

## COLD WAR AND AFTER: 1945-present

After World War II, there were many changes in Europe. Great Britain, France, and Germany saw their influence diminish as the Soviet Union and the United States became global superpowers. Europe was divided between Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe and U.S.-influenced democratic Western Europe, as the Cold War raged across the world. This division, often referred to as the Iron Curtain, persisted for nearly fifty years, until the Soviet Union collapsed in the early 1990s. Eastern European revolutions in 1989 and the disintegration of Yugoslavia in the 1990s changed the face of Europe and introduced an era of change on the European continent. The fall of the Soviet Union accelerated Europe's drive toward unity and cooperation, making the growth of the European Union in the twenty-first century possible.

### KEY TERMS

abstract	denazification	<i>glasnost</i>	North Atlantic Treaty Org. (NATO)
Expressionism	<i>détente</i>	globalization	<i>perestroika</i>
Berlin Air Lift	domino theory	guest workers	Postmodernism
Berlin Wall	ethnic cleansing	iron curtain	socialized medicine
Brezhnev Doctrine	Eurocommunism	Korean War	Stalinization
containment	European Economic Community (EEC)	Marshall Plan	Truman Doctrine
Cuban Missile Crisis	European Union (EU)	Multiculturalism	Warsaw Pact
de-Stalinization	European Union (EU)	mutual deterrence	welfare state
decolonization	existentialism	nationalization	
	feminism		

### KEY CONCEPTS

- After World War II, Eastern and Western Europe were separated by a global rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union that continued until the Soviet Union collapsed in the early 1990s.
- After the war, the economies of Western Europe rebounded. Governments embraced various forms of social welfare policy at home while confronting decolonization abroad.
- The aftermath of war led many artists and intellectuals to question the meaning of traditional society, while advances in technology influenced the rise of popular culture.
- Increasing globalization in the international community has led to new economic and social challenges as well as hopes for a brighter future.

For a full discussion of the period 1945 to the present, see *Western Civilization*, 8th and 9th editions, Chapters 28-30.

### COLD WAR BEGINNINGS

Most historians agree that a post-war rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union was unavoidable. Their biggest conflict centered on the fate of Eastern Europe. The Soviet Union wanted a buffer zone against potential military threats from the West; the United States saw Soviet domination as a threat to the democratic freedom of the liberated nations in Eastern Europe. When conflict emerged in Greece and Turkey, the United States issued the Truman Doctrine, which promised financial support to nations threatened by communist expansion.

Of all the U.S. efforts to assist Europeans after the war, one of the most important was the Marshall Plan, which provided massive financial aid to promote economic recovery and foster political stability. The plan helped Europe rebuild, but also led to further conflict with the Soviet Union. Mutual suspicions led to a long-term rivalry and forced the United

States to remain active in foreign affairs. To respond to Soviet aggression around the world, American diplomat George Kennan designed a policy that called for “long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies.”

Cold War tensions erupted in post-war Germany in 1948. When the Western powers set out to unify their zones, the Soviets blockaded West Berlin, necessitating a dramatic airlift. The Soviets eventually ended the blockade but set up a communist East Germany.

That Churchill and Truman had not told Stalin about the Manhattan Project accounts for much of the tension between the United States and the Soviet Union. When the Soviet Union detonated its first atomic bomb in 1949, the United States worked to produce larger and more lethal nuclear weapons, sparking the arms race. The concept of mutual deterrence was used to prevent nuclear annihilation.

Military alliances were also used as a means to European security. In 1949, nine Western European nations, the United States, and Canada formed the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), agreeing to provide military assistance in the event of an attack. In 1955, the Soviet Union responded by forming its own military alliance, the Warsaw Pact, with seven East European countries.

## EUROPE AND THE WORLD

Cold War tensions quickly spread beyond Europe, especially after the Chinese communists defeated the American-backed nationalists in 1949. In 1950, when North Korea invaded South Korea, United Nations forces—mostly Americans—were sent to turn back the invasion. Mao Zedong sent Chinese troops into North Korea, leading to more fighting and eventually a stalemate. China had officially entered the Cold War.

European powers found that they could no longer continue colonial rule. The cost was prohibitive, and indigenous peoples were rebelling. The success of decolonization varied according to location. In Africa, the process was typically nonviolent, often led by Western-educated intellectuals such as Kwame Nkrumah, who guided Ghana to independence in 1957. But only after the Mau Mau uprising proved an unsustainable drain on Britain's resources did Britain grant Kenya independence, in 1963. Where a substantial European population existed, the transition to independence was more complicated. The French experienced great difficulties in North Africa, especially in Algeria, where nationalists fought a guerilla war for many years, until they won independence in 1962.

