

chapter 19

The Cold War, 1945–1968



World War II was over, but it did not bring peace to the world. It ushered in a new era of conflict, known as the Cold War, that would last for forty-five years. The conflict was called a “cold” war because the opponents—the United States and the Soviet Union—did not actually fire shots at one another. Instead, they maintained a hostile standoff.

The Soviet Union was the only European nation to emerge from the destruction of World War II as a superpower. By 1949, it had begun to manufacture and stockpile nuclear weapons in order to keep pace with the world’s only other superpower, the United States. With their antithetical political systems and economic policies, the United States and the Soviet Union were natural enemies; throughout the Cold War, each tried to contain the other’s sphere of influence. However, the development of nuclear weapons in the 1940s meant that both sides had to move very carefully; neither was willing to risk a nuclear holocaust that would literally destroy the world.

The former Great Powers of Europe played only secondary roles during the Cold War. The two devastating world wars had ended their era of supremacy. While the Western nations concentrated on restabilizing their societies and economies, the Eastern nations—those behind what Winston Churchill

described as the “Iron Curtain” of communism—learned to survive under regulated economies and governments that were imposed on them from above.

From the Asian point of view, the term *cold war* is a misnomer. When civil wars erupted in Korea and Vietnam, the Soviets backed one side and the United States the other. Hundreds of thousands of civilians and soldiers died during the Korean and Vietnam wars, and neither outcome made much difference to the overall Cold War.

CHAPTER 19 OBJECTIVES

- Define the term *Cold War* and identify the nations on each side of the conflict.
- Identify the international treaties of the era and the member nations.
- Compare and contrast Eastern and Western Europe after World War II.
- Discuss the international conflicts that arose during the Cold War.

Chapter 19 Time Line

- 1945 United Nations founded
- 1946 Winston Churchill gives “Iron Curtain” speech; Allies divide Korea into two zones
- 1948 Marshall Plan goes into effect
- 1949 North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) founded
- 1950 Korean War begins
- 1955 Warsaw Pact signed
- 1956 Hungarian uprising
- 1960 Vietnam War begins
- 1961 East Germans put up Berlin Wall
- 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis
- 1968 Prague Spring

The Cold War in Eastern Europe

In 1946, Winston Churchill made an important speech on the current state of world affairs. He spoke the following memorable sentences:

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.

Between about 1944 and 1947, Churchill's analysis was proved correct. Every Eastern European nation except Greece either established a Communist state (usually called a "people's republic") or was absorbed into the Soviet Union. Being a member of the Comintern meant answering to the absolute authority of the Soviet dictator; therefore all the Eastern European nations were now Soviet satellites, just as Churchill had described. One-party rule under an absolute dictator was the most common form of government behind the Iron Curtain.

Stalin claimed that the USSR needed these allies as a safety zone between itself and the West for its own security. Germany had twice invaded Russia and inflicted tremendous damage and loss of life; Stalin was determined to prevent any further overland attacks. Additionally, from the Communist point of view, capitalist nations were inherently enemies.

Czechoslovakia

After World War I, Eduard Beneš and Thomas Masaryk had made Czechoslovakia a democratic republic—a multinational state dominated by the Czechs. Subdued by the Nazi regime during World War II, the nation was reestablished in 1945 as an independent socialist state under President Beneš. In 1948, the Communist Party managed to shoulder Beneš aside, replacing him with Communist Klement Gottwald. Czechoslovakia struggled under an oppressive dictatorship until 1968, when Alexander Dubcek took power. Although a



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|---|---|
|  NATO member, 1955 |  Territory USSR gained by 1945 |
|  Warsaw Pact member, 1955 |  National boundary, 1937 |
|  Nonaligned communist nation |  Iron Curtain |
|  Nonaligned nation | |

Party member, he was a moderate who immediately brought about meaningful reform, such as the abolition of censorship and the granting of real legislative powers to the National Assembly. This brief period of reform is known as the Prague Spring. The Soviets, furious at this apparent defection from the Communist bloc, sent troops into the country to replace Dubcek and restore the status quo.

Hungary

The Soviets drove the Nazis out of Hungary in 1944. In 1947, Stalinist dictator Matias Rakosi took power. Moderate Imre Nagy replaced Rakosi in 1953, but was forced out of office when he tried to introduce economic reform. Nagy headed a successful popular uprising in 1956, formed a new government, and instituted widespread reform. A brief era of freedom was put down by a Soviet military invasion in November; the Soviets executed Nagy and replaced him with their own candidate, János Kádár.

