Your notes

GCSE History: revision notes

# Conflict and tension between East and West, 1945–1972

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## The origins of the Cold War

- The USA (capitalist and democratic) and the USSR (communist, with a one-party state) had been allies against Germany, but they distrusted each other.
- At Yalta (February 1945), the Allies agreed to divide Germany and Berlin into four zones, to hold free elections in Eastern Europe, and that the USSR would join the war against Japan. At Potsdam (July–August 1945), with new leaders Truman and Attlee, they disagreed over Germany and reparations. The USA now had the atomic bomb, which it dropped on Hiroshima on 6 August 1945.
- The USSR set up communist governments across Eastern Europe (satellite states). In March 1946, Churchill warned that an '**iron curtain**' had come down across Europe.
- The Truman Doctrine (March 1947) said the USA would support free peoples resisting **communism**: this was **containment**. The **Marshall Plan** (1947) gave about $13 billion of US aid to rebuild Europe. The USSR responded with Cominform (1947) and Comecon (1949).

## Berlin and the division of Germany

- In the Berlin Blockade (June 1948–May 1949), Stalin cut the road, rail and canal links to West Berlin. The Western Allies flew in supplies (the Berlin Airlift), and Stalin backed down.
- Germany was split into West Germany and East Germany (1949). **NATO**, a Western military alliance, was formed in April 1949; the communist states formed the **Warsaw Pact** in 1955.
- In August 1961, East Germany built the Berlin Wall to stop people escaping to the West. It became a symbol of the **Cold War**.

## Korea, the arms race and Hungary

- Korea was divided at the 38th parallel. In June 1950, communist North Korea invaded the South. A UN force, mostly American and led by General MacArthur, pushed them back; China joined the war in October 1950, and it became a stalemate until an armistice in July 1953.
- **Arms race**: the USA had the atomic bomb in 1945 and the USSR in 1949; both built hydrogen bombs (1952 and 1953) and long-range missiles. The Soviet satellite Sputnik (1957) started the space race.
- In 1956, the Hungarian Uprising, led by Imre Nagy, wanted to leave the **Warsaw Pact**. Soviet tanks crushed it, and the West didn't intervene.
- In 1960, an American U2 spy plane was shot down over the USSR, wrecking a summit in Paris.

## The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962

- After Castro's revolution (1959) and the failed, US-backed Bay of Pigs invasion (April 1961), Cuba grew closer to the USSR.
- In October 1962, American spy planes found Soviet nuclear missile sites being built in Cuba. Kennedy ordered a naval 'quarantine' (blockade) of Cuba. After thirteen tense days, Khrushchev agreed to remove the missiles; the USA promised not to invade Cuba and secretly agreed to remove its own missiles from Turkey.
- Afterwards, a telephone 'hotline' linked Washington and Moscow (1963), and the Limited Test Ban Treaty (1963) banned nuclear tests in the atmosphere.

## Vietnam, Czechoslovakia and détente

- Vietnam: after the French left in 1954, the USA backed South Vietnam against the communist North and the Viet Cong, fearing the 'domino theory'. US involvement grew after the Gulf of Tonkin incident (1964). The Tet Offensive (1968) turned American opinion against the war, and US troops left by 1973.
- In the Prague Spring (1968), Dubček's reforms in Czechoslovakia ('socialism with a human face') were crushed by **Warsaw Pact** forces. The Brezhnev Doctrine said the USSR would intervene to protect **communism** in Eastern Europe.
- **Détente**, an easing of tension, followed: the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (1968) and SALT 1 (1972), which limited nuclear weapons.

## Key terms

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| **Cold War** | The rivalry between the USA and the USSR that never became a direct war. |
| **Capitalism** | A system where businesses are privately owned and run for profit. |
| **Communism** | A system where the state owns businesses and property, with one party in power. |

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| **Iron Curtain** | The divide between communist Eastern Europe and the West. |
| **Containment** | The US policy of stopping communism from spreading. |
| **Marshall Plan** | US economic aid to help Europe recover after the Second World War. |
| **NATO** | The Western military alliance formed in 1949. |
| **Warsaw Pact** | The military alliance of communist states led by the USSR, formed in 1955. |
| **Arms race** | Rival countries competing to build more and better weapons. |
| **Détente** | An easing of tension between the superpowers. |

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## Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. What was agreed at Yalta in February 1945?
2. What was the Truman Doctrine?
3. What was the Marshall Plan?
4. What was the Berlin Airlift?
5. When was NATO formed?
6. What was the Warsaw Pact?
7. Why was the Berlin Wall built in 1961?
8. What happened in Hungary in 1956?

### Answers

1. Germany would be divided into four zones
2. The USA would support free peoples resisting communism
3. US economic aid to help Europe recover
4. Flying supplies into West Berlin during the blockade
5. 1949
6. A military alliance of communist states led by the USSR
7. To stop East Germans escaping to the West
8. Soviet tanks crushed an uprising

## What to do next

**Practise 13 questions on this topic**

**Try 4 exam questions, with mark schemes**

**Read the lesson, one step at a time**

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