

The Cold War

Let us not be deceived—we are today in the midst of a cold war.

—Bernard Baruch, banker and presidential advisor, 1947

Essential Question: What were the causes and effects of the ideological struggle of the Cold War?

After World War II, the democratic United States and the authoritarian Soviet Union emerged as the strongest countries in the world. Both countries had expanded their territorial control and influence after the war. After the Potsdam Conference in Germany in 1945, Truman and Stalin soon recognized their rivalry for dominance over Europe and Asia. The ideological conflict noted by Baruch, the power struggle between capitalism (led by the United States) and communism (led by the Soviet Union), was the central global conflict over the next 40 years.

Cooperation Despite Conflict: The United Nations

Despite ideological differences, the Allies shared a commitment to building a new organization to promote peace and prosperity to replace the League of Nations. The League had failed for two significant reasons:

- It lacked the support of all the world’s powerful countries, particularly the United States.
- It lacked a mechanism to act quickly to stop small conflicts from escalating into large ones.

In 1943, leaders of the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and China discussed the idea of the **United Nations (UN)**. The UN was established in 1945. (Connect: Write a paragraph comparing the United Nations with the League of Nations. See Topics 7.3 and 7.5.)

Rivalry in Economics and Politics

The existence of the United Nations did not prevent tensions from growing worse between the Soviet Union and the West. Winston Churchill’s March 1946 speech symbolized the Cold War. Churchill said that “an iron curtain has descended across the continent” of Europe. The metaphor of the **Iron Curtain** described the split between Eastern and Western Europe.

Capitalism and Communism One difference between the United States and the Soviet Union was how they organized their economies.

- In the United States, Western Europe, and other capitalist countries, economic assets, such as farms and factories, were mostly owned privately. Hence, private interests determined economic decisions. People had the freedom to act in their self-interest.
- In the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and other communist countries, economic assets were owned by the government. The system emphasized equality and fairness.

Democracy and Authoritarianism A second difference was how the rivals organized their political systems. In the United States, people chose their elected leaders through free elections. Further, they relied on an independent press to provide accurate information about the government and political parties to compete for votes. In the Soviet Union, elections were not significant, the press was operated by the government, and a single party dominated politics.

Criticisms and Similarities Each side pointed to what it saw as flaws in the other. In the United States, people attacked the Soviet system for restricting the rights of people to speak and worship freely, to elect their own representatives, and to allow businesses to operate efficiently. Soviets accused the United States of giving poor people the “freedom to starve” and for discriminating against African Americans and other minorities. The Soviet Union also stressed its emphasis on women’s equality as a difference between its system and that of the United States.

Despite the difference in the U.S. and Soviet models, some analysts emphasized their similarities. For example, in both, control of big economic decisions was in the hands of groups, either the government or millions of corporate shareholders. Further, both countries often acted out of fear of the other, which made the military a powerful force in each.

Conflicts in International Affairs

Each side wanted to expand its system of thought throughout the world. This competition resulted in a long-running battle for influence over the opinions of people and alliance with governments.

The USSR and Its Satellite Countries The Soviets were determined to make the governments of Eastern Europe as much like the Soviet government as possible. They therefore directed the countries of Bulgaria, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Romania to develop five-year economic plans focused on developing industry and collective agriculture at the expense of consumer products. All political parties other than the Communists were outlawed.

These actions allowed the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) to exploit the Eastern European nations to benefit the Soviets rather than

to help those countries grow. The **satellite countries**—small states that are economically or politically dependent on a larger, more powerful state—were forced to import only Soviet goods and to export only to the Soviet Union. Moreover, the governments of these countries were just as dictatorial as the Soviet government. (Connect: Create a graphic comparing Communist and earlier Western imperialism. See Topic 6.2.)

World Revolution Beginning with the October Revolution of 1917, the Soviet Union viewed capitalism as a threat to its power. This view was enhanced with the concept of **world revolution**, a belief that organized workers would overthrow capitalism in all countries. The Soviets supported revolutions and uprisings between 1919 and 1923 in Germany, Bavaria, Hungary, northern Italy, and Bulgaria. Soviet interference elevated Western suspicions about Soviet intentions. After World War II, growing revolutionary feelings became a serious threat to Western powers and to governments in Central and Southern Europe.

Containment U.S. diplomat George Kennan worked in the U.S. Embassy in Moscow during the 1930s and in 1946. Kennan believed that the Soviet Union would continue to expand its borders and its influence abroad if it could. He advocated a policy of **containment**—not letting communism spread farther. Some politicians criticized Kennan for accepting the status quo. They argued for a more aggressive policy of overthrowing existing regimes in order to “roll back” the spread of communism.

Truman Doctrine Kennan’s reports influenced President Harry Truman. A speech in 1947 outlined the **Truman Doctrine**, a strong statement that the United States would do what it had to do to stop the spread of communist influence, specifically in Greece and Turkey. The Soviet Union wanted to put military bases in Turkey so it could control the Dardanelles, the strait between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. In Greece, left-wing groups controlled by Communists were close to gaining control of the government. Truman pledged U.S. economic and military support to help the two countries resist this communist domination.