Poland

After the 1939 German-Soviet invasion, the Polish government fled the country, eventually making its way to London. The Soviets installed a puppet regime of their own in Lublin in 1944. At Yalta, Stalin made two demands concerning Poland. First, the Soviet Union should receive a large swath of territory in eastern Poland. Second, the Allies should recognize the Lublin regime as the official Polish government. In return for losing territory on the eastern border, Poland gained German-controlled territory in the west.

The first postwar Polish elections were held in 1947, bringing one-party Communist rule to the nation. This marked the beginning of a long period of political and social unrest in Poland.

Yugoslavia

The state of Yugoslavia was highly unstable even before World War II broke out; like the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, it contained too many ethnic groups who would only be satisfied by self-determination. The Croats hated and resented the ruling Serbs so much that they actually regarded the invading German army as liberators. Yugoslavs soon found themselves divided into two warring factions. The Chetniks were Serbian and royalist; the Partisans included Communists, anti-Nazis, and a variety of Yugoslavs who wanted self-rule. In 1945, the Allies agreed to support the leader of the Partisans, the Communist Josip Broz, who had called himself Tito since his release from prison for political protest in 1933.

Although Tito ruled as a Communist dictator, he refused to recognize Soviet authority over Yugoslavia. When he expelled the occupying Russian military forces in 1948, the Comintern revoked his Party membership.

Germany

At Potsdam, the Allies agreed to occupy Germany. There were several reasons for the occupation. First, they wanted to purge Germany of Nazism and punish any surviving Nazis. Second, they intended to help the Germans set up a new, democratic government. Third, they would work with the Germans to install a new bureaucracy, including a police force. Fourth, they would work to reestablish society and the German economy, including everything from the school systems to the postal service to the transportation network.

The Soviets occupied the eastern half of Berlin; the western half was divided among American-, British-, and French-occupied zones. Before long, the three

Western powers united their zones into one for economic purposes; Stalin's refusal to go along with their plan effectively made Berlin into two cities.

Since Berlin was many miles behind the Iron Curtain, West Berlin was entirely isolated and geographically very vulnerable to threats from the Soviets. In 1948, the Soviets blocked all ground access to West Berlin, claiming they had the right to do as they saw fit with East German roads, bridges, and railways. This was in effect an attempt at a siege; if supplies could not be delivered, the city would be forced to capitulate to Soviet control. The United States immediately organized the Berlin Airlift, which brought in food, fuel, and other supplies by plane. It took a good many flights to supply an entire city; on some days American planes landed in West Berlin every few minutes. In 1949, the Soviets accepted defeat and ended the blockade. Soon after this, West Germany officially parted from East Germany. At that point the two nations became known as the Federal Republic of Germany (West), a parliamentary democracy headed by Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, and the German Democratic Republic (East), a one-party Communist state headed by Chancellor Walter Ulbricht.

During the 1950s, hundreds of thousands of East Germans sought economic opportunity, intellectual and artistic freedom, and political asylum by the simple means of walking across the border into West Berlin, then relocating to West Germany or another western nation. By 1961, nearly 20 percent of the East German population had defected. The East Germans and the Soviets were well aware of this and knew that it was the worst possible publicity for their system. They were especially concerned because the people most likely to escape to the West were intellectuals, artists, professors, scientists, and other valuable and highly trained professionals. They took drastic measures to stop the flow of emigration. One August morning in 1961, Berliners woke up to discover that during the night, the army had secretly begun construction of a physical barrier that entirely encircled West Berlin—a barbed-wire fence that would soon be replaced by a massive concrete wall, complete with armed guards and dogs.

The Berlin Wall stopped the free westward migration. From that time on, East Germans had to have special permits to cross the wall and could only stay in the West for very limited periods of time. Travel from West to East was still unrestricted, but West Berliners had to be sure to carry identification so the guards would allow them to return home. In the Berlin metro system, the border between the two halves of the city became the last stop on all westbound trains. Many people still found ways to escape. Some hid in the trunks of cars; some clung to the undercarriage of trains; some openly made a run for it. Some

escapes were successful; others ended in death. The Berlin Wall soon became the most recognizable symbol of the Cold War era. In June 1963, U.S. President John F. Kennedy gave a memorable speech on the western side of the wall, in which he summed up the basic flaw in the Communist system thus: “Freedom has many difficulties and democracy is not perfect, but we have never had to put a wall up to keep our people in—to prevent them from leaving us.”

