

## The Cold War

Although, hostility, suspicion, and sharp ideological differences had marked the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union ever since 1917 Revolution, the two nations found themselves as allies against a common enemy during the Second World War. Yet, despite whatever cooperation may have existed in their combined efforts to defeat Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, tension between the U.S. and its Soviet partner began mounting even before the end of the conflict. Eventually emerging from the war as the world's leading superpowers, the two nations quickly became global rivals in the post-war era. Beginning with issues surrounding the future of Europe, the rivalry, unlike past ones, became centered not merely on the exercise political and economic influence, but on each nation spreading its ideology across the world; the United States (along with its weakened Western allies) embodying liberal democracy and free market economics, and the Soviet Union representing Communist autocracy. The future of many nations hung in the balance. Amazingly, despite each nation's readiness to annihilate the other militarily, they managed to avoid confronting each other on the field of battle and engaged in this struggle largely through economics, espionage, various proxy wars, and promoting the superiority of each one's system to a world audience; hence the term, "Cold War."

### The Yalta Conference, February 4-11, 1945



*The "Big 3." From left to right: Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin at Yalta*

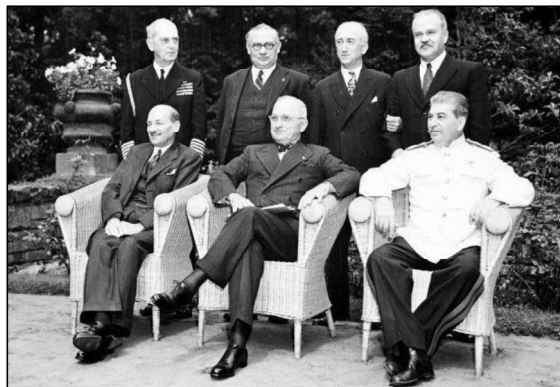
This last wartime conference among the "Big 3" (President Franklin Roosevelt for the United States, Prime Minister Winston Churchill for Great Britain, and Premier Joseph Stalin for the Soviet Union) was held in the resort city of Yalta on the Crimean Peninsula a few months before the end of the war in Europe. By this time, tensions and suspicions were high between the Western democracies and the Soviet Union. Issues for which there was cooperation at the conference included:

- In exchange for the USSR entering the Pacific War against Japan, it would receive formerly-held Russian territories in the Pacific
- Agreements were reached on plans for the United Nations

Discord included:

- The future of Eastern Europe, especially Poland. The USSR, whose armies occupied Poland, had already established a pro-Soviet, Communist puppet state there (under the “Lublin Poles”). Stalin vaguely promised Roosevelt and Churchill that he would include pro-western Poles in the government at some undetermined point and hold free elections both in Poland and the other Eastern European states it had liberated from Germany (Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria).
- Post-war Germany.
  - The powers agreed that Germany would, at the start, be divided into allied occupation zones with the goal of reuniting the nation at an unspecified time.
  - The Western leaders sought to reconstruct their sectors of Germany in order not to repeat the mistakes of the post-World War I settlement. Stalin insisted on reparations that would cripple Germany.

### The Potsdam Conference, July 17- August 2, 1945



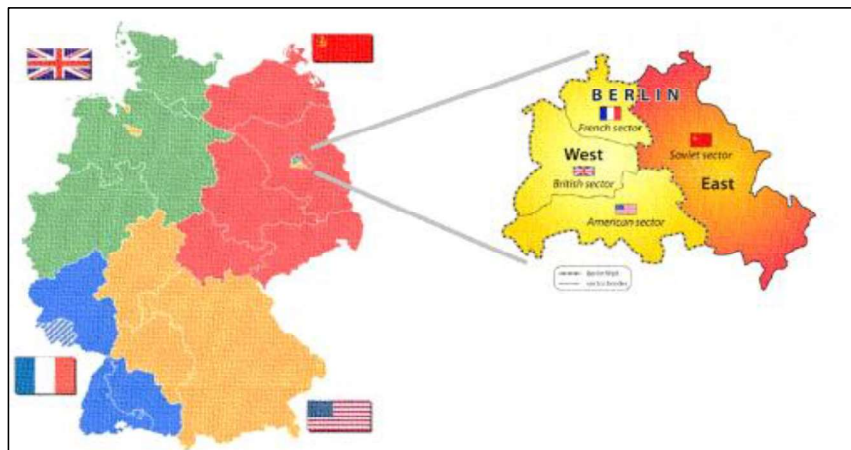
*From left to right: Attlee, Truman, and Stalin at the Potsdam Conference*

