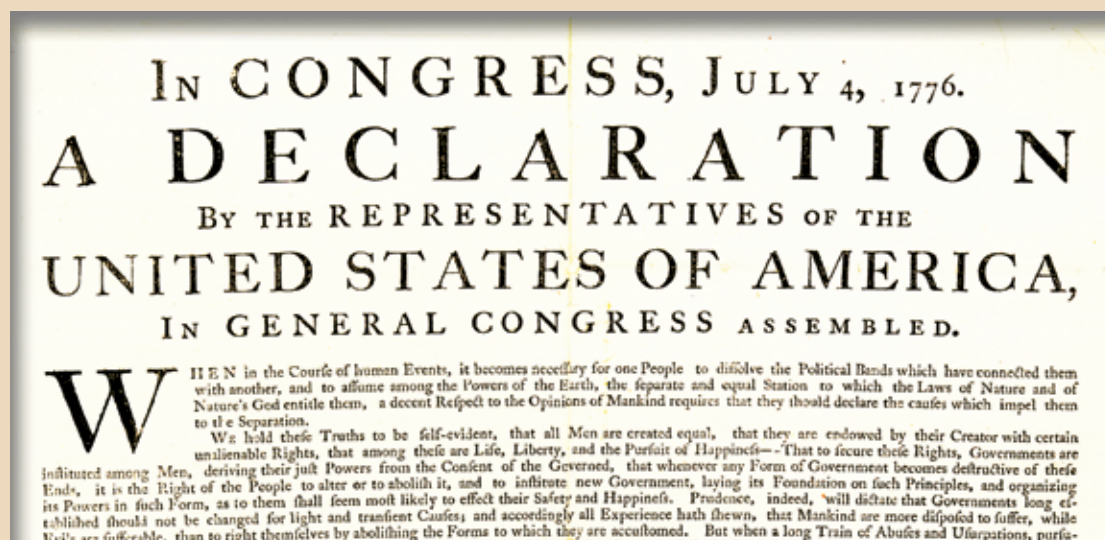
American policy to counter the Soviet threat should be based on the unique position of the United States in the world. The United States is exceptional in many important ways. It faces no enemies on its borders, and it is separated from all its potential enemies in Europe and Asia by thousands of miles of ocean. Its people enjoy great personal freedom, and its institutions are democratic. It is not burdened by totalitarian government or by a large, expensive military establishment. The American economy is by far the most productive on earth, and the United States is far and away the most powerful nation in the world. Americans are creative, entrepreneurial, energetic, and passionately committed to their country.

According to this option, the strength and situation of the United States in the world are such that it can only be defeated if it pursues weak and wrongheaded policies. The United States should not attempt to control peoples and events around the world, participate in carving up parts of the world into spheres of influence, or station troops on a permanent basis anywhere in Europe or Asia. These activities would require the maintenance of large permanent military forces and cause an unhealthy growth of the powers of the President. They would almost certainly damage

the economy by requiring large expenditures on the military, foreign aid, and an ever-larger government bureaucracy. Other consequences would be high taxes, a growing burden of debt, a loss of traditional freedoms, and the danger of involvement of the United States in foreign wars in which its vital interests are not at stake.

The United States has a long tradition of wary involvement in the affairs of other nations. Although the world community is more interrelated now than ever before, and the United States can no longer think of holding itself completely aloof from the rest of the world, our involvement in international affairs should be carefully measured and based on the unique conditions, the great strengths, and the essential freedoms that comprise America and the American way of life.

Our military forces should be strong but lean, and based primarily on air and naval power and atomic weapons. Our political and economic institutions should be made to develop in such a way that traditional freedoms are preserved. The United States should help anticommunist countries that are opposing communist aggression or subversion, but without entering into mutual security agreements with other countries.



*The language of the Declaration of Independence is embedded deep in the American peoples' sense of their nation—"all men are created equal," "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," "governments...deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed." These words help Americans define their country's special strength and the exceptional place they believe it has in the world.*



All aid should be temporary, not institutionalized into a permanent part of American foreign and defense policies. The United States, rather than relying on an oppressive, ruinously expensive garrison state to keep it secure, should help the United Nations to become an effective organization that can maintain world peace. Above all, the traditional American way of life must be preserved within a kind of fortress created by the geographical position of the United States, its strong economy, its free institutions, and its free and energetic people.