International Organizations

Since the Communist and non-Communist members of the United Nations were mutually hostile and distrustful, many heads of state felt that they would do well to form smaller international unions for their mutual protection. Two such organizations were formed; members agreed that if any nation were attacked, all the others would come to its defense.

Organization	Date Formed	Members
North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)	1947	Canada Belgium Britain Denmark France *Greece Iceland Luxembourg Netherlands Norway Portugal *Turkey United States *West Germany
Warsaw Pact	1955	Albania Bulgaria Czechoslovakia East Germany Hungary Poland Romania Soviet Union

* nation that joined NATO after 1947

Rebuilding Europe

When Communist forces took over Czechoslovakia in 1948, the U.S. Congress realized the seriousness of the Soviet threat to European democracy. They voted for full funding of the European Recovery Program, universally known as the Marshall Plan.

General George C. Marshall, the American secretary of state and former army chief of staff, created a foreign-aid plan by which the United States would provide almost unlimited funding for the necessary repairs to Europe's cities, highways, and railways. Any European nation that requested such aid would receive it. In the end, the Marshall Plan provided \$13 billion to war-torn Europe as an outright gift, not a loan. Although the economies of Europe were already achieving near-miracles of recovery by their own efforts, Marshall Plan funds played a crucial role in rebuilding—but only in the West. Stalin, who regarded the Marshall Plan as a blatant American attempt to subjugate Western Europe, would not allow any nation behind the Iron Curtain to accept American aid.

Thanks to their people's superhuman efforts plus the boost provided by the Marshall Plan, Western European nations returned to normal much faster than anyone would have expected on seeing the destruction wrought by the war. Infrastructure was rebuilt, theaters reopened, people went back to work. Many difficulties, including food shortages and rationing, still existed for some time after the war, but governments took what steps they could to bring their nations back to prosperity.

Behind the Iron Curtain, conditions were quite different. Although one benefit of Communist rule was full employment, jobs were assigned without regard to individual preference and wages were low. Housing was overcrowded—an entire family sharing a one-room apartment without a private kitchen or bathroom was typical in any Russian city. In addition, there were constant shortages of necessities, and luxury goods were a thing of the past. Behind the Iron Curtain, there was never any guarantee that shops would have anything to sell. When people heard that a market had just received a truckload of, say, fresh eggs, a long line of customers would appear as if by magic at that market, because it might be the last chance for eggs for a month or more. People carried shopping bags called “perhaps-bags” everywhere they went, just in case—perhaps—there might be something to buy and carry home. Barter, rather than cash purchases, became common. Luxuries were completely out of reach. The state owned and ran all businesses and industries, so no one had

any personal pride or vested interest in doing a good job or seeing his or her business succeed.

Cold War Conflicts

Until 1949, the United States was the only nation that had the technology to make nuclear weapons. However, Soviet scientists, following the same research path as the Western scientists, had their own bomb by 1949. A nuclear arms race ensued. By 1960 the United States had about five times as many nuclear weapons as the Soviets. Nuclear weapons were enormously expensive, and during the 1950s the U.S. economy was thriving.

The possession of nuclear weapons made both superpowers very cautious. The United States had dropped nuclear bombs on Japan in 1945, so the world knew exactly how destructive such weapons were. Neither side in the Cold War wanted to cause a nuclear holocaust. However, they played key roles in two conventional wars and arrived at one dangerous standoff.

Korean War

Japan occupied Korea during World War II. During the war, the Soviet Union had fostered a Korean Communist Party within the USSR. In 1945, the victorious Allied leaders agreed to divide Korea geographically. The Soviets occupied industrial North Korea, which was proclaimed the Korean Democratic People's Republic under chairman Kim Il Sung in 1948. The Americans occupied agricultural South Korea, withdrawing in 1949 after the election of Syngman Rhee as president of the Republic of Korea. North Korea invaded South Korea in 1950 with the goal of uniting the nation under Communist rule. U.S. troops fought on the side of South Korea, while Communist China sent troops to aid the North Koreans. Fighting ended with a 1953 truce that left matters where they were in 1950—with two independent Koreas, one Communist, one democratic.

Cuban Missile Crisis

The closest the world came to nuclear war was an event known as the Cuban Missile Crisis. In 1959, rebel leader Fidel Castro seized power in Cuba, turning the country into a Communist dictatorship. The presence of a Communist nation—a Soviet ally—only ninety miles from the Florida coast was a grave

concern to the Americans. A botched American attempt to remove Castro from power increased Cold War hostility between the superpowers.

Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev, meeting U.S. President John F. Kennedy face to face at a European summit, came away mistaking Kennedy's youth and inexperience for weakness. Believing the United States would be easy to intimidate, Khrushchev began building up nuclear arms in Cuba. As soon as the United States learned of the presence of the missiles, it established a naval blockade of the island. Both sides prepared for battle, but at the last moment the Soviet ships turned back. Khrushchev offered Kennedy an exchange: if the United States would withdraw its nuclear missiles from its European bases, the USSR would do the same with the Cuban missiles. Nuclear war had been avoided and from that time forward, both sides worked slowly and cautiously toward achieving what later became known as *détente*, loosely translated as "peaceful coexistence."

Vietnam War

France controlled what it called Indochina—Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia—from 1883 to 1945. (See Chapter 14.) Japan occupied Indochina during World War II. When the Japanese withdrew, rebel leader Ho Chi Minh declared Vietnamese independence. The United States backed France's refusal to grant independence for two reasons: first, Ho was a Communist; second, the United States felt obliged to support France because they were longtime allies.

The United States poured money into the French effort to regain control over Indochina, while Communist China aided the Vietminh. The guerilla tactics of the Vietminh were very effective against a French fighting force that was unfamiliar with the Vietnamese jungles. At Dien Bien Phu in northern Vietnam, the Vietminh outnumbered and trapped the French. President Eisenhower was unwilling to send American troops to Vietnam. Unable to win without reinforcements, the French surrendered to Ho's troops on May 7, 1954.

France, Britain, the United States, the USSR, China, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos all met for a peace conference in Geneva. The conference ended in a stalemate, dividing Vietnam into a northern half ruled by Ho and the Vietminh and a southern half ruled by France. The representatives agreed that in 1956, the two Vietnams would hold general elections and reunite under one government.

With American backing, government official Ngo Dinh Diem became president of South Vietnam. Widely and deservedly unpopular, Diem refused to

hold the agreed-on elections for fear of losing. Meanwhile, the Vietminh began sending weapons to their fellows in the South, who would become known as the Vietcong.

Fighting between the Vietcong and North Vietnamese troops on one side and American and South Vietnamese troops on the other side dragged on from the early 1960s through 1975. French troops had abandoned the area in 1956, as agreed at the peace conference. The Americans held out until the end, finally acknowledging in 1975 that they had reached an impasse. The war ended in a victory for the Communist North, who were quick to unite the two halves of the country under one rule.

QUIZ

- The Marshall Plan offered aid to**
 - all the nations of Europe.
 - all nations behind the Iron Curtain.
 - all nations that had fought for the Allies during the war.
 - all nations west of the Iron Curtain.
- What was the purpose of the Berlin Airlift?**
 - to get supplies to West Berlin in spite of the blockade
 - to help people escape from East Berlin or East Germany
 - to return German refugees to their homes after the war
 - to provide aid to any Iron Curtain nation
- One important reason for the Allied occupation of Germany was**
 - to help Germany rearm.
 - to discuss plans for the United Nations.
 - to obliterate all surviving elements of Nazism.
 - to divide the country into two independent nations.
- The Berlin Wall was built in order to**
 - prevent Westerners from entering East Berlin.
 - prevent East Germans from entering West Berlin.
 - block Allied or Western access to West Berlin.
 - prevent violence from breaking out in Berlin.

5. **At the end of the civil war in Vietnam, the North and South were united under _____**
- A. a constitutional monarchy.
 - B. a democratic republic.
 - C. a Communist dictatorship.
 - D. a hereditary monarchy.
6. _____ **was one advantage of life under Communist rule.**
- A. Freedom of expression
 - B. Comfortable housing
 - C. High wages
 - D. Full employment
7. **Which of the following best describes the result of the Korean War?**
- A. a victory for Communist North Korea
 - B. a victory for democratic South Korea
 - C. a stalemate
 - D. anarchy
8. **Recent memories of _____ persuaded Stalin to maintain a safety zone of friendly states on the western border of the USSR.**
- A. czarist rule
 - B. international peace treaties
 - C. nuclear bombings
 - D. German invasions
9. _____ **was the only Eastern European Communist nation to avoid Soviet domination.**
- A. Czechoslovakia
 - B. East Germany
 - C. Poland
 - D. Yugoslavia
10. _____ **rebelled against the forces of communism by emigrating westward.**
- A. Czechoslovakians
 - B. East Germans
 - C. Soviets
 - D. Yugoslavians