

## 32a A brief history of the Cold War

Ronald Wiltse May 2009

This outline, minus the footnotes, vocabulary, bibliography, and worksheet, comprises the text of the slide presentation A Brief History of the Cold War, created with PowerPoint 2003.

### Summary outline:

- I. The background of the Cold War
- II. How the Cold War began
- III. Hot places
- IV. Hot issues
- V. Tensions go up, tensions go down
- VI. The collapse of communism
- VII. Epilogue: the end of the Cold War
- VIII. The danger of the USA to the world
- IX. Hot times: a timeline of major events

### Full outline:

#### I. The background of the Cold War

- A. The Open Society
  1. The Open Society refers to a society with a high amount of freedom for its citizens.
- B. The Closed Society in its Communist form
  1. A Closed Society refers to one in which the government gives its citizens few freedoms. Communist governments allow fewer freedoms than any other type of dictatorship.
  2. Communist governments typically want to force communism on other countries.
- C. The effect of World War II
  1. The Open Society, represented by Britain and the US, found itself allied to the Closed Society of the Soviet Union because of a common threat, Nazi Germany/Austria.

#### II. How the Cold War began

- A. The postwar breakdown
  1. The Potsdam Conference freed the Soviet Union to make many aggressive moves, such as taking all of eastern Germany.
  2. The USSR began by mistreating former Nazi territories (all of Germany and Austria)
  3. The USSR began to set up communist dictatorships in Eastern Europe wherever they had control.
  4. The USSR turned over Japanese arms captured in Manchuria to Chinese communists, who subsequently conquered China.
  5. An assistant to the US ambassador to the USSR George Kennen sent a long message<sup>1</sup> to the Treasury<sup>2</sup> Department (February 1946) calling for resistance to Soviet aggression.<sup>3</sup>
  6. Churchill spoke out against the Soviet Union in Fulton, Missouri (March 7, 1946) and called for an alliance of Western nations to stand up to Soviet expansion.

"From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an Iron Curtain has descended across the continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw [Poland], Berlin [Germany], Prague [Czechoslovakia], Vienna [Austria], Budapest [Hungary], Belgrade [Yugoslavia], Bucharest [Romania] and Sofia [Bulgaria], all these famous cities and the populations around them lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere."

7. The Marshall Plan (announced June 1947), an American plan to put money into European nations to help them rebuild, was regarded by Stalin as a plot to establish capitalistic control over them, leading Stalin to reject aid to countries under his control.
8. The Soviet argument for its aggressive actions was that it needed a layer of friendly states between it and Germany to act as a buffer in case Germany should ever attack it again—thus

---

<sup>1</sup> the "Long Telegram", referring to the way it was transmitted to Washington

<sup>2</sup> in answer to some questions from the Treasury Department May 20, 2009

<sup>3</sup> George Kennen expanded on this in the X-article (because Kennen signed it with an x rather than his name) that appeared in the July 1947 issue of Foreign Affairs.

the justification of setting up communist governments in a chain of states.

