

Containing the spread of communism history essay



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CHAPTER 2

In February of 1948, Czechoslovakia was taken over by communists and incorporated into the Soviet alliance system. This and many other crises heightened Western concerns about military defense. In April 1949, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was formed. Those part of the NATO formation of 1949 were the United States, Great Britain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Italy, Portugal, Denmark, Iceland, Norway, and Canada; later, more nations were added such as Spain, Turkey, West Germany and more. All members of this military alliance agreed that an attack on one would be considered an attack on all. In response to NATO, the Soviet Union and its Eastern European allies signed a military agreement known as the Warsaw Pact in 1955. The purpose of the Warsaw Pacts was as much to strengthen the Soviet hold on Eastern Europe as to defend it.

Along with new alliances[1], came new leaderships[2], new world orders, new ideologies, and much more.

Soviet Take-over

After 1945, the Soviet Union took over what was known as “ Eastern Europe”. This take-over was not fully complete until 1948 having many formerly independent states taken under the communist wing. In 1946, Churchill described how an Iron Curtain was being put down across Europe, dividing these Soviet-colonies from the democratic, capitalist states in Western Europe. These communist-dominated governments introduced nationalism in a way that excludes international communication that is not the Union itself. Any form of opposition was illegal, elections were not an

option and land was taken from landlords; the spread rapidly increased, much faster than expected by capitalists.

China fell into the communist circle in 1949. Led by Mao Zedong, the communist success in China convinced American leaders that they needed to be more energetic in a world-wide struggle against communism. This led to a huge increase in Americans spending on defense. As the state with the greatest population in the world, the government of China expected to be taken seriously by other powerful countries. They saw themselves as equals to the Soviet Union and the United States, like a third superpower.

The relationship between communist China and the USSR was tense from the beginning. Mao was not impressed by the level of support he received from Stalin during the years of struggle. The Chinese leadership was not prepared to see the USSR as the senior partner in the communist world. After Stalin's death, Mao was angered that the Soviet leaders did not consult him before attacking Stalin's memory. These tensions came to surface in 1960 when the Chinese criticized Khrushchev for being too friendly towards the West. The USSR ordered home many of the Soviet scientists and engineers who were in China. Between 1968 and 1970 the USSR and China came close to war over arguments about the frontier. The two countries remained on poor terms until the late 1980's.

Germany and Berlin's Situation

Since in 1945, Germany had been divided into the four zones controlled by Great Britain, France, the United States and the Soviet Union. The three zones of the Western Allies were known as West Germany, while the Soviet

zone was Eastern Germany. Since Berlin was found deep within the Soviet zone it was also divided into the same four zones: France, Great Britain, United States (West), and the Soviet Union (East).

The Western Allies and the Soviets could not reach an agreement as to the final peace treaty for Germany. As relations with Stalin got tenuous, the western zones decided to include West Germany to the Marshall Plan. While the Soviets stripped their German zone of its industrial resources and equipment, the three western powers aided toward economic recovery; free elections for local governments were held. The United States, Great Britain and France also agreed to combine their sectors of Berlin officially to form the city of West Berlin. In June of 1948, a new currency was introduced for use of only Western Germany.

The news of a new currency in West Germany alarmed Stalin. The new money, known as Deutschmark, was not allowed in the Soviet zone, and what Stalin saw was another step in the direction of a wealthier Western Germany allied with the USA. What Soviets were truly afraid of was another attack like that in 1941 during WWII.

In June of 1948, the Soviets tried to block the merging by cutting off all land access from the West to West Berlin. The only way for the people of West Berlin to obtain food, oil and other crucial supplies was from their Western friends; meaning when they were cut off, two million Berliners risked starvation and failure of their factories. The US and other western allies considered using force to gain back access to the city, but this could have

started an unnecessary war in Europe with the USSR once again, so instead they came up with the plan of airlifting the supplies to the isolated city.

