Superpower Relations and the Cold War
Setting the Scene 1941-1948

Historical Context to the Cold War 1917-1941

In 1917 there was a revolution in Russia. The Russian people had rejected the system whereby the rich had all the power while the poor did all the work and Russia became the world’s first communist country - the Soviet Union (aka USSR). Britain, France and America were scared that workers in their countries might copy the Russians. So, in 1919, they sent soldiers to Russia to support the ‘White Russians’ (the Russians who were AGAINST the new Communist government). The Soviet Union never forgot this and felt threatened by America and other wealthy, powerful, capitalist countries.

Because the Soviet Union thought that their system was the best for the majority of the people in the world (poor people) they wanted their communist ideas to spread to every country in the world, including America. Meanwhile Americans believed that the answer for all the world’s problems was for people to learn to live in ‘the American way’. By trading with other countries and sharing a democratic ideology, countries would get richer and everyone would be happy.
During the Second World War, Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union formed “The Grand Alliance”. Although they had very different political systems and values, they had common enemies - Germany and Japan. The leaders - President Roosevelt, Joseph Stalin and Winston Churchill understood that it made sense for them to put their differences to one side for the duration of the war and to work together to defeat Germany and Japan.

So what exactly was the Cold War? Almost as soon as the Second World War had ended, the winners started to argue with each other. In particular, a bitter conflict developed between the United States of America and the USSR (aka the Soviet Union). This struggle continued until the late 1980s. At various points between 1945 and 1989, it looked as though hatred of each other might actually result in a nuclear war, which would have seen the whole world wiped out. The first person to call the conflict ‘the cold war’ was an American journalist called Walter Lippmann.

Why did ‘The Cold War’ develop? The United States and the Soviet Union worked together as allies against Japan and Germany in the Second World War. Here are 3 interpretations of why these allies became enemies after the war:

- The Soviet Union (USSR) was to blame. Stalin had plans for a Communist takeover of the world. His demand to control Eastern Europe was the first step towards world domination.

- America (the USA) was to blame. Soviet actions were defensive, not aggressive. America wanted to control its area of influence but weren’t prepared to let the Soviet Union do the same.

- Neither side was to blame. The Cold War was based on misunderstandings and forces beyond the control of either side.

How did the Cold War Develop?

*This picture was taken in 1943 and shows (from the left) Joseph Stalin, the leader of the Soviet Union (USSR); President Roosevelt of the USA and Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister of the UK.*

The Grand Alliance between America, the Soviet Union and Britain was also called ‘The Big Three’ and it was very much ‘a marriage of convenience’; in reality although they were Allies, the United States and the Soviet Union had nothing in common.
Why did a Cold War develop between two members of the Grand Alliance?

- The United States and the Soviet Union wanted to gain power and influence over Europe and Asia because each wanted their different political systems to become dominant in parts of the world.
- Each side was afraid that the other side would try to increase their influence if they didn’t do it first.

As soon as it became clear that the Allies would win the war, two key questions began to be asked about the future:

1. When the war finished, should Japan and Germany (and their allies) be encouraged to become capitalist democracies (like the United States) or communist states (like the Soviet Union)?
2. What would happen to the countries in Europe and Asia which had been conquered by Germany or Japan after they had been liberated?

Long before the Grand Alliance had defeated Germany and Japan, it began to show signs of falling apart. The end of the Second World War would be the beginning of what became known as The Cold War.

The Big Three and the Three Conferences

Before Germany was defeated, the Grand Alliance had three big conferences to discuss how to finish the war and what should happen to the defeated nations once the war was over. It was at these conferences that the cracks in the Alliance really began to show. The three conferences were at Tehran in 1943, Yalta in February 1945 and Potsdam in the last week on July in 1945.

What happened at Tehran in 1943?

1. Roosevelt, Stalin and Churchill planned the invasion of Western Europe. The USA and Britain would open up a new front in France and push towards Germany via Western Europe and the Soviet Union would approach Germany via the countries of Eastern Europe.
2. The basic principle was accepted that the USSR should have influence in Eastern Europe while the USA and Britain should have influence in Western Europe.

What happened at Yalta in February 1945?

