

"the cold war was the result of an exaggerated fear of soviet expansion." do you ...



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At the end of the Second World War only two out of the all the great powers were left standing. Germany and Japan had been crushed in the war and Britain and France were weakened economically and politically. The United States, who had not seen much fighting on her shores, emerged from the war economically and politically intact as a great nuclear power and Russia, although weakened economically, had the largest and strongest army in the world and an Empire in Eastern Europe. The balance of world power had changed and as the Great Alliance between Russia, Britain and America broke down tensions between Russia and America grew until they found themselves engaged in a Cold War. There has been much argument among historians over the origins of the Cold War. However, one cannot locate its origins merely in fear and the American reaction to Soviet expansion. The historiography of the Cold War needs to be examined as well as economic and territorial considerations and differences in ideology in the origins of the Cold War. Traditional historians place the blame for the Cold War firmly on Soviet Russia's shoulders. John Lukacs points out that " Stalin's main aim was to establish together with the reduction of Germany, his control over most of Eastern Europe". He says of Stalin's demands for territory in Eastern Europe that " the United States did not face the situation until it was too late, until the Russians were in possession of more territory than her allies... here was the source of the Cold War." 1 The Red Army's victory in Stalingrad in early 1943 signified a shift in the military balance in Stalin's favour. It soon became apparent that with the strength of his army he would be able to impose his will on Eastern Europe. By the time of the Yalta Conference in February 1945, the Red Army had swept into Rumania, Hungary and Bulgaria conquering the Balkans and moving into western Poland and Czechoslovakia.

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Stalin, who had been clear about his territorial requests from the beginning of the war, now occupied territory that had belonged to the pre-communist Tsarist Russian Empire. Stalin had begun to assert his control over Eastern Europe. Russia's influence in Poland was a major cause of concern for Britain and America. Lukacs points out: " It was because of Poland that World War two began and because of Poland that the Yalta conference was called." 2 Neither Britain nor America wished to see the fascist domination of Poland replaced with Soviet domination. However given Russia's position in Eastern Europe and the fact that her assistance was needed to win the war, both Roosevelt and Churchill knew that they would have to make some territorial concessions. Stalin left Yalta convinced that his influence in Eastern Europe had been acknowledged. Roosevelt's main concern was that Stalin should not appear to be violating the Atlantic Charter in Eastern Europe but rather be seen to be adhering to the principles of self-determination. Gaddis argues that Roosevelt failed to properly communicate the need to accede territory to Russia in Eastern Europe to the American public and instead led them to expect that the principle of self determination would be upheld everywhere. He says: " Americans reacted angrily when the Soviet Union proceeded to extract territorial concessions from its neighbours, and to impose spheres of influence on them ... with lessons of the past firmly in mind they gradually began to regard Stalin as an aggressor with unlimited ambitions, who like Hitler would have to be resisted and contained." 3 From 1946-1947 Stalin certainly seemed the aggressor by setting up communist governments loyal to Moscow in Rumania, Hungary, Bulgaria and Poland. Traditional historians argue that it was this aggression along with strong communist parties

gaining support in other European countries such as France, Greece and Italy
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(which many felt was aided by Soviet intervention and support) that demonstrates Soviet aggression. As the problems in Eastern Europe, especially the invasion of Poland were thought to have contributed to the outbreak of the Second World War, the Soviets certainly looked expansionist to the American public. " Stalin's decision to sign a non aggression pact with Japan in April 1941 simply confirmed the prevailing view that the Soviet Union was a cruel and rapacious dictatorship only slightly less repulsive than Nazi Germany." It is all too easy to see the Cold War as the American response to this expansion. Russia's aid to rebels in Iranian Azerbaijan in December 1945 and when communists emerged as a strong political force in early 1946 in Czechoslovakia (central Europe) in 1946 Russia certainly seemed expansionist. When one considers that Americans felt that Moscow was aiding communist parties in other countries and the fact that Hitler had been aggressively expansionist Americans fears of Soviet expansion do not seem on the surface to have been exaggerated.