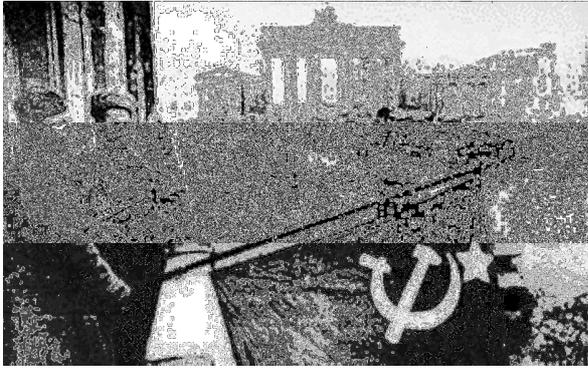


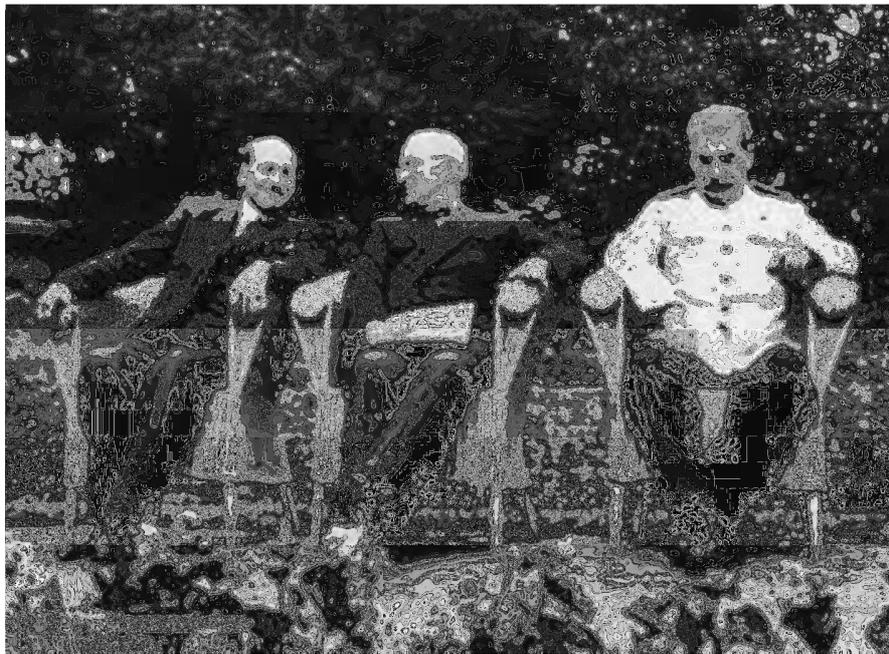
# The Cold War (1947-1991)

## Introduction



*Soviet soldiers in Berlin, May 1945*

The **Grand Alliance** formed by the U.S., USSR and the UK in World War II managed to defeat European fascism and Japanese expansionism, but began to crumble even before Allied troops occupied Berlin. Two years later, the Allies had broken their friendship. The **Cold War began, a long period of rivalry (1947-1991)** which pitted the U.S. against the Soviet Union and their respective allies and determined international relations for almost half a century.



*Potsdam conference, the alliance started to crumble, July 1945*

The Cold War was fought on the **political, economic, and propaganda fronts**. There was **no direct military confrontation** between the **two nuclear superpowers: the U.S. and the USSR**. Such a conflict would have led to a nuclear holocaust on the planet. However, *multiple wars* in other locations punctuated the period. In almost all of these conflicts, the two superpowers and their allies supported diplomatically and armed the contenders. The Cold War **ended with the collapse of the Soviet bloc**. Weapons did not defeat the USSR, but the **ineffectiveness of its economic system and the lack of political freedoms**.

## The world is divided into blocks: 1945-1955

The settlement of the communist system in European countries conquered by the Red Army alarmed Western leaders. Churchill proclaimed in 1946 that an "**Iron curtain**" separated communist Europe from free Europe. In 1947, U.S. President Truman expressed their willingness to implement a policy of "containment of communism" to prevent its expansion to Greece and other parts of world. To achieve this goal, the US implemented the **Marshall Plan**, an economic plan that sent aid to Europe. The goal of this plan was to prevent the impoverishment of the populations that favoured European communist expansion.

The first stage of the Cold War took place in the defeated country of Germany. The country had been divided into **four occupation zones: British, French, American and Soviet**. The city of Berlin was similarly divided. Soon there were increased differences between Western and Soviet authorities. The rupture between the former allies led to the division of Germany. In **1949**, the **Federal Republic of Germany**, in the western zones, and the **German Democratic Republic** in the Soviet zone, were born. Henceforth, throughout the Cold War, there existed two Germanys, one a democratic and capitalist, the other a Soviet-style communist dictatorship.

