

# THE COLD WAR

## The Causes of the Cold War

Political differences: Communism vs. Capitalism

As its heart, the Cold War was a conflict between **two different ideologies**. The Soviet Union was a **communist country**, where the state controls all the property, industry and services and freedoms (of elections, of the media and of the individual) are limited. The US was a **Capitalist economy**, where individuals are free to acquire wealth, own private property and profit from business with little to no interference from the government. It was also a **democracy**, where there were various political parties, political parties, people could vote in elections and the free press and free speech were protected.

Conflict and mistrust during World War Two

Although the Soviets and the Americans had fought as allies to defeat Hitler, there were tensions between them during the war. **Stalin**, the Soviet leader, believed that Britain and the US (the Western Allies) had deliberately delayed the **D-Day landings** so that the Soviets would suffer more damage by fighting the Nazis alone. In addition, the US refuse to share the secrets of the **atomic bomb** with the Soviets when they used it to defeat Japan in August 1945.

### **The Iron Curtain**



After World War II, Stalin wanted to create a '**buffer zone**' to protect the USSR from future invasions. This meant he would need states in Eastern Europe that were loyal to the Soviets. He imposed communist governments on Poland,

Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria. These were known as the '**satellite states**' as they were under the control of Moscow. The West believed that the Soviets were aggressively expanding their control of Europe. Many feared that they would try to take over the rest of Europe as well.

'From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic an 'Iron Curtain' has descended across the continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the Ancient States of Central and Eastern Europe. [They] lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere and all are subject, in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and in some cases increasing measures of control from Moscow.'

Winston Churchill (1946)

## Containment

In response to Soviet actions, US President Harry Truman announced a new policy called the **Truman Doctrine**. This declared that the US would aid other countries to resist the spread of Communism. In a speech to the US Congress in March 1947, Truman said "I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free people who pressures". The US promised to provide **military aid** to any country that was fighting communist forces within its own state.

In addition, the US government announced it would **provide funds** to help Europe rebuild after World War 2. Under the **Marshall Plan**, named after the US Secretary of State General **George Marshall**, the US spent over **\$15 billion** on helping Western Europe to rebuild. They believed that if these countries were economically prosperous, they would be better able to resist communism. Stalin refused to allow countries in Eastern Europe to receive the aid, fearing it would weaken his control over them. President Truman understood that he could not remove communism from countries where it was already established, as this would mean war against the Soviets, but he did believe that he could limit its spread. This became known as the policy of **containment**.

## The Berlin Blockade 1948-1949

## Germany after World War 2



▲ Post-war Germany showing the four zones and the division of Berlin into sectors

During the war, the Allied leaders had agreed how to deal with Germany after it was defeated:

- Germany would be divided into **four zones**, occupied by the Americans, British, Soviets and French.
- **Berlin**, although it was in the middle of the Soviet Zone, would also be divided into **four sectors**, one for each of the allies
- The division of Germany would be **temporary**, until a new, peaceful country was created.

Germany was devastated after the war and its people faced great economic and social hardship. The Allies disagreed about the future of the country. The USSR demanded compensation from Germany for the terrible damage it had suffered during the war. It wanted a permanently weakened Germany that would never be a threat again. The others wanted a strong, prosperous, democratic Germany that would be an obstacle to communism and be the economic anchor of Europe.

## The Berlin Blockade

Tensions came to a head when the Western allies introduced a new currency to their zones and sectors of Berlin. They intended the new **Deutschmark** to help revive the economy. The Soviets refused to allow the new currency to be used in their zone and sector of Berlin and retaliated on 24 June 1948 by cutting off all road, rail and canal links to West Berlin. Stalin hoped that he could force the Allies to leave the city.

## The Berlin Airlift

This was the first major confrontation of the Cold War. The Western countries were determined not to give in to the Soviets and they decided to supply Berlin by air. They gambled that Stalin would not risk all-out war by shooting down an airplane. Codenamed **Operation Vittles**, it was a huge operation, as they had to fly cargo planes into three airports in West Berlin bringing food, clothing, medical supplies and fuel for over 2.5 million people. The airlifts continued until April 1949. Stalin eventually realised he would not be able to drive the Allies out of the city. The Allies were able to deliver more supplies by air than they had delivered by road and rail before the Blockade.



