

The Cold War

The 20th Century since 1945: Promises and Paradoxes (1945–Present)



Origins

Early conflicts

A global battlefield

A changing world

Thematic Icons



Economics and business



Geography and environment



Historical concepts and questions



Politics, government and citizenship



Religion and thought



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 have learned 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?



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?

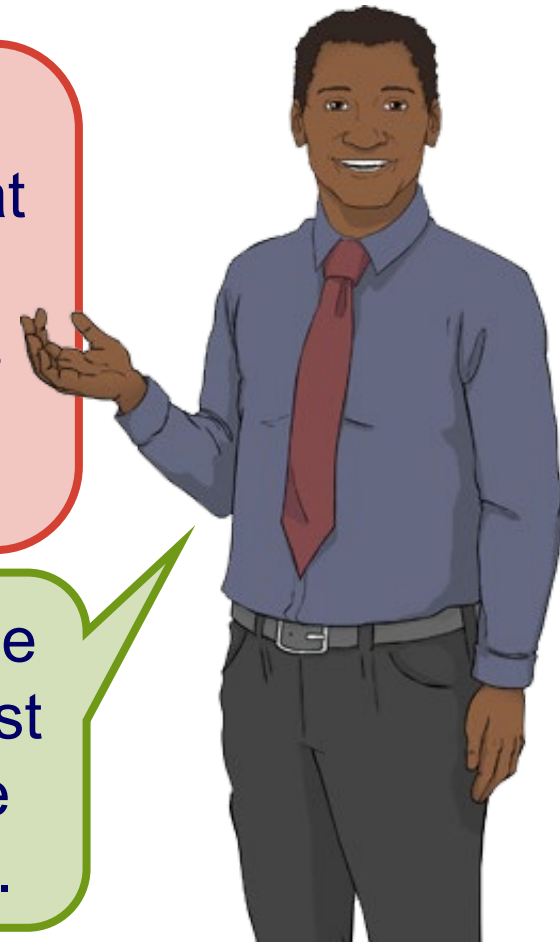


For most of the second half of the 20th century, the **Cold War** defined international relations.



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 United States or the Soviet Union.

Press **start** to begin.

start



What historical reasons were there for mutual distrust?





As World War II was drawing to a close, the U.S., Soviet Union and Britain met to discuss the peace settlement.

The “**Big Three**” leaders – **Franklin Roosevelt**, **Winston Churchill** and **Joseph Stalin** – met at **Tehran** in Iran in November–December 1943 and **Yalta** in Ukraine in February 1945. After some compromising, they agreed that:

- the Soviet Union would join the war against Japan
- Germany would be divided into four parts
- Germany should pay reparations
- free elections would be held in Soviet-occupied countries.



Was the conference a success? Why? Who for?



Germany divided



After World War II, the four main Allied powers redrew the German boundary with Poland 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?



As the war went on, it became clear that the U.S. and Soviet Union were only working together to fight a common enemy – Nazi Germany and Japan – and their relations rapidly cooled.



Mutual mistrust between the superpowers was heightened at the **Potsdam Conference** in Germany in July–August 1945. Agreements were made but tensions remained high.

The U.S. feared the spread of communism and disliked the fact that the Soviet Army occupied Central and Eastern Europe. The Soviets' distrust of the West was heightened by the U.S. testing the **atomic bomb** and not telling the Soviets.





Rebuilding the Soviet Union



World War II devastated the Soviet Union, with 20 million dead and the almost complete destruction of many cities.

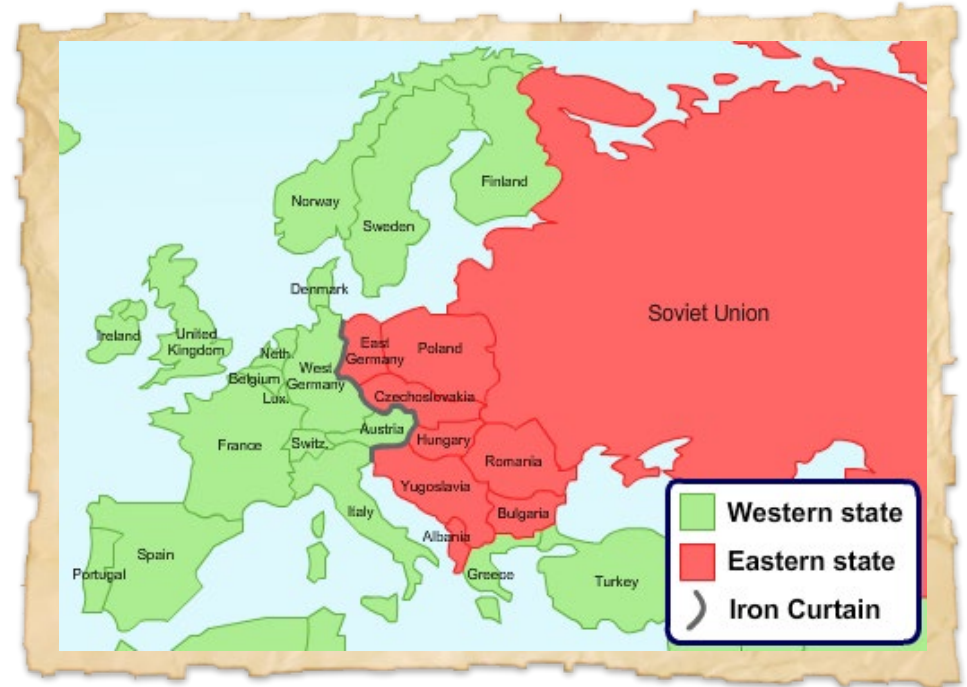
The postwar restoration to rebuild the Soviet Union took a huge effort but Stalin maintained tight control of the country. The economic recovery was impressive, with a focus on heavy industry and the military at the expense of consumer goods.



At the same time, strict measures of control were enforced. There was a strong secret police force and military to keep people in check. There was also **ensorship, propaganda** through the media and a restriction of personal freedoms.



Stalin wanted a protective **buffer zone** for the Soviet Union, so he annexed several countries in Eastern Europe. The creation of the Soviet **satellite states** formed 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?



Following the use of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the rules of war changed drastically, becoming less about conventional forces and more about nuclear weapons.

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

Initially only the U.S. had nuclear weapons. In September 1949, the Soviet Union successfully tested its own bomb. In 1952, the U.S. successfully tested a **hydrogen bomb (H-bomb)**. The Soviets successfully developed their own by 1953.





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





There were various reasons for the Cold War. These included both fundamental long-term differences between the two superpowers, such as mutual distrust and different outlooks, and short-term policy decisions. Watch this animation to find out about the **historiography** of the Cold War.

Press **start** to begin.

start