1. An international organisation called the United Nations would be created to replace the ineffective League of Nations. This organisation would have the power to make sure that major conflicts like the Second World War never happened again.
2. The borders of Poland would be moved so that the USSR gained a huge amount of land and Poland would be in the Soviet sphere of influence.
3. Free elections for new governments were to be held in all countries previously occupied by the Germany.
4. Once it was defeated Germany would be reduced in size, de-militarized and forced to pay reparations. Germany would also be divided into four zones, to be occupied by Britain, France, the Soviet Union and the United States. Likewise, Berlin would also be divided, even though it was in the Soviet zone. The Nazi party would be banned and war criminals put on trial. Germany would have to pay reparations to the Allies.

5. It was also agreed that once Germany had been defeated, the USSR would declare war on Japan to speed up the end of fighting.

**What happened between Yalta and Potsdam?**

1. Germany had surrendered in May 1945.
2. Roosevelt died and was replaced by his Deputy President, Harry Truman, who was much more suspicious of USSR.
3. The Soviet Army had expanded into Finland, Czechoslovakia, Romania and the Baltic States.
4. There had been no free elections in the liberated countries in Eastern Europe because Stalin was determined that these countries must have pro-Soviet communist governments for the future safety of the USSR.

**What was agreed at Potsdam August 1945?**

**NOTE:** During the Conference Winston Churchill lost the General Election in Britain and was replaced by the Labour leader, Clement Attlee.

1. The new boundaries of Poland and the division of Germany was agreed.
2. Germany’s capital Berlin, which was in the Soviet zone, would also be divided into the same 4 zones as the rest of Germany.
3. Each country would be allowed to take reparations from its German zone.
4. Trials were to be held at Nuremberg to punish Nazi leaders guilty of war crimes.
5. Nothing was said about the fact that there had been no elections in the countries that the Soviet Union were occupying, despite the commitment made at Yalta.
How did the use of the atomic bomb affect relations between the superpowers?

Less than a week after the Potsdam Conference, on the 6th and 9th of August 1945 the USA used two different types of atomic bombs against Japan (Hiroshima and Nagasaki) to end the war in the Asia. This was the start of what became known as the ‘ARMS RACE’. Although the United States and the Soviet Union were still Allies at this point, Truman chose not to share the technology behind the bomb with Stalin. This meant that the United States was the only country with nuclear weapons until 1949 (when the Soviet Union caught up).

The existence of nuclear weapons meant that a war between the USA and the USSR would no longer be a war between two armies; it would be a war between two nations and the impact would be catastrophic. If the COLD war should become a HOT war, then massive damage could be done to the population and infrastructure of the two nations.

What do the terms ‘Iron Curtain’, ‘sphere of influence’ and ‘buffer zone’ mean?

**The Iron Curtain**

Just after the war had ended Winston Churchill went on a tour of the USA and gave a speech in which he came up with the expression “the Iron Curtain” to describe the imaginary wall dividing Europe. Churchill blamed Stalin for this division but the truth was that both the USA and the USSR wanted this to happen because they each wanted to create ‘spheres of influence’ - regions where their particular political system was adopted. For the Stalin and the USSR this was seen as crucial because in 1941 Hitler had invaded Russia via the central and East European countries and Stalin wanted the East European countries would remain a ‘buffer zone’ between the capitalist West and the communist USSR.
**Key Words You MUST Understand!**

Before we continue, there are some words and expressions that you need to be sure that you understand:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sphere of Influence</td>
<td>This is a region in which political and economic influence or control is exerted by one powerful nation over another weaker nation or nations. In other words, in a sphere of influence there would be some small countries which were totally under the control of one big, powerful country even though technically they were independent.</td>
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<td>Satellite State</td>
<td>This is the word that describes a country which is in a sphere of influence. Officially it is independent but in reality it is controlled by another country. Between 1947 and 1949 the USSR extended its control over Eastern Europe turning Czechoslovakia, Poland, East Germany, Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania into satellite states. These countries formed a BUFFER ZONE between the Soviet Union and the West.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Buffer Zone</td>
<td>This is an area which has been created to separate opposing forces or nations. Think of two bumper cars (dodgems); when they hit each other, no real damage is done because of the ring of rubber protecting the cars. The Soviet Union wanted some smaller countries between them and the west to act like the ring of rubber on the bumper car.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nationalisation</td>
<td>This is a process in which the government takes over control and ownership of an industry or company; this is usually done so that any profit will benefit the workers (or the government) not private owners. <strong>It is central to communism.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Collectivisation</td>
<td>This is the organisation of all of a country's land and industry so that it is owned and managed by the government.</td>
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**How did the USSR become so powerful in Eastern Europe?**