## What We Could Do

Option Three argues that the United States should base its national defense on its strong geopolitical position, the strength of its traditional political and social institutions, and its economic dominance. Governmental power should be limited. The economy should be kept strong through conservative fiscal and monetary policies that keep government expenditures and debt low. The military should be strong but limited in size and based primarily at home. Involvement in international affairs should be limited as much as is compatible with national security.

The United States should :

- ***Minimize the cost of government and limit its power.***

**But . . .** if the Government is kept small, the United States may be unable to respond adequately to national emergencies.

- ***Rely primarily on less expensive air and naval power and atomic weapons to keep the nation secure from foreign threat. Keep troops stationed primarily at home.***

**But . . .** such a small military force might not be able to respond effectively and flexibly to a determined Soviet threat against the United States and its allies.

- ***Avoid international agreements that include mutual security pledges—promises that all countries in an alliance will come to the defense of any one of its members if it is attacked.***

**But . . .** without mutual security pledges the United States might not keep its allies for long, and might not receive assistance from them if we are attacked.

- ***Minimize foreign aid.***

**But . . .** if the United States doesn't provide aid to its allies, they might become too weak to maintain their independence of the Soviet Union. The United States will also lose any leverage its aid would give it in changing the institutions and practices of its allies.

- ***Investigate all government employees to identify communists and communist sympathizers and remove them from government service.***

**But . . .** such a program of investigation can very easily endanger the traditional American liberties we value so highly.

***"The potential might of this nation is the strongest thing in this whole world. . . . That strength is always here in America. America cannot be defeated."***

Former President Herbert Hoover, from a speech broadcast on NBC Red Network, May 11, 1941.

***"We have no greater obligation. . . than to preserve here in America a state in which the individual shall be free to think and be master of his own soul, and where the people shall be free to govern their own government."***

Senator Robert A. Taft, from a speech at Gettysburg National Cemetery, May 30, 1945.

# SUMMARY

## Preserving Freedom, Democracy, and the American Way of Life

### *What should the United States do about the emerging threat posed by the Soviet Union?*

President Harry S. Truman hopes that World War II will be followed by an era of peace in which freedom and democracy will spread throughout liberated Europe and to Japan and other areas of liberated Asia as well. The Soviet Union is acting in ways that suggest it does not share Truman's vision for the postwar world. Soviet leader Joseph Stalin wants substantial areas of liberated Europe and Asia to have communist governments that are friendly and subservient to the Soviet Union.

Truman wants America's great wartime ally to be an ally in peacetime as well, but he doesn't want the Soviet Union to impose communism and totalitarianism on other countries, which he fears could undermine American national security and ultimately the ideals and institutions Americans most cherish.

President Truman wants his advisers to consider the three options he identified during his meetings with people who represent a wide spectrum of beliefs and experiences. How should the United States deal with the emerging Soviet threat?

### OPTION ONE: Reach Out to the Soviet Union

Main Arguments in Favor of This Option	Examples of What Might Be Done	Some Consequences and Trade-offs to Consider
<p>The Soviet Union wants peace just as much as the U.S. does. It can come to trust the U.S. and to cooperate in creating an era of peace if its fears and suspicions about the U.S. are allayed.</p> <p>The U.S. should recognize the Soviet Union's security needs and its anxiety about being surrounded by capitalist nations. The U.S. should recognize that peace cannot be built on military might. It should focus aid programs on creating economic prosperity, and join with the Soviet Union to make the United Nations an effective peacekeeping organization.</p>	Allow the Soviet Union to have a sphere of influence along its European border.	This would abandon the people in the concerned countries to totalitarianism.
	Maintain an open dialog with the Soviet Union.	This may make the U.S. appear to go along with Soviet actions that it doesn't support and doesn't want to be associated with.
	Avoid rhetoric which enflames Soviet fears of capitalist encirclement.	If the U.S. government doesn't publicly oppose aggressive actions by the Soviet Union, it may weaken its relations with its allies and cause it to lose support among the American people.
	Focus U.S. aid on economic development, not on building military forces.	If the U.S. does not provide military aid to its allies, they may be unable to defend themselves against communist aggression and subversion. They may feel compelled to reach accommodation with the Soviet Union.
	Join with the Soviet Union and other nations to make the United Nations an effective peacekeeping organization.	The U.S. may surrender too much of its ability to control world events to a new organization (the UN) which may prove ineffective if the Soviet Union uses its veto in the Security Council to oppose U.S. interests.



