

# The Cold War, 1945-1989

## THE STORY MATTERS...

In 1957 when the Soviets launched the first satellite into space, both the USSR and the United States possessed nuclear missiles. By the time Vice President Richard Nixon visited the Soviet Union in 1959, relations between the two countries were already extremely tense. During Nixon's trip, he and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev participated in a heated debate about capitalism and communism. Their argument illustrates the nature of the growing rivalry between the two nations.

## Lesson 31-1

# The Cold War Begins

### READING HELPDESK

#### Academic Vocabulary

liberate nuclear

#### Content Vocabulary

satellite state      policy of containment  
arms race            deterrence

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How does conflict influence political relationships?

### IT MATTERS BECAUSE

At the end of World War II, a new conflict erupted in the Western world as the two new superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, competed for political domination of the world. Europeans were forced to become supporters of one side or the other.

## Balance of Power After World War II

**GUIDING QUESTION** *Why did the United States and the Soviet Union become political rivals after World War II?*

After the Axis Powers were defeated, the differences between the United States and the Soviet Union came to the front. Stalin still feared the capitalist West, and Western leaders still had a great fear of communism. It should not surprise us that two such different systems would come into conflict.

Because of its need to feel secure on its western border, the Soviet Union was not prepared to give up its control of Eastern Europe after Germany's defeat. Nor were American leaders willing to give up the power and prestige the United States had gained throughout the world. Suspicious of each other's motives, the United States and the Soviet Union soon became rivals.

Eastern Europe was the first area of disagreement. The United States and Great Britain believed that the liberated nations of Eastern Europe should freely determine their own governments. Stalin, however, fearful that these nations would be anti-Soviet if they were permitted to have free elections, opposed the West's plans. Having freed Eastern Europe from the Nazis, the Soviet army stayed in the conquered areas and set up pro-Soviet regimes in Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, and Hungary.

A civil war in Greece created another area of conflict

between the superpowers. The Communist People's Liberation Army and anti-communist forces supported by Great Britain fought for control of Greece in 1946. However, Britain had its own economic problems, which caused it to withdraw its aid from Greece.

### The Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan

President Harry S. Truman of the United States, alarmed by British weakness and the possibility of Soviet expansion into the eastern Mediterranean, responded with the Truman Doctrine. This doctrine, created in 1947, said that the United States would provide money to countries (in this case, Greece and Turkey) that were threatened by communist expansion. If the Soviet Union was not stopped in Greece and Turkey, the Truman argument ran, then the United States would have to face the spread of communism throughout the free world. As Dean Acheson, U.S. undersecretary of state, explained on February 29, 1947:

### PRIMARY SOURCE

"Like apples in a barrel infected by one rotten one, the corruption of Greece would infect Iran and all to the east. It would also carry infection to Africa through Asia Minor and Egypt, and to Europe ..."

– from *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department*

The Truman Doctrine was soon followed by the European Recovery Program. Proposed in June 1947 by General George C. Marshall, U.S. secretary of state, it is better known as the Marshall Plan. Marshall believed that communism was successful only in countries that had economic problems. Thus, to prevent the spread of communism, the Marshall Plan provided close to \$13 billion to rebuild war-torn Europe.

The Marshall Plan did not intend to exclude the Soviet Union or its economically and politically dependent Eastern European satellite states. Those states refused to participate, however. According to the Soviet view, the Marshall Plan guaranteed "American loans in return for the relinquishing by the European states of their economic and later also their political independence." The Soviets saw the Marshall Plan as an attempt to buy the support of the

smaller European countries.

In 1949 the Soviet Union responded to the Marshall Plan by founding the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) for the economic cooperation of the Eastern European states. COMECON largely failed, however, because the Soviet Union was unable to provide much financial aid.

By 1947, the split in Europe between the United States and the Soviet Union had become a fact of life. In July 1947, George Kennan, a well-known U.S. diplomat with much knowledge of Soviet affairs, argued for a policy of containment to keep communism within its existing boundaries and to prevent further Soviet aggressive moves. Containment of the Soviet Union became formal U.S. policy.

### **The Division of Germany and the Berlin Airlift**

The fate of Germany also became a source of heated contention between the Soviets and the West. At the end of World War II, the Allied Powers had divided Germany into four zones, each occupied by one of the Allies—the United States, the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and France. The city of Berlin, located deep inside the Soviet zone, was also divided into four zones.

The foreign ministers of the four occupying powers met repeatedly in an attempt to arrive at a final peace treaty with Germany but had little success. At the same time, Great Britain, France, and the United States gradually began to merge their zones economically. By February 1948, Great Britain, France, and the United States were making plans to unify the three Western sections of Germany (and Berlin) and create a West German government.

The Soviets reacted with a blockade of West Berlin, which allowed neither trucks, nor trains, nor barges to enter the city's three Western zones. Food and supplies could no longer get through to the 2.5 million people in these zones. The Russians hoped to secure economic control of all Berlin and force the Western powers to halt the creation of a separate West German state.

