

## Eisenhower: New Look or Old Familiar?

### Guiding Question:

To what extent do you agree that Eisenhower's foreign policy was neither new nor successful?

### Background Information

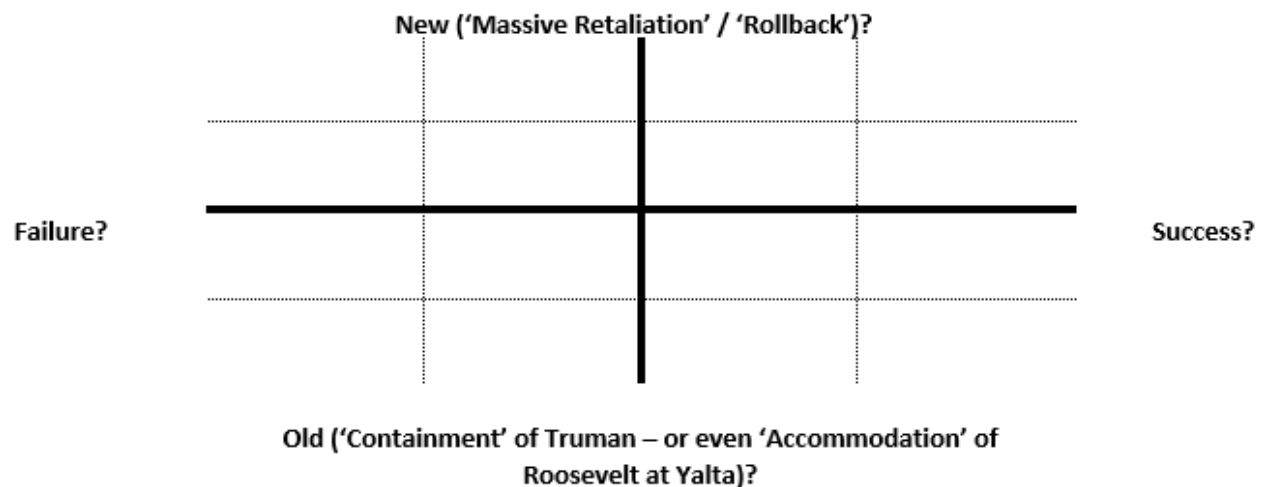
**President Dwight ("Ike") Eisenhower** was the experienced World War Two general who had led the Allied forces during the D-Day Landings. The Republicans, led by Eisenhower, captured the White House in 1953 after they claimed that the Truman administration had been "*soft on Communism*" and after stating that they were determined to turn the tide against the "Red menace." Eisenhower's vice president, Richard Nixon, had spoken of "twenty years of treason" as Presidents had appeased the USSR.

Eisenhower was much keener to pursue "*rollback*" rather than mere "*containment*". Eisenhower's secretary of state, **John Foster Dulles**, had pledged that Republicans would "roll back the Iron Curtain in Eastern Europe."

The essence of this '*New Look*' for foreign policy was to threaten 'massive retaliation' (in the form of atomic bombs) against any attack upon US interests. This retaliation would take place "instantly, by means and at places of our choosing" (Dulles). He felt the strategy would provide "more basic security at less cost". The goal was to discourage the Soviets and Chinese from making aggressive moves in Europe or Asia, while saving the US from having to commit large, expensive armies to posts around the world. In this view of the USSR as a regime which only understood force, Eisenhower was building on the views of the Kennan Telegram, NSC-68 and, to be fair, President Truman - whom he shared more in common with than perhaps he cared to admit.

### Task Instructions:

1. Contained in this document are seven key policy areas. Working alone, read through the first policy area carefully then decide how 'new' and 'successful' it was.
2. Complete this same process for the rest of the policy areas and be able to explain your answers in class discussion.
3. When you have completed the other policy areas, compare your findings with other people in the group to reach an agreement.
4. The class can then compare the two grids and talk through any disagreements of opinion.



**1. Korea (1953)**

During the 1952 election campaign, Eisenhower had vowed to "go to Korea," vaguely implying he would find a way to end the war. He did. Through forceful negotiations, he managed to achieve a cease-fire on 27 July 1953, ending the conflict that had begun in 1950. The settlement left the situation on the Korean peninsula almost exactly as it had been when the war started. In other words: containment, not rollback. Eisenhower also established SEATO as an Asian counterpart to NATO.

