

A Bit Brisk: The Beginning of the Cold War

Picking up the Pieces

How does someone pick up the pieces of a broken life? This was the question that dominated the minds of Europeans; indeed, the entire world. Europe had been at the center of two worldwide wars that had taken the lives of over 80 million people. The cost of the damage in Europe was in the billions of dollars. Europe, which had been the center of power in the world for two thousand years, was broke and broken.

The seat of power is never empty. WWII saw the rise of two superpowers, countries who lead the world with rich economies and powerful militaries.

These new superpowers were the USA and USSR (the new name for Russia).

USA was the new kid on the block, being less than 200 years old, in comparison to the European countries that were over a thousand years old. USA was a capitalist country. Capitalism is an economic system based on competition between businesses for people's money. People own and control the businesses, and the government mainly stays out of the way. The Americans had tried to remain isolated from world events, but found themselves pulled into WWI. After WWI, the Americans tried to isolate themselves again, having zero interest in the rest of the world unless it was an opportunity to make money. When the Japanese brought WWII to American soil, America decided to embrace the idea of being a leader in world affairs. By the end of WWII, the USA was the richest country in the world, with an extremely powerful military. USA wanted to be in the driver's seat, reshaping the world after the war to be democratic and capitalist.

The USSR rose as the second superpower. The USSR was the world's largest country and the only Communist country. Communism is an economic system where the government makes sure that

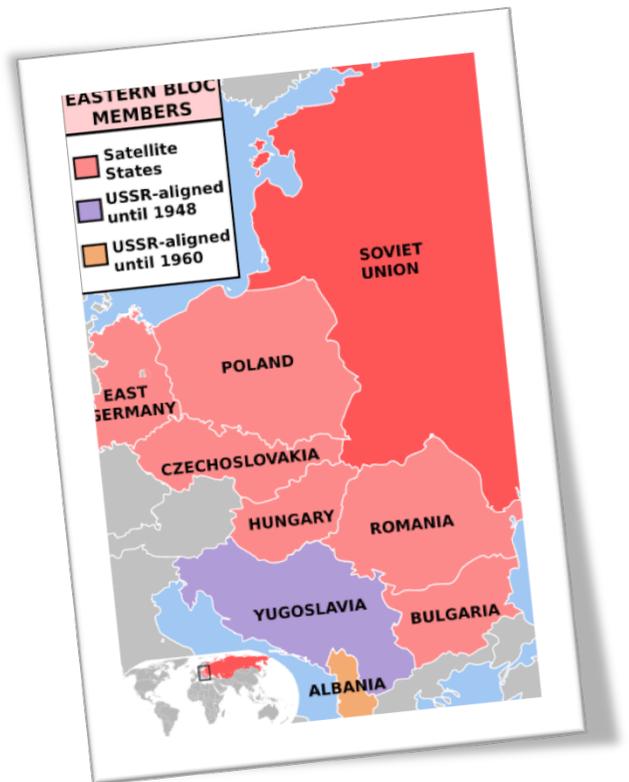
everyone shares everything equally. Communism also carries the desire to be spread around the world through violence and revolution. Coming out of the war, USSR lost more troops than any other country (26 million), but had almost singlehandedly stopped the Nazis and were the country to arrive in Berlin to force the surrender. This gave them a very strong seat at the table of discussing how post-war Europe was going to be shaped. Stalin had made his dream known before and during the war that the USSR and Communism would start WWIII to control all of Europe and eventually the world, ending capitalism forever. The USSR was a rich country with a strong military that was taking every step possible to making Stalin's dream a reality.



Dividing Europe

Once the threat of Hitler was out of the way, there was immediate tension between USA and USSR. Mistrust and suspicion kept the two superpowers from working together. Joseph Stalin wanted to crush Germany's industry and to spread communism to the Eastern European countries... with the eventual aim of spreading it to all of Europe. Harry Truman felt that capitalism and democracy were the only way of quickly recovering from the war, and that all European countries should be allowed to choose who ruled over them. These two ideas clashed and were the beginning of a long series of conflicts.

USA and USSR joined together with 50 other countries in the creation of the United Nations, an organization of countries joined together to promote world peace and security. Both countries looked at this as an opportunity to have greater influence in the rest of the world. However, the two countries butted heads on everything else. USA wanted all European countries to have "free and fair" elections to decide on their government leaders, also known as "Self Governance". USSR at first disagreed, wanting to use the Eastern European countries a buffer or barrier between Western Europe and the USSR. Eventually, Stalin decided to allow the elections. However, the Stalin secretly sent



the KGB (the USSR secret service) into the Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Albania to "convince them" to vote for the communist party in the elections. Amazingly, all the countries the USSR wanted to control all voted for the Communist party and for leaders who were friendly toward the USSR. This group of countries was called the Eastern Bloc.



As for Germany, it was divided up between the superpowers. The land each side had conquered by the end of the war became the dividing lines. USA and Britain controlled the western half of Germany (called Western Germany) and USSR controlling the eastern half (called East Germany) as apart of the Eastern Bloc. They also divided the capital city Berlin in half, the same way, with the USA/Britain getting

the western half (called West Berlin) and USSR getting the eastern half (called East Berlin).

These became the new battle lines for an event we now know as the Cold War. A Cold War is when countries are hostile/mean to each other, but do not fire weapons or physically fight. There was the East vs West, USSR vs USA, Communism vs Capitalism. Each side believing they were correct and that the other side was evil. Each believing that their destiny was to control and dominate the rest of the world.