### III. Hot places

- A. Eastern Europe, where Soviet troops annexed land (eastern Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, eastern Romania, a bit of Finland and Germany) and established communist governments in all other occupied land but Austria.
  - 1. All had Soviet controlled dictatorships, secret police, rule by terror, foreign policy set by Moscow, and command economies.
- B. Greece
  - 1. A communist inspired civil war in Greece (1946-1949) led to the **Truman Doctrine** (March 1947) in which Truman announced that the US would support any government resisting communism.<sup>4</sup>
- C. Berlin
  - 1. Berlin Blockade of 1948-1949
    - a. Because the "free" part of Berlin (divided just like Germany) was a threat to Stalin's control of East Germany, he blocked land access to Berlin in 1948, expecting to starve the West Berliners into submission.
    - b. Truman authorized an airlift to supply West Berliners with all their necessities.
    - c. The Berlin Airlift was so successful that Stalin gave in, restoring land access again.
  - 2. The Berlin Wall, August 1961
    - a. Because of free movement between East and West Berlin, East Germany was losing many of its citizens through West Berlin, where the West German government would fly them out to West Germany.
    - b. In August 1961, the East German government began to build a wall around West Berlin, to seal off access.
- D. Korea (1950-1953)
  - 1. North Korea, whose communist government was set up in 1945 by Stalin, attacked South Korea on June 25<sup>th</sup>, 1950.
  - 2. The United Nations authorized a defense of South Korea under American leadership.
  - 3. The North Koreans were driven back and a truce in 1953 ended the fighting.
- E. The Cuban missile crisis (1962)
  - 1. Convinced that the new American president John Kennedy was weak, Soviet dictator Nikita Khrushchev ordered Soviet nuclear missiles to be set up in Cuba, endangering Florida.
  - 2. Kennedy ordered subsequent Soviet ships to be stopped before they could land their cargos.
  - 3. The conflict threatened to end in nuclear war, but war was averted when Khrushchev backed down.
- F. Vietnam (1959-1975)
  - 1. Communist North Vietnam invaded South Vietnam, which asked the US for help.
  - 2. American involvement started out with military advisors, but slowly grew to massive troop participation (from 1964).
  - 3. Because the Soviet Union supported North Vietnam, the US was involved indirectly in a war with the USSR.
  - 4. Because the North Vietnamese used new guerrilla tactics, it proved difficult for American troops.
  - 5. Americans slowly turned against American involvement, and the US dropped out of participation. South Vietnam lost shortly afterward.
  - 6. The Vietnam War marked the first time the US lost a war.
- G. Various revolts against communist governments in Eastern Europe.
  - 1. East Germany (1953)
  - 2. Hungary (1956)
  - 3. Czechoslovakia (1968)
- H. The world's countries choose sides.
  - 1. The Western countries (with alliances such as NATO and SEATO)
  - 2. The Soviet bloc countries (Warsaw Pact)
  - 3. The Third World (lesser developed countries open to either side)

### IV. Hot issues

- A. The arms race

---

<sup>4</sup> The Doctrine talked of freedom "from coercion," thus avoiding the direct mention of communism.

1. Starting with nuclear weapons and ways to deliver them
  2. Conventional weapons and standing armies
- B. The space race
1. This arose out of the development of rockets to deliver missiles.
  2. The space race began in October 1957 when the Soviets launched the first artificial satellite.
  3. A critical American victory was scored when the US landed astronauts on the moon on July 20, 1969.
- C. The economic race
1. Expressed in aid to third world countries.
  2. While the Open (and free enterprise) Societies of the West prospered, the Soviets channeled resources to Cold War efforts, leaving its citizens poor.
- D. The war of ideas
1. Propaganda by each side to convince all of the superiority of the ideas of one side over the other.
  2. Military and economic aid to third world countries encouraged uncommitted countries to ally themselves with one side or the other.
  3. Espionage helped uncover the other side's secrets.
  4. The first arena in the war of ideas was for the loyalty of Germans.

## V. Tensions go up, tensions go down

- A. Tensions decreased with the death of Stalin (1953).
- B. Tensions increased with the race to build intercontinental ballistic missiles (1958-1962).<sup>5</sup>
- C. Detente—a period of lessened tensions—began in the late 1960s when both sides reached a rough parity in nuclear strength.
1. Both sides sought to lessen expenditures for weapons.
  2. In West Germany Chancellor Willy Brandt had given up hope of reunion with East Germany and sought accommodation with them.
  3. The Soviet Union also worried that the US and China might unite in some degree, to the disadvantage of the USSR.
- D. The election of Ronald Reagan led to a renewed arms race.
1. Reagan hoped that this would drive the Soviets into accepting meaningful reductions in arms expenditures (it did).
- E. Cold War tensions eased greatly toward the end of Reagan's second administration.
1. Some argue that Reagan's hard line attitude toward the Soviet Union (in rhetoric and support of arms build-up) helped bring about the end of the Cold War by helping to drive the Soviet Union to the point of collapse. Mikhail Gorbachev said of Reagan's role: "[He was] a man who was instrumental in bringing about the end of the Cold War."<sup>6</sup> British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher said, "Ronald Reagan had a higher claim than any other leader to have won the Cold War for liberty and he did it without a shot being fired."<sup>7</sup>
  2. Others argue that Reagan played no significant role, that the Soviet Union was slowly collapsing anyway.

