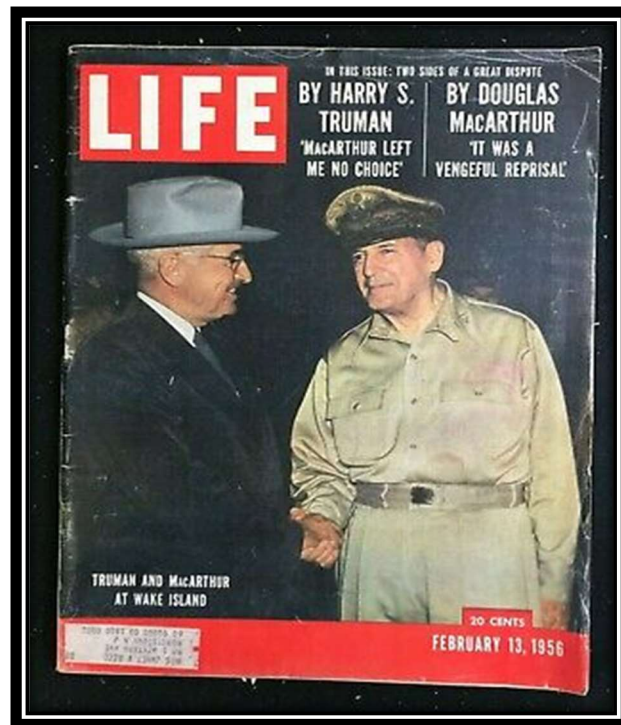


MACARTHUR VS TRUMAN

THE SHOWDOWN THAT CHANGED AMERICA

A BOOK ABOUT PRESIDENT HARRY TRUMAN'S DISMISSAL OF GENERAL DOUGLAS MACARTHUR REVEALS HOW THEIR CLASH ALTERED AMERICAN HISTORY FOR DECADES TO COME.

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"This looks like the last straw," a seething President Harry Truman scrawled in his diary on April 6, 1951. Once again the commander of U.S. forces in the Korean War, General Douglas MacArthur, had gone public with his differences with the commander in chief over the conduct of the war—this time in a letter to House Republican Leader Joseph Martin.

Truman thought it nothing less than "rank insubordination," and five days later he delivered the shocking news to the American people that he had relieved MacArthur of his command and replaced him with General Matthew Ridgway.

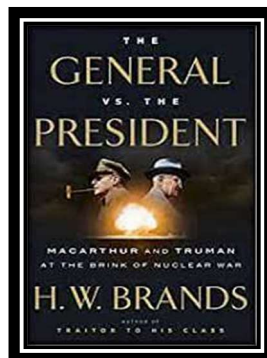
"With deep regret, I have concluded that General of the Army Douglas MacArthur is unable to give his wholehearted support to the policies of the United States Government and the United Nations in matters about his official duties," the president said.

The tension that had been mounting for months between the modest president and the egotistical general went beyond mere personality differences.



Still upset that MacArthur had mistakenly assured him during a face-to-face meeting on Wake Island that the communist government of China would not intervene on behalf of North Korea, Truman favored a “limited war.” MacArthur, however, publicly advocated the more expansive use of American military power, *including the bombing of China, the employment of Nationalist Chinese forces from Formosa (Taiwan), and the possible use of nuclear weapons.* Fearing that such an approach risked a massively expanded war in Asia and even the start of World War III—with the Soviet Union coming to the aid of China—Truman clashed repeatedly with MacArthur before finally dismissing him.

H.W. Brands, author of the new book *“The General vs. the President: MacArthur and Truman at the Brink of Nuclear War,”* tells HISTORY that Truman’s decision *had far-reaching implications beyond just the conduct of the Korean War.*



“I think the enduring legacy is that Truman took a great political risk, and he did it immediately to prevent World War III, but also to prove the principle that civilian elected officials are above military officials, *however grand and decorated they may be,*” he says.

“Generals ever since have taken that lesson. With Lyndon Johnson, the generals in Vietnam knew not to take their differences outside of the administration or popular opinion would probably be against them. *Truman’s decision not only ended MacArthur’s military career, it ended the president’s political career as well,* setting the stage for the subsequent presidency of Dwight Eisenhower. In the first 24 hours after the president’s announcement, the White House received more than *5,000 telegrams—three-quarters of them backing the popular MacArthur, who had been named the greatest living American in a 1946 poll.*

MacArthur, however, *harbored ambitions of succeeding Truman as commander-in-chief* after returning home to a hero’s welcome that included an address to a joint session of Congress and a ticker-tape parade through New York City.

