

# [The early stages of the cold war](https://assignbuster.com/the-early-stages-of-the-cold-war/)

The Cold War was an ideological war that took place after World War Two between the then two world superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. After World War Two, Germany was left defeated, and Britain and France were left economically and socially exhausted. The United States and the Soviet Union held a considerable amount of power and both soon rose to superpower status.

This then resulted in the two powers becoming rivals through conflicting ideologies and mutual distrust in which both constantly competed for power. The Soviet Union wanted to spread Communism in Eastern Europe and create a zone of friendly governments as defence against Germany. In 1946, with Eastern Europe under Soviet control and influence, Europe was divided into a West (western democracies and the United States) bloc and East (Soviet Union and Soviet occupied territory) bloc. An “ Iron Curtain” separated Europe. Tensions in the Cold War rose as high as they did because Germany’s defeat in 1945 left a power vacuum in central Europe

## Paragraph 1. a Yalta Conference

The Yalta conference was held in the resort town of Yalta from the 4th to the 11th of February 1945. The “ Big Three” met there to decide the fate of post-war Europe. The United States was represented by Franklin D. Roosevelt, Great Britain by Winston Churchill, and Josef Stalin represented the Soviet Union. The goal of the conference was to discuss many aspects surrounding post WWII. Amongst the issues discussed in relevance to Germany was the dividing of Germany and German war reparations. The countries represented at Yalta ideally wanted to divide Germany into successive parts. They could not risk another power surge by Germany and another World War. Germany had to be limited in its economic capacity. All powers had a different perspective as to how Germany should be divided. Franklin D. Roosevelt of the United States felt that Germany should be divided into five constituent parts. However, Churchill felt that a division into Germany and Austria with the German heartland of the Ruhr under international control was best. The British representative also pushed for a zone occupation of France, which was initially opposed by Stalin, but later accepted. It was then decided that the exact boundaries should be left up for future discussion.

## Paragraph 1. b Potsdam Conference

Following the Yalta conference, the three main powers met again in Potsdam to primarily discuss how to deal with a post war Germany. The main representatives now were Stalin, Truman (Roosevelt’s successor as President of the USA) and Churchill who was later replaced by Clement Atlee in whom he lost the British prime ministry to. The war with Germany was over, but no agreement had been reached on its long-term future beyond what had been decided at Yalta. It was understood by all that Germany should be disarmed, the Nazi Party disbanded and its leaders tried as war criminals. The conference itself was able to seek an agreement by the powers for the division of Germany. It was decided that Germany was to be divided into four zones administered by the United States, Britain, France, and Soviet Union. Though Berlin lay inside the Russian zone, it was to be jointly occupied as the headquarters of the Allied Supreme Council by also being divided into four zones as well. Despite the administrative divisions, Germany was to remain one economic unit so it could pay reparations for wartime damages as agreed earlier in the conference.

The Potsdam Conference was significant in that it sowed the seeds for future discontent between the free powers and the Russians. During the meeting, Stalin demanded that the Allied powers recognized the governments of Bulgaria, Hungary, and Romania, all of which governments in Eastern Europe laboured under Russian control. Harry Truman refused to concede with Stalin’s request until these states held free elections. But Joseph Stalin candidly admitted that they could not conduct free elections because the results would go against the Soviets

It was becoming clear that Russia was extending totalitarian control to its wartime conquests in Eastern Europe. It was also becoming clear that the wartime alliance of Russia and the democracies was beginning to flounder.

## Paragraph 2 Iron Curtain Speech

Following the agreements and discontent between the Major Powers after the Yalta and Potsdam Conferences and nine months after Churchill failed to be re-elected as president, Churchill travelled by train with President Harry Truman to make a speech and gave his now famous post-war “ Iron Curtain” speech to a crowd of 40, 000. In this speech, Churchill gave the very descriptive phrase that surprised the United States and Britain, “ From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent.” Before this speech, the U. S. and Britain had been concerned with their own post-war economies and had remained grateful for the Soviet Union’s pre-emptive role in ending World War II. It was Churchill’s speech, which he titled “ The Sinews of Peace,” that changed the way the democratic West viewed the autocratic Communist East. The speech was essentially recognized as the division of Europe into East and West and was declaring a war between capitalism and socialism by laying out the borders of Soviet influence on Central and Eastern Europe. Germany was one of the countries in Europe which was split between other countries, and this split was also part of the Iron Curtain that Churchill described in his speech.

## Paragraph 3 Marshall Plan

Ensuing the aftermath of Churchill’s “ Iron Curtain” speech and Europe’s then disastrous economic state came the implementation of the Marshall Plan which was put into effect in order to stop the Soviet Union from influencing any of the weakened western powers. It became known to the western allies that the influence of communism from Russia may prove to be ideal to states in which were economically starved, thus increasing the likelihood of the spread of communism though Europe. During the time the United States sent economic aid to European democracies to help them economically rebuild their respective states. Billions of dollars were spent to help countries recover promptly and to reduce the influence of Communism. The USSR rejected the Marshall Plan and made sure that its satellite states did the same and as a result, Russia and neither of its allies received financial aid from the plan, they were essentially allowed to remain communist in a restricted territory surrounded by the financially aided western powers.

