

How the us and soviet union became adversaries



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HOW THE UNITED STATES AND SOVIET UNION BECOME COLD WAR ADVERSARIES

No one seems to be able to agree on an exact date of when the Cold War began. There was never an official announcement of warfare to note the start beginning of the conflict. Many say it began around the time of the Russian Revolution in 1917. Others say it began after World War II, when both powers tried to settle their differences and decide what to do with Europe. They entered World War II for different reasons: the Soviets because of Germany's invasion and the United States because Hitler declared war after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. Both were well ahead of other countries in many areas. However, after the World War their similarities ended. The differences between the nations outweighed the similarities enormously. Both countries had their own ideas as to how things should have been during the period after the war. This can be seen in the Potsdam, Tehran, and Yalta conferences. Also, they both tried to enforce their ideologies through events during the Iron Curtain and Marshall Plan.

To begin with, many believe that conflicts between the Soviet Union can be traced back to the Russian Revolution of 1917, started by Vladimir Lenin. The ensuing civil war, in which Western powers unsuccessfully intervened, and the creation of Comintern, an organization dedicated to the spreading of communism, globally fuelled a climate of mistrust and fear between Russia and the rest of Europe/America. From 1918 to 1935, with the US pursuing a policy of isolationism and Stalin keeping Russia looking inward, the situation remained one of dislike rather than conflict. From 1918 to 1935, with the US pursuing a policy of isolationism and Stalin keeping Russia looking inward,

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the situation remained one of dislike rather than conflict. In 1935 Stalin changed his policy: afraid of fascism, he tried to form an alliance with the democratic Western powers against Nazi Germany. This initiative failed and in 1939 Stalin signed the Nazi-Soviet pact with Hitler, which only increased anti-Soviet hostility in the West, but delayed the onset of war between the two powers. However, while Stalin hoped Germany would get bogged down in a war with France, early Nazi conquests occurred quickly, enabling Germany to invade the Soviet Union in 1941.

The Second World War and the Political Division of Europe

The German invasion of Russia, which followed a successful invasion of France, united the Soviets with Western Europe and later America in an alliance against their common enemy: Adolf Hitler. This war transformed the global balance of power, weakening Europe and leaving Russia and the United States of America as global super-powers, with massive military strength; everyone else was second. However, the wartime alliance was not an easy one, and by 1943 each side was thinking about the state of Post-war Europe. Russia 'liberated' vast areas of Eastern Europe, into which it wanted to put its own brand of government and turn into soviet satellite states, in part to gain security from the capitalist West.

Although the Allies tried to gain assurances for democratic elections from Russia during mid and post war conferences, there was ultimately nothing they could do to stop Russia from imposing its will on their conquests. In 1944 Churchill, Prime Minister of Britain, was quoted as saying " Make no mistake, all the Balkans apart from Greece are going to be Bolshevised and

there's nothing I can do to prevent it. There's nothing I can do for Poland, either". Meanwhile the Allies liberated large parts of Western Europe in which they recreated democratic nations.

Two Superpower Blocs and Mutual Distrust

World War Two finished in 1945 with Europe divided into two blocs, each occupied by the armies of, in the west America and the Allies, and in the east, Russia. America wanted a democratic Europe and was afraid of communism dominating the continent while Russia wanted the opposite, a communist Europe in which they dominated and not, as they feared, a united, capitalist Europe. Stalin believed, at first, that capitalist nations would soon fall to squabbling among themselves, a situation he could exploit, and was dismayed by the growing organisation among the West. To these differences were added fear of Soviet invasion in the West and Russian fear of the atomic bomb; fear of economic collapse in the west versus fear of economic domination by the west; a clash of ideologies (capitalism versus communism) and, on the Soviet front, the fear of a rearmed Germany hostile to Russia. In 1946 Churchill described the dividing line between East and West as an Iron Curtain.