▲ Berliners watching Operation Vittles in action

## The results of the Berlin Blockade and Airlift

- The Soviets were prepared to increase pressure on the West but were unwilling to provoke a direct military confrontation.
- The division of Germany became permanent. The three western zones became the **Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany)**, which was a democratic and capitalist country. The Soviets created the **German Democratic Republic (East Germany)** in their zone. It was a communist country within the Soviet sphere of influence.
- The US, Canada and ten other Western European states set up the **North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)** in 1949. This was a military alliance: its members agreed to support each other against attack by other states.
- The Soviets accelerated their nuclear weapons programme and detonated an atomic bomb in 1949. They also set up a military alliance in Eastern Europe in 1955 called the **Warsaw Pact**.
- The detonation of the Soviet atomic bomb started the **arms race**. Both sides in the Cold War spent billions every year to build bigger and more powerful nuclear weapons that could wipe out the other side. They also created huge, well-equipped armies with the latest technology.

## 29.3: The Korean War, 1950–1953



- The partition of Korea
- The course of the Korean War
- The impact of the war

### Korea after World War II

Korea was a former Japanese territory that had been divided along a map line called **the 38th parallel** at the end of World War II. In **North Korea**, the Soviets established a communist government. **South Korea** had a US-backed government. It was expected that there would be free elections in 1948 to create a united, democratic Korea. These elections did not take place due to mistrust on both sides. The victory of the communists, under **Chairman Mao Zedong**, in the **Chinese Civil War** in 1949 increased tensions in the region.

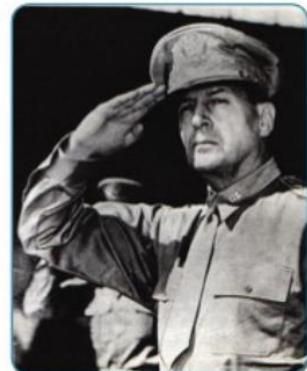
### North Korea's invasion of the South

There were several military clashes in 1949 along the border between the two states. In June 1950, the North Korean army invaded the South. They had Soviet weapons and quickly pushed the South Korean army back, taking the capital, **Seoul**. President Truman believed that if the US did not help, the South would be conquered. He ordered US military support for the South and persuaded the United Nations to send an army to help them.

#### ▼ Fighting in the Korean War



▲ Chairman Mao



▲ General MacArthur

## The war escalates



▲ The four stages of the Korean War

In September 1950, UN forces (mostly US, but with soldiers from 15 other countries) landed at **Inchon**, west of Seoul, under the command of US **General Douglas MacArthur**. They quickly drove the North Koreans out of the South and MacArthur ordered them to advance into North Korea. The UN forces headed for **the Yalu river**, which was the border with China. The Chinese thought MacArthur intended to invade China and they sent 500,000 soldiers to help the North Koreans repel them.

MacArthur wanted to attack communist China with nuclear weapons. Truman worried this would bring the Soviets into the war and could start World War III. Truman rejected MacArthur's proposal and fired him after the general criticised him. The war settled into a stalemate along the 38th parallel and dragged on until 1953. In June 1953, the two sides agreed to a truce to end the war.

## The consequences of the Korean War

- **The division of Korea became permanent.** The North became a brutal communist dictatorship. The South emerged as a prosperous, industrialised capitalist economy.
- The US considered the war a success for the policy of **containment**, as communism had been stopped from spreading to South Korea. As in Berlin, all-out war had been avoided while the communists had been confronted and contained.
- **The Cold War divided Asia**, as it had Europe. The US gained new allies in South Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand. The Soviets and the Chinese became allies.

## 29.4: The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962



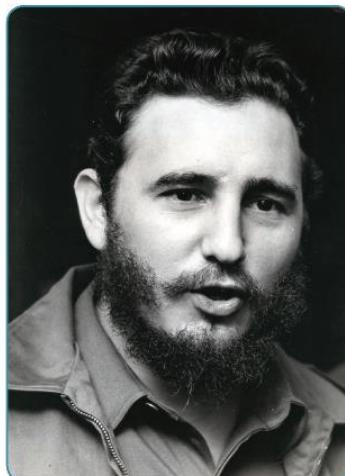
- The background to the Cuban Missile Crisis
- The events of October 1962
- The results of the crisis

### Background: The Cuban Revolution

In October 1962, the world stood on **the brink of nuclear war**. Tensions between the superpowers had been rising for some time, especially over Berlin. The crisis, however, was over a small island some 140 km off the coast of Florida. In 1959, **Fidel Castro** led a communist revolution to overthrow the US-backed government of **Cuba**. Castro took over many US-owned businesses on the island and the US cut off trade to Cuba. The Soviets agreed to buy Cuban sugar and to sell weapons to Castro.

