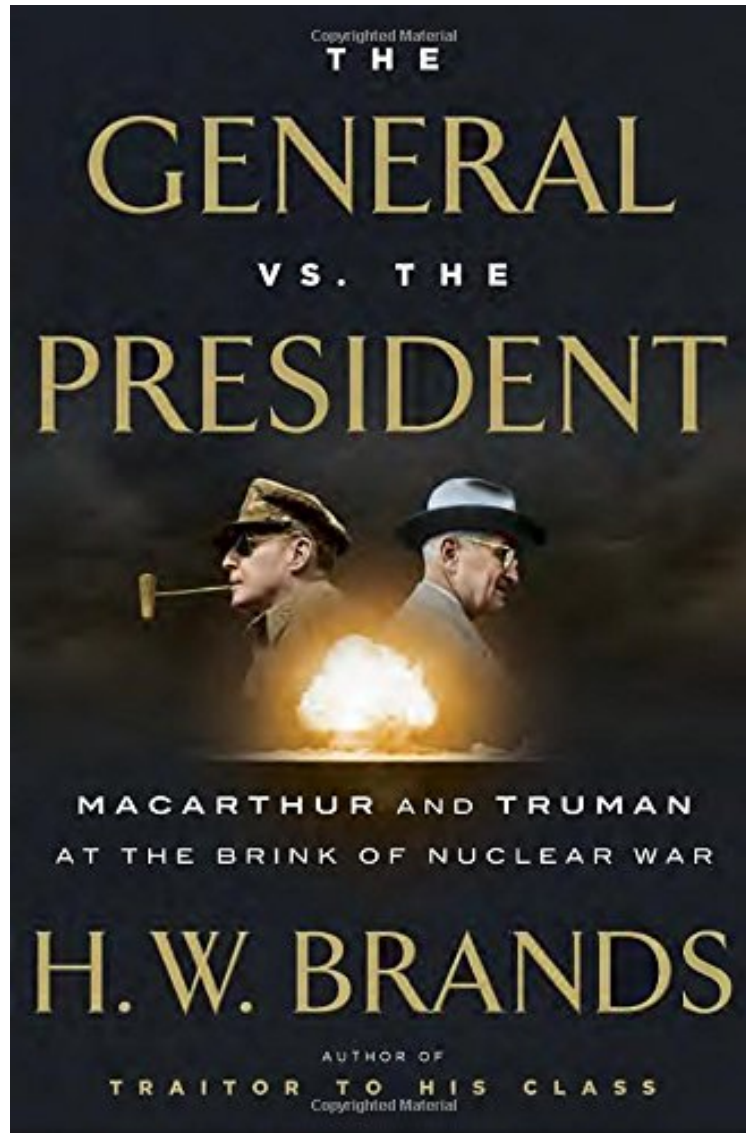


[Free] The General vs. the President: MacArthur and Truman at the Brink of Nuclear War

The General vs. the President: MacArthur and Truman at the Brink of Nuclear War

H. W. Brands

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#24594 in Books Brands H W 2016-10-11 2016-10-11 Original language: English PDF # 1 9.50 x 1.50 x 6.50l, 1.25 #File Name: 0385540574448 pages The General vs the President MacArthur and Truman at the Brink of Nuclear War | File size: 39.Mb

H. W. Brands : The General vs. the President: MacArthur and Truman at the Brink of Nuclear War before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The General vs. the President: MacArthur and Truman at the Brink of Nuclear War:

118 of 124 people found the following review helpful. The clash of wills between two volatile men makes for compelling history. By Michael Birman. The death of Franklin Roosevelt as World War Two entered its final stages thrust a little known Vice-President onto the world stage. Coarse where Roosevelt was refined, usually described by a skeptical press as a "failed haberdasher" and known for building a political career with the help of the Kansas City Democratic machine led by corrupt party boss Tom Pendergast (and later sarcastically hailed as "the senator from Pendergast"), little was expected from a Truman presidency as he assumed office with the war still raging on two fronts. Some of the most momentous decisions of the twentieth century were forced upon this unprepossessing man with a reputation for plain speaking and salty language. But history has a habit of producing great leaders during difficult days (not much was expected from President Abraham Lincoln either during equally dangerous times a century earlier). General Douglas MacArthur (like Lincoln's general George B. McClellan) was glamorous, willful, egotistical, a darling of the press and feverishly ambitious with political aspirations that were vast. Once described by an angry Roosevelt as "the most dangerous man in America", there was little that MacArthur needed to do in order to find and monopolize the spotlight. During their tense personal meetings, MacArthur's disrespect for Truman was galling. Yet somehow the notoriously feisty president managed to hold his temper when dealing with the general. With the new war in Korea becoming more dangerous by the hour and his leadership questioned from all corners, President Truman committed a serious slip-of-the-tongue when asked by a reporter about the possible use of atomic weapons in response to China's shocking entry into the war, Truman replied somewhat angrily that "the military commander in the field will have charge of the use of the weapons, as he always has." This suggested that General MacArthur, commander of the American and U.N. forces in the Korean theater, had his finger on the nuclear button and the will and temperament to push it. This was certainly NOT what the president wished to convey. Truman's quick correction did little to minimize the damage and the political fall-out was fierce. It created the illusion of two distinct and mutually exclusive paths to "victory" in this war, with the vision of an unpopular president pitted against that of the man who had single-handedly (or so he seemed to claim) won the war against Japan in the Pacific theater of operations. Truman appeared clueless to a war-weary public while General MacArthur appeared fearless and bold, unafraid of unleashing the nuclear genie despite Russia's recent entry into the "nuclear club." The two men soon clashed, spurred on by an American news media whose political agendas were as entrenched as today and just as noxious. The rise of Senator Joe McCarthy and his relentless anti-communist crusade, the ubiquitous House Un-American Activities Committee, staffed by a rising star in the Republican firmament Richard Nixon, who had recently broken the Alger Hiss spy case and relished the increasing acclaim, Soviet actions in blockading Berlin and threatening the freedom and safety of a nervous Europe, the testing of increasingly powerful and horrifying nuclear weapons and the heavy losses in Korea, all of these events served as a poisonous backdrop to the clash of wills between an obstinate and feisty President Truman and a supremely self-confident and narcissistic General MacArthur. The General vs. The President is exhaustive in detailing these events with a clear but unavoidable bias towards the president. History has been much kinder to Truman, who is generally considered to have been a great president (as discussed in David McCullough's masterful biography Truman). The flaws in General MacArthur's personality have been revealed and magnified over time but author H. W. Brands maintains as much fairness as is possible under the circumstances. The story of the struggle between these two men is riveting and fascinating with its obvious ramifications for today. The modern political world was born during this era and The General vs. The President does an exemplary job in telling the story. It often reads more like a political thriller as it delves into what can only be described as "high stakes poker" with its frequent raising of the stakes, bluffing and savage endgame with its winners and losers. The General vs. The President is compelling history that I often found difficult to put down. If you're interested in the Cold War era, the Korean War and the various political forces and actors engaged in a life-and-death-struggle for military and political supremacy, this is an indispensable book. An excellent history book and strongly recommended. 71 of 74 people found the following review helpful. Clarity and insight. By Geoff Arnold. I asked a few of my friends what they knew about Truman and MacArthur in the Korean War. All are well read in history; they all had an answer. And for most it was "MacArthur wanted to use nuclear weapons against China," (or North Korea, or Russia), "and Truman wasn't willing to use the bomb, so he had to fire MacArthur." And while there's a bit of truth to each part of their answers, that's not really how it all played out. And I think all of them would love to read "The General vs. the President". This is a wonderful work of history. I've read biographies of both MacArthur and Truman, but this book brought both of them to life in a fresh way, especially with respect to their relationships with others. The complex narrative is laid out with great clarity, including both military and political maneuvers. I particularly appreciated the account of MacArthur's Congressional hearings, and the striking contrast between the public posturing and the devastating closed sessions. In a way, both men are diminished by this history. Truman's reputation has been on the rise in recent years, because of his no-nonsense pragmatism, but as Brands shows clearly, Truman was in over his head, and he made careless mistakes. MacArthur did wonders in Japan, particularly in the way he transformed its politics, but his naivety about global geopolitics seems breathtaking from our perspective. Highly recommended. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Detailed Account of MacArthur Truman Controversy. By Ambrose Rankin. Brands gives a good deep dive into the MacArthur-Truman controversy. Most people know the overall story, but this book fills in a lot of the details with an almost day

