
CHAPTER 44

THE COLD WAR

The **Cold War** refers to the conflict between the communist nations of Eastern Europe, led by the Soviet Union, and the western democracies, led by the United States. Although the United States and the Soviet Union were allies during World War II, united to fight Nazi Germany, the two nations were ideological opposites with a deep-seated mistrust of each other.

In 1943, an agreement was reached between Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill concerning the conduct of the war. The United States and Britain would launch their offensive against Germany from France, leaving the Soviets to open an offensive on their own in the east.

YALTA

In 1945, the Big Three met again at **Yalta**. Soviet forces controlled Poland, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Romania, as well as parts of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Germany, while the forces of Britain and the United States were still struggling to get out of France. At Yalta, they agreed that when victory came, they would divide Germany into zones under the control of the Big Three, and Germany would pay reparations to Russia. Free elections for all the Eastern European countries under Soviet control were guaranteed, but those countries had to remain friendly to the Soviet Union.

Potsdam

The agreement did not hold up for long. Roosevelt, who had been the key figure in trying to work with Stalin and hold the Big Three together, died. When the Big Three met at Potsdam, in July 1945, the new president, Harry Truman, represented the United States. Truman insisted Stalin allow the promised free elections. Stalin refused, as he believed that such elections would result in anti-Soviet governments in the Eastern countries. One reason

why Stalin wanted pro-Soviet countries along his western border was that they would serve as a buffer against future German aggression.

Truman and Churchill were in no position to force Stalin to comply. At the same time, they could not simply ignore the situation. Truman cut off U.S. aid to Russia and declared that the United States would not recognize any government that was not freely elected, and so the “Cold War” was on.

THE COLD WAR

Why the “Cold War”? Although armed conflict would erupt around the world between Soviet and U.S.-backed factions, and the leaders of these two nations would engage in tough talk, these two “superpowers” managed to avoid engaging in direct military conflict with each other. Thus, the war was “cold.”

The Iron Curtain

Elections in Britain ousted Churchill from office, but he remained adamant in his opposition to Stalin. In one of his most famous speeches, he coined the phrase “the **Iron Curtain**” to describe the division of Europe into free democracies and states under communist control.

Stalin encouraged communist organizations in other countries in Europe and other areas of the world. France, Italy, Greece, Iran, Turkey, and China all felt his influence. The “communist threat” was considered serious enough for Truman to issue his Truman Doctrine.

THE TRUMAN DOCTRINE

The Truman Doctrine was a plan to stop the spread of communism. The plan involved offering military and economic aid where needed. Under the Marshall Plan, military aid went to Greece and Turkey and economic aid to Europe. Stalin refused aid for the Eastern bloc nations. He then solidified his control over them by removing all noncommunists from governmental positions. Such was the case in Soviet-occupied Czechoslovakia, which had attempted to restore a democratic-style government following the war. Stalin opposed any form of democratic government and insisted that the Czechs refuse aid under the Marshall Plan. In 1948, members of the Cabinet who were not communists resigned, hoping to force a new round of elections. Jan Masaryk, the foreign minister, was the only remaining opposition leader. Two weeks after the coup, he fell from a window, in what was the third “defenestration of Prague.” Although his own secretary believed that he committed suicide, many have accused Soviet sympathizers of orchestrating the event. The new Czech government then deposed the president, Edvard Benes,

and replaced him with the leader of the Czech communist party, Klement Gottwald. The government also imprisoned many advocates of democracy.

Stalin then blocked access to Berlin. The Big Three had divided Germany into zones, each zone controlled by a different nation. Berlin was situated in the zone controlled by the Soviet Union, but was also divided into zones. The United States and its allies launched the **Berlin Airlift** to bring supplies to West Berlin despite the Soviet blockade. The airlift succeeded.

NATO AND THE WARSAW PACTS

In 1949, the United States and its allies formed NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Its main purpose was to thwart the advance of communism in Europe. Stalin answered by strengthening his control over Eastern Europe in what would ultimately become known as the **Warsaw Pact** of eastern European nations and the Soviet Union.