Held in the Berlin suburb of Potsdam after the end of the European War (and while the Pacific War still raged) and the death of Franklin Roosevelt, the United States was represented by President Harry S. Truman. During the conference, British Prime Minister Churchill was replaced by Clement Attlee and Stalin continued to lead the Soviet Union. By the time the conference began, Soviet actions in Eastern and Central Europe since the Yalta Conference had inflamed hostility and alarmed the Western democracies. These included:

- Stalin's refusal to include pro-Western Poles in the Polish government, despite his previous promises
- The Soviet Union's forcible establishment of pro-Communist puppet states in other recently-liberated states in Eastern and Central Europe (Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and, soon, Czechoslovakia)

During the Potsdam Conference, the following issues, among others, were decided upon:

- The official division of Germany into four defined occupation zones to be administered by the United States, Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union. The arrangement was to be overseen by the Allied Control Council. The city of Berlin, deep in occupied Germany's Soviet Zone, would likewise be divided between the four powers.



- Setting the Oder-Neisse line as the border between Germany and Poland, giving Poland former German territory to its west, while the Soviet Union seized territory in eastern Poland.
- Denazification and demilitarization of Germany and the prosecution of Nazi war criminals
- Recognition by the Western allies of the Soviet-controlled Polish government
- German reparations. The Western allies were against allowing the Soviet Union to extract monetary reparations from its occupation zones. Each occupying power would decide upon reparations from its own zone.

## The Iron Curtain



*Winston Churchill at Fulton, Missouri, 1946*

With animosity rising between the Western allies and the Soviet Union, especially over the latter's creation Soviet-controlled Communist satellites in the Eastern European states it controlled (instead of holding free elections, as promised), British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, during a speech at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, spoke of an "Iron Curtain" that had descended across Europe, essentially dividing the democratic West and the Soviet-controlled East into opposing camps. He stated:

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. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia, all these famous cities and the populations around them 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 many cases, increasing measure of control from Moscow."

## The Truman Doctrine and Containment



*President Truman before joint session of Congress, March 12, 1947*

In 1947, Great Britain informed the United States it could no longer financially support the pro-western government of Greece in its war against Communist insurgents—an insurgency funded by the Soviet Union and its Communist “allies.” In addition, Turkey needed assistance in its effort to keep the Soviets from controlling the critically strategic Dardanelles Strait. As the only nation financially and militarily capable of leading the effort against what appeared to be the early stages of a Soviet attempt to expand Communism globally, the United States faced a decision that would change its national trajectory more fundamentally than perhaps at any point in its history. If it agreed to help the Greeks and Turks, which was deemed necessary to stop Communist expansion into the Mediterranean, the United States would be accepting the role of a permanent international power, checking and countering the Soviet Union by providing assistance to all nations fighting against a Communist takeover. Accepting this responsibility represented, indeed, a dramatic break from the traditional peacetime isolationist foreign policy of the United States. On March 12, President Truman, stepping up to the challenge posed by the Soviet Union and march of international Communism, asked Congress to provide aid to Greece and Turkey. In his address, he stated:

I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free people who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures. The free peoples of the world look to us for support in maintaining their freedom. If we falter in our leadership, we may endanger the peace of the world and we shall surely endanger the welfare of this nation.

