The origins of the Cold War and the partition of Germany

France, Britain, and the USSR (Russia) had been allies during the Second World War (since 1939). In 1941, the USA entered the war on their side. These four countries were forced to co-operate during the war, but once the war was over, tensions emerged.

Reasons for tensions:

* The USSR went through a violent revolution in 1917. The USA were scared that communism would spread to the USA. The USSR was not allowed to join the League of Nations in the 1920s.
* The USSR were suspicious as they did not receive allied help until 1944 – when the D-Day attack relieved pressure on their country. 28 million Russians died during World War 2.
* The USA were annoyed that the USSR did not declare war on Japan until the Second World War was almost over.

What is a Cold War?

* Influencing other countries (including through propaganda)
* Spying on each other
* Creating and building a wealth of bigger and dangerous weapons
* Building up and supporting alliance countries
* THESE COUNTRIES DID NOT PHYSICALLY FIGHT EACH OTHER

Why did a Cold War develop?

The USA and USSR were suspicious of each other after the war. Some of the tensions (above) were realised before and during the war. Others emerged after the war. Both countries had emerged as the most powerful in the world – they were ‘superpowers’. Their strength can be measured in terms of population, military might, and technology. The USA were ahead of the USSR economically, as the USSR had been strongly damaged during the war. Both countries became rivals mainly because of their differing ideology – Communism and Capitalism.

The Soviets’ main aims were to keep Germany as weak as possible so that they could not fight another war, they wanted to keep Eastern Europe (Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, etc) under their influence so that they could act as ‘buffer states’ should Germany attack them. The USSR were affected badly by the Second World War, and wanted their security guaranteed.

The USA wanted to rebuild Germany. Just like Woodrow Wilson after the First World War, the USA, Britain and France recognised that a harsh settlement would lead to further conflict and want of revenge. Therefore they wanted to rebuild Germany now that it was free from Nazi control.

Tensions between these powers grew when the USSR did not remove their troops from Eastern Europe immediately after the Nazi’s defeat. They stayed on to influence these Eastern European states. The USSR had a hand in creating ‘puppet governments’ in Eastern Europe. Only Yugoslavia remained independent from Soviet control, even though they too became communist. Communism appealed to Eastern Europeans because of the poverty that existed in these countries following war.

Yalta and Potsdam – two conferences held in February and July/August 1945. Their aim was to create an agreed settlement for dealing with 1) Germany now that the Nazis had been defeated; and 2) Eastern Europe as their governments had been destroyed.

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| Yalta (Feb 1945) | Potsdam (July/August 1945) |
| * Roosevelt, Churchill, Stalin attended. * Germany and Berlin (the capital city) were to be divided into four zones. Each zone was to be maintained by Britain, France, USA and the USSR. * Stalin promised to allow free elections in Eastern Europe, and pull his troops out. * The USSR agreed to declare war on Japan in three months time. | * Truman (who replaced Roosevelt), Churchill (soon to be replaced by Clement Atlee), and Stalin attended. * Stalin went back on his promises in Eastern Europe. * Truman and Stalin did not get on personally. * Truman was tougher as he did not need the Russians to help deal with Japan. |

It was also agreed that the Nazi party would be dissolved and war criminals tried, reparations would be paid to the USSR from Germany. Also the Allies agreed to take a part in the United Nations. All four countries were to have a say in how Germany, and Berlin, would be governed.

What were the differences between East and West?

Stalin believed that Europe had been divided into two spheres of influence at Yalta and Potsdam. Britain and the USA could do as they liked in the West, but, at the same time, the USSR could do as it liked in the East. The zones of Germany and the sectors of Berlin received very different treatment from the occupying forces. The Soviet sector was stripped of machinery and equipment, which was taken to the Soviet Union to help rebuild the country after the appalling damage inflicted by the war. The Western Allies wanted to rebuild their sectors and quickly began to reorganise industry and trade unions. To the West, Stalin appeared to be an evil predator; to Stalin, the West were creating a stronger Germany – something he strongly feared.

The Berlin Blockade and Airlift

In December 1946 Britain and the USA agreed to unite their zones in Germany for economic purposes. This became known as Bizonia in January 1947. France later joined them, and the Western-occupied sectors collectively became known as Trizonia. Massive differences began to emerge between Eastern and Western sectors – especially in Berlin. Stalin thought that this made him look bad and decided to ‘blockade’ Western Berlin. Canals, roads, and railways were blocked off. As the city of Berlin was in the Soviet controlled East-side of Germany, the only way Britain, France and the USA could supply West Berlin was through an ‘airlift’. This meant that they dropped food and supplies from planes. This solution was reached as any other method (e.g. army) would have been too aggressive. From June 1948 until May 1949 the airlift was in operation over West Berlin.

