

## Topic 8.2

# The Cold War from 1945 to 1980

## You Will Learn To:

- Explain how the United States attempted to limit the growth of Communism after World War II.
- Describe how the postwar tensions between the US and the USSR led the US to create an international order to promote democracy and capitalism.
- Explain how the US engaged in major direct and indirect conflicts to contain Communism.
- Explain how the US and USSR engaged in periods of confrontation and coexistence.

## One War Ends, Another Begins

In 1945, the Allied Powers, which included the Soviet Union (USSR), declared victory in WWII. During the war, US president Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) nurtured a delicate relationship with the Soviet leader Joseph Stalin.



Yet relations between the US and the USSR deteriorated rapidly toward the end of the war. FDR's successor, president Harry S. Truman, took a more confrontational approach after the war. By 1950, the US and the USSR were locked in a Cold War, pitting capitalism against communism that would continue for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



## A New International Order

The wartime alliance between the US and the USSR was an uneasy one born of necessity. Following the defeat of Nazi Germany in WWII, tensions between the two nations rose over the future of postwar Europe. Both nations envisioned a peaceful and stable world but with radically different methods of achieving it.



In the late 1940s, a new world order emerged as the US became the world leader in finance, international security, and diplomacy. Although the US envisioned rebuilding European states as free-market democracies, the USSR created buffer states in Eastern Europe to prevent future aggression from the West.

### **Containment**

Between 1945 and 1980, the US and USSR treated the world like a chessboard, one superpower's move followed by the other's countermove. After the Soviet military liberated Eastern Europe from Nazi Germany, they occupied the territory. Truman realized that Stalin had no intention of keeping the agreements made at the Yalta Conference. Truman's advisors believed that FDR had been too soft on the Soviet leader during postwar talks. In response, Truman sought a new confrontational approach to counter Stalin's moves in Eastern Europe.

The Truman Doctrine created an international security system that would contain the spread of Soviet Communism. The US pledged to financially support governments in Europe, specifically Greece and Turkey, countries that were vulnerable to external communist pressure. Truman's approach assured US allies that they wouldn't be abandoned after the war.

### **International Capitalism**

In 1941, Winston Churchill and FDR issued the Atlantic Charter, which outlined the two nations' economic and diplomatic goals after the war. Both leaders believed that a Western-organized economic structure was a path to permanent peace. In 1944, the Bretton Woods Conference put these ideas into place.

The Allies believed that a stable currency backed by the US dollar would prevent another war. Yet the Soviets rejected the agreement because it relied heavily on the US economy. The lack of Soviet participation began to isolate Stalin, furthering tensions.

### **International Security**

After two world wars and the horrors of the Holocaust, the US assumed its role as a world leader. After WWII, the US emerged as a founding member of the newly formed United Nations (UN), a postwar international security agency. In theory, the UN would function as an arbitrator by settling the type of disputes that led to the conflicts that had plagued Europe since 1914.

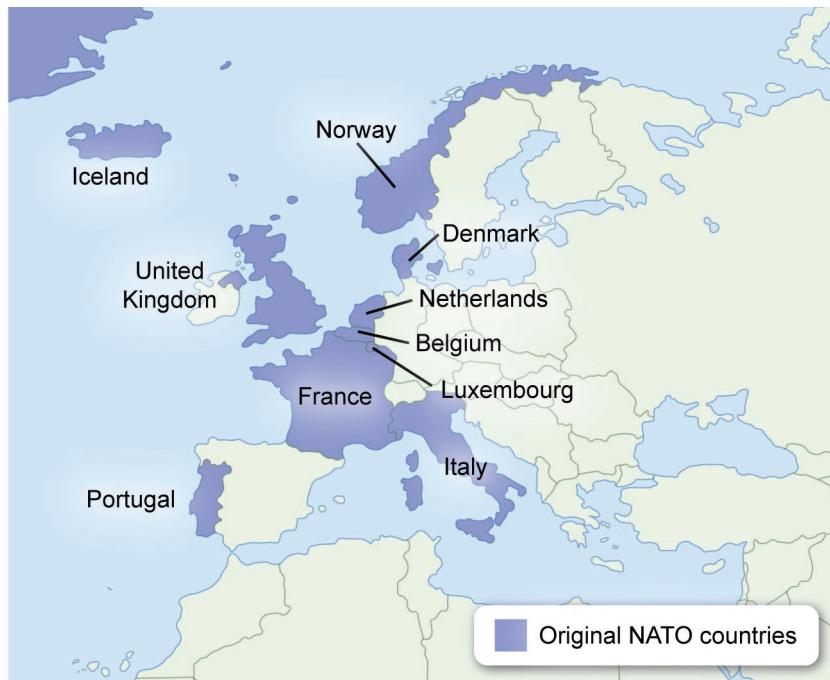
## **Post-war Tensions Rise**

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As the wartime alliance between the Western democracies and the USSR crumbled, the US became a leader in several international agreements aimed at securing peace and security in Europe.

