

Origins of the Cold War

MAIN IDEA

The United States and the Soviet Union emerged from World War II as two “superpowers” with vastly different political and economic systems.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

After World War II, differences between the United States and the Soviet Union led to a Cold War that lasted almost to the 21st century.

Terms & Names

- United Nations (UN)
- satellite nation
- containment
- iron curtain
- Cold War
- Truman Doctrine
- Marshall Plan
- Berlin airlift
- North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

One American's Story

Seventy miles south of Berlin, Joseph Polowsky and a patrol of American soldiers were scouting for signs of the Soviet army advancing from the east. As the soldiers neared the Elbe River, they saw lilacs in bloom. Polowsky later said the sight of the flowers filled them with joy.

Across the Elbe, the Americans spotted Soviet soldiers, who signaled for them to cross over. When the Americans reached the opposite bank, their joy turned to shock. They saw to their horror that the bank was covered with dead civilians, victims of bombing raids.

A PERSONAL VOICE JOSEPH POLOWSKY

“Here we are, tremendously exhilarated, and there’s a sea of dead. . . . [The platoon leader] was much moved. . . . He said, ‘Joe, let’s make a resolution with these Russians here and also the ones on the bank: this would be an important day in the lives of the two countries.’ . . . It was a solemn moment. There were tears in the eyes of most of us. . . . We embraced. We swore never to forget.”

—quoted in *The Good War*

The Soviet and U.S. soldiers believed that their encounter would serve as a symbol of peace. Unfortunately, such hopes were soon dashed. After World War II, the United States and the Soviet Union emerged as rival superpowers, each strong enough to greatly influence world events.



▲ American and Soviet soldiers meet (top) at the Elbe River in Germany near the end of World War II. A 1996 postage stamp (above) commemorates the historic meeting.

Former Allies Clash

The United States and the Soviet Union had very different ambitions for the future. These differences created a climate of icy tension that plunged the two countries into a bitter rivalry.



Background

See *communism* on page R39 and *capitalism* on page R38 in the Economics Handbook.

Under Soviet communism, the state controlled all property and economic activity, while in the capitalistic American system, private citizens controlled almost all economic activity. In the American system, voting by the people elected a president and a congress from competing political parties; in the Soviet Union, the Communist Party established a totalitarian government with no opposing parties.

The United States was furious that Joseph Stalin—the leader of the Soviet Union—had been an ally of Hitler for a time. Stalin had supported the Allies only after Hitler invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941. In some ways, the Americans and Soviets became more suspicious of each other during the war. Stalin resented the Western Allies' delay in attacking the Germans in Europe. Such an attack, he thought, would draw part of the German army away from the Soviet Union. Relations worsened after Stalin learned that the United States had kept its development of the atomic bomb secret. **A**

THE UNITED NATIONS In spite of these problems, hopes for world peace were high at the end of the war. The most visible symbol of these hopes was the **United Nations (UN)**. On April 25, 1945, the representatives of 50 nations met in San Francisco to establish this new peacekeeping body. After two months of debate, on June 26, 1945, the delegates signed the charter establishing the UN.

Ironically, even though the UN was intended to promote peace, it soon became an arena in which the two superpowers competed. Both the United States and the Soviet Union used the UN as a forum to spread their influence over others.

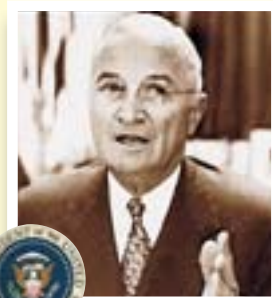
TRUMAN BECOMES PRESIDENT For the United States, the key figure in the early years of conflict with the Soviets was President Harry S. Truman. On April 12, 1945, Truman had suddenly become president when Franklin Roosevelt died. This former Missouri senator had been picked as Roosevelt's running mate in 1944. He had served as vice-president for just a few months before Roosevelt's death. During his term as vice-president, Truman had not been included in top policy decisions. He had not even known that the United States was developing an atomic bomb. Many Americans doubted Truman's ability to serve as president. But Truman was honest and had a willingness to make tough decisions—qualities that he would need desperately during his presidency.

MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Causes

A What caused the tension between the Soviet Union and the United States after the war?

KEY PLAYERS



HARRY S. TRUMAN
1884–1972

Harry S. Truman, the son of a Missouri livestock trader and his wife, did not seem destined for greatness. When he graduated from high school in 1901, he drifted from job to job. After WWI, he invested in a men's clothing store, but the business failed.