## VI. The collapse of communism

- A. Eastern Europe escaped Soviet domination as Soviet leader Gorbachev relaxed control of the Satellite states.
- B. The collapse of the Soviet Union meant the end of the Cold War.
- C. The decay of Chinese communism
1. Unlike the communist government of the Soviet Union, the communist government of the People's Republic of China maintained its control over China, while allowing capitalism to develop in many parts of the country. The result is an authoritarian government which gives lip service to communist ideology.
- D. The dregs of communism

---

<sup>5</sup> "Cold War", Encyclopaedia Britannica.

<sup>6</sup> Heintz, Jim. "Gorbachev mourns loss of honest rival". Oakland Tribune, June 7, 2004 ( Associated Press).

<sup>7</sup> "Reagan and Thatcher; political soul mates". MSNBC. June 5, 2004. (<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/5145739/>).

1. Cuba maintains a communist government without Soviet help.
2. North Korea has maintained a communist government that is so unsuccessful in feeding its citizens that it has resulted in mass starvation of its citizens. “. . . the only truly totalitarian regime on earth.” (Robert Joseph)
3. Vietnam now allows a measure of free enterprise.

## **VII. Epilogue: the end of the Cold War**

- A. What caused the Soviet Union to collapse? Some possibilities:
  1. Harry Truman’s actions sowed the seeds.
  2. Pope John Paul II’s encouragement of Polish anti-government activities.
  3. Ronald Reagan’s arms build-up and anti-Soviet rhetoric.
  4. Internal Soviet weaknesses.
- B. Peoples without a tradition of political independence have difficulties in successfully moving from dictatorship to democratic republican government.
- C. Western leaders failed to understand the political maturity underlying self-rule.
  1. The naivety of presidents George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton regarding democratic republican government and capitalism (saying “good luck” to former Soviet republics instead of warning them that the road ahead would be extremely difficult) helped set up the former republics for failure.
  2. Communism (or at least authoritarian government) has to a degree renewed its appeal where democratic republican government and capitalism has not produced the expected utopia.

## **VIII. The danger of the USA to the world**

- A. America as a light on a hill
  1. From its beginnings, Americans have seen themselves as different from other nations, with a higher calling to act justly.
- B. Power tends to corrupt
  1. As the world’s most powerful nation, the US may be tempted to abuse its power, while remaining blind to the abuse.
  2. This does not mean that the US will abuse its power, but that it could.
  3. LESSON FROM HISTORY: Athens (during its golden age) abused its power, bring about its downfall, all the while remaining unaware of its corruption.
- C. The limits of American power
  1. Going from isolation to playing the world’s policeman (a new activity begun during and because of the Cold War) has set the US up to take on difficult or impossible tasks.

