The Cold War

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

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

Flash activity (these activities are not editable)   Teacher notes included in the Notes page
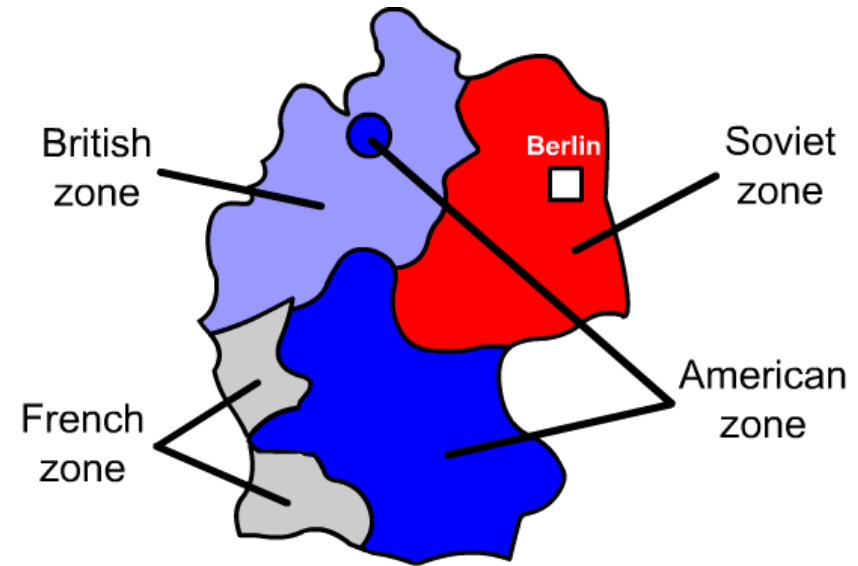
Early conflicts

By the end of this section, you will have learned about the early conflicts of the Cold War and the policies pursued by each of the superpowers:

- Conflicts in Berlin

- NATO and the Warsaw Pact

- Changes in the arms race and other policies

- Internal conflicts within the superpowers.

After World War II, Germany was divided into four sectors under control of each of the Allies – Britain, France, the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Berlin was deep inside the Soviet sector, yet it was divided between the four Allied powers.

British zone

French zone

Berlin

Soviet zone

American zone

Both Germany and Berlin were run jointly by the Allies. The countries differed as to how they felt Germany should be governed. The Soviets wanted to keep Germany weak, but the U.S. and Britain wanted to rebuild the German economy.

Why was Berlin so important after World War II?

Stalin's determination to keep Germany weak was in order to prevent future invasions of the Soviet Union.

This policy brought him into conflict with the other Allies in 1948, resulting in the **Berlin Blockade**, solved by the **Berlin Airlift**.

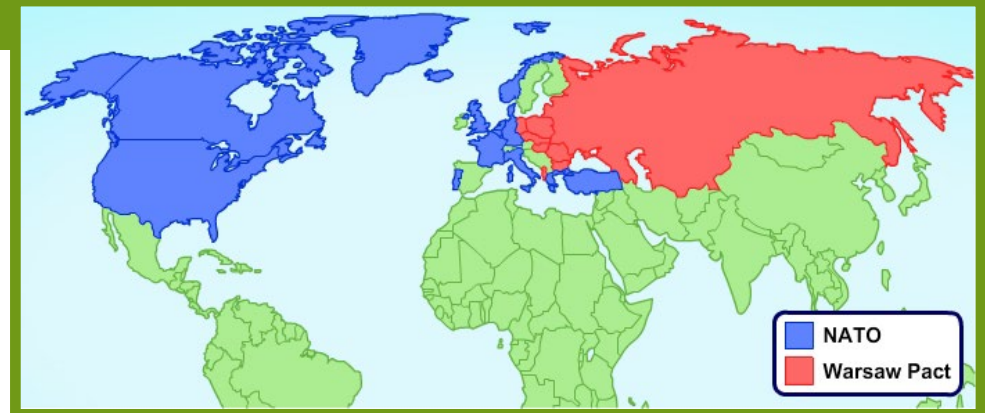Watch this animation to find out about it.