Discouraged by his business failure, Truman sought a career in politics. As a politician, his blunt and outspoken style won both loyal friends and bitter enemies. As president, his decisiveness and willingness to accept responsibility for his decisions ("The Buck Stops Here" read a sign on his desk) earned him respect that has grown over the years.

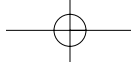


JOSEPH STALIN
1879–1953

As a young revolutionary, Iosif Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili took the name *Stalin*, which means "man of steel" in Russian.

His father was a failed shoemaker and an alcoholic. His mother helped support the family as a washerwoman.

Stalin is credited with turning the Soviet Union into a world power but at a terrible cost to its citizens. He ruled with terror and brutality and saw "enemies" everywhere, even among friends and supporters. He subdued the population with the use of secret police and labor camps, and he is believed to have been responsible for the murder of millions of Soviets.



THE POTSDAM CONFERENCE Truman's test as a diplomat came in July 1945 when the Big Three—the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union—met at the final wartime conference at Potsdam near Berlin. The countries that participated were the same ones that had been present at Yalta in February 1945. Stalin still represented the Soviet Union. Clement Attlee replaced Churchill as Britain's representative mid-conference, because Churchill's party lost a general election. And Harry Truman took Roosevelt's place.

At Yalta, Stalin had promised Roosevelt that he would allow free elections—that is, a vote by secret ballot in a multiparty system—in Poland and other parts of Eastern Europe that the Soviets occupied at the end of the war. By July 1945, however, it was clear that Stalin would not keep this promise. The Soviets prevented free elections in Poland and banned democratic parties. **B**

MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Causes

B What did Stalin do to make President Truman distrust him?

Tension Mounts

Stalin's refusal to allow free elections in Poland convinced Truman that U.S. and Soviet aims were deeply at odds. Truman's goal in demanding free elections was to spread democracy to nations that had been under Nazi rule. He wanted to create a new world order in which all nations had the right of self-determination.

BARGAINING AT POTSDAM At the Yalta conference, the Soviets had wanted to take reparations from Germany to help repay Soviet wartime losses. Now, at Potsdam, Truman objected to that. After hard bargaining, it was agreed that the Soviets, British, Americans, and French would take reparations mainly from their own occupation zones within Germany.

Truman also felt that the United States had a large economic stake in spreading democracy and free trade across the globe. U.S. industry boomed during the war, making the United States the economic leader of the world. To continue growing, American businesses wanted access to raw materials in Eastern Europe, and they wanted to be able to sell goods to Eastern European countries.

SOVIETS TIGHTEN THEIR GRIP ON EASTERN EUROPE The Soviet Union had also emerged from the war as a nation of enormous economic and military strength. However, unlike the United States, the Soviet Union had suffered heavy devastation on its own soil. Soviet deaths from the war have been estimated at 20 million, half of whom were civilians. As a result, the Soviets felt justified in their claim to Eastern Europe. By dominating this region, the Soviets felt they could stop future invasions from the west.

U.S. Aims Versus Soviet Aims in Europe

The United States wanted to . . .