by day narrative and extensive quoting from correspondence, press conferences and the ultimate Congressional hearings, At the same time, Brands writes so well this reads at times like a 1950s suspense novel. The book doesn't really break any new ground - with the famous Bradley quote about MacArthur's advocacy for the "wrong war, wrong enemy, wrong time, etc" still the best summary - but it is well worth a history fan's time.

From master storyteller and historian H. W. Brands comes the riveting story of how President Harry Truman and General Douglas MacArthur squared off to decide America's future in the aftermath of World War II. At the height of the Korean War, President Harry S. Truman committed a gaffe that sent shock waves around the world. When asked by a reporter about the possible use of atomic weapons in response to China's entry into the war, Truman replied testily, "The military commander in the field will have charge of the use of the weapons, as he always has." This suggested that General Douglas MacArthur, the willful, fearless, and highly decorated commander of the American and U.N. forces, had his finger on the nuclear trigger. A correction quickly followed, but the damage was done; two visions for America's path forward were clearly in opposition, and one man would have to make way. Truman was one of the most unpopular presidents in American history. Heir to a struggling economy, a ruined Europe, and increasing tension with the Soviet Union, on no issue was the path ahead clear and easy. General MacArthur, by contrast, was incredibly popular, as untouchable as any officer has ever been in America. The lessons he drew from World War II were absolute: appeasement leads to disaster and a showdown with the communists was inevitable--the sooner the better. In the nuclear era, when the Soviets, too, had the bomb, the specter of a catastrophic third World War lurked menacingly close on the horizon. The contest of wills between these two titanic characters unfolds against the turbulent backdrop of a faraway war and terrors conjured at home by Joseph McCarthy. From the drama of Stalin's blockade of West Berlin to the daring landing of MacArthur's forces at Inchon to the shocking entrance of China into the war, *The General and the President* vividly evokes the making of a new American era.