### **New Alliances**

The toll of World War II severely damaged Great Britain, which could no longer prevent Soviet expansion in Europe. As a result, the US increased its role in containing Communism in Europe.



In 1949, the US joined the newly formed North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). US membership in NATO meant that the superpower would defend member nations that might come under attack from the USSR.

### International Aid

After World War II, Europe was in ruins, and US officials feared that Europeans might turn to the Soviet Union for relief. In response to the growing humanitarian crisis, the US implemented the Marshall Plan to bring Europe much-needed relief.



Although the US provided humanitarian relief to Western Europe, it also provided a market for American-made products, helping US manufacturing to flourish. The Marshall Plan furthered US prestige in the world as a defender of free nations.

## Economic Aid

With Europe in ruins, the US continued to use its economy as a tool against the Soviets to keep markets open and promote global capitalism. In addition to the Bretton Woods agreement, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) worked to open trade barriers to help noncommunist nations. The agreement offered cheap, easy credit to newly independent nations.

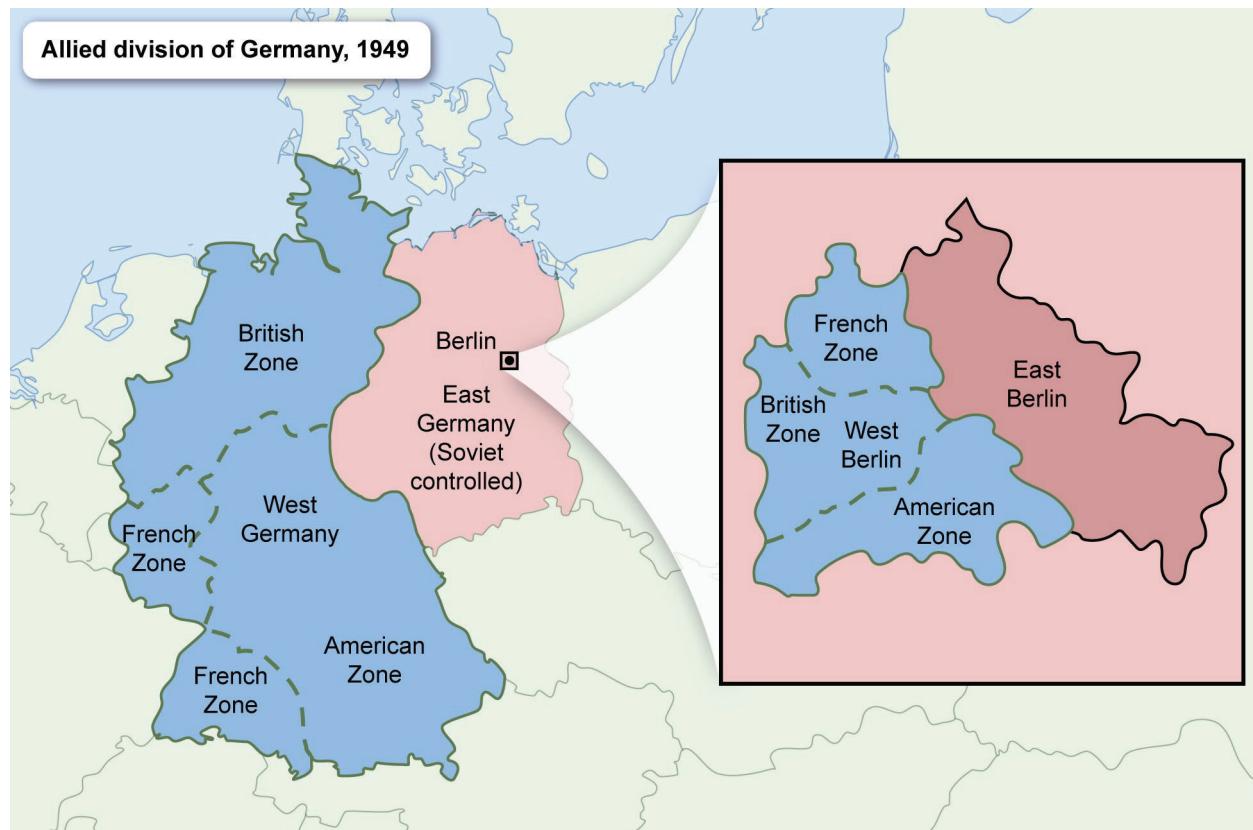
This international aid built up both the European and American economies; European economies created the demand, and Americans created the supply. The Marshall Plan and GATT were a resounding success, resulting in a thriving Europe.