THE KOREAN WAR (1950–1953)

The Marshall Plan had failed to stop the spread of communism, and during the period from 1946–1949, the United States had formulated a new policy of “containment.” Meanwhile, communism still continued to spread. The revolution in China resulted in a communist government for that country. North Korea, too, was a communist nation. With the support of Russia, North Korea invaded South Korea in 1950. Truman responded with military aid, including troops of fifteen members of the United Nations’ countries. General Douglas MacArthur led the United Nations’ forces. When he drove the Koreans back past the **38th parallel**, communist China entered on the side of North Korea. Russia provided aid, but did not directly enter the conflict, and the United States chose not to confront them openly in order to avoid a direct conflict. On October 19, 1950, the Chinese assault began under the command of General Peng Dehuai. Some 380,000 People’s Liberation Army troops pushed the United Nations’ troops back to the 38th parallel. The communist Chinese and North Korean forces captured Seoul on January 4, 1951. United Nations troops were defeated at the battle of Chosin Reservoir. After MacArthur suggested the possible use of atomic weapons, Truman removed him from command in 1951. That same year, peace negotiations started in Kaesong, and parties agreed to a cease-fire. A **demilitarized zone (DMZ)** was created around the 38th parallel, which is still in existence today and defended by North Korea on one side and South Korean and American troops on the other. No peace treaty was ever signed; the conflict was officially a police action rather than a war. Japan provided much of the supplies for the conflict; its manufacturing economy grew by over fifty percent in the early stages of the

war. The peace treaty of 1951, signed in San Francisco, ended the six years of Allied military occupation since the end of World War II, and restored full sovereignty over Japan and its territorial waters to the Japanese people. According to the treaty, Japan renounced its previous claims to Korea, Taiwan, Formosa, and several other areas; Japan also did not regain her sovereignty over Okinawa and the Ryukyu Islands. The treaty is considered the formal end to the Pacific portion of World War II. Provisions of another treaty signed in the same year between the United States and Japan permitted United States' troops to remain in Japan in order to launch maneuvers in the Korean War.

CASTRO IN CUBA

In 1958, Fidel Castro led his supporters to a successful revolution in Cuba, establishing a communist country within striking distance of the U.S. coastline. Tensions remained high for decades, culminating in the **Bay of Pigs** invasion in April 1961. President John F. Kennedy authorized the invasion of armed Cuban exiles to overthrow the Castro government. The fighting lasted only two days, as the exiles did not receive the support of their fellow Cubans nor of the Americans on the air or on the ground. Castro imprisoned several, but twenty months later he released them in exchange for \$53 million worth of food and medical supplies.

The Cuban Missile Crisis

Tension continued to mount, culminating in the **Cuban Missile Crisis**. Under the Soviet leader **Nikita Khrushchev**, sixty ships were sent to Cuba in May 1962, many carrying military material. The Soviets wanted to shift the advantage in the nuclear arena from the United States and place missiles in Cuba. A U-2 flight of October 14 photographed an SS-4 site under construction near San Cristobal. By October 19, surveillance photographs showed four sites operational. While the Soviets had made no special attempt to keep secret their placement of missiles in Turkey, for example, they had not informed Washington of missiles in Cuba. This alarmed the administration, as not only was Cuba well within easy striking distance of the United States, but the United States could not be sure of Khrushchev's motives.

Kennedy addressed the nation on October 22 and announced a naval quarantine or blockade within 500 miles around the Cuban coast. On October 25, Adlai Stevenson brought the case to an emergency session of the United Nations. The Soviets at first denied the charges, but later made two offers of settlement, offering to withdraw their missiles for an American promise not to invade Cuba. In addition, the U.S. was to withdraw missiles from Turkey. On October 27, a U-2 was shot down over Cuba, while Russians almost intercepted another U-2 flying over Russia. After several tense

days, Kennedy accepted both offers of the Soviets, and the crisis was over. Khrushchev never recovered politically, since he had not only backed down in the face of U.S. threats but also initiated the crisis in the first place. In 1964, the Politburo removed him from power, and he died under house arrest in Moscow seven years later. Given the proximity of nuclear warheads and the fact that the Soviets had given authorization to the Cubans to use them when deemed necessary, many of Kennedy's advisors believed his response to the crisis was too weak to guarantee national safety. The crisis was clearly the closest that the United States and the Soviets came to nuclear war in the Cold War era, and Kennedy's choice of diplomacy over a military response kept an invasion and conflict from happening. The Cuban Missile Crisis also prompted the two superpowers to seek a better means of communication, and they established a "**hot line**" between Washington and Moscow. The crisis also likely contributed to the development of *détente*.