### Background: The Bay of Pigs

US President **John F. Kennedy** authorised the **Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)** to plan an invasion by anti-Castro Cuban exiles in April 1961. It was a total disaster: Castro's forces easily defeated the invaders. Castro asked the Soviets for more weapons to defend against a future invasion. At the same time, Soviet leader **Nikita Khrushchev** was worried about the nuclear missiles that the US had stationed in Europe, which could reach Soviet cities. Khrushchev offered to build missile bases in Cuba that would be able to hit cities all across the US.



▲ Fidel Castro



▲ Nikita Khrushchev



▲ John F. Kennedy

### October 1962: The world on the brink of war

In October 1962, an **American U-2 spy plane** photographed a missile base being built in Cuba. The Americans realised that these missiles could reach nearly every major US city. On television, Kennedy announced a **naval blockade** of Cuba. The US navy would prevent any ship from landing in Cuba until the Soviets agreed to remove the missiles. US forces around the world were on full alert. As Soviet ships continued to sail towards Cuba, the world seemed to be heading for a nuclear war.

After several days of tense stand-off, the two sides came to an agreement to end the crisis. The US publicly declared that it would not invade Cuba and Kennedy privately promised Khrushchev that he would remove US missiles from Turkey. In return, the Soviets agreed to dismantle the missiles and remove them from Cuba. The Soviet ships turned around and returned home.

## Consequences of the Cuban Missile Crisis

Both superpowers took steps to avoid nuclear war in the future:

- A **telephone hotline** was set up between Moscow and Washington to deal with potential crises when they arose.
- The **Nuclear Test Ban Treaty** was agreed by the superpowers and others that banned atomic testing on land, sea or in space.



▲ The Cuban missile sites and their potential strike range

Go to page 164 of your Sources and Skills Book for an evidence task on Khrushchev's account of the crisis.

## 29.5: The Vietnam War, 1964–1975



- The background to the Vietnam War
- US involvement in the war
- The results of the war

### Vietnam after World War II

Before World War II, Vietnam had been a French colony. It was occupied by the Japanese during the war until local communist forces drove them out of the northern half of the country in 1945. When the French tried to return after the defeat of Japan, these forces, the **Viet Minh** under **Ho Chi Minh**, fought back and by 1954 they had forced the French out. Vietnam was partitioned, with the North under communist rule and the South ruled by a pro-Western government. When promised elections to unify the country did not take place, the North attacked the South.

### US involvement

Due to its policy of **containment**, the US had financially aided the French in their war against the Viet Minh. It also sent aid and troops to help the South after the North attacked. Initially the troops numbered only in the hundreds, but that rose to over **16,000** under President Kennedy. After Kennedy's death in 1963, President **Lyndon Johnson** continued to increase troop levels until they reached **500,000** in 1968. Johnson sent them into direct combat with the communists in Vietnam in 1965.

### The war in Vietnam

The North Vietnamese fighters, called **Vietcong**, adopted **guerrilla tactics** against the Americans and their Southern allies. They attacked in small groups, hid in the jungles and constantly disrupted their opponents' supply lines. They had the support of the people in rural areas, who hid them and their weapons. The Americans were unable to deal effectively with these tactics. They used chemicals to destroy the jungles, burned villages where guerillas were believed to be hiding and bombed the North heavily. These actions only strengthened support for the Vietcong in many areas.



▲ North and South Vietnam, divided by a demilitarised zone (DMZ)



▲ North Vietnamese guerilla fighters

Over 58,000 US soldiers were killed and tens of thousands were injured. The Vietnamese casualties numbered in the millions. The destruction, death and seemingly never-ending war produced the **anti-war movement** in the US, where huge protest marches took place from 1967 onwards.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

In order to avoid American patrols, the North Vietnamese brought supplies to their fighters in the South through neighbouring Laos and Cambodia along the 'Ho Chi Minh Trail'.