Spread of Communism, Truman Doctrine, Marshall Aid, and the Soviet response

Within a few years of the end of the Second World War, it was clear that Soviet influence was spreading. Countries such as Yugoslavia, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Bulgaria, all became communist. They were seen as ‘puppet states’ as the real control over these countries was held at Moscow. This scared the USA as it proved that communism was an ideology that could spread quickly. Winston Churchill famously exclaimed that “an Iron Curtain had descended across Europe”. The US response was to issue the ‘Truman Doctrine’ in March 1947 which was a speech stating that the USA would help any country whose freedom was threatened by outside influences (obviously meaning Communism, but not stating it explicitly). This was followed up by Marshall Aid a few months later – a programme which handed out millions in aid to West Germany, and countries such as Greece who was threatened by communist revolution. Stalin set up Cominform (Communist Information Bureau) in response to this. It attempted to co-ordinate the activities of communist parties in Europe. 16 countries joined.

NATO and the Warsaw Pact

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| NATO (April 1949) | Warsaw Pact (May 1955) |
| * 12 countries joined including West Germany * Defensive pact according to West, but aggressive according to Stalin * If one member was attacked, the others would help out * US military forces were now stationed in Eastern Europe | * 8 countries joined including East Germany * Response to NATO, created after West Germany joined NATO. * It was an attempt to protect the USSR from further invasion. * It led to a greater presence of Soviet troops in Eastern European states. |

Stalin died in 1953, before the Warsaw Pact was signed. His death appeared to make little difference at first. Nikita Khrushchev took over as the leader of the USSR. He believed in ‘peaceful co-existence’ with the USA and took a less aggressive stance to foreign affairs. He did not want to destroy the west, but believed that he had to compete with it to show the USSR’s superiority.

Khrushchev wanted to replace confrontation with co-existence. His break with Stalin’s policy was announced in his ‘Secret Speech’ at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956. Unfortunately, Khrushchev’s actions were misunderstood, both abroad and inside the Soviet Union. He was not prepared to sacrifice the security of the USSR, and continued to spend heavily on arms. This softening in policy led to the Hungarian Uprising in 1956.

The Cuban Missile Crisis

1. Background
   * In 1959 Fidel Castro's rebels overthrew corrupt pro-US government in Cuba.
   * Castro tried to make a trade agreement with the USA.
   * USA refused as they saw Castro as a Communist.
   * Thus Castro turned to the USSR, who readily made a deal.
   * In return for buying Cuban goods, the USSR got permission to build a nuclear missile site in Cuba.
   * On 14th October 1962 a US U2 spy plane spotted the nuclear site being built.
2. ExComm set up
   * US President Kennedy set up 'ExComm' a committee to decide what to do.
   * On 22nd October, Kennedy ordered the US navy to blockade Cuba.
   * He stated that any Soviet vessel that tried to break the blockade would be destroyed.
3. On the brink of war
   * On 23rd October, the United Nations backed the US and ordered any missiles to be removed.
   * Soviet ships were spotted heading towards Cuba.
   * The world was on the brink of all out nuclear war.
   * On 27th October Khrushchev secretly offered to pull out of Cuba if the USA pulled out of Turkey.
   * Kennedy agreed and a day later Khrushchev ordered Soviet ships to turn round.
4. Consequences
   * Major propaganda victory for the USA - they looked to have 'won'.
   * As the compromise was secret, Khrushchev appeared to have backed down.
   * Both sides began seeking ways of improving relations e.g. a hotline was set up providing immediate contact.
   * A test ban treaty meant that both sides agreed nuclear weapons should only be tested underground.

Why did the Cuban Missile Crisis end like this?

Much of the credit must go to the good sense of the two leaders. Most members of ExComm advised military action; Kennedy refused to be pushed into war even though he realised that he had to make a stand. For his part, Khrushchev realised that he had gone too far. He was simply not prepared to go to war for Cuba or probably for anything else. This was another sign of a new understanding between the superpowers. Both leaders realised the need to allow the other to save face. So Kennedy publicly agreed that the USA would leave Cuba alone and privately agreed to remove the missiles from Turkey. Khrushchev publicly agreed to remove the missiles from Cuba and also accepted Kennedy’s private invitation to begin discussions about detente.

What was detente?

In one of his letters to Khrushchev, Kennedy used the word detente. He meant a lessening of tension, a drawing together of the two superpowers. The process of Detente started in 1963.

