

The Cold War: Why did the United States and the USSR enter into the Cold War after World War II?

INTRODUCTION FOR STUDENTS

In this lesson, you will learn about the source of tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union in the post-World War II era. The two nations were allies during World War II, but the United States was concerned that the Soviet Union, which was a communist nation, posed a challenge to America's government and values. As a capitalist nation, the United States feared the revolutionary rhetoric of communism, which vowed to create a world order led by workers and which denounced organized religion. The United States and the Soviet Union disagreed about what post-war Europe should look like, and their mutual suspicion led to a Cold War that lasted until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

After World War II, American leaders hoped that an American monopoly on the atomic bomb would convince the Soviet Union to agree to American plans for Europe (the monopoly was short lived, as the Soviets developed a bomb by 1949). American leaders wanted to ensure

the continued health of its economy, so it wanted to see governments with similar economic and political systems established in Europe. They therefore tried to "contain," or limit, the spread of communism all over the world. On the other hand, after suffering 20 million deaths and huge damage during the war, the Soviet Union feared another invasion and wanted to protect its western borders by establishing pro-commu-

nist governments in Eastern Europe. Stalin claimed that he was protecting Soviet interests in Europe, just as the United States was protecting its interests.

In the rest of this lesson, you will map the alliances that formed in Europe during the Cold War. You will also read sources in which American, British, and Soviet politicians explore their goals and their foreign policy in the years after World War II.



Temporary basement fallout shelter, circa 1957.

Source: Michael Barson and Steven Heller, *Red Scared*, p. 134

PART II: COLD WAR DIPLOMACY

American goals: American leaders wanted to keep the nation's economy strong, so they wanted to see nations with capitalist economies and representative governments established in Europe. Although this foreign policy met American economic needs, Americans saw these goals not as self-interest but as a crusade to bring freedom, democracy, and capitalism to the world. They therefore tried to "contain" the spread of communism all over the world.

Soviet goals: The Soviet Union suffered huge losses—including 20 million deaths and heavy damage to industry and agriculture—during World War II. Joseph Stalin wanted to protect the USSR from further attack by establishing "satellite nations"—that is, nations that were sympathetic to communism—along its western borders. Stalin said that he was protecting Soviet interests in Europe, just as the United States was protecting its interests. Suspicious of the United States, Stalin did not let the USSR join agencies such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which helped the capitalist economies in Western Europe.

Winston Churchill

Speech by Winston Churchill
Winston Churchill delivered this famous speech at Westminster College in Missouri on March 5, 1946.

...From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic an iron curtain has **descended** across the Continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia; all these famous cities and the populations around them lie in what I must call the Soviet **sphere**, and all are subject, in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and in some cases increasing measure of control from Moscow...

Source: Internet Modern History Sourcebook

GLOSSARY FOR EXCERPT:

descended—fallen over or covered

sphere—an area of interest or influence

Questions about Churchill's speech (see page 13):

1. Looking at your map of Europe (page 22), draw a line that separates the Soviet-bloc nations from the Western European nations that were members of NATO.
2. What phrase does Churchill use to describe Soviet power in Eastern Europe? Why might this scare an American audience in 1946?
3. Why would an American care about Soviet power in Europe?

Joseph Stalin

Joseph Stalin's response to Churchill
Printed in the New York Times (p.4) on March 14, 1946 (interview with Pravda)

... Mr. Churchill now stands in the position of a **firebrand** of war. And Mr. Churchill is not alone here. He has friends not only in England but also in the United States of America.

In this respect, one is reminded remarkably of Hitler and his friends. Hitler began to set war loose by announcing his racial theory, declaring that only people speaking the German language represent a fully valuable nation. Mr. Churchill begins to set war loose, also by a racial theory, maintaining that only nations speaking the English language are fully valuable nations, called upon to decide the destinies of the entire world.

