

The Cold War – From Confrontation to Co-Existence (1945–1962)

The Origins of the Cold War

Between 1945 and 1949, the Cold War between the new world powers, the USA and USSR*, began. The outbreak of this conflict was a consequence of World War II. Even before Hitler had been defeated, these two major Allied powers started to disagree on what Europe should look like after the war. The United States and the Soviet Union managed to maintain their
5 unity during the war because it was a vital precondition for defeating the Axis powers*, but once their victory was assured, the profound differences between the two major victorious powers became apparent.

The total collapse of the Nazi Empire created a vacuum in both Germany and most of continental Europe which was filled by the armies of the wartime allies. As a result, the Red
10 Army* occupied Eastern Europe up to the river Elbe, while the USA, Britain, and France dominated Western Europe, Greece, and the Mediterranean. The rivalry between the two new superpowers had its roots in their different perspectives and their irreconcilable political objectives. While the United States wanted to promote Western-style democracy, the Soviet Union strove for the spread of socialism, which – according to Soviet perspective – was the true
15 form of democracy: a people's democracy*. Both sides were suspicious of each other's motives. Consequently, neither side was willing to give up the advantages it had gained during the Second World War, and the mutual fears of the two rivalling powers soon reached a critical level which led to various conflicts between 1945 and 1949.

The Beginning of Confrontation

At the Yalta Conference* in February 1945 and later at the Potsdam Conference* in July
20 1945, the United States, the Soviet Union, and Great Britain agreed on dividing both Germany and Austria into zones of occupation. These powers and, later on, France would each be responsible for the administration of one zone in each country. In accordance with this principle, the cities of Berlin and Vienna would also be divided into four sectors. Furthermore, the four Allies decided to establish the Allied Control Council* which would be in charge of
25 supervising the occupied regions. Decisions of this council had to be taken unanimously. Although the different interests of the Allies became apparent at the Potsdam Conference, they could at least agree on four common aims they would pursue in their occupied zones: demilitarization, denazification*, democratization, and decentralization.

However, this apparent unity of Potsdam soon gave way to reality. The first area of
30 disagreement was Eastern Europe. Whereas the USA and Great Britain campaigned for self-determination and democratic freedom for the liberated nations of Eastern Europe, Stalin* opposed the West's plans. Since, from the Soviet point of view, the Red Army had liberated

Eastern Europe from the Nazis, Stalin now proceeded to install pro-Soviet regimes in Poland, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria. The practical reason for the establishment of these pro-Soviet governments was Stalin's desire for a buffer zone against the West. The newly founded satellite states* were subordinate to the Soviet Union in matters of both domestic and foreign
5 policy. The local populations of Eastern Europe and the West regarded the regimes as an expansion of Stalin's empire. Thus, in 1946, Winston Churchill* referred to the Communist takeover in Eastern Europe as the descent of an 'iron curtain.' The Soviet Union and its satellites were often referred to as 'iron-curtain' countries.

The USSR continued fostering communism throughout Europe. In 1947, the Communist
10 Information Bureau (Cominform),* began to publish propaganda about the supposed unity of European Communist parties, thus intending to win over politically unstable countries to communism. A good example of these unstable countries was Greece. In 1946, communist rebels tried to overthrow the Greek government which led to a civil war. The anti-communist forces were supported by the British, but, in 1947, economic problems caused the British to with-
15 draw from the active role they had been playing in Greece.

The Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan

The United States of America was very much concerned about the development in Europe. President Harry S. Truman*, alarmed by the possibility of Soviet expansion into the eastern Mediterranean, had to react. In March 1947, Truman gave a speech before Congress, announcing what came to be called the *Truman Doctrine*. The USA, the president proclaimed, con-
20 sidered the continued spread of communism to be a threat to democracy and the free world. The United States would not take action against countries where communist governments had already been established. However, the USA would offer financial, economic, and political aid to support countries threatened by communism if they asked for help. This *containment policy* aimed at 'containing,' or restricting the spread of communism.

25 In order to implement the aims stated in the Truman Doctrine, the president asked Congress to appropriate a sum of \$400 million to help Greece and Turkey against communist aggression. With American financial and technical assistance, the Greek government succeeded in putting down the rebellion. The Greek civil war was a decisive step towards confrontation between the USA and the USSR since the United States demonstrated to the Soviet Union that
30 it was determined to enforce the policy of containment as outlined in the Truman Doctrine.

However, the Greek episode was just a foretaste of future conflicts. In June 1947, the pro-
clamation of the Truman Doctrine was followed by the European Recovery Program (ERP), also known as the Marshall Plan. This programme included \$13 billion for the economic re-
covery of Europe. The main objective of the Marshall Plan was to rebuild prosperity and sta-
35 bility in order to make the independent countries of Europe immune to communist agitation. Eventually, 17 European nations participated in the European Recovery Program. The Mar-

shall Plan was also offered to the USSR and its satellites, but they rejected it. From the Soviet perspective, the ERP was a political weapon since it granted financial help to first make countries economically, and then politically dependent on the U.S.