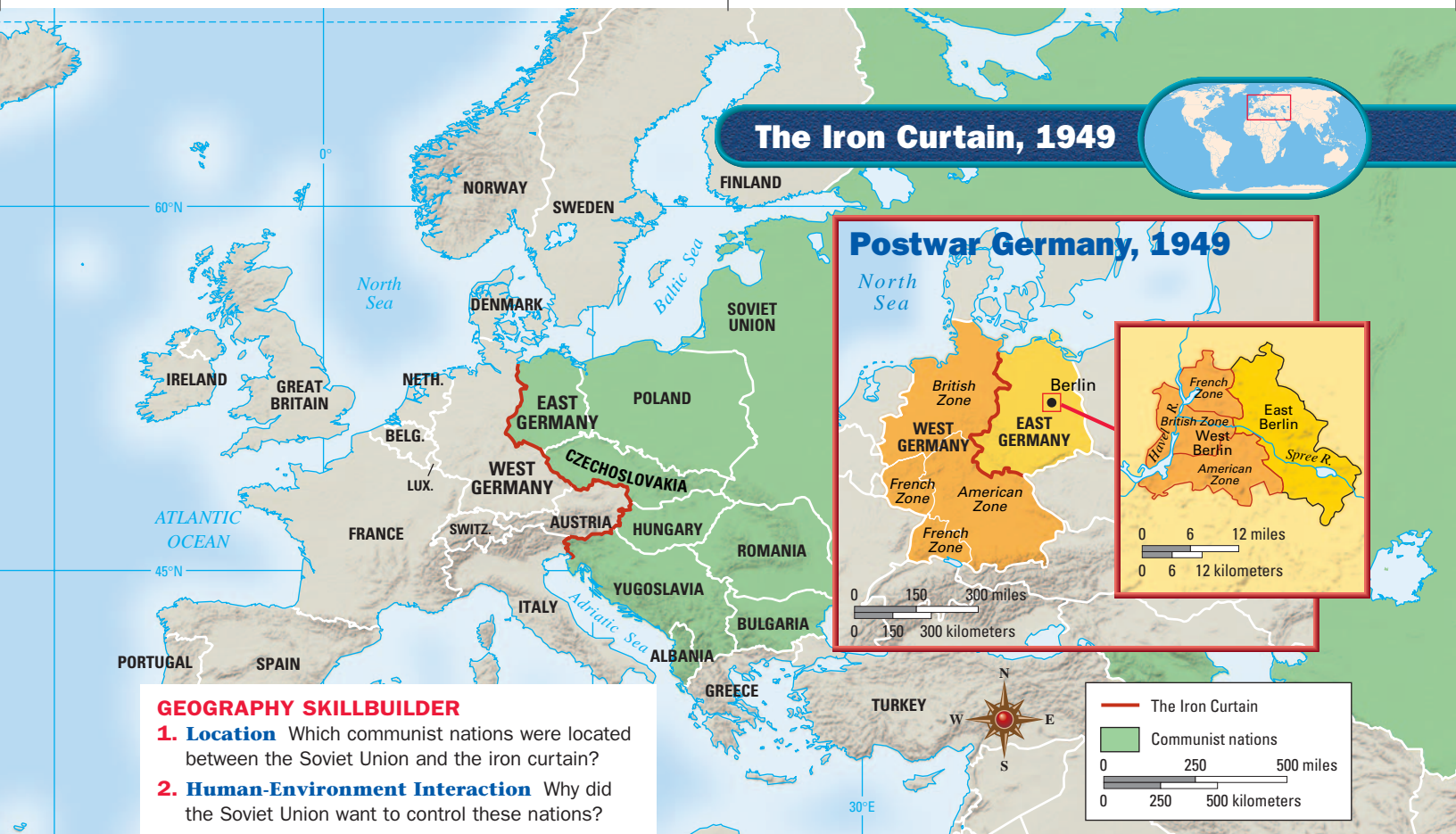
- Create a new world order in which all nations had the right of self-determination
- Gain access to raw materials and markets for its industries
- Rebuild European governments to ensure stability and to create new markets for American goods
- Reunite Germany, believing that Europe would be more secure if Germany were productive

The Soviets wanted to . . .

- Encourage communism in other countries as part of the worldwide struggle between workers and the wealthy
- Rebuild its war-ravaged economy using Eastern Europe's industrial equipment and raw materials
- Control Eastern Europe to balance U.S. influence in Western Europe
- Keep Germany divided and weak so that it would never again threaten the Soviet Union

SKILLBUILDER Interpreting Charts

1. Which aims involved economic growth of the United States?
2. Which Soviet aims involved self-protection?



GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER

- 1. Location** Which communist nations were located between the Soviet Union and the iron curtain?
- 2. Human-Environment Interaction** Why did the Soviet Union want to control these nations?

Stalin installed communist governments in Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Poland. These countries became known as **satellite nations**, countries dominated by the Soviet Union. In early 1946, Stalin gave a speech announcing that communism and capitalism were incompatible—and that another war was inevitable.

UNITED STATES ESTABLISHES A POLICY OF CONTAINMENT Faced with the Soviet threat, American officials decided it was time, in Truman’s words, to stop “babying the Soviets.” In February 1946, George F. Kennan, an American diplomat in Moscow, proposed a policy of **containment**. By containment he meant taking measures to prevent any extension of communist rule to other countries. This policy began to guide the Truman administration’s foreign policy. **C**

MAIN IDEA
Analyzing Motives

C What were Truman’s goals in establishing the policy of containment?

Europe was now divided into two political regions, a mostly democratic Western Europe and a communist Eastern Europe. In March 1946, Winston Churchill traveled to the United States and gave a speech that described the situation in Europe.