1. After the end of the Second World War, the Red Army (the army of the USSR) remained in the Eastern European countries it had occupied. This was because Stalin felt the Soviet Union needed these countries to act as a ‘buffer zone’.
2. Stalin wasn’t prepared to allow these countries to have free elections and between 1945 and 1948 Stalin installed pro-Soviet ‘puppet governments’ in Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia.
3. Stalin set up an organisation called ‘Cominform’ to control information in these countries. That was to be no freedom of speech and no alternative political parties in the satellite states.
4. Stalin also set up an organisation called Comecon in 1949. Its role was to control the economies of the satellite states. Mainly it worked to nationalise and collectivise their agriculture and industries because these were the key features of a communist economy.

Needless to say, none of this pleased the USA!
A War of Words 1946 - 1948

In 1947, Stalin and Churchill engaged in a ‘war of words’ which revealed that trust had completely broken down and misunderstandings were shaping policies.

Source 1 - Churchill’s ‘Iron Curtain’ speech in March 1946

“From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic an iron curtain has descended across the continent. Behind the 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 are all subject, in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and increasing measure of control from Moscow.”

Source 2 - Stalin’s Response to Churchill’s speech, also in March 1946

“Essentially Mr Churchill now adopts the position of the warmonger* and in this Mr Churchill is not alone. He has friends not only in Britain but in the United States of America as well. A point to be noted in this respect is that Mr Churchill and his friends bear a striking resemblance to Hitler and his friends.”

● A person who wants war

What was the impact of this ‘war of words’?

In the light of these speeches, Truman and Stalin were very concerned about the possibility of a new war. Each leader asked for secret reports from their embassies, to help them understand what their opponents were thinking. Both reports were sent as telegrams. These reports were very important because they greatly influenced the thinking and policies of Truman and Stalin.
Source 3: The Long Telegram
This telegram was sent by George Kennan, America's ambassador in Moscow. It reported that:

- Stalin had given a speech in Moscow calling for the destruction of capitalism.
- There could be no peace with the USSR while it remained determined to resist capitalism.
- The USSR was building up its military power, even though the Second World War was over. Why would it be doing this if it had peaceful intentions?

Source 4: Novikov's Telegram
This telegram was sent to Stalin by the Soviet Ambassador in American, Novikov. It reported that:

- Following the death of President Roosevelt, the American government had no interest in working with the USSR.
- Truman wanted to use its power and wealth to dominate the whole world and eliminate communism.
- The American public would support its government if a war broke out against the USSR.

What was ‘The Truman Doctrine?’
As a consequence of the Long Telegram, Truman was determined that America would remain more powerful than the USSR. He was concerned that Stalin would try to extend the influence of communism by offering support to communist groups in European countries. After the war, much of Europe was devastated and people in countries like Italy, France, Greece, and even Britain, were suffering great hardships. Truman understood that communism was highly attractive to poor people because it involved sharing the money and land of a small group of people and sharing it out amongst the majority. In March 1947, To make sure that there were no more communist revolutions, Truman set out a new policy that soon became known as “The Truman Doctrine”.

**Key Ideas within the Truman Doctrine**
- The world had a choice between communist tyranny and democratic freedom.
- America had a duty to fight for freedom and protect the world from the spread of communism, which, he said, was evil.
- America would give military and economic support to any nation which was threatened by a communist takeover because communism must not be allowed to spread to other countries.

An example of this: In 1948 America gave $400 million to Turkey and Greece in an attempt to stop the communists in these countries winning the civil wars which were being fought between them and pro-Western governments.
What was the importance of the Truman Doctrine

1. The Truman Doctrine was important because it was a change of policy. This new policy was called ‘containment’. Before being dragged into the Second World War, America had maintained a policy of ‘isolationism’. Isolationism meant that the United States did not get involved in international affairs unless it absolutely had to. Containment meant that America would do all that it could (apart from actually going to war) to stop the spread of communism.