To keep the city alive, at least 3.5 million kilograms of supplies were needed each day. Airplanes would land constantly at West Berlin's two airports, making the airlift a success. After 11 months, the Soviets decided to lift the blockade. To the people in the West, Stalin's actions were seen as direct aggression and an attack on West Berlin. This may have been the first step towards a communist march westwards, but since it was stopped, the Soviets were not able to expand.

Within the Soviet satellites, East Germany was the most prosperous, yet rebellious of them all. Its people deeply resented the Soviet controls. In the aftermath of Stalin's death in 1953, East German workers went on strikes and riots about work and living conditions; however, Soviet troops and tanks easily ended them. The new Soviet leader was Nikita Khrushchev; and the American leader, President Eisenhower, succeeded by John F. Kennedy. Both were determined to show which side was right, discovering they were going to have a lot on their hands.

In the years that followed, nearly 3 million Germans migrated to West Germany, and many other Berliners migrated to West Berlin. Soviets had to seal the East German-West German border, since they were losing too many well-educated ambitious professionals to the capitalists. This was an embarrassment for Khrushchev and an economic blow for the East German state.

Since West Berlin was considered an island of capitalism within an ocean of communists, and the Eastern constantly tried passing to the west, in 1961, frustrated by the lack of settlement, Khrushchev ordered the construction of a wall to separate East and West Berlin. The Berlin Wall was a massive concrete structure 42 kilometers long and 4.5 meters high, topped with barbed electrified wire.

The stated purpose of the wall was to keep the Westerners in and out of the Eastern side, but its true purpose was to keep the Eastern Berliners from fleeing to the Western side. Now, when they tried to get across, people had to get passed mined trenches, guard dogs, and self activated guns. They had to scale the wall itself, some reaching triumph; others got killed in the process. This wall became famous; it was the symbol of the Cold War because it became the most visible and powerful symbol of the Iron Curtain; cutting right through the German city.

The whole crisis started in 1958 when Khrushchev called to end the four-power control of Berlin, saying that it should become a neutral free city and western troops should withdraw. West Germany's leader, Konrad Adenauer was strongly against any deal, whereas President Eisenhower was considering Khrushchev's offer. Though before any agreement was made, Americans elected new President John F. Kennedy for office and in his election speeches said that he will be much tougher on the Soviets than Eisenhower. Extracts of his speeches:

“ The enemy is the communist system itself – unceasing in its drive for world domination. This is a struggle for supremacy between two conflicting ideologies: freedom under God versus ruthless, godless tyranny.

“ We will mound our strength and become first again. Not first if... Not first but... Not first when... But first period. I want them to wonder not what Mr. Khrushchev is doing. I want them to wonder what the United States is doing.” (John F. Kennedy: September 1960)

Kennedy brought a new argument over Berlin; he met with the Soviet leader in Vienna in June of 1961, a meeting which was unfriendly and unsuccessful. Khrushchev demanded Berlin, saying even if war was needed. As the year passed slowly, war seemed more and more probable, since Kennedy was in no way going to deal. A nuclear war was at stake, but in the end, Khrushchev simply set of the order to seal off the city, and the Wall was built.

Containing the Spread of Communism

After the communist take-over in Eastern Europe, the United States government was worried and felt the need to stop the spread of communism. To counter any expansionist threat from the Soviet Union, the United States developed a new foreign policy in 1947; this same was presented by George Kennan and is known as containment. Believing that the Soviets only mission was to expand their territory, the United States hoped to use this policy to keep communism inside their borders.

The containment policy was put to practice with the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, the founding of NATO and the setting up of Western Germany.

To all of these plans, the USSR had its own policies and responses, yet they <https://assignbuster.com/containing-the-spread-of-communism-history-essay/>

took much longer since they took longer to recover from WWII and other conflicts. The Soviet's reactions included: the Berlin Blockade, COMECON, setting up East Germany and the Warsaw Pact.

The Cold War affected the internal policies of the Soviet Union and its Eastern European satellites. During the late 1940's and early 1950's, Josef Stalin believed that a full-scale conflict with the West was totally inevitable. To confront the West, the USSR had to increase control over the people in it and Eastern Europe. Stalin eliminated the Communist parties of anyone suspected of disloyalty. He also forbade writers and artists to use Western ideas in their works.