In the Middle East, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Iraq achieved independence at the end of World War I. After World War II, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon became independent states. They formed the Arab League to promote Arab unity, but were unified on only one issue: the settlement of Palestine. Britain had taken control of the area after World War I, but the Zionist movement and increased Jewish settlement caused friction, and the pressure for an independent Jewish state in Palestine was powerful. Although Jews were a clear minority in Palestine, the United Nations divided Palestine into two states; the state of Israel was created in 1948. Tensions with its neighbors continue to this day.

In 1956, two years after taking control of Egypt, Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal Company, threatening British and French ships' passage to the Indian Ocean. Israel joined with Britain and France to attack Egypt. The United States and the Soviet Union forced a withdrawal, arguing that the invasion was a return to colonialism. Nasser emerged as the leading figure in the Pan-Arab movement.

In Asia, British worries that massive bloodshed would accompany Indian independence were justified; the partitioning of India proved deadly, as millions of Hindus and Muslims shifted across the India-Pakistan border. Unwilling to leave Southeast Asia, French forces fought a bloody guerilla war, led by the Communist Ho Chi Minh. Vietnam was

divided between the communist north and the pro-Western south, and would remain divided until the mid-1970s. But its experience with the Vietnamese nationalists forced France to grant independence to Laos and Cambodia.

Cold War politics hung over decolonization. As the European powers relinquished control over their territories, the superpowers supplied military and financial support to emerging states in an effort to thwart rival expansion. This often led to armed conflict—as in Vietnam, starting in the mid-sixties. Some newly independent nations, however, chose to remain nonaligned, frustrating the superpowers, which were unable to exert direct influence.

## THE SOVIET UNION

Despite being a global superpower, the Soviet Union nonetheless faced tremendous hardships at home. With the USSR's economic infrastructure destroyed by the war, Stalin used drastic measures to spur economic renewal. Soon after, the country witnessed unimaginable industrial growth, thanks largely to the astounding efforts of the Soviet workers. The Soviets also had great success in science, highlighted by the launching of Sputnik in 1957. But consumer goods and adequate housing were scarce, and political terror continued unabated, as dissent was put down.

The Soviet Union continued to dominate Eastern Europe except in Yugoslavia, where Josip Broz Tito, exploiting Yugoslavian nationalism, insisted on an independent communist state free from Soviet influence. Upon Stalin's death in 1953, Nikita Khrushchev took over and initiated a process of de-Stalinization. Many people in Eastern Europe used this opportunity to press for political freedom. In 1956, first Poland and then Hungary attempted to gain independence. Poland was given some independence after pledging to remain in the Warsaw Pact. In Hungary, the ruling Stalinist party was ousted in favor of the reform-minded leader Imre Nagy. Soon after, the Red Army removed Nagy from office and put down all dissension. Hungary's experience dimmed prospects for revolts in Eastern Europe.

Another problem bedeviling the Soviets was the city of Berlin. West Berlin, an affluent island in destitute East Germany, was an embarrassment to Communist leaders as many East Germans escaped into West Berlin. In 1961, Khrushchev ordered the construction of a wall around West Berlin, which became a bleak symbol of a divided Europe.

Meanwhile, Khrushchev and the United States had a confrontation over the deployment of Soviet missiles in the Caribbean. In 1959, Cuban revolutionary Fidel Castro set up a government modeled on Soviet communism. Unwilling to have a communist country so close to the homeland, the United States attempted to overthrow Castro. An invasion by U.S.-backed Cuban exiles was an embarrassing failure. The so-called Bay of Pigs invasion encouraged Castro to form closer ties with the Soviet Union.

On the pretext of preventing American attacks, Khrushchev set out to build nuclear missile sites on Cuban soil, a plan that the United States firmly rejected. In response,

Khrushchev pointed out that American missiles were located in Turkey, on the Soviet border. The United States ordered the Soviets to halt all missile-laden Soviet ships sailing to Cuba and blockaded Cuba to prevent their arrival. After many tense hours, Khrushchev agreed to turn the fleet around, on the condition that the United States promise not to invade Cuba and to remove its missiles from Turkey. To avoid another close call, both superpowers made genuine efforts to improve communication.