A PERSONAL VOICE WINSTON CHURCHILL

“A shadow has fallen upon the scenes so lately lighted by the Allied victory. . . . From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe. . . . All these famous cities and the populations around them lie in . . . the Soviet sphere, and all are subject in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and . . . increasing measure of control from Moscow.”

—“Iron Curtain” speech in Fulton, Missouri



Winston Churchill,
Prime Minister
of Great Britain

The phrase “**iron curtain**” came to stand for the division of Europe. When Stalin heard about the speech, he declared in no uncertain terms that Churchill’s words were a “call to war.”



Cold War in Europe

The conflicting U.S. and Soviet aims in Eastern Europe led to the **Cold War**, a conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union in which neither nation directly confronted the other on the battlefield. The Cold War would dominate global affairs—and U.S. foreign policy—from 1945 until the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991.

THE TRUMAN DOCTRINE The United States first tried to contain Soviet influence in Greece and Turkey. Britain was sending economic and military support to both nations to prevent communist takeovers. However, Britain's economy had been badly hurt by the war, and the formerly wealthy nation could no longer afford to give aid. It asked the United States to take over the responsibility.

President Truman accepted the challenge. On March 12, 1947, Truman asked Congress for \$400 million in economic and military aid for Greece and Turkey. In a statement that became known as the **Truman Doctrine**, he declared that “it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.” Congress

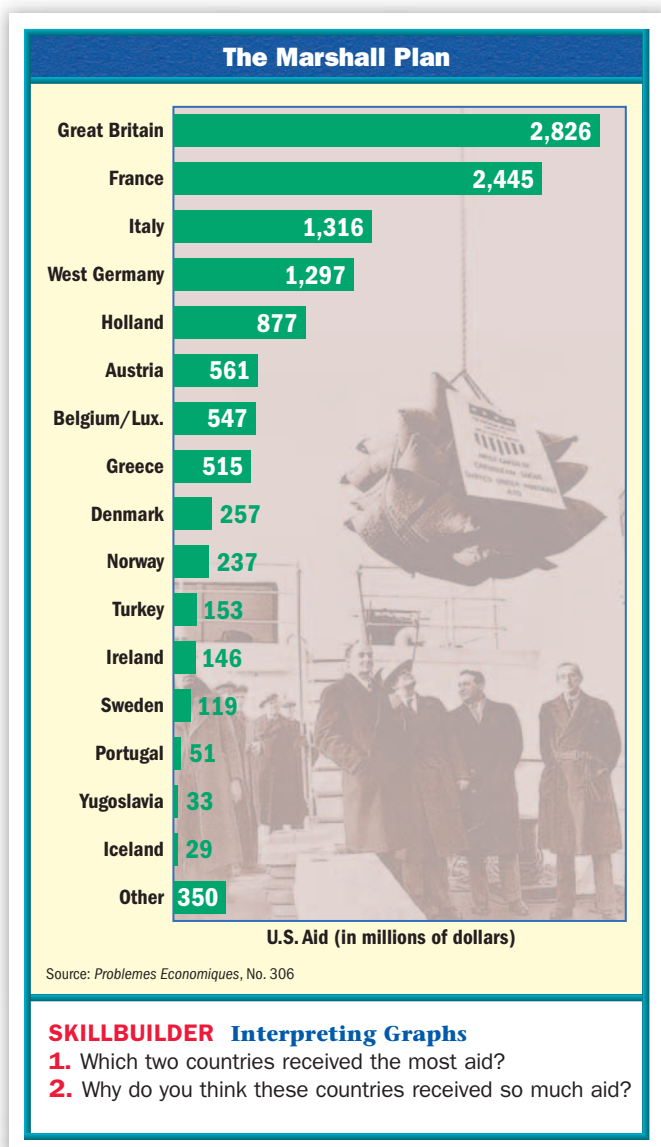
agreed with Truman and decided that the doctrine was essential to keeping Soviet influence from spreading. Between 1947 and 1950, the United States sent \$400 million in aid to Turkey and Greece, greatly reducing the danger of communist takeover in those nations.

THE MARSHALL PLAN Like post-war Greece, Western Europe was in chaos. Most of its factories had been bombed or looted. Millions of people were living in refugee camps while European governments tried to figure out where to resettle them. To make matters worse, the winter of 1946–1947 was the bitterest in several centuries. The weather severely damaged crops and froze rivers, cutting off water transportation and causing a fuel shortage.