THE VIETNAM WAR (1964–1975)

The conflict in Vietnam was also an outgrowth of the Cold War, and, in the U.S., of the belief that once communism was allowed to flourish in South Vietnam, all of the other governments in southeastern Asia, such as those of Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Malaysia, and Indonesia, would fall to communism. This idea was known as the "domino theory." The United States, the Republic of Vietnam or South Vietnam, Australia, and South Korea fought against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam or North Vietnam and the National Liberation Front, a South Vietnamese guerrilla movement led by communists. The Russians provided aid to the North Vietnamese, but, as in the Korean conflict, did not directly participate in hostilities.

The First Indochina War

The origins of the war go back to the French struggle in the First Indochina War against communist party leader **Ho Chi Minh**, who led a movement for independence of the colony from France. The Vietnamese communist forces, or Viet Minh, defeated the French army at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu, in 1954. Following this event, the French granted the colony independence. At a settlement reached in Geneva, Vietnam was divided into a communist North and a noncommunist South, with hopes that the South would be a democracy. Elections in 1956 were intended to unify the two Vietnams, but the southern President Diem and President Eisenhower of the United States worried about a possible victory for Ho Chi Minh and the elections were never held.

The Viet Cong

The communists in the North launched a guerilla movement against the South known as the National Liberation Front. This movement was also known in the United States and in South Vietnam as the **Viet Cong**, from *Viet Nam Cong San*, meaning “Vietnamese Communist.” The United States began sending support to the South, while the U.S.S.R. and the North Vietnamese communists provided arms, advisors, and military to the Viet Cong along the Ho Chi Minh trail.

The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution

The United States never declared war in Vietnam. In 1964, the Senate approved the *Gulf of Tonkin Resolution*, which authorized the use of armed forces in support of freedom in Southeast Asia. On March 8, 1965, President Lyndon Baines Johnson sent 3,500 marines to South Vietnam, which escalated to over 500,000 troops by 1968. The commander of the U.S. forces was General William Westmoreland.

The Tet Offensive

The guerilla war in Vietnam was very difficult to win, and although victory often seemed near, it never came. On January 30, 1968, the Tet Offensive in South Vietnam suggested renewed vigor at a time when the American public desperately wanted an end to the conflict. Opposition further increased with the My Lai massacre, in which forces led by Lt. William Calley entered a village and massacred Vietnamese civilians, including children.

The Nixon Doctrine

By 1968, President Johnson was in political trouble, and eventually announced he would not seek reelection. Robert Kennedy, who might have drawn on the mystique of his brother, the former president, ran for the nomination, but his bid was cut short when he was assassinated by Sirhan Sirhan. Richard Nixon, a Republican, won the presidency, and initiated the Nixon Doctrine, according to which South Vietnam would be enabled to fight on its own. Although he gradually withdrew troops from Vietnam, Nixon continued air raids and more U.S. servicemen eventually died during his presidency than during Johnson’s tenure in office. Nixon also pardoned Lt. Calley, who led the My Lai massacre.

In 1970, Nixon ordered a strike in Cambodia against the Viet Cong. Protests against U.S. involvement in Vietnam had been escalating since 1966, but the events at Kent State, in 1970, horrified many Americans, who were having increasing difficulties understanding the goals of the conflict and Washington’s justification of its decisions. When several students on the

campus of Kent State University protested the war, the National Guard was called in and several students were literally shot down.

The conflict further escalated in 1971, when South Vietnam invaded Laos with the help of the United States. Although George McGovern ran as an anti-war candidate against Nixon in 1972, Nixon triumphed and ended heavy bombing in North Vietnam that same year. In 1973, the Paris Peace Accords officially ended U.S. involvement in Vietnam, and, in 1975, Congress made the end more official when it refused further aid to South Vietnam.

The North Vietnamese invaded South Vietnam in 1975, captured Saigon, and formed the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in 1976. Saigon became Ho Chi Minh City, a painful reminder of the failure of the United States in Vietnam to stop the spread of communism.

Meanwhile, the communist Khmer Rouge seized power in Cambodia in 1975, beginning the infamous reign of terror of Pol Pot, who tried to return Cambodia to its ancient agricultural ways and to wipe out its religion. By the end of his regime, he had exterminated a sizeable proportion of Cambodia's population in the infamous killing fields.