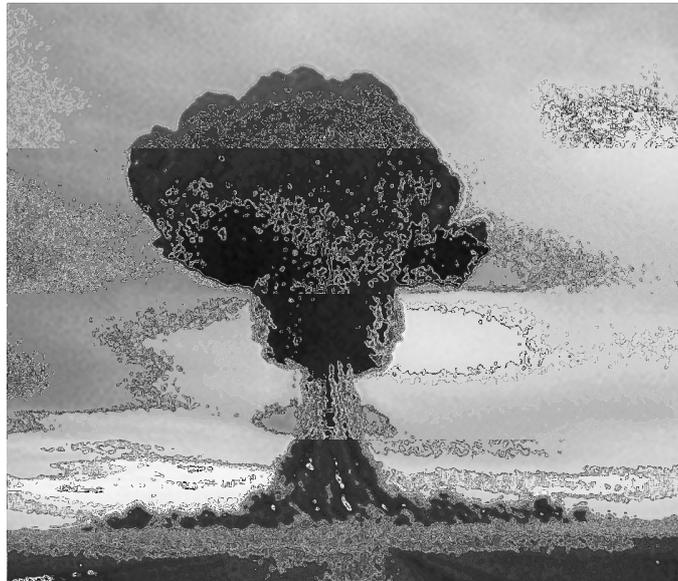


That same year the Cold War moved to Asia. The victory of Mao Zedong's communist forces led to the proclamation in **October 1949 of the Republic of China**. The world's most populous country joined the communist bloc.



*Mao Zedong proclaiming the People's Republic of China*

To further increase Western anxiety, a few months before the **Soviet Union** had detonated **its first atomic bomb**. Thereafter the two nuclear powers could face off anywhere in the world.



*Joe-1, the American nickname for the first Soviet atomic test, referred to Joseph Stalin.*

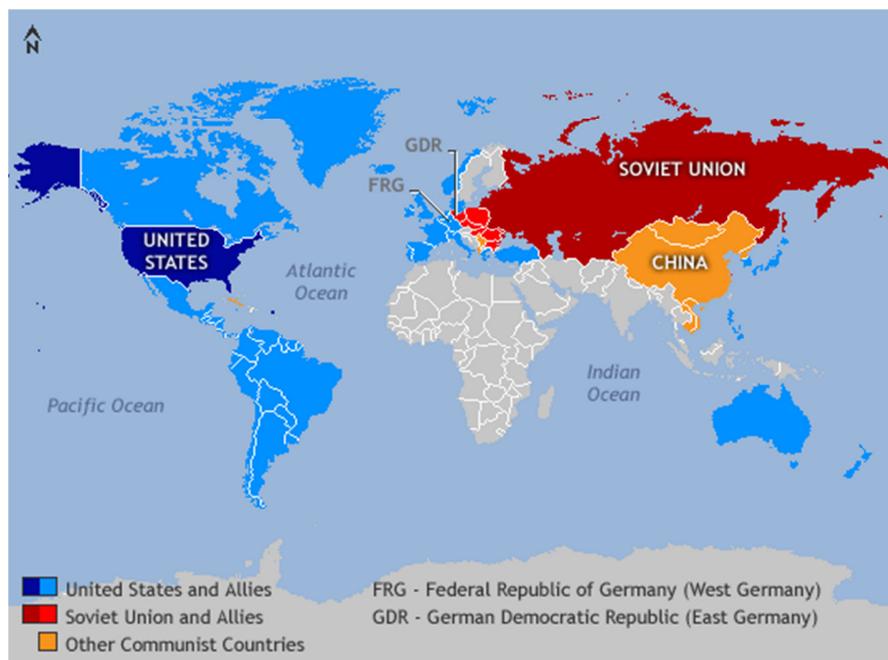
The new point of conflict arose again in Asia. The **Korean War (1950-1953)** led to the partition of Korea into two antagonistic countries. The North was a tight communist regime backed by the USSR and China, while the South was a US-backed military dictatorship.

The Korean War clearly showed the global dimension to the Cold War. Henceforth, Asia became one of the main stages for the Cold War.

## The Bipolar World 1949-1955

The partition of Germany and the Korean War showed the world a new reality: a division into two separate blocs led by the United States and the USSR. Thereafter, each block defended its hinterland against the advance of their opponent block.

U.S. took various measures to establish its global influence. First, it reinforced its ties with Western Europe. **NATO** (the **North Atlantic Treaty Organization**) was created in 1949. The great Western bloc military alliance is still in existence to this day. Second, Washington pushed the European integration process that culminated in **1957** with the birth of the **European Economic Community**. Finally, the U.S. wove a **network of anti-Soviet alliances** worldwide.