The Western powers faced a dilemma. No one wanted to risk World War III. Therefore, an attempt to break through the Soviet blockade with tanks and trucks was ruled out. However, how could the people in the Western zones of Berlin be kept alive when the whole city was blockaded inside the Soviet zone? The solution was the Berlin Airlift—supplies would be flown in by American and British airplanes. For more than 10 months, more than 200,000 flights carried 2.3 million tons (1.4 million t) of supplies. At the height of the Berlin Airlift, 13,000 tons (11,800 t) of supplies were flown daily to Berlin. The Soviets, also not wanting war, finally gave in and lifted the blockade in May 1949.

The blockade of Berlin increased tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union. It also brought the separation of Germany into two states. In September 1949, the Federal Republic of Germany, or West Germany, was

formally created. Its capital was Bonn. Less than a month later, a separate East German state, the German Democratic Republic, was set up by the Soviets. East Berlin became its capital. Berlin was now divided into two parts, a reminder of the division between West and East.

#### **READING PROGRESS CHECK**

**Comparing** What did the Marshall Plan and COMECON have in common?

## **The Spread of the Cold War**

**GUIDING QUESTION** *What was the result of increased tensions between the superpowers?*

In 1949 the Cold War spread from Europe to the rest of the world. The victory of the Chinese Communists in the Chinese civil war created a new Communist regime and strengthened fears in the United States about the spread of communism.

### **New Military Alliances**

The search for security during the Cold War led to the formation of new military alliances. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was formed in April 1949 when Belgium, Luxembourg, France, the Netherlands, Great Britain, Italy, Denmark, Norway, Portugal, and Iceland signed a treaty with the United States and Canada. These powers agreed to provide mutual help if anyone of them was attacked. A few years later, Greece and Turkey joined, followed by West Germany,

The Eastern European states soon followed suit with a military alliance. In 1955 the Soviet Union joined with Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Romania in a formal military alliance known as the Warsaw Pact. The alliance operated much like NATO in that member states were required to provide mutual help if any other member was attacked. The Soviet Union also hoped to use the alliance to further its control over the militaries of its Eastern European allies. Europe was once again divided into hostile alliance systems, just as it had been before World War I.

New military alliances spread to the rest of the world after the United States became involved in the Korean War. The war began in 1950 as an attempt by the Communist government of North Korea, which was allied with the Soviet Union, to take over South Korea. The Korean War confirmed American fears of communist expansion. More determined than ever to contain Soviet power, the United States extended its military alliances around the world. By the mid-1950s, the United States was in military alliances with 42 states around the world.

### **The Arms Race Begins**

By the mid-1950s, the United States and the Soviet Union had become involved in a growing arms race, in which both countries built up their armies and increased the size of their weapons arsenals. Nuclear weapons added an increasingly frightening element to the arms race as each superpower raced to build deadlier bombs and farther-reaching delivery systems.

Also by the mid-1950s, the United States feared that the Soviet Union was gaining ground in the arms race. The Soviet Union had set off its first atomic bomb in 1949. In the early 1950s, the Soviet Union and the United States developed the deadlier hydrogen bomb. By the late-1950s, both had intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), which made them capable of sending bombs anywhere.

The United States and the Soviet Union now worked to build up stockpiles of nuclear weapons. The search for security soon took the form of deterrence. This policy held that huge arsenals of nuclear weapons on both sides prevented war. The belief was that neither side would launch a nuclear attack, because both knew that the other side would be able to strike back with devastating power.

In 1957 the Soviets sent Sputnik I, the first human-made space satellite, to orbit Earth. New fears seized the American public. Was there a “missile gap” between the United States and the Soviet Union? Could the Soviet Union build a military base in outer space from which it could dominate the world? One American senator said, “It was time... for Americans to be prepared to shed blood, sweat and tears if this country and the free world are to survive.”

## A Wall in Berlin

Nikita Khrushchev (kroosh • CHAWF), who emerged as the new leader of the Soviet Union in 1955, tried to take advantage of the American concern over missiles to solve the problem of West Berlin. West Berlin remained a “Western island” of prosperity in the midst of the relatively poverty-stricken East Germany. Many East Germans, tired of Communist repression, managed to escape East Germany by fleeing through West Berlin.

Khrushchev realized the need to stop the flow of refugees from East Germany through West Berlin. In August 1961, the East German government began to build a wall separating West Berlin from East Berlin. Eventually it became a massive concrete block wall 15 feet (4.5 m) high topped with barbed wire. Hundreds of machine-gun watchtowers lined the wall, which stretched 28 miles (45km) through the city. Another 75-mile (120.7 km) long section of wall separated West Berlin from the surrounding East German countryside. The Berlin Wall became a striking symbol of the division between the two superpowers.

### READING PROGRESS CHECK

**Making Connections** How were the theory of deterrence and the arms race related?

## LESSON 31-1 VOCABULARY

**satellite state** a country that is economically and politically dependent on another country

**policy of containment** a plan to keep something, such as communism, within its existing geographical boundaries and to prevent further aggressive moves

**arms race** building up armies and stores of weapons to keep up with an enemy

**deterrence** during the Cold War, the U.S. and Soviet policies of holding huge arsenals of nuclear weapons to prevent war; each nation believed that neither would launch a nuclear attack since both knew that the other side could strike back with devastating power