

How was US Foreign Policy between 1945 and 1972 influenced by domestic factors?

US Foreign policy was shaped by many domestic factors. Public opinion and the mood of the nation influenced decision-making at the highest governmental level. The views and opinions of the public are of **huge importance** to politicians running for the Senate and Presidency in terms of how they run their campaigns and these are tested frequently through opinion polls. In post- World War 2 America, an important factor in government decision-making was the military-industrial complex. This was a powerful combination of the armed forces, the politicians who supported them and the industries who supplied them. **Three other major influences in the following decades included McCarthyism, the anti-war movement and race relations.** Each contributed to successive US governments' decision-making in foreign policy and how these administrations felt America was perceived in the rest of the world. (8)

The most extreme form of anti-communist hysteria in post- WW2 America was McCarthyism. This was named after Joseph McCarthy, a junior Senator from Wisconsin. The Cold War created feelings of tension and uncertainty in America and McCarthy exploited this. During the post-World War II era of McCarthyism, many thousands of Americans were accused of being Communists or communist sympathizers and became the subject of aggressive and very personal accusations. McCarthy became Chairman of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations where the number of those investigated and witnesses called, greatly increased under his chairmanship. In an opportunistic way, he identified himself with a popular issue and wielded enormous power as a consequence. The primary targets of such suspicions were government employees, those in the entertainment industry and educators. As part of the general Red Scare in the US, and along with other committees such as the House of Un-American Activities, **McCarthy turned public and political opinion against communist Soviet Union and its 'evils', and, in this way, helped shape US foreign policy.** (9)

All foreign policy was viewed through the prism of the Cold War and containment of communism. McCarthy himself was very critical of President Truman and described him as a 'dangerous liberal'. He accused him of being soft on Communism after China 'fell' to Communism in 1949. No politician, whether Democrat or Republican, dared criticise him for fear of the potential backlash. Absence of any real concrete proof ultimately led to his downfall in 1954 but his negative impact on US politics is undeniable. The US went on to support corrupt governments in Central America and Taiwan, simply because they provided an alternative to a rival left-wing option. (6)

The State Department was another victim of McCarthy's purges with many of its employees losing their jobs. This loss of vital expertise can be attributed to America's disastrous Vietnam War campaign. This lack of cultural and political understanding of Vietnam and its history led the US to believe that this was purely a cold war conflict where in reality it was much more like a nationalist uprising. America was also viewed with greater cynicism and criticism by European countries. McCarthyism in America was viewed as being undemocratic. His contribution to Foreign policy was negative in cold war terms. **By heightening the fear of Communism in America, McCarthyism influenced and distorted American thinking on foreign policy and served to increase tension between the US and USSR.** (7)

An anti-war movement grew rapidly throughout America in the mid-1960s. Support for the Vietnam War declined for several reasons. Many Americans, especially the less well-off, felt it was a financial drain on the country which diverted funding away from Johnson's Great Society program. People also viewed it as a foreign conflict which America should not be part of. It became increasingly perceived as being morally corrupt. Television brought pictures of the war into American homes. US cruelty, such as the use of napalm, horrified the American public. (5)

A credibility gap began to emerge. People realised that the glowing reviews of the war effort their government had been releasing were "sanitised" and far from the truth. Student protests escalated in number. In 1969, 300,000 anti-war protesters marched past the White House in silent protest. Four students were shot at Kent State University in 1970 as the anti-war movement intensified. Undoubtedly, the anti-war movement undermined American will to continue fighting in Vietnam. Opinion polls reflect this. In May 1971, the approval rating of the war had plummeted to 28%. Moreover, it was largely down to the anti-war movement that Johnson didn't run for re-election. Incoming president Richard Nixon's number one campaign promise to voters was that he'd end the war with "Vietnamization", or systematic troop withdrawals. **This change in government policy toward the Vietnam conflict can also be attributed to the Anti-war movement.** (8)

Another factor was race relations. There existed a rising state of expectations for the black population in America after WW2. Black soldiers had fought bravely for their country in the war and weren't willing to accept discrimination at home on their return. Consequently, segregation in the armed forces was outlawed by President Truman in 1948. Despite the advances in Civil Rights in 1960s(Civil Rights Act/Voting Rights Act) race-relations had worsened by the end of the decade. This was largely due to unfulfilled economic and social expectations being met for the black population. Martin Luther King spoke out against the war and said: **"The Great Society has been shot down in the battle fields of Vietnam"**. Between 1965 and 1975, the United States spent \$111 billion on the war (around 700 billion in 2013 dollars) which resulted in a large federal budget deficit. (8)

As US commitment in Vietnam escalated, so the number of casualties increased. There were a disproportionate number of young black soldiers being killed as college students could avoid the draft. Fewer blacks could afford to go to college and this social injustice angered black political leaders. Discrimination at home was transferred to the war zone. Black Americans represented only 11% of the U.S. population. However, out of the 246,000 men who were recruited between October 1966 and June 1969, 41% were black. Less than 3% of the officers in the Army were black and less than 1% in the Marines. As the war continued, fewer blacks were willing to serve than before. As a result, American military leaders were forced into changes which resulted in a reduction in the proportion of black deaths in Vietnam. **Racial considerations were now a factor in US foreign policy decision making.** (8)

More than in any other time in its history, American foreign policy decisions had been formed, amended, coloured and reversed due to widespread protests and social unrest; considerations of race and internal hysteria over fears of subversion by Communism. Some of these complaints were legitimate and justifiable, others fabricated to a large extent for political gain. **These internal factors contributed in a radical change in American Cold War foreign policy. From the 1970s onwards US foreign policy was focused more on financial help and covert military assistance, rather than direct involvement in global conflicts.** (7). CM 66/60. OE 40/40. Total: 100%