### The end of the war

The US and the Viet Minh fought to a **stalemate** until the war's unpopularity pressured President **Richard Nixon** to 'bring the troops home'. In 1972, a ceasefire agreement was signed between the US, the North Vietnamese and the South's government. The US pulled out their troops in 1973. In 1975, the North launched a full-scale invasion of the South, and the Southern capital of Saigon fell in April 1975.

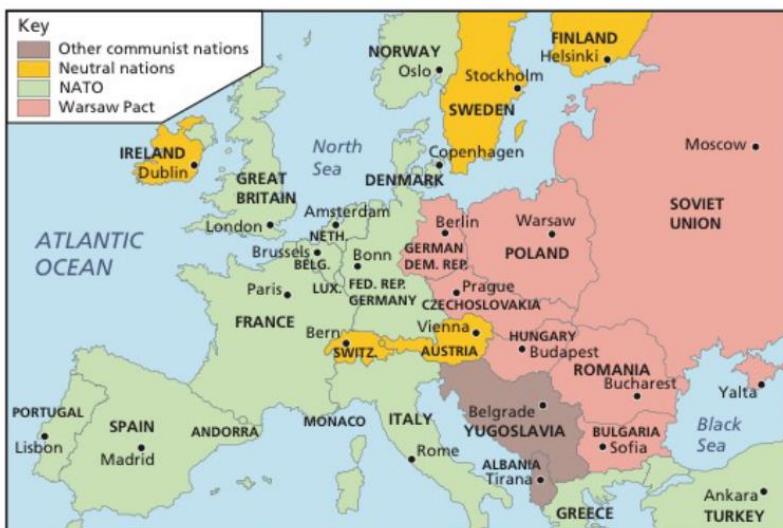


▲ US soldiers in Vietnam

### Results of the Vietnam War

- The policy of **containment** failed in Vietnam. South Vietnam became communist and the spread of the fighting during the war meant that the neighbouring countries of Laos and Cambodia became communist as well.
- The US suffered a **humiliating defeat** at the hands of a guerrilla army of farmers and workers in one of the poorest countries in the world. It was much more cautious in sending its army overseas again during the Cold War.
- **Deep divisions** were opened up in US society, where many people vehemently opposed the war.

## 29.6: Eastern Europe under the Soviets



▲ Political allegiance in Europe at the beginning of the 1950s

### Controlling Eastern Europe

In the years immediately after World War II, the Soviets ensured that communist governments were set up in the countries of Eastern Europe. These countries and the Soviet Union were together known as **the Eastern Bloc**. In the following decades, the USSR had to retain its control over these countries. It did this through various means:

- Economic: In response to the Marshall Plan, the Soviet Union launched **Comecon** in 1949. It claimed this was to give economic aid to other communist countries, but in reality, it allowed Moscow to exert control over their economies.
- Military: The **Warsaw Pact** was established in 1955 as a military alliance, like NATO. This brought the armies of the satellite states under direct Soviet control.
- Political: The Soviets used an organisation called **Cominform** to coordinate the activities of local communist parties. This ensured that local communist leaders were loyal to Moscow and did as they were told.

### Soviet control in action

For the most part, the Soviets allowed the satellite states to run their own affairs, as long as they did not endanger communist rule. A number of times they intervened directly into the satellite states to ensure continued Soviet control:

1. **1953:** Workers on strike in East Berlin were attacked by Soviet tanks stationed in the city.
2. **1956:** During the **Hungarian Uprising**, there were mass protests against the USSR and the local communist government. The protesters appealed to the West for help, but they were ignored. The uprising was crushed by a Soviet invasion after 13 days.
3. **1961:** **The Berlin Wall** was built to stop people fleeing from East Berlin to the West. Afterwards, anyone trying to cross over was shot by the border guards.
4. **1968:** The Czechoslovakian government tried to introduce more freedoms for its people in the **Prague Spring**. Moscow sent in tanks, as it feared that the country might try to leave the Eastern Bloc.
5. **1980–1981:** Workers in Poland formed the **Solidarity** trade union to demand more rights and better pay from the government. Under the threat of a Soviet invasion, the Polish government imposed military rule (**martial law**) on the country and arrested the leaders of Solidarity.

The threat of the Soviet Union using military force kept the governments and people of Eastern Europe under its control for over forty years.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

In 1983, the Soviet Union's military leaders mistook army training manoeuvres by NATO forces in Western Europe as the first step in an attack. They almost launched a full-scale nuclear strike that would have started World War III before they realised the truth. No one in the West had any idea how close the world had come to war until years later.