The German racial theory brought Hitler and his friends to the conclusion that the Germans, as the only fully valuable nation, must rule over other nations. The English racial theory brings Mr. Churchill and his friends to the conclusion that nations speaking the English language, being

GLOSSARY FOR EXCERPT:

firebrand—one who speaks forcefully for a cause

irrevocably—unable to change

oblivion—the state of being forgotten

expansionist tendencies—having the desire to grow or achieve more power

Stalin continues on next page.

the only fully valuable nations, should rule over the remaining nations of the world....

As a result of the German invasion, the Soviet Union has **irrevocably** lost in battles with the Germans, and also during the German occupation and through the expulsion of Soviet citizens to German slave labor camps, about 7,000,000 people. In other words, the Soviet Union has lost in men several times more than Britain and the United States together.

It may be that some quarters are trying to push into **oblivion** these sacrifices of the Soviet people which insured the liberation of Europe from the Hitlerite yoke.

But the Soviet Union cannot forget them. One can ask therefore, what can be surprising in the fact that the Soviet Union, in a desire to ensure its security for the future, tries to achieve that these countries should have governments whose relations to the Soviet Union are loyal? How can one, without having lost one's reason, qualify these peaceful aspirations of the Soviet Union as "**expansionist tendencies**" of our Government?... .

Source: Internet Modern History Sourcebook

Questions about Stalin's response:

1. What historical figure does Stalin compare Churchill to? Why do you think Stalin uses this comparison?
2. In the fourth through sixth paragraphs above, Stalin states how many Russians died during World War II. Why were these losses important, according to Stalin?
3. How does Stalin defend the Soviet Union's post-World War II actions in Europe? Were Stalin's goals military goals, national security goals, or economic goals?

Harry Truman

Truman Doctrine (March 12, 1947).
This excerpted speech, given by President Harry Truman before a joint session of Congress, outlined the president's plans for economic aid to Greece and Turkey.

I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted **subjugation** by **armed minorities** or by outside pressures...

I believe that our help should be primarily through economic and financial aid which is essential to economic stability and orderly political processes...

It is necessary only to glance at a map to realize that the **survival** and **integrity** of the Greek nation are of grave importance in a much wider situation. If Greece should fall under the control of an armed minority, the effect upon its neighbor, Turkey, would be immediate and serious. Confusion and disorder might well spread throughout the entire Middle East.

Moreover, the disappearance of Greece as an independent state would have a **profound** effect upon those countries in Europe whose peoples are struggling against great difficulties to maintain their freedoms and their independence while they repair the damages of war.

Source: Internet Modern History Sourcebook

GLOSSARY FOR EXCERPT:

subjugation—control

armed minorities—
Truman means a small group that takes over through force

survival—ability to live

integrity—soundness or completeness

profound—important or deep

Questions about the Truman Doctrine:

1. Find Greece and Turkey on your map again.
2. Given the world political situation in 1947, who do you think are the “armed minorities” and “outside pressures” who are trying to take over Greece and Turkey?
3. According to this excerpt, what kind of aid does Truman plan to give to Greece and Turkey?
4. Looking at the final two paragraphs, what does Truman say will happen in Europe and the Middle East if the United States does not help Greece and Turkey?
5. Truman’s foreign policy has often been described as the “domino theory.” Here’s the concept: if dominoes are stacked one slightly behind the other, a slight push on one will knock down all of the pieces in a row. Why do you think it has been described in this way?
6. Were Truman’s plans in Greece and Turkey military goals, national security goals, political goals, or economic goals?

George C. Marshall

Marshall Plan (June 5, 1947)
This excerpted speech, given by Secretary of State George C. Marshall, outlined the need for American economic aid to western Europe.

...The truth of the matter is that Europe's **requirements** for the next 3 or 4 years of foreign food and other essential products—principally from America—are so much greater than her present ability to pay that she must have **substantial** help or face economic, social, and political **deterioration** of a very grave character...