CHALLENGES TO THE SUPERPOWERS

The Cold War, which polarized the world in a standoff between communism and democracy, renewed desires of Europe to assert itself. Under President Charles de Gaulle, France resisted attempts of Americans to dominate Europe. They feared that American protection would be insufficient against the threat of nuclear attack by Russia, and also wished to regain the status they had enjoyed before the world wars. The French wanted independence from NATO, and, in 1963, refused to sign a treaty banning the testing of nuclear weapons. In 1964, they detonated their first atomic bomb in the Sahara Desert. Over the next four years, the French created a *force de frappe*, or nuclear strike force, which they hoped would encourage other European nations to disengage from NATO and American domination.

Yugoslavia

Meanwhile, the Soviet Union's influence was also challenged. In Yugoslavia, **Marshal Tito** (Joseph Broz) ruled from 1945 until 1980, and fought for Yugoslavian independence from Soviet control. In 1948, Stalin ousted Yugoslavia from the Soviet Bloc.

Rise of Khrushchev and de-Stalinization

In the Soviet Union itself, Nikita Khrushchev took control after Stalin's death in 1953 and attempted to "de-Stalinize" Russia. He ended Stalin's reign of terror and freed many prisoners from Siberian camps, such as Alexander

Solzhenitsyn. Solzhenitsyn won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1970 for many of his works depicting the horrors of Stalin's prison camps.

Solidarity in Poland

Eventually, though, communism began to crumble in the Eastern Bloc. The realities of communist society had never matched the ideals. By the 1980s, economic problems sparked public unrest. Poland was the first to break ranks with the Soviet Union and hold free elections. These elections were the result of revolutionary activity by Solidarity, the workers' union turned political party led by **Lech Walesa**, and **Mikhail Gorbachev**, the new leader of the Soviet Union. Gorbachev was less reactionary and more tolerant than were his predecessors. He could have attempted to use the Soviet military to violently put down any uprisings in Eastern Europe. Instead, he pledged to honor the wishes of the people of the Eastern Bloc nations by ending the Brezhnev Doctrine of 1968 of combating antisocialist forces.

Czechoslovakia and the Velvet Revolution

The revolution in Poland was followed by revolutionary actions in Czechoslovakia, where Alexander Dubcek led reforms in 1968 known as the Prague Spring. These ended when the Soviet Union invaded Prague and took Dubcek to Moscow to force him to accept Soviet demands. Responding to Gorbachev's new policy of openness, in 1989, the Velvet Revolution, a peaceful movement, took power and ousted the communists and held democratic elections. In 1993, Czechoslovakia split into the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

Hungary

The communist regime in Hungary had embraced the de-Stalinization movement, but its citizens wanted a democracy. Massive rebellions ensued, and the Hungarian army joined the people in their effort to overthrow Soviet influence. Imre Nagy and János Kádár formed a new government that declared neutrality and withdrew from the Warsaw Pact. In 1956, the Soviets invaded, executed Nagy in secret, and installed Kádár as a puppet leader loyal to the Soviets. Gorbachev's new policy of openness in the late 1980s resulted in reform in Hungary. In 1989, the Communist government initiated reforms that led to a multiparty system and competitive elections.

The Fall of the Berlin Wall

The fall of communism in Hungary opened once again the border between Hungary and Austria. Hungary allowed East Germans to pour over the

border to Austria and to freedom in the west. Back in East Berlin, resistance to the communist government grew, and, by 1990, the Berlin Wall fell. A few months later Germany was once again a united country for the first time since the end of World War II.

Romania

Romania was not so fortunate. The Romanian military violently resisted the attempt to overthrow the communist government of **Nicolae Ceausescu**. Eventually, anticommunist forces won the day and arrested and executed Ceausescu.

Détente

The many difficulties faced by the superpowers in the Cold War eventually led them to agree to **détente**, or a reduction in hostilities, in the 1960s. In 1973 and 1974, Soviet and U.S. leaders began to agree to a number of treaties, the most important being the SALT treaties growing out of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks. By the end of the 1970s, however, détente was weakening, as the U.S. established full diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China in 1979, and announced the sale of weapons to the Chinese military in 1980. Both events created hostility among the Soviets.

