

Cold War-- "Cold War." American History. 2009. ABC-CLIO. 11 Mar. 2009
<<http://www.americanhistory.abc-clio.com>>.

"Let us not be deceived—today we are in the midst of a cold war." Thus spoke Bernard Baruch, a wealthy financier and presidential adviser, in a speech in April 1947. He had coined the term that would come to define the open struggle for power and influence between the Soviet Union and the United States in the decades after World War II.

Though the competition between the world's two dominant superpowers stopped short of open warfare, numerous incidents and crises demonstrated the seriousness of the rivalry. The hostility and mistrust that defined the relationship was all the more intense because it pitted not only two great powers against each other, but two clashing ideological systems—communism and capitalism. The Cold War finally ended in 1991 with the collapse and breakup of the Soviet Union.

Beginning in the late 19th century, a rivalry over economic development and influence in eastern Asia had evolved between the United States—then just emerging as a serious world power—and the ancient empire of Russia under the autocratic rule of the czars. When Bolshevik revolutionaries overthrew the regime of Czar Nicholas II in 1917 and established a new government based on communist principles, the United States officially opposed the new government. Communism, which the 19th-century writer and philosopher Karl Marx had defined as a political and economic system in which workers owned the means and instruments of industrial production and governed themselves, appeared to most Americans a conscious repudiation of their own free-enterprise, capitalist economic system and a direct challenge to American power.

Vladimir Lenin, the leader of the Bolshevik Party and the new Soviet Union, declared the goal of his regime was to export revolution to other nations and overthrow the capitalist system everywhere. This ambition seemed to support the American view of the new regime as a threat to the Western way of life.

Hence, in 1918, the United States and several other European states sent a small expeditionary force to help Russian monarchist, counterrevolutionary forces trying to topple the Bolsheviks and restore the czarist regime. This effort was unsuccessful, however, and the foreign troops had left Russia by 1920, as the new Soviet government wiped out opposition and established itself firmly in control. This intervention, as well as further hostile rhetoric between the Soviets and Americans, established a climate of mistrust between the two nations that prevented them from establishing diplomatic relations until 1933.

Yet it was only in the immediate aftermath of World War II that a real "cold war" developed. In the face of a common threat from Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union joined the United States and Britain in an alliance dedicated to defeating the German armies and ending the threat to world peace and stability. Still, the British and Americans never entirely trusted the Soviets, who had actually cooperated with Nazi leader Adolf Hitler between 1939 and 1941 until Germany repudiated their agreement and invaded Russia.

The Soviet Union, under the iron-willed and ruthless dictator Joseph Stalin, bore the brunt of Hitler's aggression, with some 25 million people killed in the assault and a staggering destruction of property. Throughout the war, the Soviet Red Army did the lion's share of the fighting on land that led to Hitler's ultimate defeat and broke the back of the German forces.

Determined not to be subject to invasion from the West again and to take what he thought was rightly due to his nation after the suffering it had endured and the victory it had won, Stalin insisted that Eastern Europe come under Soviet influence after the war ended. However, the Americans and British had done their fair share of fighting, and the vast productive resources of the United States had supplied not only its armies, but those of the Soviets as well. Moreover, the United States was sole possessor of the atomic bomb, which the Americans had dropped on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to end the war in the Pacific. Thus, the Americans were unwilling to let Stalin dictate the shape of the postwar world. The two nations, despite their wartime cooperation, had not lost their suspicion and mistrust of one another, and they still regarded their economic and political systems as mutually incompatible.

As the war ground to a close in the spring of 1945, President Franklin D. Roosevelt died, and his successor, Harry Truman, emerged as a more determined opponent of communism. He stressed the right of nations (particularly those of Eastern Europe) to choose their own form of government, free trade, open markets, and a strong, rebuilt Europe (including Germany). Stalin clearly favored a different approach, and between 1945 and 1947, he ensured the installation of pro-Soviet communist regimes in the countries of Eastern Europe that were heavily dependent on the Soviet Union.

