

World History

Cold War: U.S. v U.S.S.R.

Restructuring the Postwar World, 1945–Present

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The United States and Soviet Union opposed each other as they tried to achieve different goals. Communists won a civil war in China, making it the world's second communist nation. The United States fought two wars in Asia trying to contain communism. The Cold War also spread to Latin America and elsewhere. The superpowers later began to enjoy better relations.

Two Superpowers Face Off

KEY IDEA The conflicting aims of the United States and the Soviet Union led to global competition.

The United States and the Soviet Union were

Allies during World War II. In February 1945, they agreed that Germany would be divided into separate zones. Each zone would be occupied by the soldiers of one of the main Allied powers. They also agreed that Germany would have to repay the Soviet Union for damage and loss of life. Soviet leader Joseph Stalin, in turn, promised free elections in Eastern Europe and to declare war on Japan. These allies also were among 50 countries that formed the United Nations in 1945. This new world body was pledged to save the world from war.

Still, the two superpowers had sharp political and economic differences. They also had different goals after the war. The United States wanted to encourage democracy and trade. It wanted to put the different zones of Germany back together to make one nation. The Soviet Union had these goals: to promote communism, to take advantage of raw materials in Eastern Europe and rebuild its own economy, and to keep Germany divided and weak.

When Stalin refused to allow free elections in Eastern Europe, U.S. President Truman was angry. Stalin would not budge. Truman then began a policy of containment—blocking the Soviets from further expansion. As part of this policy, the United States adopted the Marshall Plan in 1947. The plan donated food and materials such as machines to European countries, helping them rebuild from war.

In 1948, the Soviets and Americans clashed over Germany. France, Britain, and the United States agreed to pull their troops out of Germany and let the three zones that they occupied unite. The Soviets refused to leave their zone, however. Then they cut off all highway and train traffic into Berlin, which was deep within the Soviet zone. The United States and British responded with the Berlin Airlift.

They flew food and supplies into the city for 11 months. Finally, the Soviets lifted the blockade.

The growing struggle between Americans and Soviets came to be called the Cold War. Many other countries allied with one superpower or another. The United States, Canada, and several countries in Western Europe formed the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). In this military alliance, each nation promised to defend any other member that was attacked. The Soviets and the countries of Eastern Europe made a similar agreement. It was called the Warsaw Pact. In 1949, the Soviet Union announced that it, like the United States, had developed an atomic bomb. Three years later, both superpowers had a newer, even more deadly weapon—the hydrogen bomb. Soon both nations were involved in an arms race, as they produced growing numbers of nuclear weapons and developed new ways to deliver them.

In 1957, Soviet scientists shocked the world by launching Sputnik, the world's first human-made satellite. Many Americans felt that the Soviets were far ahead in science and technology. The United States then began spending huge amounts of money to improve math and science education.

Cold War Around the World

KEY IDEA The superpowers supported opposing sides in Latin American and Middle Eastern conflicts.

After World War II, many nations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America had serious problems. They were plagued by ethnic conflict, lack of education and technology, poverty, and political unrest. Some of these countries tried to stay neutral in the Cold War. Others actively sought American or Soviet aid.

In Cuba, the United States backed a dictator in the 1950s. In 1959, a young lawyer, Fidel Castro, led a successful revolt. Castro then turned to the Soviets for aid.

In 1962, the Soviets and Americans almost went to war over Soviet nuclear missiles placed in Cuba. The Soviets finally pulled the missiles out. Over time, the Cuban economy became more dependent on Soviet aid. When the Soviet Union dropped communism in 1991, this aid stopped. It was a serious blow to Cuba's economy.

The United States had also backed a dictator in Nicaragua. He fell in 1979 to communist rebels. When the new government began helping leftist rebels in nearby El Salvador, the United States struck back. It began to support forces in Nicaragua who wanted to overthrow the communists. The civil war lasted more than a decade. Finally, the different sides agreed to hold free elections.

The Middle East often saw conflict between those who wanted a modern, more Western society and those who wanted to follow traditional Islam. Such a struggle took place in Iran. In the 1950s, a group tried to take control of the government from the pro-West Shah, or ruler. The United States helped the Shah defeat them. Over time, the Shah tried to weaken the influence of the Islamic religion in Iran. A Muslim leader, the Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini, led a successful revolt. In 1979, the Shah was forced to leave the country. Khomeini made Islamic law the law of the land and followed a foreign policy that was strongly against the United States. He also led his country to a long war with Iraq, its neighbor.

The Soviets gained influence in Afghanistan after 1950. In the 1970s, Islamic rebels threatened the country's communist government. The Soviets sent in support troops. The United States felt its Middle East oil supplies were in danger and supported the rebels. In 1989, after a costly occupation, Soviet troops left Afghanistan.

The Cold War Thaws

KEY IDEA The Cold War began to thaw as the super-powers entered an era of uneasy diplomacy.