Place one cross along each line to indicate where the policy fits, then explain your reasoning below

Old								New
Failure								Successful

Reasoning:

## 2. Taiwan (1954)

A crisis that blew up two years into Eisenhower's first term showed how complicated and perilous this game of brinkmanship was. After China's long-running civil war ended in 1949 with Chairman Mao's Communists defeating Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists, Chiang and his supporters retreated to the island province of Formosa (now called Taiwan). The US continued to recognize Chiang as the legitimate ruler of not only Taiwan but of all China.

In August 1954, Mao's forces began to shell Quemoy and Matsu, two small island groups in the Formosa Strait, the body of water that divided the island from the mainland. Chiang had fortified Quemoy and Matsu in the unrealistic hope of using them as staging grounds for an invasion of the mainland. Now Mao's Communists were threatening to use them instead as stepping-stones to launch their own invasion of Formosa.

Eisenhower quickly upped the ante. He got Congress to provide him with advanced authorization to use military force to defend Taiwan. If the Chinese amassed troops opposite Formosa, he would bombard them with nuclear weapons. Maybe. He never said exactly what would provoke such a devastating American response. Was he bluffing? Would he really go to nuclear war over a few tiny islands? Nobody knew. "The fog of equivocation Ike generated gave him the supreme diplomatic advantage of flexibility," wrote biographer Piers Brendon.

In this case, the ploy worked. The Communist Chinese backed off, at least temporarily. But the world had come dangerously close to a nuclear holocaust. And some said the granting of war-making power to a president was an abdication of Congressional responsibility that set a dangerous precedent for the future. And most unsettling of all was the notion that a relatively minor dispute over control over a couple of nearly meaningless islands might be all it would take to ignite nuclear war. The problem with massive retaliation and brinkmanship was that they required a credible threat of near-suicidal aggressiveness with nuclear weapons. It was no accident that terrified Americans began building backyard bomb shelters in hopes of surviving a nuclear Armageddon that seemed a very real possibility.

Place one cross along each line to indicate where the policy fits, then explain your reasoning below							
Old							New
Failure							Successful
Reasoning:							

## 3. Vietnam (1954 / 1956)

Ever since the end of World War II, the French, with heavy U.S. backing, had been trying to recover their colonies in **Indochina**. In Vietnam, they had run into fierce opposition from forces under the leadership of Vietnamese **Ho Chi Minh**, who was a Communist but also a nationalist hero who had been leading the country's struggle for independence since the 1920s. In the spring of 1954, the French tried to lure the Vietnamese into a decisive battle in a remote jungle outpost called **Dien Bien Phu**. The fighting there turned out disastrously for the French; Ho's forces were able to surround the French completely and threatened to inflict a decisive defeat upon them. The calamitous French position at

**Dien Bien Phu** looked likely to lead to an independent, Communist Vietnam under Ho's powerful leadership.

Eisenhower voiced the worries of many when he warned that the loss of Vietnam to Communist forces could have repercussions for surrounding countries. "*You have a row of dominoes set up, you knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go over very quickly.*" This was a statement of what became known as the **domino theory**—the idea that allowing Communists to take over anywhere would demoralize neighboring countries and lead to a cascade of losses. The theory, which proved erroneous, ignored the nationalistic nature of many of the conflicts in the postcolonial era.

Some American military men urged the president to use atomic bombs to help the French stave off defeat. As a former general, Eisenhower knew such a tactic would not work and he was reluctant to commit the tens of thousands of American troops that it was estimated would be needed to take over the war and win it. Ultimately, he chose not to intervene. With no hope of breaking the siege, French forces surrendered on 7 May 1954.

The treaty ending the **First Indochina War** temporarily divided Vietnam into a Communist north and anti-communist south, calling for nationwide elections in 1956 to reunite the two halves of the country. **Ho Chi Minh** was an extremely popular leader who would almost certainly have won that election—if it had ever been held. This might have been a good time for the US to step back and accept the inevitable will of the Vietnamese people, but Eisenhower did not want to be accused of "losing" Vietnam. He refused to support elections and instead threw American support firmly behind **Ngo Dinh Diem**, the corrupt and repressive ruler of South Vietnam. A devout Catholic, Diem had lived in the United States since 1950. In Vietnam, he was widely (and probably not unfairly) viewed as an American puppet.