"The General vs. The President is that rare military chronicle that becomes an instant page-turning classic." *San Antonio Express-News* "Fast-paced, dramatic, and amply illustrates why Truman's stock has been on the rise in recent decades." *Boston Globe* "A vivid accounting of an event that was, on the surface, a personality conflict between two strong-minded figures and, at the bottom, a courageous act that solidified civilian authority over the military in wartime." *Dallas Morning News* "Brands spikes the shadowboxing between [Truman and MacArthur] with vivid dispatches from the battlefield that give his tale a get-along kick." *TIME* "A highly readable take on the clash of two titanic figures in a period of hair-trigger nuclear tensions . . . History offers few antagonists with such dramatic contrasts, and Brands brings these two to life." *Los Angeles Times* "Two American heroes tested and tried at their most inspired hours . . . An exciting, well-written comparison study of two American leaders at loggerheads during the Korean War crisis." *Kirkus* s, starred review About the Author H. W. BRANDS holds the Jack S. Blanton Sr. Chair in History at the University of Texas at Austin. A *New York Times* bestselling author, he was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in biography for *The First American* and *Traitor to His Class*. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. *The General vs. the President* PROLOGUE December 1950 Clement Attlee didn't like appearing flustered. The British prime minister's predecessor, Winston Churchill, was the one who indulged in dramatics: the speeches about blood, sweat and tears; finest hours; Iron Curtains. Attlee had evicted Churchill from 10 Downing Street at the end of World War II in no small part because the British people wanted less drama and more predictability. Yet the sudden news from America had even Attlee sweating. The House of Commons was debating the optimal course of British foreign policy when the BBC brought word that Harry Truman was brandishing the atom bomb against China. This itself horrified the British lawmakers. The American president was the only person in history who had ordered the use of the monstrous weapon, and a man who had atom-bombed Japan might, without additional scruple, do the same to China. But there was a crucial new element, these five years after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, that made the prospect still more appalling. The Russians had the bomb, too, and were China's allies. A nuclear war in 1950 would not be one-sided. And there was something else, something that pushed the alarm level in Britain far past that of any previous Cold War crisis. By Truman's own statement, the decision on use of the atom bomb rested with the American field commander in Korea, Douglas MacArthur. Attlee and many others in Britain could think of no one more frightening than MacArthur to have control of the bomb. MacArthur was brilliant, brave and imaginative even his critics granted that. But the general had isolated himself so long in Asia, and surrounded himself with such sycophants, that he had lost all perspective. He suffered from an extreme version of the theater commander's habit of thinking his own region the pivot of any conflict. During World War II MacArthur had behaved as though fascism would triumph or be defeated according to the outcome of battle in the Pacific; in the Cold War he contended that communism would win or lose depending on what happened in Asia. He had chafed at the communist victory in China's civil war, now a year past. The outbreak of fighting in Korea five months ago had given him his chance to engage the communists, and the sudden entry of China into the conflict, just a week ago, had raised the stakes dramatically. MacArthur seemed to relish the opportunity to smash the communists, using whatever weapons were available. And now Truman was making the ultimate weapon available. The House of Commons burst into an uproar on hearing the word from