The Soviet bloc was strengthened by the victory of Mao Zedong in 1949. **The USSR signed military agreements and cooperation with communist China of Mao.**

Finally, in **1955**, the **Warsaw Pact** created a military alliance that joined the USSR with all European countries of the communist bloc with the exception of Yugoslavia.

## Peaceful Coexistence 1955-1962

Stalin's death in 1953 and the rise to power of a new Soviet leader, **Khrushchev** opened a new period in the Cold War. After a period of great tension, a new and more diplomatic climate in relations developed between Washington and Moscow, which led to talk of "**peaceful coexistence**" and "**thaw**". However, this new environment did not mean the end of international crises. In this period the **Berlin Wall** was erected and the Cold War came to America with the **Cuban Missile Crisis**. It was also during these years when, to the delight U.S.,

that the two communist giants, China and the USSR, broke their alliance and became antagonistic powers.

The main factor that led to the "thaw" in relations between the two superpowers was what was called the "**balance of terror**", i.e. the situation created after the conversion of the USSR to atomic power and accelerated rearmament for both powers. There was a general certainty that a war between the superpowers would lead to **mutual destruction of both and much of the planet**.

Paradoxically, during the new period of peaceful coexistence were two of the most serious crises of the Cold War: the construction of the Berlin Wall and the Cuban Missile Crisis.

From 1951 to 1958 the German Democratic Republic (GDR), the German Communist, had seen more than two million East Germans fled to West Germany. The differences in living standards and lack of freedoms prompted this exodus of the population.

On August 13, 1961, before the astonished eyes of the Berliners, the GDR authorities began building an **impenetrable wall that would surround the entirety of western Berlin**. As it was known in the West, the "wall of shame" became the great symbol of the Cold War.

Two years earlier, with the triumph of the **Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro** took the Cold War at the gates of the U.S. Hostility culminated when the US failed to invade the island and were repulsed by Castro's forces in **Playa Girón**. The Cuban Revolution was, in principle, was not communist, but the revolutionaries sided with the communist bloc. The U.S. aggression allowed Cuban dictator to ask the USSR to deploy nuclear missiles to its territory.

When U.S. spy planes detected **missile ramps**, Kennedy reacted by declaring a blockade of the island and announcing in October 22, **1962** that the U.S. Navy would prevent the passage of any Soviet ship to be routed to the island. The world held his breath at the prospect of an incident that could lead to fatal nuclear escalation. Finally, on October 29, Khrushchev relented and gave the order to their ships to turn back. The USSR agreed to remove the missiles from Cuba in exchange for the U.S. commitment not to invade the island. The worst crisis of the Cold War had passed.



The next major event of this period was great news for the United States. **The two communist giants, the USSR and China, broke relations and initiated a period of deep hostility.** Ideological and strategic rivalries led communist bloc excision.

## **The Détente 1962-1975**

After peeking "over the edge" in the nuclear missile crisis in Cuba, Kennedy and Khrushchev decided to start a **more systematic and enduring policy of détente.** This opened a new Cold War period in which agreements between the superpowers did not prevent serious conflicts such as Vietnam or the Middle East.

Among the treaties highlighted was the **NPT** (Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty), signed in 1968 by the U.S., the USSR, and the United Kingdom and the **SALT I** (Strategic Arms Limitation) Agreement (1972) which limited the number of intercontinental missiles that the USSR and the USA could own.



*Nixon and Khrushchev after signing SALT treaty*

The détente did not prevent local conflicts from degenerating into bloody wars in which both superpowers intervened.

The **Middle East conflict**, which began with the birth of the state of Israel in 1948, reached a peak with the "**Six Day War**" in 1967 and the **Yom Kippur War** in 1973. Both conflicts brought major changes in the region: Israel, with U.S. support, went from being a small country besieged by enemies to becoming the hegemon of the region and occupied Palestinian territories and part of Syria.