## Option Two: Resist Soviet Expansionism

Main Arguments in Favor of This Option	Examples of What Might Be Done	Some Consequences and Trade-offs to Consider
<p>The U.S. must employ superior counterforce at every point where the Soviet Union attempts to advance into a new area. This will preserve area sphere of freedom in the world and might, by continuously frustrating Soviet ambitions, force the Soviet Union to change.</p> <p>The Soviet Union has shown since World War II ended that it cannot be trusted to keep its agreements and that it will take advantage of any weakness of resolve on the part of the U.S. and its allies to expand Soviet influence into new areas. Soviet ideology holds that the U.S. and other capitalist countries are its enemies. It believes that conflict with these countries is inevitable.</p>	Use military force to counter Soviet expansionism wherever it occurs.	Such a policy could draw the U.S. into conflicts in parts of the world that are not vital to U.S. interests and will increase the risk of general war.
	Provide economic and military aid to the free and democratic countries of Europe to help give them the security they need to remain independent of the Soviet Union.	The Soviet Union might respond to U.S. aid by increasing its repressive control of countries under its power and building up the military forces of those countries.
	Provide military aid to countries threatened with or fighting communist insurgencies.	U.S. military aid could be used to strengthen dictators who oppress their own people.
	Conduct secret operations to weaken or overthrow governments that are communist or tending toward communism.	Secret operations intended to destabilize or overthrow governments are corrosive to American democratic institutions and could weaken the moral position of the U.S. in the world.
	Create an air force that is capable of delivering atomic weapons to destroy much of the Soviet Union if general war breaks out.	The existence of such a military force will cause the Soviet Union to build a similar military force and threaten the world with catastrophic nuclear war.

## Option Three: Keep America Strong at Home

Main Arguments in Favor of This Option	Examples of What Might Be Done	Some Consequences and Trade-offs to Consider
<p>The U.S. is so powerful that its security can be undermined only if its leaders pursue wrongheaded policies that weaken its economy or draw it needlessly into international conflicts. The U.S. has a unique position in the world. It has no enemies on its borders and is protected from potential enemies abroad by vast oceans. The U.S. economy is the strongest in the world.</p> <p>If the U.S. is strong at home, it can defend itself against any enemy, including the Soviet Union. While the U.S. cannot hold itself completely aloof from the rest of the world, its international involvement should be limited as much as possible.</p>	Minimize the cost of government and limit the powers of the President to those enumerated in the Constitution.	A small government headed by a weak Presidency may be unable to respond adequately to national security emergencies.
	Rely primarily on naval and air power and on atomic weapons to keep the nation secure from foreign threat, keeping U.S. military forces at a modest level and stationed primarily at home.	A small military based in the U.S. might not be able to adequately respond to threats against the U.S.
	Avoid international agreements that include mutual security pledges.	Without such pledges, the U.S. might not keep its allies for long, and may not receive assistance if the U.S. is attacked.
	Minimize foreign aid expenditures.	Without foreign aid, U.S. allies might become weak, and the U.S. might lose much of its ability to shape the world.
	Keep the U.S. Government free of communist subversion by investigating government employees to identify communists and communist sympathizers and removing them from office.	Such investigations can easily endanger the traditional American liberties we want to protect.



***“Being President is like riding a tiger.***

***A man has to keep on riding or be swallowed.”***

*Memoirs of Harry S. Truman: Years of Trial and Hope*





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## Do not read this section until the forum discussion is finished.

### President Truman Considered His Options

Although President Truman never sat down with his advisers on a single occasion to consider the three options you have considered today, he did consider the substance of the three options at different times during his Presidency. The ideas and proposed actions contained within these options were part of the public dialog. Truman's advisers brought these ideas and proposed actions to him for discussion, members of Congress talked about them, Truman read about them in the newspapers, and they were featured in political campaigns.

#### **Could the Soviet Union Be an Ally in the Postwar World?**

In the weeks and months following World War II, Truman hoped and probably, for a time, even expected that the Soviet Union would be an ally in building a peaceful postwar world, just as it had been an ally against Germany during the war. He was gradually persuaded, though, that the Soviet Union did not and could never share the U.S. vision for the postwar world and could no longer be an ally. Truman had probably reached this conclusion by the time of your meeting with him—that is, early 1947. The Soviet Union, he believed by that time, was an adversary that threatened the security of the United States. He considered those who wanted to reach out to the Soviet Union in the ways proposed in Option One to be naïve.