## IX. Hot times: a timeline of some major events

May 1945	Germany surrenders
from May 1945	USSR begins to act aggressively in Eastern Europe
1945-1948	Soviet backed dictatorships established in Eastern Europe
July 1945	Potsdam agreement clears the way for Stalin to occupy northern Korea
August 1945	Soviet troops occupy northern Korea
February 1946	George Kennen's Long Telegram
March 1946	Churchill's Fulton, Missouri speech
1945-1949	Chinese Civil War, interrupted by WWII, continues
1948-1952	Marshall Plan
1948-1949	Berlin Blockade
1949	Chinese communists gain control of mainland China
April 1949	NATO established
May 1949	West Germany becomes self-governing
Oct. 1949	Soviets create East Germany
June 1950-July 1953	Korean War
March 1953	Joseph Stalin dies, changing the nature of the Cold War
June 1953	Soviet troops put down an <b>uprising in East Germany</b>
Sep. 1954	SEATO established
1955	Warsaw Pact founded as Eastern counterpart to NATO; West Germany admitted to NATO
Oct.-Nov. 1956	<b>Hungarian freedom fighters revolt</b> unsuccessfully
Oct. 1957	USSR launches the first artificial satellite (beginning of space race)
Jan. 1959	Fidel Castro defeats Cuban government
1960	China and the Soviet Union split
April 1961	the US supports an unsuccessful invasion of Cuba (Bay of Pigs)
Aug. 1961	Berlin wall begun
Oct. 1962	Missile crisis in Cuba
1963	Nuclear Test Ban Treaty signed
1964-1975	Vietnam War
Jan.-Aug. 1968	Prague Spring ( <b>revolution in Czechoslovakia</b> ) fails
Sep. 1968	Brezhnev Doctrine announced
July 1969	Americans land on the moon
1986-1991	Mikhail Gorbachev leads the Soviet Union into its decline
1988	Soviet leader Gorbachev begins to loosen control over Satellites
1989	Eastern block nations begin to abandon communism:
June 1989	Poland elects a non-communist government
Sep. 1989	Hungarian government effectively opens border with Austria
Oct. 1989	Hungary allows multi-party elections
Nov. 9, 1989	East Germany allows citizens to enter West Berlin
Nov. 1989	Czechoslovakia government relinquishes power
Dec. 1989	Romanian oust dictator Ceaușescu from power
Feb. 1990	Bulgarian government relinquishes power
July 1990	Soviet leader Gorbachev agrees to allow East Germany to join West Germany
Oct. 3, 1990	East Germans join West Germany
July 1991	Warsaw pact ends
Dec. 25-31, 1991	The Soviet Union collapses

Fill in the missing dates.

Name:

Period:

## When and what? a timeline of some major events

	Germany surrenders
	USSR begins to act aggressively in Eastern Europe
	Soviet backed dictatorships established in Eastern Europe
	Potsdam agreement clears the way for Stalin to occupy northern Korea
	Soviet troops occupy northern Korea
February 1946	George Kennen's Long Telegram
	Churchill's Fulton, Missouri speech
	Chinese Civil War, interrupted by WWII, continues
	Marshall Plan
	Berlin Blockade
	Chinese communists gain control of mainland China
	NATO established
	West Germany becomes self-governing
	Soviets create East Germany
June 1950-July 1953	Korean War
	Joseph Stalin dies, changing the nature of the Cold War
	Soviet troops put down an <b>uprising in East Germany</b>
	SEATO established
	Warsaw Pact founded as Eastern counterpart to NATO; West Germany admitted to NATO
	<b>Hungarian freedom fighters revolt</b> unsuccessfully
	USSR launches the first artificial satellite (beginning of space race)
	Fidel Castro defeats Cuban government
	China and the Soviet Union split
	the US supports an unsuccessful invasion of Cuba (Bay of Pigs)
	Berlin wall begun
	Missile crisis in Cuba
	Nuclear Test Ban Treaty signed
	Vietnam War
Jan.-Aug. 1968	Prague Spring ( <b>revolution in Czechoslovakia</b> ) fails
	Brezhnev Doctrine announced
	Americans land on the moon
	Mikhail Gorbachev leads the Soviet Union into its decline
	Soviet leader Gorbachev begins to loosen control over Satellites
	Eastern block nations begin to abandon communism:
	Poland elects a non-communist government
	Hungarian government effectively opens border with Austria
	Hungary allows multi-party elections
	East Germany allows citizens to enter West Berlin
	Czechoslovakia government relinquishes power
	Romanian oust dictator Ceaușescu from power
	Bulgarian government relinquishes power
	Soviet leader Gorbachev agrees to allow East Germany to join West Germany
	East Germans join West Germany
	Warsaw pact ends
Dec. 25-31, 1991	The Soviet Union collapses <sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Gorbachev resigned on December 25 and all state functions ceased by "the end of the 1991."  
McCauley, Encyclopaedia Britannica.

