# Cold War

### The Postwar World

The **United Nations**had been created at the end of the war in the hopes of being a stronger kind of League of Nations. The Soviet Union and the US were both important members, but this didn't stop relations between them from souring rapidly.

Remember two things here. First, the Soviet Union was communist—it had been ever since the **Revolution of 1917.**The thing about communism is that it's evangelical. The whole idea behind communism is that it needs tospread,because it's the next step in human history. Now remember the second thing: the Russian army had shoved Germany out and chased it all the way to Berlin, liberating Eastern Europe along the way.

That was the catch—it liberated Eastern Europe from Nazirule, but it was nice to have Russian troops all nicely camped there. A perfect opportunity to take those places under the Soviet wing of communism. That's exactly what happened after the war: occupied Soviet zones became **satellites.**

An **Iron Curtain**(a metaphor coined by Churchill) descended. Or maybe a better description would be that it slammed into the ground like a massive chunk of metal. It separated communist Eastern Europe from capitalist Western Europe. Nothing symbolizes this curtain better than the **Berlin Wall,** which was built in 1961.Remember that Russians andAmericans occupied Berlin. Russia went and claimed East Berlin—and the whole of East Germany—as communist, and an actual wall, guarded by soldiers with guns, split it from the west.

This didn't exactly bode well for the rest of the world. America and the Soviet Union were the new World Powers. They had the ability to reconstruct the globe according to their own plans. It wasn't only that Europe was newly dependent on them. It was that a new **Third World**was, too.

The "Third World" was the name given to regions of South America, Asia, and Africa that had been under European imperialist rule. After the war, Europe agreed to give all those places their independence (well…some faster than others). A whole bunch of fresh, new countries appeared like daisies, looking around them for models of government.

"Me. ME," said the US, "You guys should totally go democratic and capitalist." The Soviet Union, on the other hand, said, "Pssh, capitalism is a thing of the past. Workers around the world will throw off their chains and becommunist.Follow our lead." So began an era of tug-of-war between the Soviet Union and the United States. Both competed with each other to influence other countries—and, of course, competition doesn't only include money and propaganda. It includes breaking out your men with guns and facing them off against the other men with guns to see whose men and guns are bigger. Hello, **Cold War.**

It was called a "cold" warbecause American and Russian armies didn't actually face off against each other. They sent their troops in to "influence" and "protect" other countries, like Vietnam, China, and Korea. It was "cold" because there wasn't the "heat" of combat, and because both countries were kind of frozen in action against each other.

This was because both began stockpiling weapons (aka nukes) in case the other tried to attack. This resulted in two countries with insane numbers of missiles pointed right at each other, just waitingfor the push of a "little red button." Of course, if one sent off its missiles at the other, the other would catch it on radar and push its own red button to send its ownmissiles right back. Sound confusing? American politicians simplified it by calling it **mutually assured destruction.**

It was bad news—but both countries were so sure that their own ideology was best, and that the other country's was evil, that compromise wasn't reached for decades. The Cold War raged from the late 1940s until the late 1980s.

### Truman's Foreign Policy

No sooner did Truman oversee the end of the war, than a whole new series of headaches descended upon him. Russia was looming over Eastern Europe, and even talking about taking over Greece and Turkey. Truman issued the **Truman Doctrine,**which committed the U.S. to **containment.**The U.S. would try to "contain" communism by helping out any country that was trying to resist it. If communism wanted to be evangelical and spread its word, the U.S. would fight a capitalist crusade against it.

First, Truman wanted to make sure that no one in Europe began thinking that communism sounded nice. To do this, he had to help rebuild it ¬fast—and put it right back on its nice little capitalist track. The **Marshall Plan**was instituted, giving more than $12 billion dollars to Europe for reconstruction. It was also offered to Eastern Europe—but Russia pooh-poohed it. It wasn't about to let the U.S. convince its new satellites of how nice they were, and how rich capitalism made everyone.

With Europe smiling and holding out its hands for aid, the US felt it was time to coax the continent over to America's side. It created the **North American Treaty Organization (NATO)**as a mutual defense alliance. Congress wasn't happy about it (Yikes. "Foreign entanglements.") but communism scared enough people to make the want some kind of wall against it.

One thing that helped convince them was the **Berlin Blockade.**Remember how Berlin was divided into different zones? Russia was so mad that the US, England, and France were rebuilding western Germany along capitalist lines that Stalin ordered a blockade of Berlin. The US knew its people wouldn't want to go to war again (after all, they were off "booming" babies). What to do? Bring in supplies by air.U.S. planes dropped supplies from planes to supply the city for almost a year. Thankfully, Russia backed down.