TOP SECRET

DECLASSIFIED
E.O. 11652, Sec. 302 and 501
White House Press Release 4/11/51
By *WAT/SSC*, WASS Date *3-7-75*

PROPOSED ORDER TO GENERAL MacARTHUR TO BE SIGNED BY
THE PRESIDENT



I deeply regret that it becomes my duty as President and Commander in Chief of the United States military forces to replace you as Supreme Commander, Allied Powers; Commander in Chief, United Nations Command; Commander in Chief, Far East; and Commanding General, U. S. Army, Far East.

You will turn over your commands, effective at once, to Lt. Gen. Matthew B. Ridgway. You are authorized to have issued such orders as are necessary to complete desired travel to such place as you select.

My reasons for your replacement, which will be made public concurrently with the delivery to you of the foregoing order, will be communicated to you by Secretary Pace.

*AND ARE
contained in the next following message,*

Douglas MacArthur

TOP SECRET

President Truman fires General Douglas MacArthur

APRIL 11, 1951

“There was this popular surge of support for MacArthur when he came home, but it turned out it was for what MacArthur had done in the past rather than what he might do in the future. He was the last of the generals to come home and get his victory parade,” Brands says. *“MacArthur read it as possible support for a MacArthur candidacy for president. It turned out that wasn’t it.”*

MacArthur’s support among right-wing Republicans began to sag after a Senate committee heard secret testimony from his superiors, including Generals George Marshall and Omar Bradley, that disputed the viability of MacArthur’s plan for total war and revealed the United States lacked the military capability at the time to win another world war. “It demonstrated that MacArthur was just talking hot air, and very silently the air started to leak out of the MacArthur balloon,” Brands says.

When MacArthur’s keynote speech at the 1952 Republican National Convention fell flat, delegates abandoned the general. “They turned to another general—one with a more common touch, Eisenhower,” Brands says. *“MacArthur’s political balloon sank to earth and was never seen again.”*

“The two competing visions of Truman and MacArthur as to how to respond to the threat of communism and wage war in the nuclear age reverberated for decades after Eisenhower brought the Korean War to a conclusion. “Truman thought the Cold War could be won without an all-out war with the Soviet Union, but MacArthur did not believe that was possible,” Brands says. *“MacArthur essentially believed that World War III had begun* and the U.S. had to wage it. He believed there was no substitute for victory.

“MacArthur thought that if we go to war, we go to war. Any commander in battle wants to protect those forces, and to send men into battle knowing he can’t use all potential resources is exceedingly frustrating. That’s going to get any general upset,” Brands says. “World War II, however, was the last war that Americans have been able to fight all out. The reason is that the dangers of escalation outweigh the benefits of victory.”

Total war was no longer possible in a world in which other countries, including the Soviet Union, had the atomic bomb as well as the United States. Brands says Truman’s notion of a limited war may have been a reality of the nuclear age, but it wasn’t as satisfying as the previous policy of unconditional victory.

“World War II created the model war in American minds—a war where we take the gloves off, we win and we come home. *The Cold War wasn’t like that. It was very unsatisfying for Americans. It was a world that took some adjusting to.*”

Brands says the “end of the Cold War on the terms that Truman had pioneered,” including “firm, patient resolve,” vindicated the president’s approach in his showdown with the general. As he writes at the close of his book, *“The courage of Truman’s decision had never been in question; six decades later, its wisdom was apparent as well.”*

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION CONCERNING TRUMAN’S DECISION

On 5 April, Representative Joseph William Martin Jr., the Republican leader in the House of Representatives, *read aloud on the floor of the House a letter from MacArthur critical of Truman’s Europe-first policy and limited-war strategy. The letter concluded with:*

“It seems strangely difficult for some to realize that here in Asia is where the communist conspirators have elected to make their play for global conquest and that we have joined the issue thus raised on the battlefield; that here we fight Europe’s war with arms while the diplomats. They still fight it with words; if we lose the war to communism in Asia the fall of Europe is inevitable, win it and Europe most probably would avoid war and yet preserve freedom. As you pointed out, we must win. There is no substitute for victory.’

