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**2017-2018 Module: American Civ**

**Foreign policy**

**The cold war era/ From 1946 to the present**

As Soviet forces set up pro-communist governments in Eastern Europe in the weeks after the Yalta Conference, Roosevelt discovered how differently he and Stalin had interpreted its results. Before he could establish a policy to deal with the new situation, Roosevelt died of a sudden heart attack. In August 1945 president Truman ordered the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He justified the mass slaughter of civilians by saying the attack would save many other lives (both Americans and Japanese) because it would bring the war to a rapid close without an invasion of the Japanese home islands. The chain of events dividing the globe into the opposing blocs of the cold war was under way. A year later Churchill said an ‘Iron curtain’ existed between Soviet-controlled Eastern Europe and Western Europe with its American ally.

As the former allies struggled to influence the governments emerging on the borders of the Soviet Union after the war, American policy-makers became convinced that the Soviets were fanatically intent on establishing communist regimes around the world. In 1947 President Truman announced what became known as the Truman Doctrine in a speech to Congress during which he asked for funds to fight communist aggression in turkey and Greece.

According to the Doctrine, the US had to follow a policy of containment to prevent communist expansion anywhere in the world. The Soviet ideology, inherently a threat to the US and to democratic institutions, was being spread through internal subversion as well as outside pressure. In a ‘domino effect’, as it was called, one nation after another would fall to Soviet domination unless the US led the ‘free world’ by actively intervening to prevent it. Thus the stage was set for direct American involvement in internal conflicts and wars, not only in Latin America (where the Roosevelt Corollary justified intervention) but around the wold. Containment became the cornerstone of American foreign policy throughout the Cold War. Pursuing containment protected and expanded US interests abroad and its implementation contributed to the formulation of other foreign policy initiatives.

In the late 1940’s the US took steps to meet the communist threat and in the process revolutionized its foreign policy. It kept its military forces near wartime levels, extending mandatory military service into peacetime and continuing its military build-up. When the Soviets rejected international inspection plans to enforce a ban on nuclear weapons, the US reacted by expanding atomic research and giving nuclear weapons a central place in its arsenal. the National Security Act of 1947 centralized control over all branches of the military in a new Department of Defense and created the National Security Council (NSC) and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

In a sense, the Act put the country in a state of permanent military readiness by transferring enlarged powers over defence to the president and making it easier for him to take aggressive action internationally without a declaration of war. By 1950 a NSC report known as NSC-68 defined the US stance: more than ever, America had an important mission in the world. To that end, the nation had to quadruple its military budget so that it could take the initiative I containing communism.

Meanwhile, Secretary of State George Marshall became convinced that the US ought to fund the economic revival of Europe. The motives for the so-called Marshall Plan were mixed. Humanitarian concerns and ethnic ties played important roles in congressional and public approval of the plan. Economic concerns also inspired support. Assisting Europe could absorb surpluses that threatened to cause an economic recession in the US, and a revitalized Europe would provide markets for American goods. Finally, it was believed that prosperous economies would strengthen European resistance to communism and thus contribute to the goal of containment. Approximately 15 billion dollars were spent on this programme while it was in effect from 1948 to 1951.

The vision of one world united through the four freedoms faded and was replaced by the sense that the world consisted of two warring camps threatening each other with nuclear destruction. Therefore, the United States reversed its historic refusal to form permanent military alliances. The first of these, the Organization of American States (OAS), was founded in 1948, and was followed by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization(NATO) in 1950 and similar mutual defence pacts that eventually covered the globe. Commitment to internationalism had irreversibly replaced the country’s traditional isolationism.

When Soviet troops entered Hungary in 1956 and crushed its revolt against Soviet domination, Hungarian Americans protested strongly. President Eisenhower announced that the United States would not intervene in their homeland, however, because the Truman Doctrine did not extend to nations within the Warsaw Pact (the Eastern European-Soviet alliance organized as a counterforce to NATO). In b1968 when Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact nations put down a popular revolt in Czechoslovakia, the US followed the same policy of non-involvement.

In the early 1950s, the fear of communism set the stage for Senator Joseph McCarthy’s hunt for Americans who were involved in ‘un-American activities’ as spies or tools of the Soviets. In a general sense, ‘McCarthyism’ was nothing new, although his blatant accusations against government officials were unprecedented. Fear of communist influence and Bolshevik immigrants had appeared in the ‘Red Scare’ of the 1920s and was part of the old district of the foreign that stretched, in some form, all the way back to the Alien and Sedition of anti-communist hysteria. They merely exploited the public anxieties built up by the cold War and the threat of nuclear destruction.

The central intelligence Agency’s covert involvement in the Bay of Pigs affair and the Cuban Missile Crisis raised Cold War tensions to new heights. However, after the Missile Crisis, relations between the two superpowers began to improve. Developments furthering this trend included the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty of 1963 and the decision that neither superpower would intervene in the Israeli-Arab war. In the 1970s President Nixon initiated the policy known as détente (Peaceful coexistence) and the gradual reduction of nuclear arsenals that later presidents continued. Despite unstable periods in the superpowers’ relationship in the decades to come, a similar understanding between the superpowers was reached during the Gulf War almost thirty years later in 1991, when both countries condemned the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait in the United Nations and joined in contributing forces to drive President Hussein’s troops back into Iraq.