## Important terms:

Brezhnev Doctrine	September 1968. Clear statement of previous practice: "When forces that are hostile to socialism try to turn the development of some socialist country towards capitalism, it becomes not only a problem of the country concerned, but a common problem and concern of all socialist countries." This statement justified previous interventions in Satellite States such as the intervention in Czechoslovakia earlier in 1968. Abandoned by Mikhail Gorbachev in 1988, a move which led to the abandonment of communist governments in the European Satellite States.
Cold War	"The term was first used by the American financier and presidential adviser Bernard Baruch during a congressional debate in 1947." <sup>9</sup>
containment	The policy adopted by the Truman administration to prevent expansion of Soviet influence.
détente	A term used loosely to refer to a relaxed state of tensions between the US and the Soviet Union from the late 1960s until the Reagan administration.
East Germany, eastern Germany	East Germany refers to the Soviet zone of occupation that the Soviets turned into an independent country (or puppet state, depending on your point of view). Some Germans referred to East Germany as the Occupied Zone. When the Soviet Union relaxed its control over the country, the government lost its ability to maintain its leadership and the citizens voted to join West Germany. Today if one wants to refer to this section of Germany, the correct name is eastern Germany.
first strike capability	The ability of a nation to completely destroy the nuclear force of the other side before it could retaliate. Second strike capability meant the means of retaliating, such as could be provided by a nuclear submarine force or, earlier, by nuclear armed bombers always in the air. MAD (q.v.) would result when both sides were capable of first or second strikes. First articulated by Kennedy's Secretary of Defense Robert MacNamara.
France	Loose cannon of the Western alliance.
glasnost	1986 policy of Gorbachev, meaning "openness". "Gorbachev merely accelerated the breakup by promoting glasnost. He confirmed that a communist system cannot become democratic. When democracy triumphs, communism departs the stage". <sup>10</sup>
hard-line approach	Standing up to Soviet aggressiveness
iron curtain	Term for the border between the Eastern bloc and the Open Societies of Western Europe popularized by Winston Churchill in his Fulton, Missouri speech of March 1946.
MAD	Mutually Assured Destruction. The term used to refer to the point in armament where the US and the USSR each had sufficient nuclear weapons and delivery systems so that in the case of an attack by one side, that attack and the resulting counter-attack would destroy both sides. The idea was that such a situation would act as a strong deterrent to an attack by either side.
massive retaliation	The idea, first enunciated by President Dwight Eisenhower, that an Eastern bloc attack on Western Europe, whether nuclear or conventional, would call forth massive retaliation by the US. When both sides became capable of massive retaliation, a state of mutually assured destruction was created.
NATO	egan in April of 1949 in response to Soviet actions, specifically the Berlin blockade. Original members were United States, Canada, Portugal, Italy, Norway, Denmark and Iceland. In response to West Germany joining NATO in 1955, the Soviet Union