When Stalin died in 1953, Nikita Khrushchev became the Soviet leader. Soon protest movements in Eastern Europe challenged the Soviets' hold there. In 1956, protesters and the army toppled the communist government of Hungary. Khrushchev sent Soviet tanks to put the communists back in power. Similar events took place in Czechoslovakia in 1968. That time it was new Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev who sent the tanks.

The Soviets did not have the same control over their larger neighbor, China. Although the Soviet Union and China enjoyed friendly relations at first, they gradually grew apart.

In the early 1970s, President Richard Nixon began following a policy called *détente*. This was a lessening of tensions between the superpowers. He became the U.S. first president to visit Communist China and the Soviet Union. In 1972, Nixon and Brezhnev signed a treaty to limit the number of nuclear missiles each country could have.

The U.S. retreated from *détente* when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979. In 1981, Ronald Reagan, a fierce anti-communist, became president. Then the Soviets grew angry over U.S. support for the rebels fighting communists in Nicaragua. Tensions increased until 1985 when the Soviet Union got a new leader.

Gorbachev Moves Toward Democracy

KEY IDEA Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev promoted democratic reforms, which spread to Eastern Europe.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the leaders of the Soviet Union kept tight control on society. In 1985, communist Party leaders named Mikhail Gorbachev as the leader of the Soviet Union. He was the youngest Soviet leader since Joseph Stalin. He was expected to make minor reforms. Instead, he launched a revolution.

Gorbachev felt that Soviet society could not improve without the free flow of ideas and information. He started a policy called *glasnost*, or open-ness. He opened churches and released dissenters from prison. He allowed books to be published that in the past had been banned. Then he began a new policy called *perestroika*, or restructuring. It aimed at making the Soviet economy perform better by lifting the tight control on all managers and workers. In 1987, he opened up the political system by allowing the Soviet people to elect representatives to a

legislature. Finally, Gorbachev changed Soviet foreign policy. He moved to end the arms race and the war in Afghanistan.

Gorbachev urged leaders in Eastern Europe to change their policies as well. They resisted, but the people of their countries wanted reform. Protest movements began to build. In Poland, many years of economic problems led the government to lift a ban on a workers' movement called Solidarity. Facing growing unrest, the government was forced to allow elections. The Polish people voted overwhelmingly against the communists and for Solidarity. In Hungary, reformers took over the communist Party. Then it voted itself out of existence.

Change soon came to East Germany. Its leaders resisted at first. Then thousands of people across the country demanded free elections. Soon the Berlin Wall, which divided East and West Berlin, was down. By the end of 1989, the communist Party was out of power. The next year the two parts of Germany, East and west, were united once again. The new nation had many problems, though. It had to fix the problems in the old East German economy.

In Czechoslovakia, similar calls for reform took place. When the government cracked down on protesters, thousands of Czechs poured into the streets. One day 500,000 people gathered to protest in the nation's capital. The communists agreed to give up power. In Romania, a tough dictator used the army to shoot at protesters. The incident enraged Romanians. Massive protests forced him out. He was captured and executed in 1989. General elections followed.

Collapse of the Soviet Union

KEY IDEA In the early 1990s, the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia all broke apart.

While freedom was sweeping Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union had serious troubles. People from many different ethnic groups began calling for the right to have their own nation. In 1990, Lithuania declared itself independent. Gorbachev sent troops, and they fired on a civilian crowd, killing a few people. This action and lack of reform cost Gorbachev support among the Soviet people.

Many people began to support Boris Yeltsin. Old-time communists, at the same time, were becoming angrier at Gorbachev's changes. They thought the changes made the Soviet Union weaker. In August 1991, they tried to take control of the government. Thousands rallied in the streets. When the army refused to back the coup leaders, they gave up.

To strike back, the parliament voted to ban the party from any political activity. Meanwhile, more and more republics in the Soviet Union declared their independence. By the end of 1991, Gorbachev announced that the Soviet Union would no longer exist. Russia and the other 14 republics were each becoming independent states.

Gorbachev lost all power, and Yeltsin became president of Russia. He faced many problems. Efforts to move the Russian economy toward capitalism caused suffering. In addition, rebels in the small republic of Chechnya declared their independence from Russia. Yeltsin refused to allow it. He sent thousands of troops, who were caught in a bloody war for two years.

Yugoslavia was made up of many different ethnic groups, and in the early 1990s they began fighting. When Serbia tried to control the government, two other areas declared independence. Slovenia beat back a Serbian invasion, but Serbia and Croatia fought a bloody war. In 1992, Bosnia-Herzegovina also declared independence. Serbs who lived in that region opposed the move. Using aid from Serbia, they fought a brutal civil war with Muslims, the largest group in Bosnia. The United Nations was able to stop the fighting, but peace remains uncertain.

The change to democracy and capitalism in Eastern Europe was not smooth. The Polish people were frustrated with how long and painful the process was. In new elections in 1995, they voted the former leader of Solidarity out as president of Poland. In Czechoslovakia, democracy led to a breakup. In 1993, the country split into two separate nations: the Czech Republic and Slovakia.