## Containment in Europe and Asia

In 1946, Winston Churchill declared that an "Iron Curtain" had fallen in Europe, separating the Eastern bloc from Western Europe. Stalin used the postwar political climate to test US resolve and expand Soviet influence in Eastern Europe.

### Berlin

The first test of Truman's containment policy came in 1948. The Potsdam Conference had divided Berlin into four sectors, with the Western nations controlling the west and the Soviets the east.



The allied divisions of Berlin posed problems for the Western nations. Although West Berlin was under the control of Western nations, the city was deep inside communist East Germany. Soviet-backed East Germany could easily limit Western access to the city.

Stalin decided to test the US commitment to West Berlin by cutting off rail access to the city. Rather than responding with force, Truman responded with the Berlin airlift. This strategic move assured allies that the US would not abandon them to Stalin.

## Korea

In 1949, the US-backed Chinese government fell to Chairman Mao Zedong's Communist Party. Containment was holding in Europe, but Communism was spreading in Asia, specifically Korea.



The Korean War was a proxy war in which the democratic West and the communist East battled indirectly.

In 1945, the Korean peninsula was occupied by Soviet and US forces. From the Soviet-occupied north, Kim Il Sung led Soviet-backed forces to reunify Korea under a single communist government. By 1950, Kim's army had overrun South Korean forces.

Truman sent US forces, under the UN, to push the North Koreans back. For three years, American and South Korean armies fought against North Korean forces backed by the Chinese and armed by the Soviet Union.

## Détente

The Cuban Missile Crisis brought the superpowers to the brink of nuclear war. After the crisis, the US and USSR stepped back and reassessed their relationship. New leadership in both governments looked for ways to coexist rather than compete for world domination. After Cuba, the US and the USSR entered a phase of détente.



The new US President, Richard M. Nixon, started his political career as an avid anticommunist (Topic 8.3). Yet Nixon was more than willing to work with leaders of both the USSR and communist China. The president even accepted a personal invitation to visit Mao's China.



Nixon exploited the growing rivalry between the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union. Anxious to not be left out, the Soviets negotiated with the US over nuclear weapons. The crowning achievement of détente was the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT), which limited the number of deployable nuclear weapons. The spirit of détente made the US partners with, instead of rivals of, the USSR.

## Things to Remember

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- The US emerged from World War II as a superpower and helped create a stable international order.
- The Cold War was an ideological conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union that fluctuated between periods of intense rivalry and mutual coexistence.
- The US wanted to expand global capitalism and protect its allies from the expanding influence of the Soviet Union and its communist ideology.

### Key Terms and Developments

Berlin airlift

Bretton Woods agreement

Buffer states

Containment

Cuban Missile Crisis

Detente

General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

Marshall Plan

NATO

Potsdam Conference

Proxy wars

SALT

Truman Doctrine

Yalta Conference

## 8.2 Check for Understanding

**1. Assemble the following historical events in chronological order:**

- I. The Truman Doctrine
- II. The Berlin Airlift
- III. The Korean War
- IV. The Potsdam Conference

A. II, III, IV, I  
B. IV, I, II, III  
C. IV, II, I, III  
D. II, I, IV, III

**2. Which of the following was a major break with the longstanding United States tradition of avoiding "entangling alliances"?**

- A. NATO
- B. GATT
- C. The Marshall Plan
- D. The Atlantic Charter

**3. Which of the following was the primary reason for the start of the Korean War?**

- A. The division of Korea into two separate zones of occupation following World War II
- B. The desire of the Soviet Union to expand its communist influence in Asia
- C. The invasion of South Korea by North Korea
- D. The intervention of the United States and its allies in the Korean conflict

**4. Which of the following is a major difference between the Cold War policies of Richard Nixon and Harry Truman?**

- A. Harry Truman desired to work with the Soviet Union, whereas Richard Nixon pursued a more confrontational approach
- B. Harry Truman was nonconfrontational with the Soviets as opposed to Richard Nixon who sought to dominate them
- C. Harry Truman pursued a more confrontational approach, whereas Richard Nixon looked for ways to coexist with the Soviet Union
- D. Harry Truman encouraged Soviet participation in the international community, whereas Richard Nixon looked for ways to isolate the Soviet Union