

# Anchor Topic 7

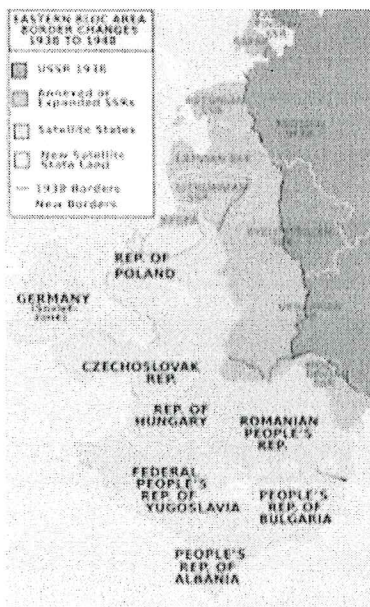


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## 1.1 The Cold War: An overview

Provided by [National Park Service](#).

The Cold War was a decades-long struggle for global supremacy that pitted the capitalist United States against the communist Soviet Union. Although there are some disagreements as to when the Cold War began, it is generally conceded that mid- to late-1945 marks the time when relations between Moscow and Washington began deteriorating. This deterioration ignited the early Cold War and set the stage for a dynamic struggle that often assumed mythological overtones of good versus evil.



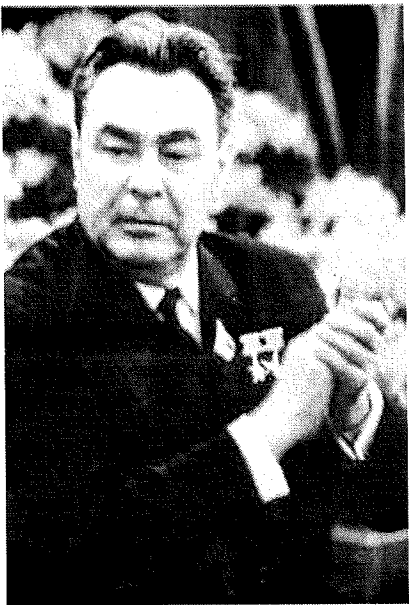
This map shows the communist states of Eastern Europe from 1938 to 1948. [Image source](#).

At the close of World War II, the Soviet Union stood firmly entrenched in Eastern Europe, intent upon installing governments there that would pay allegiance to the Kremlin. It also sought to expand its security zone even further into North Korea, Central Asia, and the Middle East. Similarly, the United States established a security zone of its own that comprised Western Europe, Latin America, Southeast Asia, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan. From the long view of history, it is clear that both sides were jockeying for a way to secure their futures from the threat of another world war, but it was the threat that each side perceived from the other that

through “mutually assured destruction” had come to be regarded as vital to the national interest of both. As nuclear weapons became more prolific, both nations sought to position missile systems in ever closer proximity to each other’s borders. One such attempt by the Soviet government in 1962 precipitated the Cuban Missile Crisis, arguably the closest that the world has ever come to a large-scale nuclear exchange between two countries.

It was also in the early 1960s that American containment policy shifted from heavy reliance on nuclear weapons to more conventional notions of warfare in pursuit of a more “flexible response” to the spread of communism. Although originally articulated by President Kennedy, it was in 1965 that President Johnson showcased the idea of flexible response when he made the initial decision to commit American combat troops to South Vietnam. American thinking had come to regard Southeast Asia as vital to its national security, and President Johnson made clear his intention to insure South Vietnam’s territorial and political integrity “whatever the cost or whatever the challenge.”

The United States ultimately fought a bloody and costly war in Vietnam that poisoned U.S. politics and wreaked havoc with its economy. The Nixon administration inherited the conflict in 1969, and although it tried to improve relations with the Soviets through detente – and even took the unprecedented step of establishing diplomatic relations with Communist China – neither development was able to bring about decisive change on the Vietnamese battlefield. The United States abandoned the fight in 1973 under the guise of a peace agreement that left South Vietnam emasculated and vulnerable.



Leonid Brezhnev in 1967. [Image source.](#)

Although Nixon continued to negotiate with the Soviets and to court Maoist China, the Soviet Union and the United States continued to subvert one another’s interests around the globe in spite of detente’s high-minded rhetoric. Leonid Brezhnev had been installed as Soviet premier in 1964 as Krushchev’s replacement, and while he too desired friendlier relations with the United

allowed for the development of mutual suspicion. It was this mutual suspicion, augmented by profound distrust and misunderstanding that would ultimately fuel the entire conflict.