No one in the Fifties could have known that American commitments to South Vietnam would lead to a prolonged and unwinnable war that would cost of the lives of more than 50,000 Americans (and millions of Vietnamese) in the 1960s and '70s. Still, Eisenhower bears some of the responsibility. He had the wisdom not to commit America to war in Vietnam in 1954, but his misguided decision to back Diem ultimately set the United States on that very same path a decade later. If Eisenhower had still been in power in the 1960s, would he have been wise enough to disengage from Vietnam at the moments when presidents Kennedy and Johnson chose instead, fatally, to escalate? There's no way for us to ever know.

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Failure							Successful
Reasoning:							

## Middle East

### 4. Iran (1953)

Eisenhower introduced covert action into the Cold War contest soon after his inauguration. He had learned the value of clandestine operation during World War II. As president, he made use of the **Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)** to pursue US strategic goals on the cheap. The CIA, headed by Allen Dulles (the younger brother of the Secretary of State), became closely tied to the White House.

The first significant operation was the overthrow of the democratically elected government of Iran. The country was ruled by a constitutional monarchy, with **the Shah** sitting as king and **Mohammed Mossadegh** as the elected prime minister. In the early 1950s, Mossadegh nationalized the Iranian oil industry, which had been controlled by the British. Eisenhower felt that he was moving "closer and closer to the Communists."

Kermit Roosevelt Jr., grandson of Teddy, was sent to Iran to arrange a coup. In August 1953, the Iranian army, backed by mobs of rioters hired with CIA money, overthrew Mossadegh and installed the Shah as the ruler of Iran. The Shah held onto power for another 25 years.

Eisenhower's policy certainly did keep Iran out of the Soviet camp (although it's not at all clear that Mossadegh's plan was actually to lead it into the Soviet camp in the first place). During his long reign, the Shah made efforts to modernize his country, but he also held onto power as a brutal dictator. His reign, propped up by American support from start to finish, caused many ordinary Iranians to come to hate the United States with a fiery passion. When the people of Iran, led by radical Islamic clerics, finally overthrew the Shah in 1979, many Americans were surprised to learn that Iranians viewed them as "the Great Satan." Iranian militants stormed the American embassy in Tehran and held the Americans captured there as hostages for years; the two countries have mostly viewed each other with deep hostility ever since. Some in the United States remained puzzled by the continuing distrust with which so many Iranians view America. But perhaps we should ask, what if a foreign government had used illegal tactics to overthrow a freely elected American president? Wouldn't citizens there be justifiably outraged?

During the Eisenhower years, keeping the Soviet menace from spreading was the first priority (it often seemed to be the first, last, and only priority). In a sense, Eisenhower wore blinders. They allowed him to focus on the country's main enemy, but kept him from seeing the complexity beyond the fight against Communism. Historians are still debating whether covert actions such as the overthrow of Mossadegh in Iran was a necessary tool in the desperate struggle against Communism, or a misguided and cynical policy that betrayed core American values while setting the stage for later catastrophes.

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Old							New
Failure							Successful
Reasoning:							

## Europe

Less than two months after Eisenhower took office, iron-fisted Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin died. Stalin had been the leader of the Soviet Union for nearly thirty years and left no clear successor. Nikita Khrushchev, that country's Communist Party leader, would not fully consolidate power over his rivals within the Kremlin for several years.

### 5. Hungary

Since World War II ended with the Red Army in control of all territory east of Berlin, the nations of Eastern Europe had lived under the domination of the Soviet Union. The Soviets viewed control over the governments of Eastern European nations as vital to their own security, using Communist regimes in nations like Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary as a "buffer zone" to block yet another German invasion of Russia (such as those launched in both World Wars, costing tens of millions of Soviet lives). And if the actual people who lived in those Eastern European nations didn't want to live under Soviet-dominated Communist regimes? Too bad. The Eastern Europeans' resentment became more pronounced after Khrushchev denounced Stalin in February 1956. That summer, riots in Poland prompted the Soviets to make reforms.

The people of Hungary began an even more far-reaching uprising against their Soviet-imposed government on 22 October 1956. Prompted in part by Radio Free Europe, the American propaganda broadcast, Hungarians renounced their membership in the Warsaw Pact, which allied Eastern European countries with Russia. On 4 November, Khrushchev sent 200,000 soldiers and 4,000 tanks into Hungary, crushing the rebellion and killing 40,000 Hungarians in the process.

The world was stunned by this brutal demonstration of force, but the United States was impotent to do anything about it. Eisenhower knew that he had no realistic military options. He couldn't start World War III, and he couldn't do anything to help Hungary without starting World War III. All the talk from Secretary of State Dulles about rolling back Soviet influence in Eastern Europe was shown, rather dramatically, to be little more than empty rhetoric.