In March 1951 secret United States intercepts of diplomatic dispatches disclosed clandestine conversations in which General MacArthur expressed confidence to the Tokyo embassies of Spain and

Portugal that he would succeed in expanding the Korean War into a full-scale conflict with the Chinese Communists.

When the intercepts came to the attention of President Truman, he was enraged to learn that MacArthur was not only trying to increase public support for his position on conducting the war but had secretly informed foreign governments that he planned to initiate actions that were counter to United States policy.

The President was unable to act immediately since he could not afford to reveal the existence of the intercepts and because of MacArthur's popularity with the public and political support in Congress. However, following the release on 5 April by Representative Martin of MacArthur's letter, Truman concluded he could relieve MacArthur of his commands without incurring unacceptable political damage.

Truman summoned Secretary of Defense George Marshall, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Omar Bradley, Secretary of State Dean Acheson, and Averell Harriman to discuss what to do about MacArthur. They concurred MacArthur should be relieved of his command, but made no recommendation to do so. Although they felt that it was correct "from a purely military point of view", they were aware that there were important political considerations as well. Truman and Acheson agreed that MacArthur was insubordinate, but the Joint Chiefs avoided any suggestion of this. Insubordination was a military offense, and MacArthur could have requested a public court martial similar to that of Billy Mitchell. The outcome of such a trial was uncertain, and it might well have found him not guilty and ordered his reinstatement.

The Joint Chiefs agreed that there was "little evidence that General MacArthur had ever failed to carry out a direct order of the Joint Chiefs, or acted in opposition to an order". "In point of fact", Bradley insisted, "MacArthur had stretched but not legally violated any JCS directives". He had violated the President's 6 December directive [not to make public statements on policy matters], relayed to him by the JCS, but this did not constitute a violation of a JCS order."

Truman ordered MacArthur's relief by Ridgway, and the order went out on 10 April with Bradley's signature.

In a 3 December 1973 article in Time magazine, Truman was quoted as saying in the early 1960s: I fired him because he wouldn't respect the authority of the President. I didn't fire him because he was a dumb son of a bitch, although he was, but that's not against the law for generals. If it was, half to three-quarters of them would be in jail.

The relief of the famous general by the unpopular politician for communicating with Congress led to a constitutional crisis and a storm of public controversy. Polls showed that the majority of the public disapproved of the decision to relieve MacArthur.

By February 1952, almost nine months later, Truman's approval rating had fallen to 22 percent. As of 2014, that remains the lowest Gallup Poll approval rating recorded by any serving president. As the increasingly unpopular war in Korea dragged on, Truman's administration was beset with a series of corruption scandals, and he eventually decided not to run for re-election.

Beginning on 3 May 1951, a Joint Senate Committee—chaired by Democrat Richard Russell Jr.—investigated MacArthur's removal.

It concluded that "the removal of General MacArthur was within the constitutional powers of the President but the circumstances were a shock to national pride".

Douglas MacArthur died in his sleep at Walter Reed Army Medical Center on 5 April 1964, of biliary cirrhosis. He was 84 years old.

President Kennedy had authorized a state funeral before he died in 1963, and Johnson confirmed the directive, ordering that MacArthur be buried "with all the honor a grateful nation can bestow on a departed hero".

On 7 April his body was taken to New York City, where it lay in an open casket at the Seventh Regiment Armory for about 12 hours. That night it was taken on a funeral train to Union Station and transported by a funeral procession to the Capitol, where it lay in state at the United States Capitol rotunda. An estimated 150,000 people fled by the border.

MacArthur was quoted by Justice Betty Ellerin of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court of the State of New York, First Department in the 23 July 1987 decision on the case "Dallas Parks, Respondent, v. George Steinbrenner et al., Appellants." The quote used was about him being "proud to have protected American freedoms, like the freedom to boo the umpire."



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HAS BEEN TAKEN FROM WHAT APPEARS TO BE AUTHENTIC WEBSITES
I CANNOT ENSURE THAT ALL THE DATA IN THIS ARTICLE IS ACCURATE AND CORRECT.