The Division of Germany

By 1947, the division of Europe into East and West had become a fact. Now the future of Germany became a source of contention between the USSR and the USA. As a consequence, the four occupying powers pursued very different policies in their respective zones. The Soviets, whose country had been devastated most by the war, took reparations from Germany. They dismantled hundreds of factories in the western sectors of Berlin before transferring their control to the Western powers and then did the same in their eastern zone. These factories were rebuilt in the Soviet Union. At the same time, the Soviets re-established and fostered the German Communist Party and put its leaders in charge of the political reconstruction of the Soviet zone in eastern Germany.

In contrast to this, the three Western occupying powers reacted by starting discussions aimed at uniting their zones and eventually creating a West German federal government. In June 1948, the Soviets responded by blockading all land and water traffic into Berlin from the West. They refused to allow trucks and trains to pass the Soviet occupied zone, thus threatening the people of West Berlin with starvation.

To the surprise of the Soviets, the Western allies reacted swiftly and determinedly to the Berlin Blockade. Since direct military confrontation seemed dangerous, the United States and Great Britain organized the Berlin Airlift* to supply West Berlin. It was an enormous undertaking unprecedented in history. The Western allied air forces worked around the clock for nearly one year in order to fly the daily supplies of food, coal, oil, and gasoline to the 2 million inhabitants of the Western sectors of Berlin. The airlift operated so efficiently that even raw materials were supplied to West Berlin factories. In May 1949, the Soviet Union lifted its blockade of the city.

The Berlin Blockade had contributed substantially to the intensification of the tensions between the USA and the USSR. As a result, the three Western occupying powers announced that they would unite their zones and allow the West Germans to write a constitution and set up a democratic government. On 23 May 1949, the Federal Republic of Germany* (FRG) was proclaimed, known as West Germany. In October 1949, the German Democratic Republic* (GDR) was established in the Soviet zone of Germany, known as East Germany. Berlin remained a divided city with West Berlin being a thorn in East Germany's side.

The Global Dimension of the Cold War

With the creation of several Soviet satellite states in Eastern Europe, many people in the West feared further Soviet expansion. The Western nations felt a need to deter any Soviet expansion, especially after the Soviet Union had detonated its first atomic bomb in 1949.

In April 1949, a Western military alliance was established, the *North Atlantic Treaty Organization** (NATO). It was signed by twelve nations: the USA, Great Britain, France, Italy, Portugal, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Canada, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. In 1952, Greece and Turkey joined NATO, followed by West Germany in 1955. The member nations of the alliance agreed that if one of them was attacked, all members would provide mutual assistance and take united action against the aggressor. In 1954, the NATO members drew up a detailed defence plan, with each member nation contributing to a standing NATO force of about 750,000 troops. The plan also called for large-scale commitments of ships and aircraft.

In 1955, the Soviet Union responded to the growing strength of NATO by holding a meeting of representatives of the European Communist bloc in Warsaw, Poland. The Soviet Union, Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and Albania signed a military alliance called the Warsaw Pact*. The nations assured, in the event of war, to provide about 1.5 million troops. As a result, Europe was divided into two hostile military alliance systems and rivalling political blocs.

However, it was not only Europe that was affected by the conflict between the two superpowers USA and USSR. In the Far East, the defeat of the Japanese empire in 1945 had also brought along significant changes. In 1949, the Chinese communists had won the civil war and established a new communist regime in Asia, thus intensifying American fears about the spread of communism. The USA was very much concerned that Korea was going to be the next country to be lost to the communist bloc if nobody interfered.

Having been liberated from Japanese occupation in 1945, Korea – according to an agreement made at the end of World War II – was divided at the 38th parallel. The Soviet Union occupied Korea north of this line, while the United States moved troops into the south. The two occupying powers agreed that free elections should be held to form a government that would rule the entire country. In 1948, a United Nations commission was sent to supervise these elections, but the Soviet Union refused to allow them to enter the north. In the south, elections were held, however, and they resulted in the creation of the Republic of Korea, also known as South Korea. At the same time, the Democratic People's Republic, or North Korea, was created in the north. The UN recognized South Korea as the legal government, while communist countries recognized only North Korea.