Washington. Members of Attlees Labour party, already convinced that the Americans were reckless and MacArthur was a maniac, threatened a mutiny against their prime minister for his support of the American-led effort in Korea. To quell the uprising, Attlee announced that he would travel to America. He implied that he would talk sense and restraint into Truman. But he knew, and they knew, that this was more than he could guarantee. The mutiny hung fire, stemmed for the moment yet hardly vanquished. Britains alarm was broadly shared. None of the countries that had supported the United States in the defense of South Korea had bargained on the fighting there triggering World WarIII. The French distrusted MacArthur even more than the British did, and made no secret of the fact. The French National Assembly called for immediate negotiations to defuse the crisis in Korea. French premier Ren Pleven hastened to London to meet Attlee before the British prime minister left for Washington, and to lend his voice to those insisting that the Americans refrain from rash moves. Fear of the bomb united rightist and leftist parties in Italy, where protesters branded Truman a war criminal. West German officials, on the front line of the Cold War in Europe, refused to comment publicly but privately said Americas use of the bomb against China would almost certainly compel a Russian response, probably againstthem. Indias government, which earlier had conveyed a warning from Beijing that the Chinese would enter the Korean conflict if MacArthur insisted on sending U.S. troops to the Korean-Chinese bordera warning MacArthur had airily dismissednow predicted that a resort to greater force would provoke a cataclysm. Pope Pius XII urged Catholics to pray that the world might be spared. Americans shuddered as well. Is it World WarIII? asked the New York Times. The paper didnt say yes, but it couldnt say no. New Yorkers flooded the civil-defense offices of the city and state with demands to know where they should seek refuge when the Russian bombs began falling. The state director of civil defense tried to calm things but only made them worse when he said his office was operating on the basis that an atomic or other attack could take place at any time. The response in other cities and states was much the same. Members of Congress displayed caution about criticizing the president for standing up to the communists; none wanted to get into the crosshairs of Joseph McCarthy, at the peak of his red-baiting power. But several took pains to assert that the pertinent legislation gave authority over the use of the bomb to the president alone, not to any general. Nonpoliticians were less leery. Clergy and educators implored Truman to refrain from the terrible step he seemed to be contemplating. Frederick Nolde, speaking for the World Council of Churches, declared, We would veritably be playing into the hands of those who want to pin upon us the tangible responsibility for starting a world war.If the world was alarmed, Harry Truman was livid. And he blamed Douglas MacArthur for getting him into this mess. In his five years as president, Truman had tolerated repeated slights and affronts from MacArthur: the generals habit of making pronouncements on matters beyond his military responsibilities, his failure to return to America to brief the government on the U.S. occupation of Japan, his campaigning for president in 1948 without bothering to resign his command. Truman had suppressed his anger, lest a public row between the president and the general threaten the precarious stability of the Far East. When MacArthur had refused to travel more than half a day from his headquarters in Tokyo to discuss the war in Korea, Truman had undertaken the longjourney to Wake Island. There he heard the general state with utter selfassurance that the Chinese would never dare to enter the Korean fighting. If they did, they would be obliterated. A month later the Chinese entered the war. And they proceeded to manhandle MacArthurs army. Truman was stunned and outraged. How could MacArthur not have seen this coming? Had his arrogance simply blinded him? MacArthurs horrendous misjudgment had put Truman in an impossible position. Since 1945 the president had been walking a knife-edge of decision between appeasement and war: between yielding to communist pressure and tipping the planet into a new world conflict. In 1946 a stern warning had sufficed to keep the Kremlin from grabbing Iran. In 1947 a stronger dose of American power, in the form of military aid to Greece and Turkey, had preserved the Balkans from a communist takeover. A massive airlift in 1948 had kept Berlin free. The North Atlantic Treaty of 1949 made clear to Moscow that an attack on any of Americas allies would be met with the full force of Americas arsenal. Billions of dollars of Marshall Plan money continued to pour into Europe to bolster democracy there. The North Korean attack on South Korea in June1950 proved that the communists never rested. Truman had responded with measured force, enough to secure South Korea yet not so much as to bring the Soviets into the conflict. But then MacArthurs recklessness had provoked the Chinese to enter the fight. The Soviets, linked to the Chinese by a military pact, and as opportunistic as ever, wouldnt miss a chance to jump the United States where Americas alliances were most vulnerable, should the Asian war escalate further. And further escalation was exactly what MacArthur was demanding. The knife-edge that Truman had been walking suddenly terminated above an abyss. He couldnt go forward without risking a nuclear World WarIII. He couldnt retreat without undermining the morale of all who looked to America for leadership of the forces resisting communism. MacArthur had drastically narrowed the presidents options, and the general had the gall to complain that his hands were being tied. Reporters had heard of MacArthurs complaints; they knew they had a story. They asked Truman for a response. What measures would he authorize the general to employ to fend off the Chinese? Truman didnt want to answer this question, not least because hehadnt decided. Anyway, as a poker player he knew not to tip his hand. But as a Democratic president harassed by Republicans for softness on communism, he judged he had to say something. We will take whatever steps are necessary, he replied. Will that include the atomic bomb? a reporter asked. That includes every weapon we have. Does that mean that there is active consideration of the use of the atomic bomb? There has always been active