Containment, the Marshall Plan and the Economic Division of Europe

America reacted to the threat of the spread of both Soviet power and communist thinking by commencing the policy of 'containment', outlined in a speech to Congress on March 12 1947, action aimed at stopping any further Soviet expansion and isolating the 'empire' which existed. The need to halt Soviet expansion seemed all the more important later that year as

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Hungary was taken over by a one party communist system, and later when a new communist government took over the Czech state in a coup, nations which until then Stalin had been content to leave as a middle ground between the communist and capitalist blocs. Meanwhile Western Europe was having severe economic difficulties as the nations struggled to recover from the devastating effects of the recent war. Worried that communist sympathisers were gaining influence as the economy worsened, to secure the western markets for US products and to put containment into practice, America reacted with the ' Marshall Plan' of massive economic aid. Although it was offered to both eastern and western nations, albeit with certain strings attached, Stalin made sure it was rejected in the Soviet sphere of influence, a response the US had been expecting.

Between 1947 and 1952 \$13 billion was given to 16 mainly western nations and, while the effects are still debated, it generally boosted the economies of member nations and helped freeze communist groups from power, for example in France, where the communists members of the coalition government were ousted. It also created an economic divide as clear as the political one between the two power blocs. Meanwhile Stalin formed COMECON, the ' Commission for Mutual Economic Aid', in 1949 to promote trade and economic growth among its satellites and Cominform, a union of communist parties (including those in the west) to spread communism. Containment also led to other initiatives: in 1947 the CIA spent large amounts to influence the result of Italy's elections, helping the Christian Democrats defeat the Communist party. By 1948, with Europe was firmly divided into communist and capitalist, Russian supported and American

supported, Germany became the new 'battleground'. Germany was divided into four parts and occupied by Britain, France, America and Russia; Berlin, situated in the Soviet zone, was also divided. In 1948 Stalin enforced a blockade of 'Western' Berlin aimed at bluffing the Allies into renegotiating the division of Germany in his favour, rather than them declaring war over the cut off zones. However, Stalin had miscalculated the ability of airpower, and the Allies responded with the 'Berlin Airlift': for eleven months supplies were flown into Berlin. This was in turn a bluff, for the Allied planes had to fly over Russian airspace and the Allies gambled that Stalin wouldn't shoot them down and risk war. He didn't and the blockade was ended in May 1949 when Stalin gave up. The Berlin Blockade was the first time the previous diplomatic and political divisions in Europe had become an open battle of wills, the former allies now certain enemies.

More on the Berlin Blockade

NATO, the Warsaw Pact and the renewed Military Division of Europe

In April 1949, with the Berlin Blockade in full effect and the threat of conflict with Russia looming, the Western powers signed the NATO treaty in Washington, creating a military alliance: the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. The emphasis was firmly on defence from Soviet activity. That same year Russia detonated its first atomic weapon, negating the America advantage and reducing the chance of the powers engaging in a 'regular' war because of fears over the consequences of nuclear conflict. There were debates over the next few years among NATO powers over whether to rearm West Germany and in 1955 it became a full member of NATO. A week later

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eastern nations signed the Warsaw Pact, creating a military alliance under a Soviet commander.

A Cold War

By 1949 two sides had formed, power blocs which were deeply opposed to each other, each believing the other threatened them and everything they stood for (and in many ways they did). Although there was no traditional warfare, there was a nuclear standoff and attitudes and ideology hardened over the next decades, the gap between them growing more entrenched. This led to the 'Red Scare' in the United States and yet more crushing of dissent in Russia. However, by this time the Cold War had also spread beyond the boundaries of Europe, becoming truly global as China became communist and America intervened in Korea and Vietnam. Nuclear weapons also grew more powerful with the creation, in 1952 by the US and in 1953 by the USSR, of thermonuclear weapons which were vastly more destructive than those dropped during the Second World War. This led to the development of 'Mutually Assured Destruction', whereby neither the US nor USSR would 'hot' war with each other because the resulting conflict would destroy much of the world.