

# The Cold War

*Postwar United States*  
*(1945–1975)*



Two superpowers

A global battlefield

The war heats up

## Thematic Icons



Economics and business



Geography and environment



Historical concepts and questions



Politics, government and citizenship



Society and culture



War, diplomacy and foreign policy

**Icons:** For more detailed instructions, see the *User Guide*



Flash activity (these activities are not editable)



Teacher notes included in the Notes page



By the end of this section, you will learn about the origins of the Cold War and the two superpowers involved and be able to answer these key questions:

- What was the Cold War?
- What were the long-term and short-term causes of the Cold War?
- How did the postwar peace agreements take shape?





# Looking back timeline



In order to contextualize the Cold War,  
use this timeline to recap previous key  
historical events.

Either press on a date or drag the pointer  
along the timeline to find out information  
about what happened in each year.

Press **start** to begin.

**start**





# What was the Cold War?

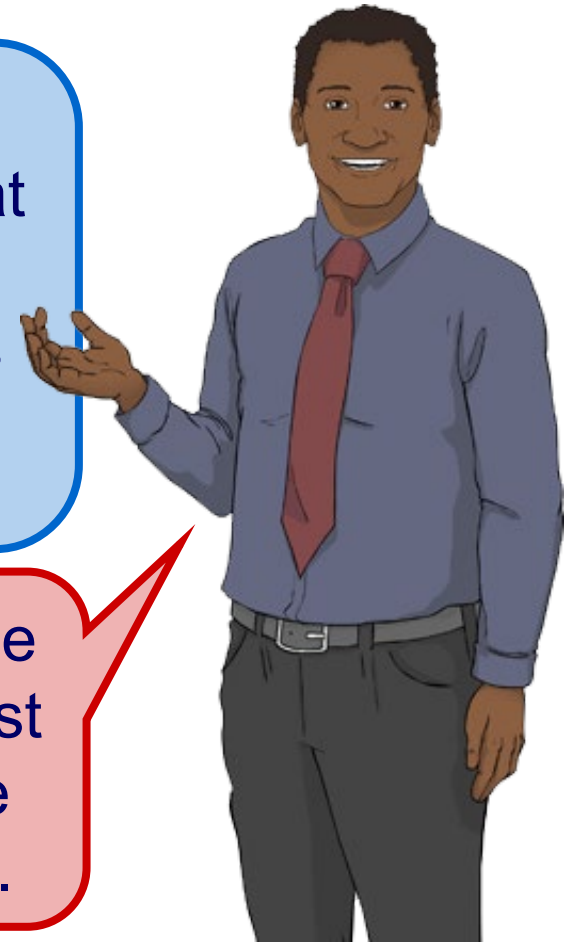


For most of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the **Cold War** defined American foreign policy.



The Cold War is the name given to the relationship that developed between the Western **capitalist** nations and Eastern **communist** nations after World War II.

It focused specifically on the rivalry between the two most powerful participants – the U.S. and the Soviet Union.



When did the Cold War begin?

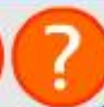


After World War II, the U.S. and the Soviet Union were the world's only two superpowers. However, they had very different economic and political systems. They also tried to spread their influence to other countries and they mistrusted each other.

Drag each statement to the correct place, depending on whether it refers to the U.S. or the Soviet Union.

Press **start** to begin.

start



What historical reasons were there for mutual distrust?





# The “Big Three”

Throughout the course of World War II, the “**Big Three**” – **Franklin Roosevelt**, **Winston Churchill** and **Joseph Stalin** – met regularly. This was to determine both military strategy and to implement a political vision of the postwar world.

The combination of mutual mistrust and the conflicting ideas of what the postwar world would be like made cooperation between the Allies difficult.

Fortunately, the need to defeat Nazi Germany and Japan required cooperation, but after their defeat it became a game of power politics.





As the “Big Three” met to plan for peace, two conflicting visions of the postwar world emerged.

Roosevelt supported an **internationalist** vision, which called for an international organization that would arbitrate disputes, the abandonment of traditional military alliances and universal adoption of the basic principles of democracy.



Churchill and Stalin favored maintaining spheres of influence. Stalin insisted on a buffer zone in Eastern Europe to protect the Soviet Union, while Churchill believed that by defining areas of influence, the West could keep Stalin in check.

How does Roosevelt’s vision compare with Wilson’s after World War I?







The “Big Three” met in **Yalta** in February 1945 and, after some compromising, reached the following agreements:



Was the conference a success? Why? Who for?