▲ Soviet tanks during the Prague Spring

## 29.7: Mikhail Gorbachev and the End of the Cold War



- The life of Mikhail Gorbachev
- Gorbachev's reforms in the Soviet Union
- The fall of communism in Eastern Europe

### A Life in Time: Mikhail Gorbachev (1931–)

#### *Early life and career*

**Mikhail Gorbachev** was born in 1931 in southern Russia. As a student, he became active in the Communist Party while studying law in Moscow. He made a name for himself in the party as a reformer and in 1978 he was appointed to the agricultural Central Committee and later to the Soviet Union's executive committee, the **Politburo**.

#### *Gorbachev's reforms*

By the 1980s, the Soviet economy was in need of drastic reform. In 1985, after three elderly leaders died in quick succession, Gorbachev was appointed leader of the Soviet Union. He believed that the cost of the Cold War was too high and the USSR could no longer afford the arms race. He wanted to **reduce military spending** so he could spend that money to **improve the lives of Soviet citizens**. He announced two major changes:

- **Glasnost** (meaning 'openness'): Gorbachev's policy to open up discussion in Soviet society: political prisoners were freed, censorship was relaxed and people were encouraged to suggest new ideas to fix the economy
- **Perestroika** (meaning 'restructuring'): Gorbachev's policy to reform and open up the Soviet economy by allowing some private ownership of business and land.

#### *The end of the Cold War*

Gorbachev saw that vast sums of money were being poured into the military to keep up with the US, which was spending **\$550 billion** a year on defence under President **Ronald Reagan**. Gorbachev and Reagan met several times and built a new relationship based on trust. They made important nuclear disarmament agreements, which dramatically reduced nuclear weaponry and tensions between East and West.



▲ Ronald Reagan with Mikhail Gorbachev

### ***The collapse of Communism***

In 1988, Gorbachev declared that the Soviet army would no longer be used to keep communist governments in power in Eastern Europe. The following year, protests broke out in all the countries under communist rule. Without the Soviet army to back them up, each of the communist governments fell. In November 1989, the Berlin Wall – the symbol of the Cold War – was opened and communist rule came to an end in Europe.



▲ The fall of the Berlin Wall, 9 November 1989

Gorbachev's reforms made the problems of the Soviet Union worse. The economy continued to decline, debt soared and people began to openly demand the end of communist rule. By the end of 1991, Gorbachev had lost control of the situation as states (such as Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) began to break away from the Soviet Union, and he resigned as Soviet leader. **The Soviet Union ceased to exist and the Cold War came to an end.**

- The Cold War was the period of heightened international tension between the superpowers and their allies after World War II. There were a number of causes:
  - different political and economic systems
  - tensions and mistrust during World War II
  - the Soviet takeover of Eastern Europe behind the 'Iron Curtain'
  - the US policy of containment under the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan.
- During the Cold War there were several major crises between the superpowers. The first was in Berlin in 1948– 1949, when the Soviets tried to force the Western Allies out of the city by cutting off supply lines. This failed when the Allies were able to supply the city through airlifts.
- In 1950, North Korea invaded South Korea. The UN sent armed forces to drive them back but when the US appeared to be threatening China, the Chinese deployed a huge army to support the North Koreans. After three years of fighting, a truce left North and South Korea as separate countries.
- The closest the world came to nuclear war was during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. The US blockaded the island to prevent the Soviets from basing nuclear weapons 144 km from Florida. The stand-off was eventually resolved when the US promised not to invade Cuba and to remove its own missiles from Turkey if the Soviets removed theirs from Cuba.
- The US fought the Vietnam War during the 1960s and early 1970s. It was humiliated by its failure to defeat the communist guerrilla fighters in the jungles.
- The Cold War eventually ended in the late 1980s when the Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, decided to reform the Soviet system. He wanted to reduce military spending and to do this he sought to reduce tensions with the West. He also was no longer willing to use military force to keep communists in power in Eastern Europe. Those governments all collapsed by late 1989.

### Reflecting on... the Cold War

The Cold War dominated international relations in the second half of the twentieth century. Never before had the human race possessed the ability, through nuclear weapons, to completely eradicate all life on the planet. On several occasions, it seemed likely that World War III would break out. However, it was almost certainly the fear of mutual annihilation that kept the peace.