Press **start** to begin.

start

The crisis in Berlin heightened fears about the Soviet armies in Europe and sped up the U.S. commitment to containment. The U.S. joined an alliance with Western Europe in April 1949. This was the **North Atlantic Treaty Organization** (**NATO**).

Security was achieved by agreeing that an attack against any one member would be viewed as an attack against all members of the alliance.

This was clearly directed against the Soviet threat to West Germany, which became a member in 1955.

NATO
Warsaw Pact

The Soviet Union responded to West Germany joining NATO with the 1955 Warsaw Pact. What was this?

Most important

Least important

Concern over a powerful Germany – the Soviet Union wanted to prevent being invaded again

Concern over the U.S.'s growing sphere of influence and military power

Demonstrating the strength of the Soviet Union by making an alliance similar to NATO

Maintaining close control of its Eastern European satellite states

During the early Cold War era in the 1940s and 1950s, the U.S. was gripped by the "**Red Scare**." This was a deep-rooted anticommunism and fear that communists had infiltrated every aspect of American life. Press on the buttons to find out more about key people, events and organizations involved in the anticommunist hysteria.

Press **start** to begin.

start

Do you think McCarthyism was justified?

When **Dwight D. Eisenhower** became president in 1953, he appointed Secretary of State John Dulles. They created a strict anticommunist policy, rejecting containment as too passive.
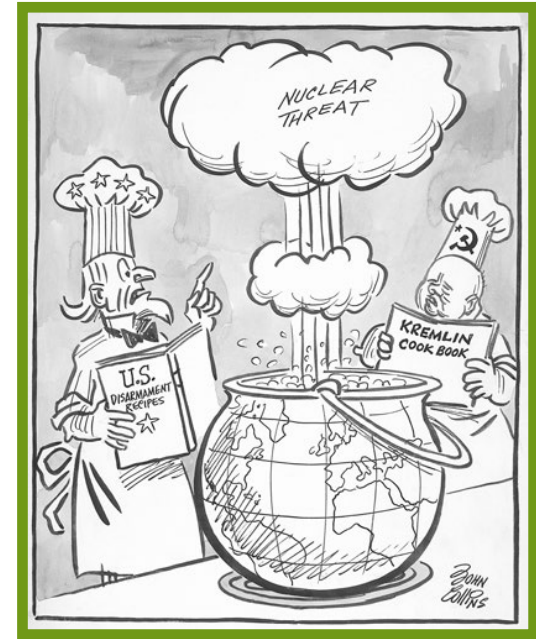
The U.S. declared it would respond to aggression with the full force of the U.S. nuclear arsenal. This doctrine of **massive retaliation** would act as a deterrent to Soviet expansion.

The U.S. adopted **brinksmanship**. This was deliberately confronting the Soviet Union and pushing it to the brink of war in order to obtain concessions.

Massive retaliation provided the basis for the **mutually assured destruction** (**MAD**) principle. This stated that unless you could destroy the other side's capacity to retaliate in a **first strike**, then neither side could risk starting a war. Both sides recognized this, so it helped to maintain the peace.

