

THE START OF THE COLD WAR 1945 - 1949

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A. Background to the the Cold War

Russia had been a communist country since 1917. Democratic countries like Britain and America were very worried that Russia would try to spread communism and so relations between these countries in the 1920's and '30's were poor.

In 1939, Russia signed a military agreement with Nazi Germany - the Nazi - Soviet Pact. This was a big surprise to all as Hitler hated communism. The deal was made so that Hitler could invade Poland.

In 1941, Hitler betrayed the Russian leader, Stalin and invaded Russia. Britain agreed to help Russia, as did America from December 1941 when she entered the war. And so from early 1942, Russia, America and Britain ("The Allies") were fighting on the same side against Hitler and his allies (Italy and Japan)

Although they were allies, tensions quickly emerged between Russia and America/Britain. The main source of friction was the time that it took to open a "Second Front" in Europe. Stalin wanted Britain to launch an invasion of France as soon as possible to relieve pressure on the eastern front ; this, however, did not finally happen until 1944 (D - Day). Stalin was very suspicious - he believed that this was a deliberate attempt to weaken Russia, so that when the war ended, America and Britain would be in a stronger position.

B. The Allied Conferences 1945 : Yalta and Potsdam

By early 1945, the war was coming to a close. The Allies decided to meet to decide (a) what to do with Germany once defeated (b) what should happen to eastern Europe (c) how to end the war against Japan (d) how to ensure a lasting peace. Two important conferences were held in 1945 to discuss these matters :

Yalta Conference, February 1945

Leaders present : Stalin (Russia) ; Churchill (Britain) ; Roosevelt (America)

What was agreed : Germany and capital city of Berlin to be divided into 4 zones ; countries of eastern Europe to hold free elections ; Russia to help in war against Japan ; trials of Nazi war criminals ; a new peace - keeping organisation ; Germany to pay reparations

Potsdam, July/August 1945

Leaders present : Stalin ; Truman (America) ; Attlee (Britain)

What was agreed : the Yalta proposals were confirmed ; details of how Berlin would be governed ; border between Poland and Germany agreed

However, although many important agreements had been made, there were many new tension between Russia and America/Britain, such as : Truman disliked Stalin and did not trust him ; Stalin wanted Germany to pay heavy reparations but Truman disagreed ; Stalin had already set up a communist government in Poland ; America had exploded the very first atomic bomb - Russia, as yet, did not have the scientific knowledge.

C. Communism and Capitalism

The main reason why relations between America and Russia began to worsen in 1945 was because of their ideological differences (political beliefs)

AMERICA	RUSSIA
~ America was a democratic country. The people elect the government	~ Russia was a communist country. There were no political parties except the communists
~ America had a capitalist economy - people could run their own businesses and make profits	~ Russia had a planned economy - all business and factories owned by the government
~ capitalism could make people rich ; at the same time people could also be very poor	~ in a planned economy, people could not become rich, but few people were very poor

D. The Problem of Eastern Europe

Russia's Policy towards eastern Europe

By 1945, Stalin had 6 million Russian troops in eastern Europe. He was determined to make sure that he kept control of eastern Europe when the war was over ; he believed that this would then act as a "buffer zone" between Russia and central Europe, protecting Russia from the possibility of any future attacks. (Russia had twice been attacked by Germany in the previous 30 years - she wanted to make sure that it never happened again)

With 6 million troops in eastern Europe, Stalin saw this as an opportunity to begin the process of spreading communism worldwide, starting first of all with eastern Europe. At Yalta, Stalin had agreed to free elections ; the

reality was that he had no intention of keeping to this. By 1948, virtually all east European countries had communist governments - Poland, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Albania. The only exception was Yugoslavia - it became communist under General Tito but was not a "satellite" state of Russia, as were the others.

By 1948, Europe had become divided into communist east and non - communist west - in 1946, Winston Churchill used the phrase "The Iron Curtain" to describe the division between east and west.

American Policy toward Eastern Europe

Truman was very concerned by events in eastern Europe after the war and was very suspicious of Stalin. Since 1919, America had kept out of the affairs of Europe and the world, but now there was a change of policy. In 1947, Truman made a promise to any country worldwide that if that country was threatened by the communists, America would help - advisers, money, troops and weapons. This was known as the "Truman Doctrine" : it was a statement that committed America to a policy of "containment" ie. containing the spread of communism worldwide.

The Truman Doctrine was first put in to action in 1947, when America provided money for the non - communists in Greece against the communists. It worked - the Greek communists were defeated. It was next seen in the "Marshall Plan" of 1947. 13 billion dollars were given to west European countries to help them recover between 1947 - 1951. Why did America do this ? The main reason was to help western Europe recover quickly from the war and so act as a barrier to the spread of communism. Also, it would help trade revive more quickly. Stalin was offered this aid also but turned it down.

E. The Berlin Blockade 1948 - 49

In 1945, Germany had been divided into 4 zones of occupation - the same thing happened to the capital Berlin. One problem, however, was the fact that Berlin was inside of the Russian zone. At first, the Allies had agreed that Germany should be kept weak, but with Stalin's take - over of eastern Europe, America, Britain and France decided that it made good sense to

help Germany recover as soon as possible so providing a barrier against communism. In 1948, America, Britain and France brought together their 3 zones known as West Germany) and began to plan for a new currency.

Stalin was angered by this and feared a strong, united Germany and so in response, he closed off "west Berlin" to America, Britain and France in May 1948. He hoped that they would agree to withdraw from Berlin as a result. The Allies, however, were not prepared to give up Berlin and so over the course of the next 11 months, Berlin was supplied by air. This whole episode was known as the "Berlin Blockade".

It worked. Stalin was not prepared to stop the planes landing as he realised that this could lead to war and so in May 1949, he lifted the blockade. Relations between East and West had hit rock bottom. In 1949, West Germany was officially created ; in response, Stalin created the German Democratic Republic out of the Russian zone.