The Marshall Plan After World War II, the United States was deeply concerned about rebuilding Europe. The United States provided assistance to those countries soon after the war ended. However, many U.S. leaders thought more was needed to get European allies back on their feet economically. Based on the belief that a communist revolution could happen in economically unstable nations, the new goal was to rebuild Europe into a prosperous and stable region. The **Marshall Plan**, enacted in June 1947, was designed to offer \$12 billion in aid to all nations of Europe, including Germany. This money would be used to modernize industry, reduce trade barriers, and rebuild Europe’s damaged infrastructure. The plan worked. Economic output in the countries aided was 35 percent higher in 1951 than it had been in 1938.

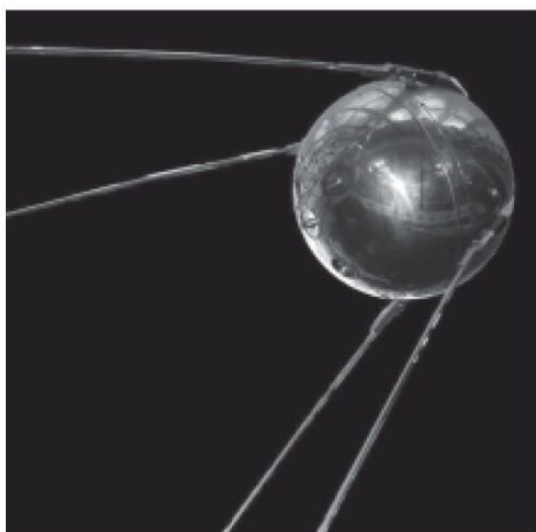
The Soviet Union and its Eastern European satellites refused to participate in the plan. Instead, in 1949, the Soviets developed their own



plan to help rebuild Eastern Europe—the **Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON)**. The scope of the organization was narrower than that of the Marshall Plan. It was limited primarily to trade and credit agreements among the six members. Its impact was modest compared to the Marshall Plan.

The Space Race and the Arms Race

Space Race In 1957, the Soviet Union launched the first artificial satellite, called *Sputnik*, into orbit around Earth, inaugurating what became known as the *Space Race*. The United States launched its first satellite in January 1958. The two nations competed to become the first with a manned satellite orbiting Earth and, later, the first to land a human on the moon.



Source: Wikimedia Commons

Replica of Sputnik 1 stored in the National Air and Space Museum.



Source: Wikimedia Commons

Launch of first U.S. satellite, Explorer 1, on January 31, 1958.

Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) Early in 1959, the Soviets tested the first intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) capable of delivering a nuclear warhead into U.S. territory. The United States tested a similar missile later that same year. Both countries realized that they had become so powerful that they had reached a point of *mutual assured destruction*. That is, regardless of who started a war, both would be obliterated by the end of it. Since neither side could win a nuclear war, neither side had an incentive to start one. As long as both sides kept improving their technology, the balance of terror between them would keep the peace—everyone hoped.

The Non-Aligned Movement

Many new African and Asian countries wanted to stay out of the U.S.-Soviet Cold War. They wanted an alternative framework for international economic, political, and social order—one not dominated by the two superpowers. In



1955, Indonesia hosted a conference, known as the Bandung Conference after the city where it was held, for representatives of these countries. Delegates from China, India, and 27 other countries—representing more than half the world’s population—passed resolutions condemning colonialism. The impulse that prompted the Bandung Conference led countries to formally organize the **Non-Aligned Movement** in 1961. However, non-aligned countries faced challenges:

- Member states tried to combine support for stronger international institutions with efforts to advance their own interests. For example, Indian leader Jawaharlal Nehru supported a stronger UN, but he opposed its efforts to intervene in the conflict between India and Pakistan over control of the region of Kashmir.
- Member states often became more closely allied with one superpower or the other. When war broke out between Somalia and Ethiopia in 1977, the Soviet Union supplied aid to Ethiopia, prompting the United States to supply aid to Somalia.

Leaders of the Non-Aligned Movement		
Name	Country	Role
Jawaharlal Nehru	India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Served as prime minister of India from 1947 to 1964 • Viewed as one of the most important leaders at the Bandung Conference
Kwame Nkrumah	Ghana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Led Ghana to independence from Great Britain in 1957 • Advocated unity among Africans across country boundaries through the Organization of African Unity • Became one of the most respected African leaders of the post-war period
Gamal Abdel Nasser	Egypt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Served three terms as president of Egypt between 1954 and 1970 • Helped negotiate compromises among people attending the Bandung Conference • Supported the Pan-Arab movement
Sukarno	Indonesia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Became the first president of Indonesia in 1945 • Organized and hosted the Bandung Conference • Criticized both the United States and the USSR but accepted large amounts of aid from each

KEY TERMS BY THEME		
<p>GOVERNMENT: Global United Nations (UN) Iron Curtain satellite countries world revolution containment</p>	<p>Truman Doctrine Non-Aligned Movement</p> <p>TECHNOLOGY: Space mutual assured destruction <i>Sputnik</i></p>	<p>ECONOMICS: International Marshall Plan Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON)</p>