Aside from the **demoralizing** effect on the world at large and the possibilities of **disturbances** arising as a result of the desperation of the people concerned, the consequences to the economy of the United States should be apparent to all. It is logical that the United States should do whatever it is able to do to assist in the return of normal economic health in the world, without which there can be no political **stability** and no assured peace. Our policy is directed not against any country or **doctrine** but against hunger, poverty, desperation, and chaos. Its purpose should be the **revival** of a working economy in the world so as to permit the emergence of political and social conditions in which free institutions exist.

GLOSSARY FOR EXCERPT:

requirements—needs

substantial—great

deterioration—decline or fall apart

demoralizing—taking away the spirit

disturbances—lack of order

stability—order

doctrine—a set of beliefs, especially religious or political

revival—a return to working order

Questions about the Marshall Plan:

1. What kind of aid did Europe need from the United States?
2. Why would the United States want to help Europe?
3. What does Marshall mean when he says, "Our policy is directed not against any country or doctrine but against hunger, poverty, desperation, and chaos"?
4. Was Marshall's plan a military goal, a national security goal, a political goal, or an economic goal?

National Security Council

National Security Council Paper 68
(April 7, 1950)

This top-secret document, an internal memo of the newly formed National Security Council, argued that only the United States could stop Soviet expansion. It advocates the policy of "containment."

As for the policy of "**containment**," it is one which seeks by all means short of war to (1) block further **expansion** of Soviet power, (2) expose the **falsities** of Soviet **pretensions**, (3) induce a **retraction** of the Kremlin's control and influence, and (4) in general, so **foster** the seeds of destruction within the Soviet system that the Kremlin is brought at least to the point of **modifying** its behavior to conform to generally accepted international standards.

...It is quite clear from Soviet theory and practice that the Kremlin seeks to bring the free world under its **dominion** by the methods of the cold war. The preferred technique is to **subvert** by **infiltration** and **intimidation**. Every institution of our society is an instrument which it is sought to **stultify** and turn against our purposes. Those that touch most closely our material and moral strength are obviously the prime targets, labor unions, civic enterprises, schools, churches, and all media for influencing opinion. The effort is not so much to make them serve obvious Soviet ends as to prevent them from serving our ends, and thus to make them sources of confusion in our economy, our culture, and our body politic...

GLOSSARY FOR EXCERPT:

containment—to prevent or limit the advance, spread, or influence of

expansion—the process of growth: the opposite of containment

falsities—lies

pretensions—appearances

retraction—a pulling back

foster—to encourage growth

modifying—changing

dominion—rule

subvert—to ruin or corrupt from within

infiltration—enter secretly

intimidation—threat of force

stultify—to make useless

Questions about the National Security Council Paper 68, page 17:

1. How did the United States plan to stop Soviet expansion? Does the document argue that the United States should go to war with the USSR?
2. According to this document, what were the key parts of “containment”? What does the phrase “by all means short of war” mean?
3. According to the document, how is the Soviet Union trying to increase its influence over the free world? Is the Soviet Union using armed confrontation or another method? How does this threaten American institutions, and how might this threat differ from other wars, like WWI or WWII?
4. Using NSC-68, can you argue that Americans were worried that communists would “subvert” (definition: to ruin or corrupt from within) American culture? Why?
5. If Stalin had issued a response to the NSC-68, what do you think he would have said?

PERSPECTIVES ON THE COLD WAR

Now that you have read the documents, please describe the objectives of the United States and the Soviet Union as each nation's leaders (or allies) explained them. Are there any similarities?

United States	Soviet Union
Economic Goals 1) 2)	Economic Goals 1) 2)
Political Goals 1) 2)	Political Goals 1) 2)
Military/National Security Goals 1) 2)	Military/National Security Goals 1) 2)

WRITING ASSIGNMENT:

The year is 1950, and North Korea, a communist country, has invaded South Korea (look at world map). President Harry Truman has to decide whether to commit ground troops to help the South Koreans fight the invasion, which would mean that the “cold war” would become a “hot war.” You are a policy analyst for the newly-formed National Security Council. Using the documents in this worksheet, write a five-sentence paragraph in which you argue for or against committing ground troops. You will need to address why the policy of “containment” applies or does not apply to the situation in Korea.