These actions alarmed the United States and other Western governments. Winston Churchill, the wartime leader of Great Britain, gave one of his most famous speeches at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri on March 5, 1946. In it, he declared, "A shadow has fallen upon the scenes so lately lighted by the Allied victory. . . . From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent." For the United States, Britain, and other Western powers, the most disturbing aspect of this "iron curtain" dividing Europe was that it ran through Germany, cutting that nation in two.

At the end of the war, Germany had been divided into four occupation zones, with Great Britain, the United States, France, and the Soviet Union each governing their own sectors. As hostility between the Soviet Union and the West grew, Stalin decided to establish the Soviet zone in the east as a separate communist state. Berlin, the former capital of Germany, lay within the Soviet zone, although the city itself was also divided into four occupation zones, each controlled by one of the major Allied Powers. This division of Berlin and its location within the larger Soviet occupation zone was not only awkward but also carried a very great potential for conflict.

The situation came to a head in 1948, when Stalin responded to what he viewed as increasing provocation from the West by setting up a blockade of the western half of Berlin. Truman's response was defiant but stopped short of open armed conflict. Instead,

he orchestrated an airlift that flew supplies into the city, thus defying the blockade without openly attacking it. By 1949, Stalin had lifted the blockade, but Germany remained definitively divided into two separate nations, while Berlin remained a divided city.

Stalin's actions in Berlin had been in response to the increasingly tense nature of the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union. By 1948, the two nations had already clashed over Soviet control of the Dardanelles Strait in Turkey—which offered access to the Mediterranean from the Black Sea—and over Soviet influence in Iran. In both instances, Stalin had backed down, but bad feelings remained.

A civil war in Greece prompted U.S. leaders to adopt a more organized plan to stop the spread of communism. Truman pledged financial support to monarchists fighting Soviet-backed communists in a speech in March 1947, which also defined his overall approach to the emerging Cold War. The so-called Truman Doctrine sought to rally the American people to commit the resources necessary to support freedom against what he called communist aggression. Truman thereby publicly committed himself to the policy of containment—stopping the spread of communism to other countries—that had already been advocated by American diplomat George F. Kennan.

The second major U.S. initiative of this period was the Marshall Plan, which Secretary of State George C. Marshall proposed in a commencement address at Harvard University on June 5, 1947. The plan called for \$13 billion in economic aid to rebuild the nations of Western Europe. The Soviets rightly saw this effort as a challenge, as the Americans were intent on preventing the spread of communism in Western Europe and in demonstrating to the world both the generosity of the United States and the superiority of the capitalist system that produced such wealth.

The year 1949 proved particularly eventful in the Cold War. In April, the United States formed the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which united numerous Western nations in a military alliance to counter any Soviet threat to the security of Europe. In August, the Soviet Union successfully tested its first nuclear device, thus ending the American monopoly on such weapons and the military superiority that came with it. Finally, by the end of that year, communists in China had ended their decades-long armed struggle by defeating their rivals and forming a new government. The following year, the Soviet Union and China entered into an alliance. All of these events led to a feeling of uneasiness in the United States.

Confronted with communists gains on several fronts, the U.S. National Security Council (NSC), a body that advised the president on matters of foreign and military policy, presented Truman with a document known as NSC 68: U.S. Objectives and Programs for National Security (1950). It argued that the Cold War had to be given a new priority and level of commitment, with a massive increase in military spending and more extensive efforts on the part of the government to rally Americans to the cause of defeating communism.

Communism is a social system in which a classless society owns and shares all property as a whole.

Socialism is a political and social system in which the government owns major industries and controls the production of goods and the means of distribution. The major aim of socialism is the creation of a classless society.

Capitalism is a free enterprise system that stresses private ownership of most farms and industries as a means of economic growth and the preservation of personal liberty.

Democracy is a system of government in which the people rule through representatives whom they elect.

An **oligarchy** is a small group of socially and economically elite citizens that rules a country or other political unit.

Monarchy is a form of government based on the rule of a single person who is normally chosen by hereditary succession to rule for life.

A **dictatorship** is the arbitrary rule by an individual or junta who is not constitutionally responsible to the people or their elected representatives.

A **republic** is a form of government characterized by popular sovereignty.