This new foreign policy approach would become known as the **Truman Doctrine**.

By this time, of course, with the Soviet Union having already subjugated the states of Eastern and Central Europe, the United States had little hope of dislodging it from there except through another major war—a prospect no one desired. Therefore, to apply the Truman Doctrine, it adopted the policy of “containing” Communism where it presently existed and thereby prevent its further spread. This policy of “containment” was based on the “**Long Telegram**” authored by George Kennan, the U.S. Chargé d’Affaires in Moscow. Kennan argued that, “. . . the main element of any United States policy toward the Soviet Union must be that of a long-term patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies.” He further believed that Soviet power would break up or mellow through, “adroit and vigilant application of counter-force at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points, corresponding to the shifts and maneuvers of Soviet policy.”

Over the years of the Cold War, containment emerged as the central feature of U.S. foreign policy and the Truman Doctrine. The strategy was held up by several pillars that decisively enhanced American global power. These included:

- Maintaining a large **peacetime military presence** and **military bases** in Europe and other parts of the world
- A new, peacetime **military draft**
- The establishment of a **military alliance** with pro-Western democracies
- The creation of the **National Security Council**, the **Department of Defense**, the **Central Intelligence Agency**, and the **Strategic Air Command**
- The implementation of the **Marshall Plan** (\$13 billion), designed to revive Europe's war-torn economies, thus countering Communist influence in the Western democracies

### [A Divided Germany and the Berlin Airlift](#)



*Allied airplane landing in West Berlin during the Berlin Airlift*

In 1948, the United States, Great Britain, and France decided to proceed with a single constitution for their occupation zones in Germany, which included the areas they occupied in the western parts of Berlin (soon to be known as "West Berlin"), deep in the Soviet zone. They soon followed with the introduction of a new currency for their occupation zones. In June, an angry Soviet Union responded by cutting off all railroads and highways leading to West Berlin. They hoped to force the Germans there into submission and compel the Western allies into abandoning them. In response, the Western allies, led by the United States, **airlifted food and supplies to the people of West Berlin** until May 1949, when the Soviets finally relented and reopened the roads and railways. During the **Berlin Airlift**, an allied airplane carrying supplies landed in West Berlin, on average, every three minutes.

With tension soaring between the Western democracies and the Soviet Union, two separate Germanys finally emerged. The American, British, and French zones (as well as West Berlin)

united to create the **Federal Republic of Germany** (“West Germany,” under pro-western democratic leaders), while Germany’s eastern zone became the **German Democratic Republic** (“East Germany,” a Communist dictatorship led by hand-picked Soviet puppets).



## [The North Atlantic Treaty Organization \(NATO\) and the Warsaw Pact](#)

As the Berlin Airlift began to wind down in 1949, the Western democracies banded together in the spirit of collective security to create the **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)**, a military alliance designed to face the Soviet threat across the Iron Curtain. The founding nations included: Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, France, Great Britain, Italy, Denmark, Norway, Portugal, Iceland, Canada, and the United States. Within a few years, West Germany, Turkey, and Greece were added.

The Soviet Union followed a few years later by creating its own alliance, called the **Warsaw Pact**, among the satellite states it controlled in Eastern and Central Europe. It included: Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and the Soviet Union.

The two sides, prepared to fight a third world war, faced off against one another along the Iron Curtain until the fall of Communism in Europe.

## [The Cold War in Asia](#)

### **China:**

In 1949, **Mao Zedong** and his Communist forces, after a long civil war, drove the pro-Western Nationalist forces under Chiang Kai-shek off the Chinese mainland and proclaimed the People’s Republic of China. Chiang and his followers established themselves on the island of Taiwan and proclaimed themselves as the legitimate government of China. Although the United States recognized Chiang’s government as such (until the 1970s), it now faced a new Communist threat in Asia.