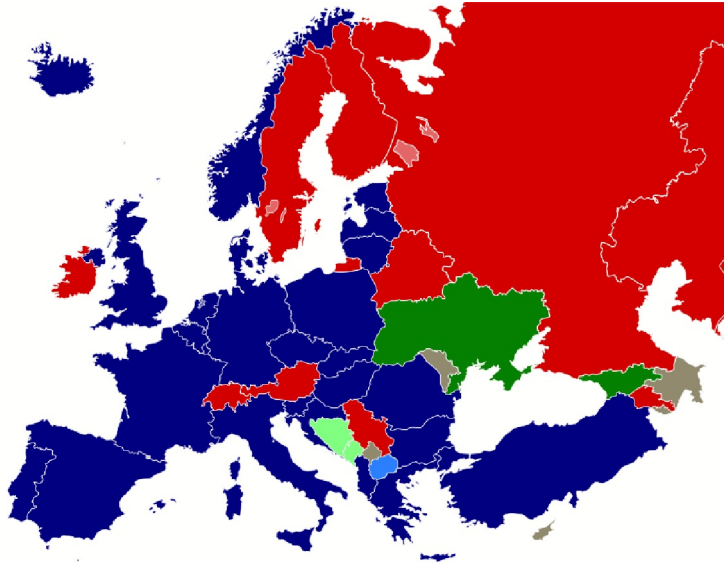
---

<sup>9</sup> "Cold War", Encyclopaedia Britannica

<sup>10</sup> McCauley, Encyclopaedia Britannica

created a counter-organization, the Warsaw Pact. Under the influence of French President Charles de Gaulle, France effectively pulled out of NATO in 1959 (although technically remaining a member). When the Warsaw Pact ceased to exist in 1991 NATO ceased to be a Cold War alliance and broadened its defensive goals. As a result, NATO opened itself to new members, including former Warsaw Pact members. This latter worried Russia. France resumed full membership in NATO in 2009.





People's Republic of . . .

This is  
ode for  
ommu  
ist  
tate.

perestroika

Soviet term used by Gorbachev to refer to economic restructuring

SDI

Strategic Defense Initiative, a proposal of Ronald Reagan, which would have enabled the US to destroy all incoming nuclear missiles, protecting the US against a nuclear strike. Whether technologically possible or not, the possibility drove the Soviet Union to the bargaining table, as it apparently could not afford to compete in creating a similar system (Reagan said that he would give the system to the Soviets when it was developed.) Often referred to as "Star Wars."

SEATO

Southeast Asia Treaty Organization. Founded in 1954. Members: Australia, France, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand, United Kingdom, United States. Internal dissension led to its dissolution in 1977.

Soviet Satellite states

One name describing Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria. A less charitable name is the Slave States. Also referred to as the Eastern bloc.

USSR, Soviet Union

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (slang: the Soviet Union) was the name of the Russian Empire adopted by the Communist Party leadership. At the collapse of the Soviet Union the empire collapsed, with the 15 SSRs (Soviet Socialist Republics) created by the Communist Party became 15 independent countries. Complicating matters was that the nuclear warheads of the former USSR were distributed throughout the former republics, making it difficult to assure their security. Although Russia is a common synecdoche for the USSR, careful speakers try to avoid using "Russia" and "Russian" when referring to the country during its communist period.

Warsaw Pact

Formed by the Eastern bloc in response to West Germany joining NATO. With the decline in Soviet power the Warsaw Pact was dissolved in 1991, causing NATO to rethink its purpose.

West Germany,  
western Germany

After a period of French resistance to Western cooperation, the other three occupying powers (Britain, the US, and France) allowed the Germans in their zones to reassert self-government, starting at the local level. In 1949, Germans were allowed to form a national government. Since the Soviets did not allow their zone to take part, the West Germans placed its capital provisionally in Bonn and provided in their constitution for East Germany to join them at some unspecified future date, should circumstances allow. By the 1970s, the West German leaders lost the hope for any such (re)union in a foreseeable future, and accepted the legitimacy of East Germany. After the vote to join West Germany (March 1990), the new government (October 1990) of the consolidated Germany voted to move the capital to Berlin (1991), a

move largely completed by 2000.<sup>11</sup>

**Bibliography:**

Joseph, Robert, "How to Deal with a Dictator", Wall Street Journal, June 6-7, 2009, page 1.

McCauley, Martin, "Union of Soviet Socialist Republics", in Encyclopaedia Britannica, DVD edition, 2009.

Turner, Henry Ashby, and Sheehan, James. "Germany", in Encyclopaedia Britannica, DVD edition, 2009.

"Cold War", in Encyclopaedia Britannica, DVD edition, 2009.

---

<sup>11</sup> Turner and Sheehan, "Germany".