Interestingly, for the first few years of the early Cold War (between 1945 and 1948), the conflict was more political than military. Both sides squabbled with each other at the UN, sought closer relations with nations that were not committed to either side, and articulated their differing visions of a postwar world. By 1950, however, certain factors had made the Cold War an increasingly militarized struggle. The communist takeover in China, the pronouncement of the Truman Doctrine, the advent of a Soviet nuclear weapon, tensions over occupied Germany, the outbreak of the Korean War, and the formulation of the Warsaw Pact and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization as rival alliances had all enhanced the Cold War's military dimension. U.S. foreign policy reflected this transition when it adopted a position that sought to "contain" the Soviet Union from further expansion. By and large, through a variety of incarnations, the containment policy would remain the central strategic vision of U.S. foreign policy from 1952 until the ultimate demise of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Successive American presidents and successive Soviet premiers tried to manage the Cold War in different ways, and the history of their interactions reveals the delicate balance-of-power that needed to be maintained between both superpowers. Dwight Eisenhower campaigned as a hard-line Cold Warrior and spoke of "rolling back" the Soviet empire, but when given a chance to dislodge Hungary from the Soviet sphere-of-influence in 1956, he declined. The death of Stalin in 1953 prefaced a brief thaw in East-West relations, but Nikita Khrushchev also found it more politically expedient to take a hard line with the United States than to speak of cooperation.



Around the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis, intelligence officers in the US created this map to show the potential range of Soviet missiles if they were launched from Cuba. IRBM stands for intermediate-range ballistic missile, and MRBM is medium-range ballistic missile. Map courtesy of Central Intelligence Agency.

By 1960, both sides had invested huge amounts of money in nuclear weapons, both as an attempt to maintain parity with each other's stockpiles, but also because the idea of deterring conflict

States on certain issues (particularly agriculture), genuinely meaningful cooperation remained elusive.

By the end of the 1970s, however, the chance for an extended thaw had utterly vanished. Jimmy Carter had been elected president in 1976, and although he was able to hammer out a second arms limitation agreement with Brezhnev, the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan significantly soured U.S.-Soviet relations. Seeking to place a greater emphasis on human rights in his foreign policy, Carter angrily denounced the incursion and began to adopt an increasingly hard line with the Soviets. The following year, Americans overwhelmingly elected a president who spoke of waging the Cold War with even greater intensity than had any of his predecessors, and Ronald Reagan made good on his promises by dramatically increasing military budgets in the early 1980s.

Nonetheless, by 1985 Mikhail Gorbachev had replaced Brezhnev in Moscow, and he quickly perceived that drastic changes to the Soviet system were necessary if the USSR was to survive as a state. He instituted a series of liberal reforms known as *perestroika*, and he seemed genuinely interested in more relations with the West, known as *glasnost*. Although President Reagan continued to use bellicose language with respect to the Soviet Union (as when he labeled it an “evil empire”), the Gorbachev-Reagan relationship was personally warm and the two leaders were able to decrease tensions substantially by the time Reagan left the White House in 1989.

Despite improved East-West relations, however, Gorbachev’s reforms were unable to prevent the collapse of a system that had grown rigid and unworkable. By most measures, the Soviet economy had failed to grow at all since the late 1970s and much of the country’s populace had grown weary of the aged Communist hierarchy. In 1989 the spontaneous destruction of the Berlin Wall signaled the end of Soviet domination in Eastern Europe, and two years later the Soviet government itself fell from power.

The Cold War had lasted for forty-six years, and is regarded by many historians, politicians, and scholars as the third major war of the twentieth century.

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## **The Truman Doctrine**

In a speech before Congress in 1947, President Harry Truman declared that the United States, as “leader of the free world,” must lead the fight against communism and defend democracy around the world. This “Truman Doctrine” included the principle of *containment*, that the Soviet

movements in Eastern Europe, the Asian Subcontinent and Latin America. Given below is a brief timeline that summarizes the significant events and incidences that occurred around the world in the Cold war era.

## Timeline of Events in the Cold War

### 1945 to 1950

In 1945 The Allies agree in Potsdam to the fundamental conditions of the occupation of Germany. American nuclear bombs destroy Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The US offers assistance to countries threatened by communism and in 1947, US Secretary of State George C. Marshall announces a massive aid program for the reconstruction of World War II-torn Europe, known as the Marshall Plan.

The first major Berlin crisis during the Cold War occurs when The Soviet blockade of West Berlin begins on June 24 1948

On April 4, 1949 the NATO Treaty is signed in Washington and on May 23rd the Federal Republic of Germany is established. Later that year on October 7th the communist German Democratic Republic (GDR) comes into existence. On the other side of the world, the People's Republic of China is established by the Communist Party under Mao Zedong.

On 25th June 1950, North Korea attacks South Korea, subsequently UN troops led by the United States invade the country. China and the Soviet Union back North Korea.

### 1951 to 1955

In 1952, Soviet leader Joseph Stalin offers to hold negotiations on the reunification of Germany with the condition that the unified Germany remain neutral. But the Western allied powers in conjunction with the West German parliament reject the offer.

In 1953, a cease-fire is declared halting the Korean War. The two countries are forced to maintain their pre-war status.