At least, it did in Berlin. In the meantime, it helped out with **Mao Tse-Tung's**Communist Revolution in China. Score ONE for the communists. The **National Security Council**was created in America, and created the top-secret document **NSC-68.**It declared that Russia had a Big Plan for world domination, and that only America could stop it. (Yup—this was the official "Team America: World Police" document). It also said that America had to immediately start stockpiling insane amounts of nukes—which it did. Big time.

Since NSC-68 said Team America was the onlyprotection the world had against the giant communist Fist of Doom (That was actually the [Soviet image](http://thumbs.dreamstime.com/thumblarge_573/1294745242v3igD2.jpg). We aren't just having fun with metaphors) it had to prepare to fight. In 1950 American troops entered the **Korean War,**fighting to expel the invading North Korean communists from South Korea. They succeeded, but North Korea was still communist—all that happened was another divided country. And—click—another domino fell to communism in Asia.

### Eisenhower and Kennedy

Eisenhower made Americans feel powerful. After all, he had been the general during World War II, and his policies against communism were just as forceful. His idea of **brinkmanship**held that the U.S. could win any war by forcing the enemy country "to the brink." The "brink," of course, was nuclear war, because of all the U.S's shiny missiles. The theory was that this would make that enemy country back down, and no fighting had to happen.

This was cool against countries withoutnukes, but of course Russia didhave them. That brought about the threat of **massive retaliation**—aka meeting a threat with the "little red button"—and "mutually-assured destruction." During Eisenhower's administration, war between Russia and the US thankfully remained "cold," but things started to becoming uncomfortably hot in Vietnam, the Middle East, Hungary, and Cuba.

In Vietnam, France's withdrawal (the area had been under French imperial rule) spelled bad news for future governments. Communists were buzzing around, hoping to create a government under the leadership of **Ho Chi Minh.**However, America didn't want Vietnam to be the next fallen domino.

Eisenhower established the **South East Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO)**which was like an Asian NATO, and put **Ngo Dinh Diem**in power in Vietnam. Diem hated the communists and liked America. Diem was also corrupt, tyrannical, and hated by his people. Not good news.

In the Middle East, the **Suez Crisis**swept the US into the Middle Eastern vortex and also gave a round scolding to Britain and France, shaking them from their seats of world power. Egypt had seized the Suez Canal, which had been a channel for oil to Europe and America. Without asking America, Britain, France, and the new Jewish state of Israel (created after the war) retaliated.

Eisenhower was mad.He made the U.N. denounce the action, and even forced Britain and France to leave the area. That humiliated the previous world powers, who headed home with their tails between their legs. To make sure everyone knew that America was Head Honcho, the president proclaimed the **Eisenhower Doctrine.**It was like the Truman Doctrine, but specifically aimed at the Middle East.

There were also some stirrings behind the Iron Curtain. Eastern Europe was squirming under Russian rule. Hungary succeeded in overthrowing its Soviet puppet government, and asked the US for help before the new Soviet ruler, **Nikita Khrushchev,**smashed the Soviet iron fist into them. However, the US feared that making the Cold War "hot" like this would cause World War II—so it let Soviet troops come in and literally obliterate the rebels.

Cuba was the first American domino to fall to communism. **Fidel Castro**overthrew Batista's dictatorship and established communism, to much applause from a delighted Russia. However, Castro also closed the island off to American interference. Eisenhower was not pleased. He decided to overthrow that upstart Castro.

### Kennedy

Sadly for the old general, he left office before he could give Cuba the big whack on the knuckles he felt it deserved. That job went to **John F. Kennedy.**He ordered a group of CIA agents to train some Cuban exiles to assassinate Castro, and then sent them into Cuba via the **Bay of Pigs**in 1961. Oops—the Cubans immediately surrounded them. Everyone—including Cuba, Russia, and even the U.N—wagged their fingers at the US. The young president was very embarrassed.

Happily for his reputation, Kennedy found another opportunity in Cuba to show his strength. Spy planes discovered Russian nuclear bases in Cuba. This was terrifying—Cuba was so close to the US that those nukes could destroy it in seconds.Kennedy ordered Khrushchev and Castro to remove them, but they refused. Kennedy surrounded the island with a naval blockade, and for a tense time US and Russian ships literally stared at each other face to face and waited to be told whether "mutually assured destruction" would occur.