After World War II, Stalin worked to rebuild the Soviet Union's heavy industry and to boost its military strength. The USSR surpassed its prewar rates of production in several major products including: coal, steel and oil. It continued a high level of military and nuclear spending. Despite the country's military highlight, the lives of the Soviet citizens was difficult. Towns and cities destroyed by the war were rebuilt, but the amount of consumer goods, food and even clothing remained short because of the governments' spending in military advances.

Once Nikita Khrushchev emerged as the dominant leader of the USSR after Stalin's death, a series of changes were being made. In 1954 the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party was held in Moscow. At a secret session, Khrushchev gave a controversial speech about Stalin. He spoke of Stalin's crimes and exposed him as a mass murderer. In addition, he also revealed the violence that had been occurring within the government; he

was a traitor to the country and communism. In this same session, Khrushchev promised better wages to peasants, more freedom and to reverse policies established by Stalin.

What Nikita Khrushchev was doing with this speech was something that had been illegal for years, criticizing Joseph Stalin. He knew the people were afraid of the government and wanted relaxation, so he promised this and better standard living. His new project was known as de-Stalinization which took from 1956 to 1964 to reverse some of Stalin's old policies.

This situation with Khrushchev was calming for the American government. It seemed as though he would lead the communist superpower down a better path; but this feeling did not last long. Some of the most crucial and highpoints of the Cold War happened during Khrushchev's power.

The United States had another policy based on what they called the "domino theory". This was the belief that the influence of neighboring countries affects the independent states around them. For example, if one country collapses economically, others close by will follow like a domino chain. The Americans used this theory to explain their involvement in foreign states at risk of the influence of the communists. The states in most "danger" of this happening were those of South-East Asia, which received great influence from the Soviet Union and China.

Wars in East Asia

The Second World War and the Cold War brought many dramatic changes to Asian countries; Japan was stripped of the lands it had conquered, Great Britain, France, and other countries were forced to withdraw themselves

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from their Asian colonies and new nations appeared. Communists won control in China, and the USSR occupied most everything else. The events of the Cold War affected the entire region.

Korea's modern history has been heavily shaped by international politics. In 1910, the Korean Peninsula was annexed by the Japanese, who ruled it as a colony until the end of World War II, when Japan was stripped of its territorial states. During the war, the Allied powers had agreed that Korea was to be temporarily occupied. In 1945 Soviet troops moved into the northern part of Korea down to the 38th parallel[4]. United States forces occupied the southern area. The occupation was to end as soon as a Korean government could be elected. However, the Americans and Soviets, as usual, could not agree on a form of election.

By 1948, two separate governments had emerged, each claiming to be the legal ruler of the whole Korea. North Korea, officially called the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, with its capital at Pyongyang, kept close ties with the Soviet Union and China. South Korea, officially the Republic of Korea, established its capital at Seoul. It maintained links with the United States. The Soviets withdrew their troops from North Korea in late 1948, and the United States withdrew theirs in mid-1949.

In June 1950, North Korea, hoping to unify the country under a communist government, invaded South Korea. The Americans won support from the United Nations for war against the invading North Koreans. General MacArthur led a fight back that drove the North Koreans out of South Korea.

Mac Arthur then continued to push the communists deep into North Korean territory as an attempt to roll back communism.

At this point, a massive Communist Chinese army came to the aid of North Korea. The Chinese forced the UN and US army to retreat nearly to the original border of 1945, where neither could advance or retreat any further. In July of 1953, a truce was finally signed and the fighting ended, drawing a new border-line that remains to today with a neutral zone of military forces preventing any conflicts.

As a result of the war, the United States and South Korea signed a Mutual Security Treaty, meaning both were considered allies and when one was in trouble, the other would help. Of course this was to be sure that North Korea would not invade again, and if so, the US will help fight them again. Yet still, this war was considered America's first real defeat, because they were unable to "contain" the communists. Since the communists kept the land of North Korea, America was not completely happy.