On June 17, 1953, a workers' strike in East Germany quickly turns into an uprising that is violently suppressed by Russian tanks.

The first Germany army to exist after Hitler's fall, the Bundeswehr, is formed as the Federal Republic of Germany joins NATO on 9th May 1955

A mutual defense treaty between eight communist nations of Eastern Europe is signed on 14th May 1955. Commonly referred to as the Warsaw Pact was a strategic counter to the NATO treaty signed by the US and its allies.

### 1956 to 1960

On October 23rd 1956, a nation-wide revolt against the Communists government of Hungary begins in Budapest. After 17 days of protests the Hungarian uprising is brutally crushed as Soviet tanks roll into the capital, leading to 2,500 deaths.

In July 1956, Egypt announced its plans to nationalize the Suez Canal. This led to military action by the forces of Britain, France and Israel with the objective of occupying the Suez Canal. The

US and Soviet Union, along with the UN, put pressure of the three nations to withdraw and avert a major escalation of conflict.

In 1959, Cuba is taken over by Fidel Castro and he promptly allies himself with the Soviet Union and its policies.

#### 1961 to 1965

In April 1961 the Bay of Pigs invasion, an exercise planned by the CIA to support rebels against Castro in Cuba, fails horribly causing embarrassment to the US.

Fearing a brain drain of professionals and damage to the political and economic credibility of East Germany, the construction of the Berlin wall, dividing the Soviet section of Berlin, began on August 13, 1961.

In 1962 the world is on the verge of nuclear war for 14 long days, after the Soviets position nuclear war heads in Cuba and the US threatens war.

In 1963, the US, Great Britain and the Soviet Union mutually agree to suspend surface and underwater tests of nuclear weapons.

The first combat forces of the US land in South Vietnam in March 1965 signifying the direct involvement of the US in the Vietnam War.

#### 1966 to 1970

On January 23rd 1968 an American research ship USS Pueblo is captured by the North Koreans along with its 82 crew members. The crew was released after 11 months, but the ship still remains with the North Koreans even today.

Soviet troops along with other Warsaw Pact members entered Prague on August 21st 1968 to halt reforms and liberalization policies followed by the Czechoslovakian government popularly known as the Prague Spring.

On September 1, 1969 Muammar al-Gaddafi overthrows the monarchy in Libya and aligns with the Soviet Union, expelling US and British personnel.

#### 1971 to 1975

The signing of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks - I (SALT - I) agreement on May 26th 1972 signals the easing of strained relations between the United States and Soviet Union.

Signing of the Paris Peace Accords on January 27th signals the end of American involvement in Vietnam.

#### 1976 to 1980

On June 18th 1979, U.S. President Jimmy Carter and Soviet leader, Leonid Brezhnev, sign the SALT-II agreement, outlining guidelines and limitations for nuclear weapons.

The USSR invades Afghanistan to save the crumbling government there. The occupation would

last almost 10 years and result in one of the costliest wars for the Soviet Union. Following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the US imposes sanctions on the Russians and boycotts the Moscow Olympic Games of 1980.

#### 1981 to 1985

A Korean Airlines flight carrying 239 civilians is shot down by Soviet interceptor aircraft on 1st September 1983.

On March 23rd 1983, US President Ronald Reagan announces the development of a world-wide "Star Wars" missile defense system with his Strategic Defense Initiative.

On 21st November 1985, Geneva, Switzerland, host to a summit between Reagan and Gorbachev, for the first time, where they agree to hold two more summits.

#### 1986 to 1991

In October 1986, Reagan and Gorbachev hold successful talks and agree to remove all intermediate nuclear missiles from Europe

U.S. President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev sign the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty in Washington, D.C on 8th December 1987, and also agree on the START - I treaty.

Mounting losses and little significant gain leads the Soviet Union to admit defeat in Afghanistan and announce withdrawal of the troops in early 1989.

In the later half of 1989, a spate of revolutions across Eastern Europe see governments in Poland, Romania and Hungary fall to democratic and liberal forces led by its people.

In December 1989 at the Malta summit, US President George Bush and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev announce the beginning of a long-lasting era of peace. This summit is regarded by many observers to be the start of the end of the Cold War.

On December 25th 1991 Mikhail Gorbachev resigns as the President of the Soviet Union, the Soviet flag is lowered over the Kremlin for the last time.

The Council of Republics of Supreme Socialist of USSR recognize the dissolution of the USSR.

On 31st December 1991 all Soviet institutions are disbanded and cease operations, officially marking the end of the Cold War.

The introduction of reform programs by the Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev laid the basis for the opening up of the Soviet Union and its satellite states to pro-democratic and liberal style of governance. This gradual and peaceful revolution led to the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Cold War lasted a good four decades and left a significant legacy wherein the world experienced the horrors of a nuclear arms race and deep divisions and animosity amongst the nations of the world.

By Gaynor Borade

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