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The Cold War became the defining feature of the international system from the end of World War II all the way up to the collapse of communism in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

American foreign policy at this time centered on two philosophies: containment and deterrence. The policy of containment was used to oppose Soviet expansion around the world.

We pursued deterrence by stockpiling enough nuclear weapons to convince the Soviets that any use of weapons on their part would end in "mutually assured destruction."



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The Cold War in Europe

- Truman Doctrine
- Marshall Plan
- NATO
- Berlin Wall

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American foreign policy also became known for helping other countries after the war. Under the Truman Doctrine, the United States provided economic and military aid to countries fighting communism.

Under the Marshall Plan, the United States financed the post-war rebuilding of Europe.

In 1949, the United States, Canada, and Western Europe joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. NATO was a collective security pact. In retaliation, the Soviet Union organized Eastern Europe under the Warsaw Pact and further divided Europe by building the Berlin Wall, dividing communist East Berlin from democratic West Berlin.

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The Cold War in Latin America

- Cuba
- Bay of Pigs, 1961
- Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962

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The Cold War in Latin America was defined by Cuba. Fidel Castro came to power in 1959. Two years later, the United States approved a plan to send exiled Cubans into Cuba to conduct guerrilla warfare against the communist government. The plan was a disaster, and the exiles were quickly defeated at the Bay of Pigs by Cuban soldiers.

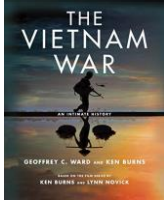
The Cuban Missile Crisis was the closest the world has ever come to nuclear warfare. President John F. Kennedy established a naval blockade of Cuba to prevent the installation of Soviet missiles. The standoff lasted two weeks, until the Soviets backed down.



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The Vietnam War

- French colonial rule
- President Lyndon B. Johnson
- President Richard M. Nixon



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Following World War II, France tried to re-assert colonial rule in Vietnam. This failed, and France withdrew in 1954. Vietnam was divided into the communist North and the non-communist South. When the North began to unify the two halves by force, the U.S. became involved.

President Johnson sent troops in to fight the North, but the conflict became increasingly unpopular with Americans at home. President Nixon set the stage for withdrawal by trying to turn responsibility for the fighting over to the South Vietnamese. In the absence of public support, U.S. forces left South Vietnam, which fell to North Vietnam.

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Détente and Human Rights

- President Richard M. Nixon
- President Jimmy Carter



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The Cold War thawed a bit with Nixon, who declared in 1969 that the "era of confrontation" was over and a new "era of negotiation" with the Soviets had begun. This era was called détente. Relations also improved with China.

The world also saw the Strategic Arms Limitations Treaties, which limited the stockpiling and deployment of nuclear weapons.


When Jimmy Carter became president, he turned from détente to focus on human rights violations. In particular, Carter targeted the Shah of Iran as a human rights abuser. The shah was forced into exile in 1979, but radical Iranians, with the help of Islamic extremists, took American embassy employees hostage. They were not released until over a year later, when Carter left office and Ronald Reagan was sworn in as president.



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The End of the Cold War

- Reagan Doctrine
- Nicaragua
- Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms



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President Reagan had promised to restore U.S. military strength. The Reagan Doctrine, as it came to be called, was a commitment to combating communism by providing military aid to anti-communist groups. In what became known as the Ira-Contra affair, Reagan had authorized the creation of the Contras, an armed guerrilla group, to block the communist Sandinista government in Nicaragua. Money for this operation was raised by illegally selling arms to Iranian militants. Following congressional hearings, members of Reagan's administration were fired and convicted.

Also around this time, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev initiated a series of political and economic reforms meant to strengthen communism, but which ultimately led to the collapse of communist governments in Eastern Europe. Two years later, the Soviet Union collapsed and broke apart.



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President George H. W. Bush was the first American president to lead the U.S. in the post-Cold War world. It soon became clear what a world without two superpowers would be like: Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990, and in January 1991, Operation Desert Storm began.

The United States sought stronger ties to China, but that process was interrupted when China attacked pro-democracy demonstrators in Tiananmen Square in 1989, killing hundreds of people. President Bill Clinton sought to define a clear role for the United States in a post-Soviet Union world. He pushed for democratic enlargement, which meant actively promoting the expansion of democracy and free markets. This foreign policy got us involved in human rights fights around the world, most notably Somalia and Kosovo.

Economic enlargement at this time centered primarily on the issue of trade and the expansion of globalization. The World Trade Organization replaced the GATT.



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President George W. Bush distanced himself from the Clinton expansionist policies that had led to U.S. intervention in foreign humanitarian crises. He rejected the international global warming treaty known as the Kyoto Protocol and refused to participate in other international efforts.

On September 11, 2001, 19 members of the terrorist group al-Qaeda headed by Osama bin Laden hijacked four planes. Two crashed into the World Trade Center, one into the Pentagon and one in a field in Pennsylvania. This sparked the global war on terrorism. The U.S. sent troops into Afghanistan to force the Taliban government to expel al-Qaeda. Although the government fell, terrorist groups remained as guerrilla fighters, and U.S. troops remained to fight them.

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In his 2002 State of the Union Address, President George W. Bush declared Iraq, North Korea, and Iran an "axis of evil." Not long after, Operation Iraqi Freedom began on March 19, 2003. Within a month, the capital city of Baghdad fell and Bush declared "mission accomplished." Casualties began to mount in what became a long, drawn-out war, and it wasn't until December, 2011, that the last combat forces pulled out of Iraq.



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Terrorism can be defined as violence designed to achieve political intimidation and instill fear. Countries like the U.S. have four key tools in crafting counterterrorism policy. It can use diplomacy, military power, economic power, such as sanctions, and covert actions.

Al-Qaeda is a militant Islamic terrorist group founded in Pakistan in the late 1980s. Its initial purpose was to conduct a Jihad, or holy war, in the name of the Islamic religion, particularly against the Soviet Union, which had invaded and attempted to occupy the Muslim nation of Afghanistan. Al-Qaeda and its leader, Osama bin Laden, later vehemently objected to the intrusion of U.S. troops in the Muslim holy land of Saudi Arabia. From a base in Afghanistan, al-Qaeda under the direction of bin Laden launched a series of attacks against U.S. interests. These attacks first focused on U.S. military and diplomatic targets in the Middle East and Africa, and then culminated in the devastating attacks on New York and Washington, D.C., on September 11, 2001.



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Nuclear Weapons

- Making arms proliferation policy
- The case of North Korea



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Countries pursue nuclear power to provide for their defense without having to rely on other countries. They may seek the international influence that comes with possession of nuclear power, and they may bend to domestic pressures to gain the weapons.

In response, countries like the U.S. have developed arms proliferation policies. These tend to take one of three forms. Disarmament sees the weapons themselves as a source of conflict and thus seeks to get rid of them entirely. Arms control accepts that there will be nuclear weapons but seeks to reduce the chances that they will be used by decreasing the number and type in existence. Denial seeks to prevent would-be nuclear powers from getting the technology they need to build a bomb. Finally, counterproliferation uses pre-emptive military action against a country or terrorist group.

While there are almost no direct diplomatic talks between the U.S. and North Korea, there have been various talks to monitor North Korea's nuclear program. In 2010, the United States called for an end to North Korea's nuclear weapons and missile programs. Confrontation between the two nations appears likely in the foreseeable future.



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Relations between the United States and North Korea have been tense since the Korean War. A military parade in 2012, shown here, showcases the country's missile technology.

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