In Asia the United States committed itself to containing communism in Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. The Vietnam War, the first the US had lost since the war of 1812, produced massive anti-war protests at home and anti-American demonstrations abroad. The conduct of the war demoralized the younger generation at home as well as US combat troops. The cost of the war drained funds from president Johnson’s programmes to deal with domestic poverty and inequality. The frustrations of trying to win a ‘limited war’ led President Nixon to authorize the secret bombing of Laos and Cambodia without congressional approval.

The Vietnam War became traumatic experience for the American people, and has therefore coloured later involvement in other countries. During the Gulf War, the US chose to act in a multinational coalition under the auspices of the UN, even though Americans constituted the largest group of participants. Low intensity warfare and short engagements executed with greater precision through technological weaponry have replaced the prolonged military engagement of the Korean and Vietnam Wars, and form part of America’s foreign policy goals today.

An important turning point in US foreign relations came when president Nixon opened talks with the leaders of mainland China, taking advantage of a split between China and the Soviet Union, and thus reduced the appearing threat of communism. In the following years, American policy was less concerned with military control, and especially since the Carter presidency, more emphasis has been put on supporting human rights in other countries. This angered the Soviets, as stories of dissident confined in psychiatric ‘hospitals’ became well known through the work of Alexander Solzhenitsyn. In the 1970s the relationship between the two powers grew more tense as a result.

But the US-Soviet relationship has gone through several pendulum swings. After proclaiming strong opposition to the communists’ ‘evil empire’, President Reagan too pursued peaceful coexistence. He accepted friendly overtures from the general secretary of the Communist Party, Mikhail Gorbachev, which led to disarmament treaties and agreements on increasing trade and cultural relations under president Bush. In 1992, however, due to internal ethnic conflicts, the Soviet Union split into a loose federation of republics. The symbol of a divided Europe, the Berlin Wall, was torn down by cheering crowds of people from both sides in November of 1989, and in the following summer the two Germanies were reunited a treaty signed by the four allies from the Second World War. The German issue had been one that the two world leaders had never before been able to settle in their talks. On the Asian scene, president Reagan extended the détente policy of previous Presidents when he signed a series of agreements with the people’s Republic of China in 1984.

American policy towards Latin America has varied with the temperature of the Cold War to a degree, but the commitment to containment of t has generally led to US support for right-wing regimes in America’s ‘background’, where apparent stability has often seemed more vital than human rights. In that frame of mind, in the 1980s the Reagan administration refused to stop giving the right –wing Contra rebels aid in their guerrilla war against the Sandinista government of Nicaragua when Congress cut off funding for the Contras. The Iran-Contras scandal revealed that Oliver North and other administration officials had secretly sold weapons to Ian and used the profits to aid the Contras, in direct contradiction of congressional policy and the administration’s public statements. For some commentators, the lesson seemed to be that the Cold War had produced an ‘Imperial presidency4 that undermined the balance of power between the branches of government.

Today the political picture is uncertain. For while most nations in Western Europe have joined the European Union(UN) and are less dependent on America for their trade and military needs, the newly independent Eastern European countries are knocking on the doors of NATO and the EU, and there have been repeated military conflicts within the Russian federation and newly independent neighbouring nations. It may seem appropriate for the US and Western Europe to aid these poorer nations with their reconstruction, just as the Marshall Plan helped war-torn Western Europe, but how to do so without interfering too much in their internal affairs, or provoking Russia (which opposes their entry into NATO), is as yet unclear. The initial attempt to do this has come through the loose cooperation of the partnership for peace.

In the post-Cold War era, the first Clinton administration lacked direction until near its end, according to many critics. However, the President successfully pursued one foreign policy goal with considerable bipartisan support. In 1992 election campaign, he promised to make foreign policy an extension of efforts to strengthen the domestic economy by increasing the opportunities for free trade. By 1995 both the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), between Canada, Mexico and the US and the Uruguay General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) had been ratified by the Senate. The President has visited both Japan and China, promoting more open and fair trade and granting China most favoured nation trade status despite its human rights abuses.

At the beginning of the second Clinton administration, it seems probable that the President will continue to give considerable responsibility to his Secretary of State. After Warren Christopher’s retirement, the President appointed Madeleine Albright, US Ambassador to the UN and as such, already a member of his foreign policy ‘team’. Albright is the first woman to hold the office and an ardent internationalist who argued for the use of force in international conflicts more than most cabinet members during Clinton’s first term. Through her, Clinton will very likely continue the administration’s general policies of open trade, reluctant intervention for humanitarian aid and strategic stability (as in Bosnia), efforts to contain the spread of nuclear weapons capacity (as in North Korea), and international cooperation through many alliances, trade organizations and the UN (where Albright les campaigns to oust Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali and greatly reduce the organization’s bureaucracy).