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Old								New
Failure								Successful
Reasoning:								

**6. Summit meetings with Khrushchev**

To Eisenhower, the operations in Iran, Guatemala, and other countries were sideshows. The main act was opposing the Soviet Union firmly, but somehow doing so without ending up in World War III. Even as he struck against Communism in Third World countries, he tried to reach an understanding with the Soviets that would limit the arms race and reduce tensions.

One of his early efforts was called "**Atoms for Peace**," a proposal in December 1952 to share uranium with a United Nations agency so that it could be used to generate energy. At first the idea was warmly received, even by the Russians. Though no country really wanted to share nuclear technology, the UN-affiliated agency Eisenhower envisioned, The International Atomic Energy Agency, was created in 1957 to promote peaceful uses of the atom.

In 1955, Eisenhower traveled to Geneva, Switzerland, for a four-power meeting with the Soviets, the British, and the French. At the meeting, he made his "**Open Skies**" proposal, suggesting that the Americans and Soviets could share intelligence about each other's forces and allow verification from the air—welcoming surveillance flights by each other's spy planes so that both sides could keep sure that the other wasn't secretly up to no good with its nuclear forces. Again, the Russians did not accept the idea. But Khrushchev made some smaller conciliatory gestures, granting Austria its independence and accepting, in principle, the idea of nuclear disarmament.

This brief thaw did not last - the Red Army's brutal crackdown of Hungary's freedom movement caused the Cold War to go back into deep freeze. But Eisenhower did not give up on his hope of warmer relations with the Russians. In 1959, he invited Khrushchev to come visit him in the United States.

The Soviet leader's historic ten-day trip through America was one of the more colourful episodes of the Cold War. Americans were fascinated by their first glimpse of a Soviet leader in the flesh. Khrushchev talked to farmers in the Midwest and to longshoremen in San Francisco. He viewed the filming of the movie Can-Can in Hollywood and professed to be shocked, declaring that "a person's face is more beautiful than his backside." Disappointed when, for security reasons, he was unable to visit Disneyland, he asked, "Have gangsters taken hold of the place?"

Talks with Eisenhower helped ease tensions. The two leaders planned to hold another summit meeting in May 1960, where they would talk about disarmament and other issues. Eisenhower agreed to tour the Soviet Union. As his second term neared its end, Eisenhower looked forward to establishing a basis for lasting peace.

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Old							New
Failure							Successful
Reasoning:							

**7. U2 Spy Plane (1960)**

Eisenhower retained a deep distrust of the Soviets. He had ordered high-speed, long-range spy planes (called **U-2's**) to fly over the Soviet Union at a height of 80,000 feet, where they were supposed to secretly photograph Soviet military installations far below. The data from these flights, which had begun in 1956, proved to Eisenhower that the United States remained far ahead of the Russians in military technology.

Because he couldn't reveal the information, though, he was constantly attacked by some in Congress for supposedly failing to prevent the Americans from falling behind the Soviets in military spending. He knew that there was no such thing as a "missile gap" with the Soviets—or rather, there was a missile gap but it the Americans, not the Soviets, who had the advantage—but he couldn't reveal he knew so without also revealing that his planes had been violating Soviet airspace (and international law) to gather intelligence.

Eisenhower suspended the spy flights as the 1960 summit meeting approached. The Russians knew about the planes, but they had always been unable to shoot them down and chose to keep their knowledge of the spy flights secret. Back in Washington, the president's advisors pushed him for a few more flights. At first he resisted, then gave in. On 1 May 1960, barely two weeks before the summit, a U-2 plane was shot down over Soviet airspace.

Assuming the plane had disintegrated and the pilot, Francis Gary Powers, had died in the crash or committed suicide, US authorities publicly denied that there had been any spy mission or shootdown. Khrushchev, seeing an opportunity to humiliate the United States before the international public, then revealed that Powers had in fact survived the crash, and confessed his espionage mission. "*That we would be caught with our pants down was rather painful,*" Eisenhower admitted.

At the summit, Khrushchev demanded Eisenhower stop the spying and apologize. The president did call off the U-2 flights but refused to apologize. The summit collapsed, Eisenhower cancelled his tour of Russia, and the Cold War took another icy turn. It was a disappointing anticlimax to Ike's foreign policy.

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Failure							Successful
Reasoning:							