#### **Should the United States Counter the Soviet Union's Attempts to Expand Its Influence?**

Option Two was more attractive to Truman in early 1947. He had recognized early in his Presidency that Stalin saw the international system primarily in terms of power. The country that is stronger than the others gets what it wants, and a weak country must be satisfied with what the stronger country lets it have, or imposes upon it. This

was Truman's view of Stalin's view of the world. Option Two recognizes the importance of power relationships in the international system and proposes to counter with superior force every attempt by the Soviet Union to expand into a new area. Truman liked the sound of this strategy, which was urged upon him by some of his most trusted advisers. Other advisers, though, worried that this strategy would be expensive, cause taxes and budget deficits to rise, and choke off Truman's attempts to expand social programs such as Social Security and begin new programs, such as national health insurance.

#### **Could the United States Be Both a World Power and Strong at Home?**

Truman felt deeply ambivalent about Option Three. He was a committed internationalist and believed America's failure in the 1920s and 1930s to take the responsibilities of a world power had encouraged the rise of fascism and Nazism and helped plunge the world into war. Option Three, Truman felt, was nothing but a kind of new style isolationism that sought once again to prevent the United States from being a responsible world power. All the main advocates of option three were his political opponents, some of whom he had no respect for. But he shared with them the belief, present within Option Three, that the United States is a special place whose ideals of freedom and democracy are present in the hearts of people all over the world—even in the Soviet Union—and whose economic and political institutions and way of life must be preserved. He worried that if the Government and the military became too big and expensive as a result of the need to counter the Soviet threat, taxes and budget deficits would rise, the economy would be weakened, and traditional civil liberties would be threatened as an ever stronger government became increasingly intolerant of dissent.



## What President Truman Did

Truman regretted that he could not regard the Soviet Union as an ally in the building of a peaceful postwar world, and decided that the United States must resist Soviet expansionism. For several years, he remained ambivalent about the nature and scope of the American commitment to counter Soviet expansionism, and he did not fully embrace Option Two until very late in his Presidency—not until 1951, after the People's Republic of China committed hundreds of thousands of troops against United Nations forces fighting in Korea. Only then was he persuaded that World War III was a real possibility and that the Soviet Union might be willing to provoke a war to gain its expansionist goals. He turned to those of his advisers who advocated greatly increased military spending and gave them his full support. From that time, the United States built up what President Dwight D. Eisenhower later called “the military industrial complex,” and it became a prominent feature of American life.

President Truman's decision-making process in the foreign and defense policy area was much less tidy than what you probably experienced in your deliberations today. It was largely improvisational and took place over a number of years. When he became President, Truman probably had no foreign policy agenda beyond ending World War II, establishing the United Nations, and working as part of the international community to keep the peace. Events, though,

kept forcing decisions on him. The United Kingdom withdrew its forces from the eastern Mediterranean in early 1947, and the United States responded by taking over responsibility for helping Greece and Turkey defend themselves from Soviet designs on their sovereignty and territorial integrity. The economies of Western Europe appeared to be failing during the winter of 1946–1947, and the United States responded with the Marshall Plan, which more than any other American program caused the division of Europe into eastern and western spheres. Some Western European countries felt the need to enter into a mutual security alliance in order to strengthen themselves against the growing Soviet threat, and the United States responded by presiding over the establishment of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in April 1949. On June 25, 1950, North Korea invaded South Korea, and the United States responded with a defense of South Korea, of the United Nations itself, as Truman believed, and of free peoples everywhere.

In his farewell address to the nation, given on January 15, 1953, President Truman said “I suppose that history will remember my term in office as the years when the ‘cold war’ began to overshadow our lives.” By this time, the Cold War had hardened into a form that would still be recognizable almost 40 years later, when it suddenly and largely unexpectedly ended.



*“When and how will the cold war end?” Truman asked in his farewell address. He pointed to a fatal flaw in the communist system. “Theirs is a godless system, a system of slavery; there is no freedom in it, no consent.” Eventually, as the free world grew stronger and Soviet hopes of easy expansion were frustrated, a time of change would come, and freedom would triumph. Then, Truman told the American people, a “new era—a wonderful golden age” would begin.*



This booklet was prepared by the National Archives and Records Administration in collaboration with the National Issues Forums Institute and the Kettering Foundation. The booklets in the “*Advise the President*” series lead participants in guided discussions based on historic Presidential decisions.

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*A Different Kind of Talk,  
Another Way to Act*