In June 1947, Secretary of State George Marshall proposed that the United States provide aid to all European nations that needed it, saying that this move was directed “not against any country or doctrine but against hunger, poverty, desperation, and chaos.”

The **Marshall Plan** revived European hopes. Over the next four years, 16 countries received some \$13 billion in aid. By 1952, Western Europe was flourishing, and the Communist party had lost much of its appeal to voters.

Vocabulary
subjugation:
bringing under control



Background

The Marshall Plan also benefited the United States. To supply Europe with goods, American farms and factories raised production levels. As a result, the American economy continued its wartime boom.




Superpowers Struggle over Germany

As Europe began to get back on its feet, the United States and its allies clashed with the Soviet Union over the issue of German reunification. At the end of World War II, Germany was divided into four zones occupied by the United States, Great Britain, and France in the west and the Soviet Union in the east. In 1948, Britain, France, and the United States decided to combine their three zones into one nation. The western part of Berlin, which had been occupied by the French, British, and Americans, was surrounded by Soviet-occupied territory. (See map, page 811.)


Although the three nations had a legal right to unify their zones, they had no written agreement with the Soviets guaranteeing free access to Berlin by road or rail. Stalin saw this loophole as an opportunity. If he moved quickly, he might be able to take over the part of Berlin held by the three Western powers. In June 1948, Stalin closed all highway and rail routes into West Berlin. As a result, no food or fuel could reach that part of the city. The 2.1 million residents of the city had only enough food to last for approximately five weeks.

THE BERLIN AIRLIFT The resulting situation was dire. In an attempt to break the blockade, American and British officials started the **Berlin airlift** to fly food and supplies into West Berlin. For 327 days, planes took off and landed every few minutes, around the clock. In 277,000 flights, they brought in 2.3 million tons of supplies—everything from food, fuel, and medicine to Christmas presents that the planes' crews bought with their own money.


West Berlin survived because of the airlift. In addition, the mission to aid Berlin boosted American prestige around the world. By May 1949, the Soviet Union realized it was beaten and lifted the blockade. 

MAIN IDEA

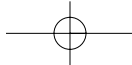
Analyzing Effects

 What were the effects of the Berlin airlift?



Beginning in June 1948, planes bringing tons of food and other supplies to West Berlin landed every few minutes. 





In the same month, the western part of Germany officially became a new nation, the Federal Republic of Germany, also called West Germany. It included West Berlin. A few months later, from its occupation zone, the Soviet Union created the German Democratic Republic, called East Germany. It included East Berlin.



▲ This cartoon depicts the nations that signed the North Atlantic Pact, which created NATO in 1949. The nations, shown as hats, are arranged in a pyramid to show the bigger countries on the bottom supporting the smaller, weaker nations on top.

THE NATO ALLIANCE The Berlin blockade increased Western European fear of Soviet aggression. As a result, ten Western European nations—Belgium, Denmark, France, Great Britain, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, and Portugal—joined with the United States and Canada on April 4, 1949, to form a defensive military alliance called the **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)**. (See map, page 830.) The 12 members of NATO pledged military support to one another in case any member was attacked. For the first time in its history, the United States had entered into a military alliance with other nations during peacetime. The Cold War had ended any hope of a return to U.S. isolationism. Greece and Turkey joined NATO in 1952, and West Germany joined in 1955. By then, NATO kept a standing military force of more than 500,000 troops as well as thousands of planes, tanks, and other equipment.



ASSESSMENT

1. TERMS & NAMES For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- United Nations (UN)
- iron curtain
- Marshall Plan
- North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)
- satellite nation
- Cold War
- Berlin airlift
-
- containment
- Truman Doctrine

MAIN IDEA

2. TAKING NOTES

Use a graphic organizer like the one below to describe the U.S. actions and the Soviet actions that contributed most to the Cold War.

U.S. Actions	Soviet Actions

Write a paragraph explaining which country was more responsible and why you think so.

CRITICAL THINKING

3. EVALUATING LEADERSHIP

People who had served as aides to President Franklin Roosevelt worried that Truman was not qualified to handle world leadership. Considering what you learned in this section, evaluate Truman as a world leader.

Think About:

- his behavior toward Stalin
- his economic support of European nations
- his support of West Berlin

4. MAKING INFERENCES

Which of the two superpowers do you think was more successful in achieving its aims during the period 1945–1949? Support your answer by referring to historical events.

5. ANALYZING MOTIVES

What were Stalin's motives in supporting Communist governments in Eastern Europe?