## **Korea:**

Following the Second World War, the United States and the Soviet Union divided the Korean Peninsula, previously occupied by Imperial Japan, along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. Although the division was meant to be temporary, two nations emerged: a Soviet-supported Communist dictatorship in the north (**North Korea, or the Democratic People's Republic of Korea**), and a pro-Western, United States-supported government in the south (**South Korea, or the Republic of Korea**).

In June, 1950, Communist North Korea invaded pro-Western South Korea. The United States, in its first major test to stop the spread of Communism outside of Europe, sent military aid to South Korea and requested that the newly-created **United Nations** intervene. American military involvement soon increased. After its expulsion of North Korean troops from South Korea and a successful invasion of North Korea, the American and pro-Western armies were forced to retreat south after the entry of **Communist China** on the North Korean side. The war eventually became a stalemate along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. An armistice was signed in 1953 ending the war and dividing the peninsula once again along the **38<sup>th</sup> parallel**.

## **The Cold War Intensifies in the 1950s**

Despite the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953, the Cold War did not cease. In many ways, it only intensified. Several crises and confrontations across the world marked this era.

- Throughout the decade, European powers saw the dismantling of their pre-war empires in Africa and Asia. The recently-decolonized, developing nations would become a central focus of the American-Soviet rivalry.
- In response to the Soviet Union having developed an atomic bomb in 1949 (thereby ending the American nuclear monopoly), United States developed the hydrogen bomb and successfully tested it in 1952. The Soviets developed a hydrogen bomb a year later. By the end of the decade, the intercontinental ballistic missiles (**ICBMs**) to deliver warheads from thousands of miles away were developed. The threat of nuclear annihilation therefore peaked during the decade.
- In 1954, French troops were routed at Dien Bien Phu in Vietnam by Chinese-backed Communist forces under Ho Chi Minh, ending France's attempt to regain its pre-war colony. Vietnam was divided along the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel, with Ho and Communists controlling the North and a pro-Western government in the South. Civil war soon broke out, eventually leading to long-term United States involvement.
- In 1956, a revolution broke out in Soviet-controlled Hungary that called for greater independence from the Soviet Union and democratic reforms. Soviet tanks crushed the uprising and a compliant pro-Soviet government was installed.



- In 1957, the United States and its Western allies were alarmed when the Soviet Union launched a satellite, *Sputnik*, into outer space. This initiated a “Space Race” between the Americans and Soviets and resulted in the creation of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in the United States.
- In May 1960, the Soviet Union shot down a U-2 American spy plane in Soviet airspace and held the pilot, Francis Gary Powers, prisoner. He was later exchanged for a captured Soviet spy.

(NOTE: Richard Bissell, the CIA Director of Plans and the central figure in the Bay of Pigs invasion, had overseen the development the U-2 spy plane. Attorney James Donovan, who brokered the deal that exchanged Francis Gary Powers for the Soviet spy, was the negotiator that arranged Brigade 2506’s release from prison in 1962)



*Richard Bissell*



*James Donovan*

## Cuba

On January 1, 1959, Cuban military dictator Fulgencio Batista was overthrown by a democratic revolution composed of numerous pro-democracy organizations. Fidel Castro, leader of the 26<sup>th</sup> of July Movement, the largest of these groups, subsequently assumed power. Although Castro promised democracy and initially enjoyed great popularity both in Cuba and the United States, he would soon reveal his intention to create a pro-Soviet Communist dictatorship on the island. The global Communist threat and a Soviet military presence were now, quite unexpectedly, present in the Western Hemisphere and on the doorstep of the United States. Not only could Cuba be used as a base for further Communist expansion in the Hemisphere, but Soviet missiles could now potentially be placed within striking distance of major U.S. cities. This situation was deemed unacceptable by the United States. Therefore, in 1960, the Eisenhower administration approved a covert program to support pro-democracy Cubans liberate their homeland and, thereby, expel the Communist menace from the Americas. The effort, carried out by Eisenhower’s successor, John F. Kennedy, would end in tragedy for the Cuban people.