Truman Plan & Marshall Plan

By 1947, Greece was one of the few countries in Eastern Europe that hadn't turned communist. The Communist rebels in Greece were prevented from taking over by the British Army.

America was becoming increasingly alarmed by the growth of Soviet power. So, when the British told Truman they could no longer afford to keep their soldiers in Greece, Truman stepped in to take over. In March 1947, he told the American Congress it was America's job to stop communism growing any stronger. This was called the Truman Doctrine. It is often said that Truman advocated containment (stopping the Soviet getting any more powerful), but Truman did not use this word and many Americans spoke of "rolling back" communism.

In June 1947, General George Marshall made a visit to Europe to see what was needed. He came away thinking Europe was so poor that the whole of Europe was about to turn Communist. Marshall and Truman asked Congress for \$17 billion to fund the European Recovery Programme nicknamed the Marshall Plan - to get the economy of Europe going again. Congress at first hesitated, but agreed in March 1948 when Czechoslovakia turned Communist. The aid was given in the form of food, grants to buy equipment, improvements to transport systems, and everything "from medicine to mules". Most (70 per cent) of the money was used to buy resources from US suppliers: \$3.5 billion was spent on raw materials; \$3.2 billion on food, feed and fertiliser; \$1.9 billion on machinery and vehicles; and \$1.6 billion on fuel. Stalin forbade the Communist countries to apply for Marshall Aid.

Soon after, the United States created the organization NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization). The purpose of NATO was to be a giant alliance between the American and European countries, where each agreed to fight and defend the other members of NATO.

Berlin Blockade

In 1945, the Allies decided to split Germany into four zones of occupation. The capital, Berlin, was also split into four zones. The USSR took huge reparations from its zone in eastern Germany, but Britain, France and America tried to improve conditions in their zones.

In June 1948, Britain, France and America united their zones into a new country, West Germany. On 23 June 1948, they introduced a new currency, which they said would help trade.

The next day, Stalin cut off all rail and road links to west Berlin - the Berlin Blockade. The west saw this as an attempt to starve Berlin into surrender, so they decided to supply west Berlin by air.

The Berlin Blockade lasted 318 days. During this time, 275,000 planes transported 1.5 million tons of supplies and a plane landed every three minutes at Berlin's Tempelhof airport.

On 12 May 1949, Stalin abandoned the blockade.

Korean War

In 1945, Korea was split along the 38th parallel between a communist north led by Kim IL Sung, and a non-communist south led by Syngman Rhee.

But communism was growing in the Far East. In 1949, the Communists had taken power in China. The US developed the 'domino theory' - the idea that, if one country fell to communism, others would follow like a row of dominoes. Then, in 1950, a report by the American National Security Council ('NSC68') recommended that the US stop containment and start to roll back communism.

In 1950, after getting the support of Russia and China, Kim IL Sung invaded South Korea. The North Korean People's Army (NKPA) easily defeated the Republic of Korea's army (the ROKs). By September, the NKPA had conquered almost the whole of South Korea. The USA went to the United Nations and got them to send troops to defend South Korea. The Russians couldn't veto the idea because they were boycotting the UN at the time.

In September, UN troops, led by the US General MacArthur, landed in Korea and drove the NKPA back. By October, the UN forces had almost conquered all of North Korea. In November 1950, Chinese People's Volunteers attacked and drove the Americans back. They recaptured North Korea, and advanced into South Korea. The Americans landed more troops and drove the Chinese back to the 38th parallel, where Truman ordered General MacArthur to stop. When General MacArthur did not obey, President Truman fired him.

The war went on as border clashes until 1953 when America's new president, Eisenhower, offered peace, but threatened to use the atomic bomb if China did not accept the offer. Recently, historians have shown that the Korean crisis almost led to a third world war - many US advisers wanted to use the atomic bomb.

A Bit Brisk: The Beginning of the Cold War – Questions

- 1) What were conditions like in Europe after WWII?
- 2) What is a Superpower? Who were the two new superpowers?
- 3) The USSR used to be known as what country?
- 4) What was the ultimate goal of the USA?
- 5) What was the ultimate goal of the USSR?
- 6) What is the United Nations? What is the purpose of the United Nations?
- 7) What was the Eastern Bloc? What was the purpose of the Eastern Bloc?
- 8) What countries made up the Eastern Block?
- 9) How was Germany divided up after WWII? Why do you think they chose to do this?
- 10) What is a Cold War?
- 11) In what ways are USA & USSR similar? In what ways are they different?
- 12) Ask your family members who are older than 30 (Parents, Grandparents, Aunts, Uncles) what thoughts, feelings, or images come to mind when they hear the words: Communism and Soviet Union (USSR).
- 13) What was the Truman Doctrine?
- 14) What was the Marshall Plan? Why did the USA offer it to European countries? Why do you think Stalin reject it for Communist countries?
- 15) What does NATO stand for? What is the purpose of NATO?
- 16) What conflicts or problem do you see between the purpose of NATO and the purpose of the United Nations?
- 17) Why was there a crisis in Berlin in 1948?
- 18) You are an American Reporter. Write a headline and two sentence summary of the Berlin events.
- 19) You are now a reporter from the USSR. Write a headline and two sentence summary of the Berlin events.
- 20) What was the Domino Theory?
- 21) Why did the Korean War break out? Why did America choose to defend South Korea?
- 22) How is the Berlin Airlift a good example of a “Cold War”?
- 23) Summarize the events of the Korean War in 17 words.
- 24) Why was General McArthur fired?
- 25) Was the Korean War successful for America (yes or no)? Why?