consideration of its use. This was huge news. Never had the president spoken so openly about using the bomb. Another reporter wanted to be sure he had heard Truman correctly. Did we understand you clearly that the use of the atomic bomb is under active consideration? Always has been, Truman said curtly. It is one of our weapons. How would the decision on use be made? The military commander in the field will have charge of the use of the weapons, as he always has. This was even bigger news. MacArthur's finger was on the nuclear trigger. The reporters scrambled to file their stories. The shock waves rolled around the world. As the extent of the alarm echoed back to Washington, Truman's advisers urged him to let the White House issue a clarification. Truman agreed, but grudgingly, for he prided himself on plain speaking. The clarification stated that use of the atom bomb had been under consideration since the start of hostilities in Korea; whenever the United States went to war, all weapons were considered. As to who would make the basic, strategic decision to use the bomb, that would be the president. Tactical choices about where and when the bomb would be used would be left to the military commander in the field. The clarification didn't alleviate the alarm, for it didn't materially revise Truman's own words. The president was considering the use of the bomb, and MacArthur would determine the time and place. Truman cursed his bad luck, and he cursed MacArthur. The last thing he wanted was to have to use atomic weapons. He claimed not to have lost sleep over the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but no one takes the deaths of a hundred thousand civilians lightly. He hoped not to have to make such a decision again. And this time the consequences would be far more terrible. World War II had ended with atomic bombings; World War III would begin with them. But he couldn't back down. The Chinese were watching. The Russians were watching. Americans were watching. The world was watching. Now Attlee was coming. Truman hated being on the spot like this: having to explain that he wasn't intending to start another world war, yet having to avoid seeming fearful or reluctant to oppose the communists. And it was MacArthur's doing. Truman couldn't decide whether the general was the damndest fool in the army, which had its share of fools, or the canniest political operator he had ever tangled with. Truman had to admit that MacArthur had outmaneuvered him, placing him on the brink of a broader war against China, when that was the last place he wanted to be. Douglas MacArthur, sitting calmly in his office on the top floor of the Dai Ichi Building in central Tokyo, wondered what all the fuss was about. MacArthur disdained politicians as a class, whether prime ministers or presidents. He believed politicians lacked the knowledge or nerve to make the decisions national safety required. He had dealt with presidents for decades and not found one who didn't falter at the moment of truth or put partisan self-interest ahead of the country's interest. This was why he had kept his distance from Washington. His deliberate exile was in its sixteenth year; he had resisted repeated requests from the White House to come home, and he would continue to resist them as long as he could. His work was more important than what consumed the office seekers. He had guided the Philippines to independence; he had defeated imperial Japan and was building a republican Japan. For the last five months he had been holding the line against communism in Korea. He was on the verge of doing much more. Since 1945 freedom had been in retreat; communism had captured Eastern Europe and then China. It had come close to engulfing all of Korea. But there he had made a stand and subsequently sent the communists reeling. His success was no thanks to Washington, where the president and his advisers had fretted and quavered until he Douglas MacArthur had taken the responsibility upon himself and plunged ahead. In short order he accomplished what no one else, no president, no general had accomplished during the Cold War, rolling back the red tide and reclaiming territory previously lost to communism. And once more he defied the fretters, who didn't want to upset the communists of China. He again assumed responsibility and ordered his troops to the Korean border with China. It was then that the Chinese entered the war, causing everyone in Washington and London and several other world capitals, apparently to run for cover. MacArthur took the new development in stride. He admitted that he hadn't expected such large numbers of Chinese to appear in Korea. But what the politicians interpreted as a mauling he accounted the cost of springing the Chinese trap. He had foiled the communists' plan to annihilate his army; he was retreating but stretching their supply lines and rendering them vulnerable to his airpower. He now had the communists just where he wanted them. All that was required was nerve in Washington. He didn't expect it to appear unprompted. Harry Truman was no less the political animal than Franklin Roosevelt, whom MacArthur had had to educate during World War II. Truman might be educated, too. The general took encouragement from the president's remarks about the atom bomb; maybe he did see what was at stake in Korea. Would he follow through? Could he stand up to Attlee and the others who would beseech him to step back? Time would tell. Was it World War III? Not yet. But if a lifetime at arms had taught Douglas MacArthur anything, it was that an inordinate fear of war was the surest guarantor of war. Hadn't the democracies learned anything from Hitler? Appeasement of the fascists had caused World War II; appeasement of the communists would cause World War III. Only the brave deserved to live free. MacArthur classed himself among the brave. His country had agreed with his self-assessment, having awarded him all the medals and ribbons it issued. He had risen to the challenge of battle on numerous occasions in the past half century, and, at seventy, he was not too old to rise to the challenge again. He was ready, indeed eager. He had felt this same thrill of anticipation at the crucial moments of World War II, when history had rested on his shoulders. He had delivered then. And if the politicians would get out of his way, he would deliver once more.