

Cold War, post-1945 struggle between the United States and its allies and the group of nations led by the Soviet Union. Direct military conflict did not occur between the two superpowers, but intense economic and diplomatic struggles erupted. Different interests led to mutual suspicion and hostility in an escalating ideological rivalry.

Background

After a century of friendship, Americans and Russians quarreled over Asian questions in the 1890s, and became enemies in 1917 when the Communists seized power, established the Soviet Union, and declared ideological war on the capitalist nations of the West. The United States intervened in the Soviet Union, sending some 10,000 troops between 1918 and 1920, and then refused to recognize the new state until 1933. The two countries fought against Germany during World War II, but this alliance began to dissolve in 1944-1945, when the Russian leader Joseph Stalin, seeking Soviet security, used the Red Army to control much of Eastern Europe. U.S. President Harry S. Truman opposed Stalin's policy and moved to unite Europe under American leadership. Mistrust grew as both sides broke wartime agreements. Stalin failed to honor pledges to hold free elections in Eastern Europe. Truman refused to honor promises to send reparations from the defeated Germany to help rebuild the war-devastated Soviet Union.

Moves and Countermoves

U.S. officials, concerned over Soviet pressures against Iran and Turkey, interpreted a 1946 speech by Stalin as declaring ideological war against the West. In 1947 the president proposed the Truman Doctrine, which had two objectives: to send U.S. aid to anticommunist forces in Greece and Turkey, and to create a public consensus so Americans would be willing to fight the cold war. He achieved both goals. That same year, journalist Walter Lippmann popularized the term *cold war* in a book of the same name. In Congress there was a series of highly publicized inquiries into pro-Communist activity in the United States. The best-known investigator, Senator Joseph R. McCarthy, gave his name to an era of intense anticommunism. In 1948 the United States launched the \$13 billion Marshall Plan (see [European Recovery Program](#)) to rebuild Western and Central Europe. When Stalin responded by extending his control over Eastern Europe and threatening the West's position in Germany, Truman helped to create a military alliance—the [North Atlantic Treaty Organization](#)—and to establish an independent West Germany.

The cold war widened in 1949-1950, when the Soviets exploded their first atomic bomb and the Communists in China conquered their vast homeland. The Chinese Communists signed an alliance with Stalin, but the United States refused to recognize the new regime. In Japan, then under U.S. control, economic development was accelerated to counter Asian communism. When Communist North Korea invaded South Korea in 1950, Truman sent the American military into action (see [Korean War](#)). The conflict ended three years later in a truce that left the prewar border intact. In 1953 Stalin died and Truman left office, but both sides continued to struggle over Europe. The USSR tried to protect Communist East Germany from serious population loss by building the Berlin Wall in 1961. Each superpower also attempted to gain influence over emerging nations in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America. A serious crisis arose in 1962 when the USSR placed missiles in Cuba, their new ally. President John F. Kennedy threatened nuclear retaliation, and the Soviets withdrew the missiles in return for Kennedy's promise not to invade Cuba.

Sobered by this crisis, the Soviets were also weakened when the Chinese split from Moscow and the East Europeans grew restless. Nationalism was proving stronger than communism. The United States, meanwhile, was fighting the **Vietnam War**, a bloody military action that cost 57,000 American lives in a failed effort to retain South Vietnam. In addition, the postwar economic superiority of the United States was challenged by Japan and West Germany. By 1973 the two stumbling superpowers had agreed on a policy of *détente*; it was an attempt to cool the costly arms race and slow their competition in the Third World. *Détente* ended by 1980, however, as Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan to save a Marxist regime. Newly elected U.S. President Ronald Reagan began a massive arms buildup and new challenges to Soviet-supported groups in the emerging nations.