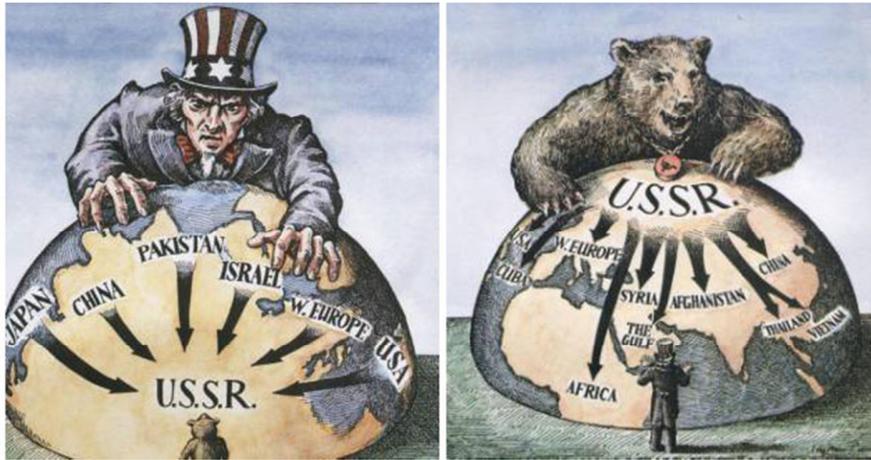


*Israeli troops observing old Jerusalem*

Arab countries reacted by using oil as an economic weapon against Western countries that supported Israel. The oil price increases that followed the Yom Kippur War in 1973 triggered the "**oil crisis**" that marked the end of a long period of expansion of capitalism in the developed countries.

The **war in Vietnam**, a country ravaged by conflict since the Second World War, is the **biggest humiliation of the U.S. during the Cold War**. After a long war in the that saw the US shipping half a million soldiers and not hesitating to use chemical weapons and massive bombings, the U.S. government had to accept defeat. It was impossible to defeat North Vietnam and the Vietcong guerrillas, who were supported by the USSR. In 1975, **Vietnam was reunified under a communist government**.

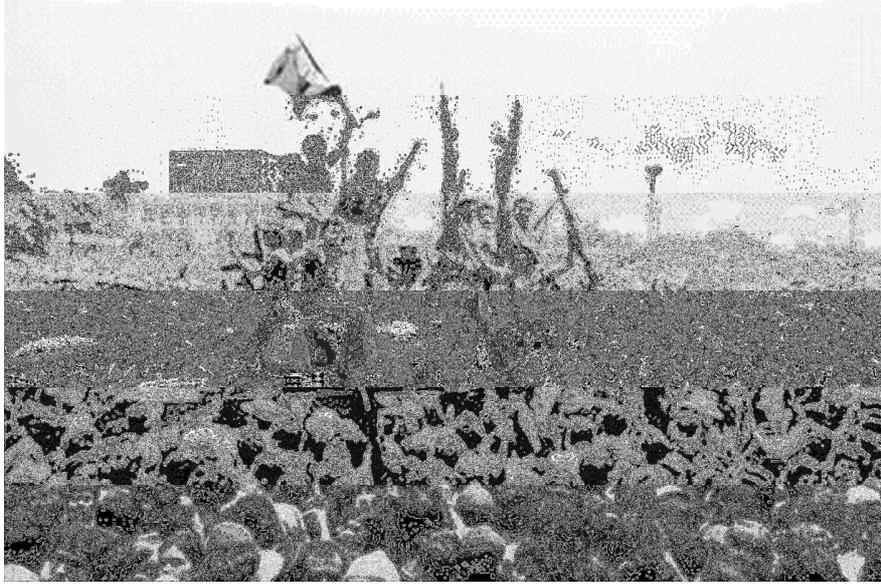
## The New Cold War 1975-1985



The **Western world's economic difficulties** following the "oil crisis" of 1973 and the **American reluctance to engage militarily abroad after the failure of Vietnam** encouraged **Moscow to intervene** in various areas of the world. It was a mirage. American weakness was apparent. The Soviet was real. However, its economy had entered a **period of stagnation** that ultimately **led to the collapse of the communist system**. **US President Reagan in the eighties returned to a policy of confrontation** with the Soviet Union and the USSR could not cope with the new challenge that came from Washington. The **Soviet economic weakness precipitated the end of the Cold War and the subsequent collapse of the USSR**.

The USSR international misread the situation and launched an expansion of its international influence regardless of the serious difficulties that depleted its economy. The last period in the Soviet leadership of **Leonid Brezhnev (1964-1982)** witnessed what can be called a **deceptive Soviet expansion**:

- In Asia, **Vietnam was reunified in 1975 under a communist government**.
- In Central America, the **Sandinista revolution of 1979** established a revolutionary regime in Nicaragua with the support of Moscow and Havana.
- In Africa, the Soviet expansion was even more spectacular. Starting in 1974, **pro-Soviet regimes in Ethiopia, Angola, and Mozambique** were established.



*The Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua*

However, the Soviet expansion was **based upon a feeble and stagnant economy**. In 1985, a **new leader took over power in Moscow: Mijail Gorbachov**. Pushed by the serious economic situation, Gorbachov launched a reformist program called the “Perestroika”, which eventually dismantled the communist bloc (the **Berlin Wall fell in 1989**) and led to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and consequently the **end of the Cold War**.



*Mijail Gorbachev, the last leader of the USSR*