The Soviets in Afghanistan

In December 1979, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, further creating renewed tension with the United States. In 1978, a pro-Soviet faction of Muslims took power as the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan. The PDPA implemented radical reforms, leading to massive protests from Islamic leaders. By 1979, the rebellions had become so intense that the Soviets intervened and installed Babrak Karmal as president. He was a confirmed Marxist. The United States supplied ground-to-air missiles to the **mujahideen**, the Islamic resistance in the countryside. In 1986, the Soviets replaced Karmal, who had not succeeded in pacifying the revolt, with Muhammad Najibullah, who had been head of the Afghan Secret Police and who had a close working relationship with the Soviets. This move was not successful either, and so, in 1988, the Soviets agreed to a cease-fire in the United Nations, and, in 1989, withdrew their forces. The mujahideen, however, disintegrated into tribal and ethnic factions who warred against one another. In 1996, the **Taliban**, an army of religious students, took Kabul and executed Najibullah. So was born the Islamic State of Afghanistan. In 2003, the United States toppled the regime, accusing it of harboring the terrorists of the radical al-Qaeda organization

responsible for the terrorist actions in the United States on September 11, 2001. The al-Qaeda evolved out of the mujahideen, and, ironically, the U.S. helped to train and provided weapons for many of their terrorists.

President Ronald Reagan

President Ronald Reagan also contributed heavily to the deterioration of Soviet-U.S. relations through his description of the U.S.S.R. as the “evil empire.” He supported a massive military budget and the creation of the Strategic Defense Initiative, or Star Wars, a system that allegedly would have provided protection from nuclear attack.

The Philippines

Surprisingly, Reagan, who had funneled arms to the Contra in Nicaragua in an effort to halt what he perceived as Sandinista support of communism, also supported the regime of **Ferdinand Marcos**, one of the world’s most hated and notorious dictators. Marcos was elected president of the Philippines in 1965 and became the first president to be reelected in 1969. He implemented educational and agricultural reforms and earned the support of the United States as a result of his anticommunist rhetoric. In 1972, he declared martial law and dissolved the democratic political institutions of the Philippines. The regime also did not respect human rights. While the people of the Philippines suffered, Imelda Marcos flaunted her thousands of pairs of shoes. The Communist New People’s Army and the Muslim Moro National Liberation Front led fierce resistance to Marcos, and, in 1981, he declared an end to martial law and began to restore “democratic” reforms. His problems increased when Benigno Aquino was assassinated at the Manila airport in August 1983. In 1986, Aquino’s wife, Corazon, won election as the new president of the Philippines. President Reagan asked Mrs. Aquino to attempt to reconcile with Marcos, as he respected Marcos for his fight against communism, but the people of the Philippines had the final say.

The Fall of the Soviet Union

In the Soviet Union itself, Gorbachev was caught between opposing groups—those who wanted to end communism and those who wanted to take a hard line and crack down on those who would end communist control. In 1986, Gorbachev initiated a radical period of reform by **glasnost**, or “openness,” and **perestroika**, or “restructuring.” In 1988, Gorbachev abandoned the policies of Brezhnev and allowed the Eastern Bloc countries to move away from communism and even to adopt democracy. This move encouraged many of the revolutions described above, and Gorbachev received the Nobel Peace prize in 1990.

In 1990, Gorbachev was elected as the first executive president of the Soviet Union, but Gorbachev seemed to be leaning towards ending communism, and, in 1991, a force of communist hardliners kidnapped him and detained him in the Crimea. Boris Yeltsin, elected president of Russia in 1991, rushed to the White House in Moscow and convinced some of the armed forces to switch sides. He sent forces to rescue Gorbachev, who returned and arrested the Gang of Eight that had led the attempt to oust him. Yeltsin, who had urged Gorbachev to more reform, outlawed communism in Russia. In 1991, the Ukraine voted for independence, and soon thereafter the presidents of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus created the Commonwealth of Independent States. As Russia was, in fact, the very heart of the Soviet Union, this was the death blow for the U.S.S.R. By 1991, the Soviet Union no longer existed and Gorbachev resigned. Boris Yeltsin served as president of Russia until December 31, 1999, and Russia took the place of the U.S.S.R. in the United Nations.

Today, most of the former Soviet republics are now part of the Commonwealth of Independent States. With the fall of the stronghold of communism, the Cold War ended. It is ironic that although Yeltsin fought for the independence of Russia, he bitterly repressed the revolts in Chechnya, whose population is largely made up of Sunni Muslims who declared independence from Russia in 1991. The situation there has reached genocidal proportions. Vladimir Putin succeeded Yeltsin as Prime Minister.