2. The Truman Doctrine was important was because it formally ended the Grand Alliance and started what soon became known as the Cold War. It was Truman’s way of telling the world that there could be no co-operation between the superpowers so long as the USSR remained a communist country.

3. The Truman Doctrine was important because, as far as Stalin was concerned the Truman Doctrine was an act of aggression. Stalin saw it as a declaration of war against the Soviet Union, since Soviet Union was the only Communist country at this time (China didn’t ‘turn’ Communist until 1949).

What was the Marshall Plan (Marshall Aid) and why was it important?
Truman had seen that extreme poverty as a major cause of communist revolutions; he had to find a way ending poverty in the European countries. The way America could do did this was to offer of financial help to all European countries affected by the Second World War. This was called ‘The Marshall Plan’.
Key Facts about the Marshall Plan

- $13 billion was made available to help the governments in democratic European countries rebuild their shattered economies.
- There was one small catch…. In order to qualify for a share of the American money, the government of a country had to agree to trade fully with America. In this way the Marshall Plan would also help the American economy as it would mean that Europe continued to be a major market for American goods.

In other words…. Marshall Aid was like the cheque book backing the Truman Doctrine. European countries damaged by the Second World War could get huge amounts of financial aid to rebuild their economies. **Marshall Aid was important because** it stopped democratic countries in Western Europe from being poor and therefore weak. Truman understood that communism became popular when the economies of democratic governments were weak. People with nothing to lose were more inclined to join revolutionary, communist movements; providing Marshall Aid meant that the people DID have something to lose and so were much less likely to support communism!

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**THE MARSHALL PLAN**

- Post-war Europe was devastated economically
- In June 1947, Secretary of State George Marshall proposed a U.S. aid package to European nations
- Western Europe accepted the help, while Eastern Europe rejected the aid
- Over the next four years 16 European countries received $13 billion in U.S. aid
- By 1952 Western Europe’s economy was flourishing
What was Europe's response to the Marshall Plan?

Most of Europe’s leaders were delighted with the offer and 16 countries were quite happy to accept ‘the strings’ which were attached to the deal (trade with the USA). They could see that money and goods from America would be a way of both rebuilding their economies and protecting their democratic way of life against the threat posed by revolutionaries.

What was Stalin’s response to the Marshall Plan?
The Soviet Union totally rejected the offer of aid from the United States. Stalin claimed:

- Marshall Aid was the first step towards a military alliance between the countries of Western Europe and the United States.
- The aim of this alliance was to attack and destroy the Soviet Union; the United States and its friends wanted to destroy communism.

What did Stalin do?

- He turned down the offer of financial assistance and insisted that all of its satellite states within the Soviet sphere of influence also turn down this offer of help.
- He said that the Soviet Union would set up a similar scheme to help the satellite states.

What was the consequence of this?

By blocking Marshall Aid, Stalin had stopped the Eastern European countries from having access to the post-war prosperity which was to be experienced by most of the countries of Western Europe in the 1950s and 1960s. In other words, he condemned Eastern Europe to continued poverty. This would reinforce the idea that Communism was a less successful economic system that capitalism and would encourage ambitious East Europeans to try to ‘escape’ to a better life in Western Europe.
# The Beliefs of the Superpowers

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Ideology (Set of Beliefs)</th>
<th>USA</th>
<th>USSR</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Political Ideology</strong></td>
<td>Capitalist</td>
<td>Communist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Set of Beliefs)</td>
<td>(an economic and political system in which a country's trade and industry are controlled by private owners for profit, rather than by the state.)</td>
<td>(a system of social organization in which all property is owned by the state and each person contributes and receives according to their ability and needs.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How the economy should be run</td>
<td>Private enterprise</td>
<td>State Control of economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Leave businessmen alone and the economy will expand)</td>
<td>(State is the boss and runs businesses for the benefit of the workers, not the bosses)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Democracy or Dictatorship</td>
<td>Political freedom</td>
<td>One party state</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Democratic rights - people could vote and had freedom of speech guaranteed)</td>
<td>(People couldn’t be trusted to vote the right way or say the right things so people didn’t have any democratic rights)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increase influence in the world by...</td>
<td>Spread American influence through trade deals with other countries</td>
<td>Support for revolutionaries in other countries Send <strong>financial support to communist movements</strong> in other countries.</td>
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