Khrushchev's popularity among Soviet leaders declined, and in 1964, the Soviet Politburo forced him into retirement. His successor was Leonid Brezhnev, whose nearly two decades of leadership were marked by a more relaxed atmosphere within the Soviet Union. The superpowers entered a period of reduced tensions called detente, signified by the Antiballistic Missile Treaty of 1972 and the Helsinki Agreement of 1975. Detente came to an end with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980. Reagan increased the tension by providing military aid to Afghan rebels.

### AP Tip

During the period of detente, the United States set out to improve relations with Communist China. By the end of the 1970s, the two nations had created a "strategic relationship" to counter Soviet influence in Asia. Although the People's Republic of China was a communist nation, both China and the U.S. shared the common goal of preventing Soviet expansion.

When Brezhnev died in 1982, the Soviet Union was involved in an unpopular military engagement in Afghanistan that drained resources from needed economic development. Further, the Soviet political structure had become ossified, as the political elite dismissed any attempts at reform. The Soviet economy was faltering because workers had little incentive to increase productivity. Innovation lagged behind the West's, and alcoholism soared. Brezhnev's successor, Yuri Andropov, began reform. One step was the appointment of Mikhail Gorbachev as party secretary in 1985.

Gorbachev, who had come of age during Khrushchev's rule and understood the value of reform, saw the necessity of radical change. He first called for perestroika, or restructuring, to energize the flagging Soviet economy with a limited free market and ownership of private property. Next he initiated a policy of glasnost, or openness, to encourage discussion of the country's problems by both citizens and officials. These reforms released enormous pent-up frustrations that were felt everywhere, from newspaper editorials to rock concerts.

Coupled with reforms that took political authority away from the Communist Party, the Soviet Union was primed for a massive change, and ethnic groups within the country began to push for greater independence.

By 1991, the Soviet Union had ceased to exist. Soviet hardliners initiated a coup against Gorbachev, but it failed

when Gorbachev refused to cooperate with the hardliners and a large resistance movement led by Russian president Boris Yeltsin emerged. Gorbachev resigned, turning leadership over to Yeltsin. Under Yeltsin, Russia implemented a free-market economy and a democratic form of government but experienced many problems, including widespread corruption and the rise of organized crime.

## TRANSITION IN EASTERN EUROPE

In 1968, more than ten years after Hungary had attempted to free itself from Soviet domination, a reform movement sprang up in Czechoslovakia. Alexander Dubcek sought to create "communism with a human face," but the Soviet military, invoking the Brezhnev Doctrine, crushed this "Prague Spring." In 1980, Polish workers formed an independent labor movement, Solidarity. Led by Lech Walesa, it earned the support of many Poles, including intellectuals and the Catholic clergy. The Polish Communist government attempted to stifle Solidarity, but unrest increased, leading to free elections. Gorbachev stood on the sidelines as Walesa was elected president in 1990.

As more reform movements emerged throughout Eastern Europe, East Germans began streaming to neighboring Hungary, and millions of people took to the streets. In November 1989, the East German government opened all of its borders with the West, and the Berlin Wall, the long-time symbol of the Cold War, was the scene of celebration as delirious people took it down with sledgehammers. By October 1990, East and West Germany reunified.

The fall of communism brought tragic consequences in Yugoslavia, which broke apart in the late 1980s. Volatile separatist movements fought each other for territory and soon began a genocidal rampage referred to as "ethnic cleansing." All told, nearly 250,000 Bosnians were killed and another two million left homeless. NATO forces halted Serbian attacks against ethnic Albanians in Kosovo, but only through a concerted bombing campaign did the Yugoslav forces relent.

## THE REVIVAL IN WESTERN EUROPE

Western Europe's remarkable recovery after World War II shaped the political landscape for many nations. Although communism had an influence early on, Western Europe embraced moderate democracy with an emphasis on social welfare.

In the post-war years, France was dominated by Charles de Gaulle. The former resistance leader helped establish a French provisional government after the war, and then became president in 1958, launching the Fifth Republic. De Gaulle built a strong military and established France as a nuclear superpower. Throughout the 1960s, the French economy grew steadily, but the nationalization of industry and resulting overwhelming deficits were a problem. As the government attempted to deal with rising costs, student protests and labor strikes brought an end to the de Gaulle presidency in 1969. During the 1970s and 1980s, France shifted to the left as socialist François Mitterrand enacted

reform measures favoring workers. Continued economic troubles led to the election of conservative Jacques Chirac in 1995. Faced with high unemployment, many French began speaking out against the large number of immigrants who had recently settled in the country. This led to rising tensions within France—still a significant issue in the twenty-first century.