# Germany divided



After World War II, the four main Allied powers drew the German boundary with Poland on the **Oder-Neisse line** and divided the remainder into four zones, one occupied by each power. Berlin was in the Soviet zone, but was itself split into four zones of control.

Can you match the countries to the area of Germany they occupied after 1945?

Press **start** to begin.

**start**



Do you know what happened to Germany in 1949?



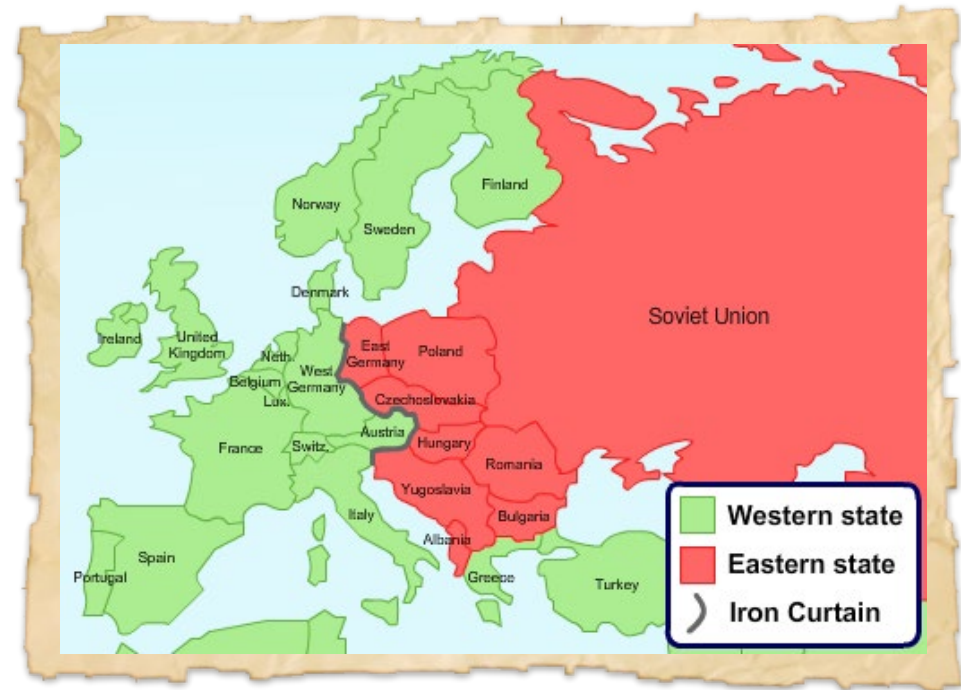
When the leaders met again in **Potsdam**, in July–August 1945, things were different for various reasons:

- the Soviet Army occupied Central and Eastern Europe
- the U.S. had a new President, **Harry S. Truman**
- Britain had a new Prime Minister, **Clement Attlee**
- the U.S. had successfully tested the atomic bomb.



Truman was tougher on communism and less appeasing. Stalin had also broken the promise of free elections and wanted to use Eastern European countries as a protective buffer zone. Agreements were made, but tensions were high.

After World War II, the Soviet Union had annexed several countries. It added to this further with the creation of Soviet **satellite states** in Eastern Europe, forming the **Eastern Bloc**.



“From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an **iron curtain** has descended across the continent.”

What did Churchill mean by an Iron Curtain?



At the start of the Cold War, the U.S. had a foreign policy that aimed to prevent the worldwide spread of communism and to provide aid to its allies.

Press the buttons to find out about two of its key early policies, the **Truman Doctrine** and the **Marshall Plan**.

Press **start** to begin.

start



What problems could arise from the Truman Doctrine?



# The nuclear arms race



The **arms race** was a competition between the Soviet Union and the U.S. to build more and increasingly powerful weapons.

In September 1949, the Soviet Union announced that it had successfully tested its own nuclear device, years ahead of when American intelligence believed it to be possible.

The U.S. responded with a National Security Council Report, **NSC-68**, in April 1950. It stated that the U.S. must take the world initiative in resisting the spread of communism. It set the stage for future U.S. interventions and the buildup of its nuclear arsenal.





# Nuclear weapon stockpiles



The nuclear arms race between the U.S. and Soviet Union effectively began with the development of the first atomic bomb. It was not long before each side possessed enough nuclear weapons to destroy the world. Guess how many nuclear weapons the U.S. and the Soviet Union possessed in each year by plotting the figures on the graph. Press the play buttons below each bar to reveal the actual figures.

Press **start** to begin.

start