The End of the Cold War

In 1985 Mikhail Gorbachev, representing a new generation of Soviet leaders, came to power in the USSR. He and Reagan agreed to cut back the superpowers' presence in Europe and to moderate ideological competition. Tensions eased as Soviet troops were withdrawn from Afghanistan. In the early 1990s Gorbachev largely cooperated with the U.S. military effort to defeat Iraq's aggression in the Middle East. The cold war ended in Europe as the newly freed East European nations elected non-Communist governments and the two Germanys became one, the arms race was cut back, and ideological competition decreased as communism was discredited. U.S. President George Bush declared the need for a "new world order" to replace the superpower rivalry that had divided the globe and fueled the cold war. See *Also Arms Control, International; Balance of Power; Nonaligned Nations; Warsaw Pact*.¹

Gorbachev, Mikhail Sergeevich (1931-), leader of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) from 1985 until its collapse in 1991. Gorbachev was born in Privol'noye, in the Stavropol' region of Russia. Trained as a lawyer at Moscow State University, he joined the Communist Party in 1952. Back in Stavropol', he rose steadily in the regional party hierarchy until he was summoned to Moscow in 1978. There he became a protégé of Yuri Andropov, whose influence secured for Gorbachev full membership in the Politburo, the party's chief policy-making body, in 1980.

When Andropov succeeded Leonid Brezhnev as Soviet leader in 1982, Gorbachev became his second in command. After Andropov died in 1984, Gorbachev remained the second most powerful person in the USSR, behind Konstantin Chernenko. Upon Chernenko's death in 1985, Gorbachev became general secretary of the Communist Party. In 1988, after Andrei Gromyko retired as president of the USSR, Gorbachev also assumed that title.

Between 1985 and 1990, Gorbachev sought to reform Soviet society by introducing *perestroika* (Russian for "restructuring") of the economy and *glasnost'* ("openness") in political and cultural affairs. He augmented the authority of the Soviet presidency and transferred power from the Communist Party to popularly elected legislatures in the union republics. In international affairs, he withdrew Soviet troops from Afghanistan, normalized relations with China, signed a series of arms control agreements with U.S. presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush, and

¹"Cold War," *Microsoft® Encarta® 98 Encyclopedia*. © 1993-1997 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

cooperated with the U.S.-led effort to oust Iraq—a longtime Soviet ally—from Kuwait see [Persian Gulf War](#). For helping to end the Cold War and allowing former Soviet-bloc countries in Eastern Europe to oust their Communist regimes, Gorbachev was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in October 1990.

In 1991, as the Soviet economy deteriorated, Gorbachev faced competing pressures from hard-line Communists, from free-market reformers, and from nationalists and secessionists seeking independence for their republics. The hard-liners, who included many top government and military officials, staged a coup in August, placing Gorbachev under house arrest in Crimea. The coup failed within three days, and Gorbachev was allowed to return to Moscow. He immediately resigned as Communist Party general secretary, suspended party activities, and placed reformers in charge of the military and KGB (secret police). Secessionist forces became stronger in the republics as the year went on. In December the Soviet parliament passed a resolution that acknowledged the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and Gorbachev resigned his position as president of the USSR.

As a private citizen, Gorbachev remained publicly active, frequently coming into conflict with government authorities. He became openly critical of the government's policies, especially the rapid pace of economic reform and the policy toward the former Soviet republics. He advocated a slower economic reform and the formation of a new confederated union to replace the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), a loose alliance of former Soviet republics founded in 1991. In September 1992 Gorbachev refused to appear before Russia's Constitutional Court regarding President Boris Yeltsin's ban on the Communist Party. The Yeltsin government forbade Gorbachev from traveling abroad until he appeared before the court, but this restriction was lifted after it caused international protests. In June 1992 Gorbachev was officially expelled from the Communist Party for allegedly having contributed to its downfall. That year he toured the United States and Japan and worked on a book about the collapse of the Soviet Union. Much of the proceeds from his international lecture tours went to support the Foundation for Social, Economic and Political Research in Moscow (also called the Gorbachev Foundation), which he established in 1991. Gorbachev attempted to reenter politics by becoming a candidate in the 1996 Russian presidential race; however, he won less than 1 percent of the vote.²

End of the Cold War

Early in his first year as president, Bush moved secretly and aggressively to try to bring the USSR and its reformist leader, [Mikhail Gorbachev](#), into what Bush called the "family of nations." Gorbachev had come to power in the USSR in 1985. He had launched a campaign to reform society and the economy in the USSR. He and President Reagan already attempted to moderate the ideological competition and tensions of the [Cold War](#). When Bush became president he wanted to forge a partnership with the USSR. Handled correctly, he believed, the USSR might become an ally. If this happened, the United States could perhaps reduce defense spending and save taxpayers billions of dollars.