In 1950, North Korean forces invaded South Korea, probably with Stalin's approval. The USA, regarding this aggressive step as yet another example of communist expansion, appealed to the United Nations and gained its support to intervene in the conflict. The allied

American and South Korean forces managed to push the North Korean army back towards the Chinese border, but communist China regarded the presence of American troops at her border as a dangerous threat. The Chinese responded by sending forces against the American and South Korean troops. Subsequently, the Americans and South Koreans were forced to retreat
5 to South Korea. American politicians regarded this retreat as a disgrace, believing that the Chinese were simply Stalin's puppets. In the USA, communism was increasingly seen as a united, demonic force directed by the Soviet Union. In 1953, after two more years of fighting, an armistice was achieved, with Korea remaining a nation divided along the 38th parallel.

The Korean War had a huge impact on the Western world and seemed to confirm American
10 an fears of communist expansion and the necessity of containing Soviet power. In the mid-1950s, president Dwight D. Eisenhower* advocated a policy of massive retaliation which included the use of American nuclear weapons to counteract any major Soviet attack on Western Europe. Additionally, by the end of the 1950s, the United States had managed to forge military alliances with 42 states all around the world. The Cold War had definitely gone global.
15 al.

Nevertheless, there were also signs of hope for a peaceful coexistence between the East and West in the 1950s. With the death of Stalin in 1953, many people in the West thought that a new Soviet government might be less aggressive and more flexible, but the Soviets proved otherwise when they brutally crushed Hungary's attempt to gain independence from their control in 1956.
20

The violent suppression of the Hungarian Rising of 1956 was soon followed by a new crisis over Berlin in the late 1950s. By 1957, the Soviet Union had gained new self-confidence through launching its first intercontinental ballistic missile* (ICBM) and, shortly after, Sputnik, the first space satellite. The American public was alarmed and afraid of falling behind in the arms race with the Soviet Union. The new Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev*, now
25 felt that he was in an advantageous position to bring up the problem of Berlin again. During the 1950s, Berlin had remained a 'Western island' of prosperity in the midst of the relatively poor and backward East Germany. As a result, many East Germans – most of them young and well educated – had left their country by escaping to West Berlin, which meant a huge burden
30 for the East German economy.

In November 1958, Khrushchev announced the *Berlin Ultimatum*. It said that unless the West removed its forces from West Berlin within six months, the Soviet Union would hand over the control of the access routes to Berlin to East Germany. President Eisenhower refused to accept the ultimatum that would have abandoned West Berlin to the communists, and
35 Khrushchev finally gave in. Realising that the West would permanently remain in control of West Berlin, the East German government began to build a wall in August 1961 that would separate West Berlin from East Berlin.

The Cuban Missile Crisis and the Way to Détente

For the moment, the issue of Berlin had faded, but Khrushchev was determined to achieve some foreign policy success. Therefore, the Soviet leader soon embarked on an even more dangerous policy in Cuba.

5 In 1959, Fidel Castro, a left-wing revolutionary, had overthrown the Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista and established a socialist regime supported by the Soviets. The USA regarded the developing relationship between Castro and the Soviet Union as a threat to American national security with island of Cuba being just 90 miles away from the coast of Florida.

10 In April 1961, the newly elected president John F. Kennedy* supported an attempt of Cuban anti-Castro rebels to invade Cuba via the *Bay of Pigs** and overthrow Castro's regime. However, the invasion utterly failed since local uprisings that the rebels expected did not take place and Castro's forces were well-organized and motivated. The Bay of Pigs invasion turned out to be a foreign policy disaster for the Kennedy administration, driving Castro into even closer ties with the USSR.

15 Fidel Castro feared that the USA would attempt another invasion. Consequently, he quickly agreed to a Soviet plan to construct nuclear missile sites in Cuba. In October 1962, an American U-2 spy plane flying over Cuba discovered a number of missile launch pads near San Cristobal, Cuba. When American intelligence found out that a Soviet fleet carrying missiles was heading for Cuba, President Kennedy decided to impose a blockade on Cuba in order to prevent the fleet from reaching its destination. He also demanded that the Soviets re-
20 move the missiles, warning that if the USSR did not, the USA would. This strategy of Kennedy's had the advantage of delaying confrontation and giving each side time. After 13 tense days, during which the world found itself on the brink of a global nuclear war, Khrushchev agreed to submit to Kennedy's demand. In return, the USA removed nuclear missiles aimed at the USSR from Italy and Turkey. Furthermore, he agreed not to invade Cuba.

25 The Cuban Missile Crisis is widely regarded as the peak of the Cold War, a time when the world felt it could be annihilated within a few days. This experience had a profound influence on both sides. Since one of the major problems leading to this confrontation was a lack of communication, a telephone hotline between Moscow and Washington was installed in 1963 in order to provide quick and efficient communication between the two superpowers. The ter-
30 rifying experience of the Cuban Missile Crisis paved the way for *détente** which would characterize the relations between East and West during the years to follow.

Jochen Marx