Between 1965 and 1973, American troops fought again against the communists in the Southeast Asian country of Vietnam.

Vietnam had been a French colony, but after the World War II, Vietnamese nationalists and communists started fighting against the French for independence. In 1954, the French finally pulled out, and Vietnam was divided in two: North Vietnam (communists) and South Vietnam (capitalists). In 1959 the communist government encouraged a revolution in the South and Southern communists that fled to the North returned to fight in the Revolution. These forces were known as Vietcong.

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The anti-communists had to rely on the Americans for protection and according to the American policy of the domino theory, they had to aid, or the whole country will fall to communism. In November of 1961, President Kennedy started providing support with troops and weapons. By air, the Americans would bomb parts of the North but the communists invaded more and more.

In July of 1965, President Johnson agreed to send 180, 000 American troops to Vietnam. The number of US troops increased over the next three years of war until there were 540, 000 American soldiers fighting for the South. This helped stop their collapse for some time, yet the fighting intensified.

American constantly bombed North Vietnam and their tactics brought little success. As a matter of fact they were highly criticized by the Americans themselves.

The problem was that the American troops relied on strategy and technology, while the Vietcong and soldiers of the North simply relied on guerilla tactics such as sabotage and sudden ambushes. The Americans, on the other hand, used massive airpower to bomb supply lines and chemical defoliants to destroy communist hiding places. Neither of these methods worked and some people started believing the Americans were useless.

American Troops were too aggressive; the turning point of the war came in early 1968. The Vietcong launched a major military offensive during the Vietnamese New Year holiday, Tet. Although they failed to take any large cities, the fighting made it clear that the several years of America's involvement had failed to weaken the Vietcong.

The Tet offensive helped the North win the war. The sight of communist fighters in the grounds of the American embassy in Saigon made ridicule the idea that Americans were close to victory. As a result of the violence of the attack and the clear determination of the communists, many American politicians and people became cynical with the war. The anti-war movement in the USA emerged and grew in strength and mass. Americans finally realized they could not win the war in Vietnam.

At the end of March, 1968 Johnson admitted that he failed in Vietnam, and he will not be seeking re-election as president. Finally, he reduced the amount of bombing in North Vietnam and called for peace talks in Paris during May of that year. The peace talks got nowhere, but it was clear that the Americans were looking for a way out. President Richard Nixon was then elected in November; he was determined to end the war.

Opposition to the war grew rapidly during Nixon's presidency. He searched for peace with honor, and not humiliating the country more than it already was. He tried many methods:

At the Paris peace talks he tried to persuade North Vietnam that their soldiers should withdraw from the South at the same time as the American troops. He threatened a massive attack on the North if they refused to compromise. Nixon was bluffing of course, and the government of North Vietnam realized it. They refused to make a deal, and Nixon did not launch any attack.

Nixon tried to persuade the USSR and China to use their influence on the government of the North. He told the Soviets and the Chinese that if they
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helped him over Vietnam the Americans would help them in other areas. This approach did not work either; the USSR and China saw no reason as to why they should help Americans in any way.

Nixon decided to put more burden of the war on the shoulders of the government of South Vietnam. He reduced the number of American soldiers and insisted that more of the fighting should be done by the Vietnamese. In April 1969 there were 543, 000 American troops in Vietnam. By 1971, the number had gone down to 157, 000. This policy of gradually passing the responsibility to South Vietnam was known as “Vietnamization”.