In 1961, President **John F. Kennedy** and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara devised a new policy of **flexible response**, building up conventional forces to avoid relying solely on nuclear weapons.
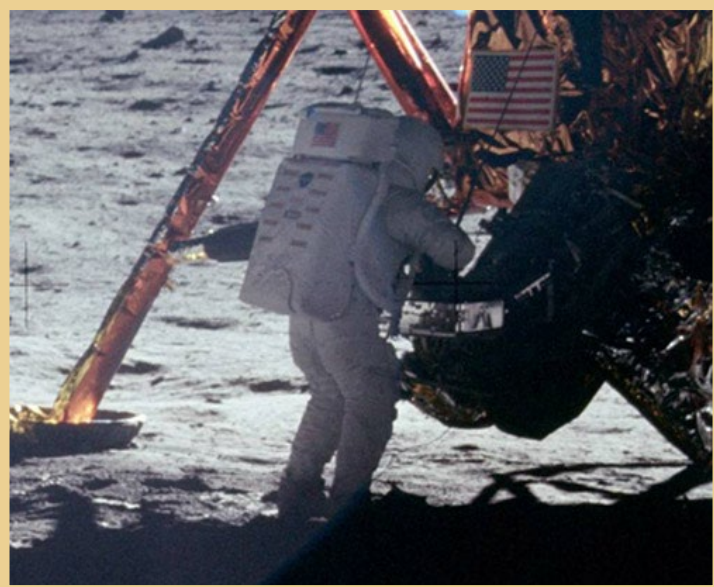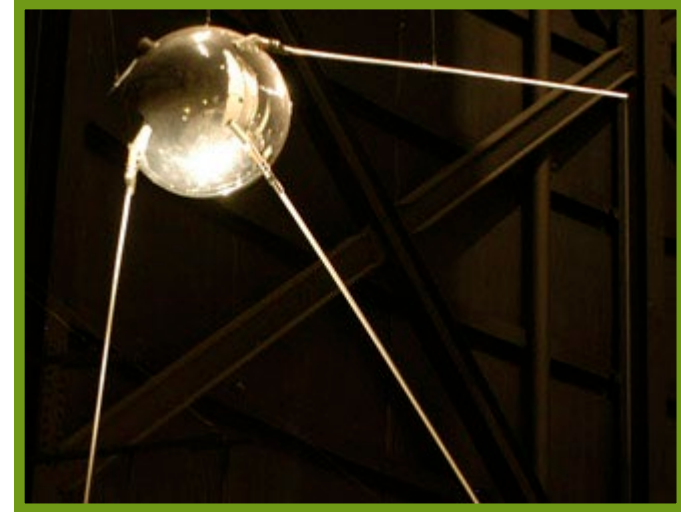
How does the cartoon portray the Cold War?

In 1957, the arms race extended into the **space race** with the launch of the first Soviet satellite, *Sputnik I*.

The Soviets also put the first human into space, **Yuri Gagarin** in 1961. The U.S. was the first to put people on the Moon, **Neil Armstrong** and **Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin** in 1969.

How do you think the U.S. public and government reacted to these Soviet developments?

Stalin's rule brought dramatic changes to the Soviet Union. His ruthless approach was responsible for an estimated death toll of almost 30 million people. Yet his fatherly role meant when he died in 1953 there was a national outpouring of grief.

Nikita Khrushchev replaced Stalin as leader. In 1956, he shocked the Soviet Union by denouncing Stalin for his crimes. The **Khrushchev Thaw** brought various important changes:

- economic reforms, including the end of collectivization

- less repression and censorship and reduction of the police state

- peaceful coexistence with other nations.

How important were Khrushchev's changes?

The Soviet Union kept strict control over its satellite states by using repressive measures. However, sometimes the states rebelled against this.

Press the buttons to find out about two of the rebellions, the **Hungarian uprising** and the **Prague Spring**.

Press **start** to begin.

start

How did the Soviet Union react to the rebellions?

Think about the similarities and differences between the Hungarian uprising and the Prague Spring. Drag each statement into the correct place in this Venn diagram.

Press **start** to begin.

start

Between them, Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev ruled the Soviet Union for nearly 60 years and each implemented many key policies and changes.
Can you match each leader to their photograph and policies?

Press **start** to begin.

start

Even after the Berlin Airlift, the city remained the main focal point of the Cold War in Europe. A second crisis in Berlin in 1961 led to the construction of the **Berlin Wall**, physically dividing the city in two.

Watch this animation to find out about the causes and construction of the Berlin Wall.

Press **start** to begin.

start