Germany signed up for the Marshall Plan but its economy was still to remain in farming and light industry, this approach soon backfired as the plan itself required an economically stable Germany and meant that Germany’s industry ban had to be reduced. As a result, the steel production in Germany went from 25% to 50% of pre-war capacity.

This plan helped to restore West Germany and rebuild it as a new state in America’s fight against Russia and her communist ideals. Russia refused the aid of the Marshall Plan and, as a result, East Germany was not completely rebuilt unlike the west.

## Paragraph 4 Berlin Blockade

On 23 June 1948 all road, rail and canal links between West Berlin and West Germany were forcibly closed by the Russians. Their primary aim was to force the West to withdraw from the city by reducing it to a desperate starvation point. When the plan had been carried out by the USSR, Berlin had only food and fuel enough for six weeks.

The western powers were convinced that a retreat from West Berlin would be the prologue to a Russian invasion on West Germany and were determined to maintain control of West Berlin. General Clay, the American commander in Berlin, stated that “ When Berlin falls, Western Germany will be next. If we withdraw our position in Berlin, Europe is threatened … Communism will run rampant.”

The statement was well received and was agreed by the Western powers and as a result, they decided to fly supplies into the city along three air corridors. They risked that the Russians would not risk the outbreak of war by shooting the supply planes down in which no event occurred. Over the next ten months two million tons of supplies were airlifted to the blockaded city in an operation that kept over two million West Berliners from starvation. Only in May 1949 did the Russians admit failure by lifting the Blockade, but by then there was no question that the old wartime alliance was over and the vital stages of the Cold War had begun.

## Paragraph 5 Berlin Crisis

Following the division of Germany into sectors there was ongoing migration from the East to the West. It severely undermined the Soviet’s ability to run East Germany as they wanted to. Between the end of the war and 1950 some 15 million people migrated from the Soviet Sector into Western Germany. There was little in place to stop people moving between the sectors and it was quite easy for East Germans to apply for, and get, political asylum once they were in the West. The high levels of migration posed a problem for the Soviet Union. A large percentage of the migrants were found to be skilled professionals and the remainder left the East short of skilled workers. In 1952 the East Germans decided to reduce the migration. They did this by closing the internal borders between the East and Western sectors. However within Berlin, it was still easy to move from one sector to another. Whilst migration became harder for some, Berlin acted as a route to the West.

By 1961 the continued migration was having a major negative impact on the economy and society in Eastern Germany. To staple this effect, Khrushchev made his first move to solve the crisis in Berlin. He informed the Western Powers that they had to demilitarise Berlin and allow it to become a Free City within a term of six months. Once this had occurred the East German Government would be handed the responsibility of controlling the border between the East and West Berlin with the right to deny access by the Western States. The Western Powers rejected Khrushchev’s demand and reminded the Soviet Union of their rights with regards to the access of Berlin. Khrushchev responded by withdrawing his deadline and agreed to meet with the Western Powers to discuss problems relating to Berlin. Following further negotiations between the Soviet Union and the USA the confrontation over Berlin eventually escalated, Kennedy, in a speech restated that the United States was not looking for a fight and that he recognized the Soviet Union’s concerns about their security in central and Eastern Europe. He said he was willing to renew talks but also announced that he would ask Congress for an additional $3. 25 billion for military spending to increase military armoury and troops. Kennedy stated, “ We seek peace, but we shall not surrender.” a sign of resilience to Khrushchev’s six month ultimatum. Khrushchev was angered by Kennedy’s speech and explained that the USA’s military build-up threated the possibility of war.

## Paragraph 6 Berlin Wall

On the night of August 13th, 1961, the East German authorities deployed workers and soldiers to completely cut off West Berlin by laying down barbed wires to mark the cut off line. All forms of public communication were also cut to the West. In the morning, it was practically impossible to pass from East Berlin to the West. In the coming days the manned blockades were developed into fences topped with barbed wire then into concrete walls. Behind the wall the East Germans created a second barrier labelled as the “ no mans land”. Anyone entering this area was in danger of being shot by the East German guards.

The sole purpose of the wall was to stop the large scale migration of East Germans to the West. The wall itself represented the disunity and discontent between the Democratic Western powers and the Eastern communist lead states.

## Conclusion

During the Cold War, Germany became the centre for the conflict between Communism and Democracy where all tensions between the two ideals was played out. Germany was the key focus of the Cold War’s early stages in numerous ways which consisted of mostly abysmal results.

Germany turned from an ideological battleground into a symbol of the Cold War which almost brought the world into another war. Germany was perhaps the most important border between capitalism and communism throughout the Cold War. Germany and more particularly Berlin, served the purpose of power in which the Western and Eastern states would battle against in order to claim power. Failure to gain power within Germany and Berlin were socially perceived as a weakness and loss of power by the opposing ideals from the public eye. It happened to be that both opposing powers already had a significant stake in maintaining power over Germany from previous agreements (Potsdam Conference) with either side claiming their right to full control over Germany due to various circumstances. The reluctance of each power to admit full control to the other lead to further discontent between the two, forming the early stages of the Cold War.