As a result, the United States began withdrawing its troops. The war was becoming even more costly to both sides. The South Vietnamese forces were not strong enough to defeat the communists. The government lacked the support and loyalty of the people willing to keep the fighting going. Nixon wrote of Vietnamization after the war:

“The real problem was that the enemy was willing to sacrifice in order to win, while the South Vietnamese simply weren’t willing to pay that much of a price in order to avoid losing.” (Richard Nixon: 1975)

As part of Vietnamization the USA stepped up the bombing of the supply lines of the Vietcong. This had the effect of spreading the conflict into neighboring countries of Laos and Cambodia. The attacks on these countries did little to stop the supplies to the communist troops but did manage to persuade local communists. Between 1969 and 1973 the US dropped over half a million tons of bombs on Cambodia. This contributed to the support for the Cambodian communists. Communists then won over Cambodia in 1975.
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The peace talks in Paris continued through the years with little success. By 1972 the communists were strong enough for another attack similar to the Tet Offensive; even though this attack was much more successful, they still were not able to conquer any major cities in the South. After this offensive, both sides felt the war was becoming much more costly, and the peace talks finally became useful. At last in January of 1973 a cease-fire was agreed and the US troops were sent home.

After 20 years of fighting, Vietnam was reunited under communism. At least 2 million people were killed in this conflict, including 58,000 American troops. About 10 million South Vietnamese fled as refugees to Taiwan and Hong Kong.

The Vietnam War affected many areas of Southeast Asia other than Vietnam itself. Fighting and civil wars broke out in many neighboring countries including Laos and Cambodia. Other countries were flooded by refugees such as Thailand. Since the 1970's, the whole region has tried to slowly recover from the effects of the conflict.

Arms and Space Race

The Cold War soon turned into a global struggle. In 1949, the Soviets finally exploded their first successful atomic bomb and international tensions increased further as the two superpowers engaged in an arms race: a competition to strengthen their armed forces and weapons systems.

Nikita Khrushchev had emerged victorious from the power and was confident that communism would eventually triumph over Western democracy and

capitalism. He believed that the communist world was just about to overtake the West in wealth and scientific research.

The Arms Race all started with the atomic bombs of 1945 and kept going parallel to many conflicts of the Cold War. There was a large advance in technology and nuclear power. Both the US and the USSR were in a competition to strengthen their armed forces and weapon systems.

“ For many years after the war, bombers were to represent the major threat in our enemy’s arsenal of weapons...It took a great deal of time and a great deal of work for us to develop a bomber force of our own.” (Nikita Khrushchev)

To make the Soviet Union more economically competitive, Khrushchev tried to boost production by improving working conditions. He wanted to improve housing and increase the production of consumer goods.

Both superpowers continued a massive military buildup. In the late 1950’s, the Americans and the Soviets successfully tested long-range rockets known as intercontinental ballistic missiles (or ICBMs). These super powerful nuclear missiles were the first that could target locations in both countries.

In a way, there were positive results; thanks to the drive of competition between the USSR and America, there was this clear and quick advance in all kinds of technology. During the 1950’s and 1960’s, American factories and industries began to use automation, the technique of operating a production system using mechanical or electric devices. With automated methods of

production, goods could be produced more efficiently than with human workers.

Beginning in the 1950's, the use of computers also began to revolutionize American industry. Businesses used computers for many purposes, including billing and inventory control. Computers were also used for such things such as sorting bank checks, forecasting weather conditions, setting type for printing and much more. Automation and computers in the workplace caused many workers to lose their jobs. In the long run, however, computers and automation created more jobs than they eliminated. In addition, the new jobs usually demanded a higher level of education.

In October of 1957 that Soviets launched the world's first ever satellite, Sputnik. Khrushchev thought this proved the strength of the communist world. Sputnik stunned the United States, and America's technological skills brought the United States into competition with the Soviet with space exploration as well. The two superpowers experimented with moon probes, weather and communications satellites and extended flights of humans orbiting Earth.

This was known as the Space Race. During this time there were huge advancements of space technology: satellites, space ships, men and animals in space, men on the moon, rovers on mars, etc. It seemed as though the Soviets were going to win it all too. In the late months of 1957 and the early months of 1958, neither side wasted any time in advances in space. Satellites and rockets were being sent out like ping pong balls.