With the creation of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1949, West Germany began a stunning renewal. Its leader, Christian Democratic Konrad Adenauer, established close ties with other Western European nations and the United States. West Germany dealt harshly with former Nazi officials, most notably during the famous Nuremberg trials, and a healthy economy allowed it to pay reparations to Holocaust victims. The threat of a communist invasion led it to re-arm and join NATO in 1955.

In the following decades, West Germany moved from center-right politics to the center-left politics of the Social Democrats. Chancellor Willy Brandt initiated a policy of *Ostpolitik* to improve contact with East Germany, but most of his successors concentrated on improving the West German economy. As unemployment fell and wages skyrocketed, West Germany experienced a severe labor shortage and turned to foreign “guest workers” to fill key jobs. These workers, essential to the economy, still have not been fully accepted, socially or politically.

In 1945, the British people voted Churchill’s Conservative Party out of office. The Labour Party, led by Clement Attlee, created the modern welfare state. Major industries and the Bank of England were nationalized, and health care was socialized as the government required doctors and dentists to participate in the national plan.

With the high cost of the welfare state, the British economy struggled through the ‘50s, ‘60s, and ‘70s, with government leadership alternating between the Labour and Conservative parties. In 1979, Britons elected the first female prime minister, Margaret Thatcher. A Conservative, the “Iron Lady” attempted to restructure the social welfare state by reducing taxes and government bureaucracy. The economy improved, but Thatcher’s policies led to some social unrest.

## WESTERN EUROPEAN UNITY

Europe’s process of unification began with NATO. In 1951, the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) was set up to create a common market for coal and steel products. In 1957, the Rome Treaty created the European Economic Community (EEC), known as the Common Market. This alliance became the world’s largest exporter and purchaser of raw materials, rivaled only by the United States in steel production.

In 1973, Great Britain, Ireland, and Denmark joined the European Economic Community to form the European Community (EC), renamed the European Union (EU) in 1994. A primary EU goal was to create a common currency called the euro. By 2007, the euro had officially replaced

thirteen national currencies. The establishment of a common agricultural policy, in which subsidies are provided for European farmers in order to allow them to successfully compete in the world agricultural market, has also helped the European economy. Subsidies for job training, education, and modernization, as well as greater flexibility in travel among member nations, has caused many Europeans to support membership in the EU. Moving into the twenty-first century, the EU began incorporating the nations of eastern and southeastern Europe into the union. This new alliance became the world’s largest exporter of raw materials and was rivaled only by the United States in steel production.

## SOCIETY AND CULTURE

Post-war economic prosperity greatly helped the working class. Increased wages unleashed consumerism, particularly in the auto industry. Through Western Europe’s implementation of the welfare state, members of the working class received expanded health care and old-age pensions. Likewise, access to higher education was made available to them.

At first, women saw few gains. In Britain and West Germany, women were discouraged from working, but as birth rates began to decline in the late 1950s, women had more opportunities to enter the workforce. They still faced discrimination, as seen by the large disparity between men’s and women’s salaries. Influenced by the French feminist Simone de Beauvoir, women in both Europe and the United States began to assert themselves as a political and social movement advocating for liberation from traditional gender roles. In the 1960s, feminism took the form of the women’s liberation movement, which advocated for true equality with men, both economically and socially.

### AP Tip

Europeans witnessed challenges to traditional morals and manners after both world wars. Two areas that saw significant change were sexuality and women’s rights. With the introduction of the birth control pill in the 1960s, women enjoyed a newfound freedom that influenced many facets of European life.

Artists continued to reject notions of traditional art as they grappled with the destruction of World War II and the despair of the modern world. During the war, many important artists fled Europe for the United States, shifting the center of the artistic world to New York City. American painters such as Jackson Pollack and Andy Warhol were at the forefront of the artistic movements known as Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art. Disillusionment also influenced literature, as seen in the works of Samuel Beckett, whose play *Waiting for Godot* belongs to the literary movement called Theater of the Absurd. The absurdists were greatly influenced by existentialism. Two of the leading voices of existentialism, Frenchmen Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre, argued that man, alone in the world and without any preordained destiny,

must rely on himself to find hope in an absurd and depersonalized world.

Technology was transforming. Communication over great distances became instantaneous, making the world more interconnected than ever before. Europeans saw themselves as members of a global, interdependent community. Large multinational corporations spanned continents, directly influencing the lives of people far removed from their headquarters. Technological advances dramatically improved life in the developed world, but not in developing nations, presenting a new challenge to the nations of Europe.