Happily, the leaders met secretly and Russia agreed to remove the missiles if the US agreed to remove its own from Turkey. They also made the US promise never to try something like the Bay of Pigs disaster again. The ships sailed away from each other and everyone trembled with relief. However, the leaders decided to stick a **red phone**in both of their offices to make sure that if anything that crazy ever happened again, they could literally grab the receiver and say "Whoa. What is going on and what are we going to do?."

### The Red Scare and McCarthyism

It seemed like the whole world might fall to communism. It seemed like little communist minions were hanging out in every nation, biding their time for revolution. So, obviously, America began to worry whether there were communists waiting like termites in its ownwoodworks.

This began a "Red Scare" even bigger than the one that came after World War I. Truman started it, ordering investigations (thanks to the helpful FBI) of federal workers to see if any were—or had been—communists. Those who were found were immediately dismissed. A famous example was **Alger Hiss,**a former State Department Official. The FBI sniffed out that he had been suspiciously hanging out with a known Communist spy. Americans freaked.

And, like always when a big conspiracy craze takes hold of a nation, there's always someone who wants to ride it to power. That was Senator **Joseph McCarthy.**In 1950 he told everyone he had a list of more than 200 communists actually inthe State Department. He instigated a huge witch hunt, forcing federal officials, Hollywood directors and actors, professors and teachers, and a whole heap of innocent people into hearings. Those who confessed had to name others, and all those "discovered" were put on a **blacklist**so that no one else would hire them—or give them loans, houses, or assistance.

People became a little suspicious when McCarthy started saying "I know 200people...I mean I know 150people...er...72 people," and no "list" ever appeared. His downfall came when he tried to accuse members of the Army. You don't mess with the military, especially when your president is fresh fromthat military. Happily, people began to take him as a joke, and his witch-hunt ended.

The early stages of the Cold War were terrifying for many Americans. Communism seemed to be bringing the apocalypse, toppling nations all over the globe. The nation seemed filled with spies. People walked around every day with the threat of nukes pointed right at their houses hanging over their heads.

They became convinced that the Russian spaceship **Sputnik**was launched so Russians could spy on them from space. The US responded by creating the **National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA),**discussing the possibility of building missile and defense systems in space.

As the arms race became ever bigger, American schools and businesses practiced the **duck-and-cover**drill. In the case of an attack, you were supposed to drop under a desk or table and cover your head with your hands. No one bothered to mention that in the case of being incinerated into plasma…that wouldn't actually help.

The government issued the **National Highway Act**of 1956, which made it all the easier for people to live in the suburbs and commute to the cities, therefore speeding the process of **suburbanization.**People also noticed that this also allowed for rapid evacuation of cities in case of attack. Families began building bomb shelters in their backyards, and stocking them with canned goods.

It might seem that Americans constantly lived in a frozen atmosphere of change—but American society was anything butfrozen at this time. Massive changes were roiling under the surface in the '50s, to explode in the '60s. It's time to take a look at what was going on beneath this cloud of Potential Total Destruction of Everything You Hold Dear.

## Sample Questions

1. Which of the following events signaled the end of European global dominance?

A) The Suez Crisis  
B) The fall of China to communism  
C) The Korean War  
D) The Marshall Plan  
E) the creation of NATO

The correct answer is (A).

This is a little tricky, because (D) also looks like a right answer. After all, when the Marshall Plan was instituted, Europe was in shreds—didn't thatsignify the end of its dominance? Well…no. At the end of World War II, Europe still had a lot of its colonies. It would only begin to lose them—and voluntarily give them up—in the next decade. In the Suez Crisis, Europe tried to reassert its dominance in an old imperial region, only to have the U.S. bark at it to go away and keep its hands off. It was official: the U.S. was the new global police power.

2. The primary reason NASA was created was to

A) beat Russian astronauts to the "final frontier" of the moon  
B) counter "Sputnik" by launching America's own spy rockets  
C) prove American superiority in scientific enterprises  
D) construct space stations for launching nuclear missiles  
E) plan military and defense operations against the Soviets

The correct answer is (E).

Americans were freaked out when "Sputnik" launched. It was easy to imagine that it was snapping photos of their lawns and their bedroom windows. America wasn't plotting how to create their own spy-craft, but they did want to make sure that if Russia decided to cart nukes into space, they were going to stay competitive. Sure, they also wanted to benefit science—but the real, immediate reason was to counter the real, immediate threat of Russian attack. They had to have their own military and defense systems.