October, 1957

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USSR

Sputnik I: first satellite in orbit

November, 1957

USSR

Sputnik II: Laika the dog is sent to orbit proving life in space

December, 1957

USA

The United States try launching their first space rocket: fails

February, 1958

USA

The Explorer: first American satellite in orbit

October, 1959

USSR

Luna III: first view of the moon from space

April, 1961

USSR

Yuri Gagarin: first man in space

December, 1962

USA

US probe gets first pictures of Venus from space

July, 1969

USA

Neil Armstrong: first man on the Moon

The Soviets and the Americans may not be in physical war but there is definite rivalry between them. It is clear, both want to outshine the other; USA with the financial part and the USSR with all the knowledge. With all the information gained from each launch, both sides were able to improve and advance onto the next space mission.

Latin America

In the twentieth century, many companies invested in Latin America. Some companies owned farms and grew crops, especially sugar, fruits like bananas and vegetables like potatoes and turnips. Other foreign companies ran mines of silver and gold. By the second half of the century, most of the businesses in Latin America were owned by or worked for international companies. As a result, they became powerful in Latin American economies, so if and when money from the sales of a foreign company comes into or out of a country, it affects the country's economy.

International companies made huge profits from their businesses in Latin America; however, these companies did little to help Latin American countries build their own economies. Many Latin Americans realized that it was important to improve their economies, and to do so they needed to build their own factories so they could make their own manufactured goods. What else was also needed was to grow different kinds of crops and to develop a wide range of resources.

Some Latin American countries soon took steps to carry out these economic building plans, while others did not. Those who did were proved successful. During the 1960's and the early 1970's, the economies of many Latin American countries grew. Nevertheless, in the 1980's, oil prices increased. This was a problem because all the Latin American companies needed oil to run their factories, meaning now they had to pay higher prices for it. Although, the real conflict came when the prices of Latin American products fell and the countries had to spend more money, but they were making less and less each time. To make of the difference, for the survival of the companies, they started borrowing money from wealthier countries. Since the United States had offered money to any capitalist country in need, they were the main loaners of money at these times; but by the 1980's, many Latin American countries had huge foreign debts.

Foreign companies still invest in Latin America. But most Latin American countries limit how investments can be made, in order to prevent foreign countries from having too much control over important parts of their economies. Some countries, for instance, have tried to stop foreign companies from acquiring too much land.

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Latin American countries have tried to improve their economies by cooperating with one another. For a long time, most of Latin American countries did not trade with each other because for the most part, they all produced the same kind of products. Recently, however, some countries have developed new industries. The products these countries make can be traded to other countries in the region. This kind of trade has increased in the past few years: Latin American countries have formed several organizations that encourage cooperation in the region.

The issue of how land is used greatly affects the future of Latin America's economies, since land is one of Latin America's most important resources. Some people and companies own great amounts of land in Latin America, but most people in the region own little or no land. In Brazil, for example, 45 percent of the land is owned by only 1 percent of the population.

Much of the farmland in Latin America is owned by a few families. This land is occupied by haciendas where crops are grown to be sold abroad. In contrast, many poor farmers and families, known as campesinos, own only small tracts of land, growing only enough to meet their own needs. So starting in the 1930's, many Latin American countries tried to help the campesinos by dividing the land more equally. These programs have met mixed success: in some cases, the land given to the campesinos was of poor quality and no matter how hard they tried, they could not make a living from it. In other cases, the campesinos struggled because they had neither the money in order to buy the utilities and machinery nor the skills needed for success. Many Latin American countries began to realize that taking land

from a family and giving it to another does not improve people's lives or the economy.

Dividing the land also raised other issues; in Brazil, the government gave land to landless peasants by moving them to the Amazonian rainforest. The peasants burned down the trees to clear land for farming. After a few years, however, the soil in the rainforest became unfit for farming. Many people around the world expressed worries about the clearing of the rainforest. Some believed that this would hurt the environment, while others said that it would change the way of life of the Natives who lived there. Nevertheless, others challenged their view. Economic progress, they say, will come only if Brazil uses all its resources. They want to find ways to help the economy and the campesinos without destroying the rainforest.

Many campesinos all over Latin America decided that making a living from the land was too