²"Gorbachev, Mikhail Sergeyevich," *Microsoft® Encarta® 98 Encyclopedia*. © 1993-1997 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Almost immediately after his inauguration, Bush launched a top-secret drive to explore ways to help Gorbachev succeed with his plans for the USSR. Bush offered a series of rewards and punishments to encourage Gorbachev to move his nation toward democracy and his economy toward capitalism. In May 1989 Bush surprised his allies with a bold proposal to reduce the number of U.S. troops that had been stationed in Europe to prevent a Soviet attack there. In December of that year, Bush invited Gorbachev to an extraordinary three-day summit on the Mediterranean island of Malta, where Bush submitted a list of 21 proposals from military cuts to economic aid.

Bush was also careful to be patient and, at times, forbearing. During much of 1989 popular protests in the Soviet bloc nations of Eastern Europe called for democratic reforms and an end to Communism. When the **Berlin Wall**, which had separated Communist East Berlin from capitalist West Berlin, fell in November 1989, Bush was careful not to gloat, as he put it. He also announced that the world needed a "new world order" to replace the superpower rivalry that had divided the globe and fueled the Cold War. In 1990 the USSR refused to grant the Baltic nations Latvia and Lithuania the same degree of autonomy that it had extended to Poland and Hungary, but Bush did not criticize the Soviet government. For these careful responses, Bush was routinely condemned in the United States; but as former Soviet satellite nations gained their independence, Bush proposed foreign aid to hasten their economic reforms and democratic political transformation.³

In the Nuclear Age

The Cold War standoff between the United States and the Soviet Union shaped the global balance of power after World War II. Although an actual war between these two superpowers never occurred, the balance of power process instead took the form of a massive arms race, in which each superpower responded by adding to their military buildup. The possession of large arsenals of **nuclear weapons** by both the United States and the Soviet Union ensured that any potential war would prove disastrous for both. Because of the threat to human survival posed by nuclear weapons, military strategists often referred to the balance of power as a "balance of terror."

During the Cold War, the U.S. policy of containment encircled the Soviet Union with military and political alliances in Western Europe, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. The major U.S. and Soviet military interventions of the Cold War--in Korea, Vietnam, and Afghanistan--took place in politically contested regions of the world where both superpowers jockeyed for influence. Small states sometimes benefited from the superpower competition. In the 1960s, for example, Cuba's relations with the United States soured. At that time, Cuba allied itself with the Soviet Union and received large economic and military subsidies.⁴

³"Bush, George Herbert Walker," *Microsoft® Encarta® 98 Encyclopedia*. © 1993-1997 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

⁴"Balance of Power," *Microsoft® Encarta® 98 Encyclopedia*. © 1993-1997 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Foreign Affairs

In January 1959 **Fidel Castro** came to power in Cuba. Although Castro initially denied that he was a Communist, Eisenhower soon concluded that he was and imposed an economic blockade on the island nation. He also created a Cuban counterrevolutionary force and ordered the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to plan an invasion of Cuba (which President John F. Kennedy carried out unsuccessfully in 1961). Communism for the first time had come to power in the Americas, only 145 km (90 mi) off the southern tip of Florida.

One of Eisenhower's deepest disappointments in foreign relations came in 1960. A summit meeting of the Big Four powers (the United States, Great Britain, France, and the Soviets) was scheduled to be held in Paris. Both Eisenhower and Khrushchev were to attend. Eisenhower had hopes that he could get Khrushchev's agreement on a nuclear test ban treaty, as a first step toward arms control, and on the status of divided Berlin. But on May 1, shortly before the summit was to convene, the Soviets shot down an American U-2 spy plane over their territory. Khrushchev demanded an apology for the spying, which Eisenhower refused to give. He pointed out that Soviet secrecy had forced the United States to overfly in order to be assured that the Soviets were not preparing a first-strike nuclear attack. The summit never got started, and the chance for peace faded.⁵

⁵"Eisenhower, Dwight David," *Microsoft® Encarta® 98 Encyclopedia*. © 1993-1997 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.