The term *cold war* refers to the worldwide strategic and political struggle that developed after *World War II*. It pitted the *United States* and its Western European allies against the *Union of Soviet Socialist Republics* and other Communist countries. The expression was coined by the American journalist Herbert Bayard Swope in a 1947 speech he wrote for financier Bernard Baruch.

The cold war initially centered on the use of Soviet military forces to install Communist governments in Eastern Europe. These actions ran counter to the U.S. government's insistence on the right of self-determination for the peoples of Eastern Europe. They also raised fears that the USSR, after gaining control of Eastern Europe, would try to communize Western Europe. The USSR had suffered enormous losses in the war against Nazi Germany and looked on Eastern Europe as a bulwark against another invasion from the West. The Soviet leaders considered U.S. objections to Soviet actions in *Poland*, *Hungary*, and *Romania* a betrayal of wartime understandings about spheres of influence in Europe. Thus they placed Eastern Europe behind a military and political barrier known in the West as the *Iron Curtain*.

Political differences were exacerbated by ideological conflict. The Marxist-Leninist Soviet leaders believed that *capitalism* would inevitably seek the destruction of the Soviet system. In the United States, a long-standing suspicion and dislike of *communism* strengthened the view that the USSR was intent on expansion and world conquest.

**The Struggle over Germany**
Meanwhile, competition began for control of Germany and other strategic points. The latter included the Dardanelles, the straits linking the Black Sea with the Aegean and the Mediterranean. Soviet pressures on Greece and Turkey led President Harry Truman to enunciate the so-called Truman Doctrine. In March 1947 he announced that the United States would give economic and military aid to those countries; at the same time, he said that it would "support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures."

In June 1947 the United States announced the Marshall Plan. This program to restore the faltering economies of Western Europe—including that of West Germany—prompted a series of ripostes from the Kremlin. In February 1948 the democratic government of Czechoslovakia was overthrown by a Communist coup. In May, Soviet authorities severed all Western land-access routes to Berlin. This cut off West Berlin; the city was isolated within the Soviet zone of occupation that later became East Germany. Only the success of air cargo planes in supplying the city permitted the United States to resist the Soviet pressure (see Berlin Airlift).

In 1949 the Western powers entered into a military agreement that led to the formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. NATO was designed to establish a military counterweight to the Soviet forces in Europe. In the same year, communism scored a major success in China. A long civil war there ended with the victory of Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-tung) and the establishment of the People's Republic of China.

War in Korea

The first phase of the cold war culminated in North Korea's invasion of South Korea on June 26, 1950. This resulted in U.S. involvement in a land war in Asia (see Korean War). Western forces suffered initial reverses. They then pushed the North Koreans back over the border and surged northward until Chinese troops entered the conflict. Then the war settled into a prolonged stalemate along the original partition line, the 38th parallel. The bitter fighting and the inability of the Truman administration to bring the war to an end froze American public opinion in a state of hostility that made normal relations with any Communist government impossible.

Competing Strategies

To meet these challenges, each side fashioned a strategy. The U.S. strategy was called "containment." This term was first used by the U.S. diplomat and Soviet expert George F. Kennan in arguing that Soviet expansionism might be contained by a strategy of responding to Soviet pressures and probes wherever they occurred. Kennan's thesis was strongly supported by Secretary of State Dean Acheson, who called for increased military power for NATO. This policy appeared to the USSR as one more Western effort to isolate and undermine the Soviet system. The Kremlin adopted a strategy of retaliation against U.S. containment.
During the 1950s, Washington's policy was shaped by the more militant John Foster Dulles. The United States sought to anticipate and prevent further Communist gains by maintaining overwhelming military superiority; by forming new alliances in Asia (the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization) and in the Middle East (the Central Treaty Organization); and by extending economic and military assistance to any country thought to be in danger of attack or subversion by Communist forces.

Relations between the two powers improved somewhat following Joseph Stalin's death in 1953. The wars in Korea and French Indochina (where French and Vietnamese forces had been fighting since 1946) were brought to an end, and the first postwar summit meeting of Soviet and Western leaders was held in Geneva in July 1955. No more than a surface thaw was achieved, however. After Nikita Khrushchev's consolidation of power in 1956, the USSR embarked on two new strategies. The first involved economic and military competition with the United States for influence with Arab and other developing countries. Thus it attempted to befriend countries such as Ghana, Egypt, India, and Indonesia. (These countries, in turn, sought a middle way between the two superpowers, forming the so-called Nonaligned Movement.) The Soviet strategy evolved into one of support for colonial revolutions, or "wars of national liberation," and for left-wing governments, most notably in Cuba. The second strategy, based on Soviet development of intercontinental ballistic missiles, was to divide the Western powers by renewing Soviet pressure to eject the West from Berlin. In 1955 the Warsaw Treaty Organization was established as a response to the rearming of West Germany. A new round of Soviet-American confrontations ensued, all the riskier because now both sides possessed nuclear weapons. In 1961 the construction of the Berlin Wall caused one crisis. Even worse was the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, when the world seemed to teeter on the brink of nuclear war.

Détente

The Limited Test Ban Treaty of Aug. 5, 1963, was a turning point in the cold war. The treaty seemed to signify that U.S. and Soviet leaders wanted to end a costly and risky struggle that increased the danger of a real war. The inauguration (Aug. 30, 1963) of a "hot line" for emergency communications between Washington and Moscow was a further reassurance.

Ideological rivalry, competition for influence, and the arms race continued between the two superpowers. U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War, for example, was at its height during the late 1960s. Nevertheless, East and West were able to negotiate in a spirit of détente. U.S. rapprochement with China occurred in the 1970s. The arms race was slowed by the Strategic Arms Limitation (SALT) agreements of 1972 and 1974. (See Arms Control.)

Estrangement and Reconciliation

Relations between the United States and the USSR deteriorated during the administration (1977–81) of U.S. president Jimmy Carter, especially after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. This revival of the cold war continued in the early years of the Ronald Reagan administration. The United States was infuriated by Soviet support for the Sandinista
government of Nicaragua. The USSR took issue with America's declared intention to develop an antinuclear Strategic Defense Initiative. With the rise to power of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985, however, the situation began to change dramatically. Gorbachev's policies of domestic reform and reconciliation with the West led to self-determination for the satellite countries of Eastern Europe. Then, in 1991—however inadvertently—they brought the collapse of the Soviet system itself. This finally brought the cold war to an end.

Or so it seemed. For a decade or so, capitalism and democracy seemed triumphant. The United States was the only superpower; Russia, a budding democracy, floundered economically. Then, as the United States became preoccupied with the threat posed to the West by Islamic terrorism, Russia emerged as a new energy-rich power. Under Vladimir Putin, Russia's democratic freedoms were curtailed and its key industries returned increasingly to state control. Moreover, Putin's Russia bullied its neighbors and engaged in newly hostile rhetoric toward the West. Putin himself spoke of "a new arms race," and some Western observers began to fear a new cold war.

David S. McLellan

Further Reading:

Bowker, Mike, and Brown, Robineds. *From Cold War to Collapse* (1992).


See also: China, history of, Europe, history of, Kennedy, John F., Cuban Missile Crisis Address speech United States, history of the

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