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|  | Events of detente – 1962-1979 |
| 1962 | The hotline set up after the Missile Crisis was a direct tele-printer between the Kremlin and the White House. It enabled the two leaders to communicate almost immediately in the event of a crisis. In fact, it was hardly ever used, except during the Afghanistan War from 1979 onwards. |
| 1963 | The Test Ban Treaty was signed. This stopped nuclear tests above ground. This was not that important as most tests were carried out underground. But it symbolised co-operation. |
| 1964 | In October Nikita Khrushchev was dismissed and replaced by Leonid Brezhnev. He appeared to be less interested in detente. He began increasing spending on the arms race. |
| 1964 | The USA began getting involved in the Vietnam War physically, following the Tonkin Incident. US involvement grew until 1969 when Nixon began his policy of ‘Vietnamisation’. The last US combat troops left in 1973. |
| 1968 | Warsaw Pact forces were sent into Czechoslovakia in August 1968. The Czech government had seemed increasingly independent since January. In April a programme was announced allowing freedom of speech, the press, assembly, and religion. By July the situation was so serious that the Czech Prime Minister Alexander Dubcek was summoned to Moscow. When he refused to go, the entire Soviet Politburo (cabinet) visited Prague. President Tito o Yugoslavia and Ceausescu of Romania also visited to offer Dubcek support. 200,000 Soviet troops invaded Prague in August 1968. Dubcek was dismissed. |
| 1968 | Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty was signed. The superpowers guaranteed not to supply nuclear technology to other countries. However, they both wanted to keep this technology to themselves. |
| 1970 | SALT (Strategic Arms Limitation Talks) begins. Brezhnev wanted to cut Soviet expenditure. An obvious way was to limit the number of arms being made. SALT 1 was signed in 1972. There would be a five-year delay on the building of more missiles. A further agreement was to be made at the end of this period (1977). Both sides also agreed to Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction Talks (MBFR). These continued until the 1980s with over 300 meetings and little agreement. Both sides agreed to use spy satellites to make sure that the numbers were being kept to. Existing weapons were not dealt with. |
| 1974 | SALT 2 began. This was an agreement on further reductions in strategic weapons. Again, it was on a five year basis. SALT 2 continued until 1979, and was to last until 1985. |
| 1975 | Soviet and US astronauts linked up in space for the first time. |
| 1975 | The USSR and USA were part of 35 countries who signed the Helsinki Agreement. This guaranteed that they would respect human rights and fundamental freedoms including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief. The current borders of Europe were also formally accepted. |
| 1977 | President Carter (1976-1980) criticised the USSR’s human rights record at the Belgrade Conference in 1977. This hampered detente. |
| 1979 | In Iran the Shah (who was pro-Western) was overthrown and replaced by an Islamic (pro-Soviet) republic. The US Embassy in Tehran was attacked and hostages seized. In Nicaragua guerrillas seized power with communist support. Cuba sent armed forces to Africa to help rebels in Angola. In Europe both sides deployed missiles as tensions heightened. |

Afghanistan

On Christmas Day 1979 the Soviet Army invaded Afghanistan. The President Hafizullah Amin was arrested and executed and a new pro-communist government was set up. President Brezhnev announced that the USSR had responded to an urgent request from the Kabul government for help. Almost immediately the good relations between the USA and the USSR broke down. Exports of US grain to the Soviet Union were stopped. The USA refused to ratify SALT 2 and the USA boycotted the 1980s Olympic Games which were held in Moscow. What was meant to be a brief invasion of Afghanistan turned into the USSR’s version of Vietnam. The USSR’s involvement was expensive, and took them to the verge of bankruptcy.

Was detente a success?

Both sides had much to gain through detente. Keeping up the arms race was costly, and both sides created trade agreements that benefited them economically. However suspicions still remained and the success of detente depended on changing personalities and relations with the rest of the world. China began to move away from the USSR following the Cuban Missile Crisis. By the 1970s, China was moving more towards the USA as their leaders visited each other (President Nixon visited Chairman Mao in 1972) and trade increased between the two countries.

Gorbachev and Reagan

Reagan was elected US President in 1980 and began spending more on US defence. He ordered research into the Star Wars programme (or Strategic Defence Initiative, SDI, a satellite anti-misslie system that would orbit the Earth.

In the USSR Brezhnev continued to support hard-line communist policies up until his death in 1982. Brezhnev was followed first by Andropov (who lived only a few months longer) and then by Chernenko. Neither lived long enough to make an impact. In March 1985 Mikhail Gorbachev became leader of the Soviet Union and immediately set about reforming the old Soviet system and improving relations with the USA. Gorbachev realised that the USSR could not afford an arms race with the USA. He accepted an invitation by Reagan to meet in Geneva in November 1985. In 1987 after several meetings, Gorbachev and Reagan signed the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty, which removed all medium range nuclear weapons from Europe.

SALT (Strategic Arms Limitation Talks) had also developed into START (STrategic Arms Reduction Talks) and on an official visit to Washington DC in December 1988 Gorbachev also proposed deep cuts in conventional (non-nuclear) US and Soviet forces.

The key figure in this period is Gorbachev. He firmly believed that the USSR needed reform and could not continue to compete with the USA. It is important to note that he had grown up in the post-Stalin era. He believed in two policies – Glasnost (openness) and Perestroika (economic restructuring). He used these as guiding principles to move the USSR forward. Glasnost in particular was aimed at getting rid of fear within the communist state, and creating better relations with the west.

Why had the Soviet Union become bankrupt?

For 40 years, the Soviet Union had supported communist regimes around the world through COMECON. In 1977, Cuba had joined. Cuba depended almost totally on the Soviet Union for aid. Military expenditure had continued to rise, despite Brezhnev’s attempts at arms limitation. No leader dared offend the military in case he was overthrown by a coup. Military expenditure prevented increased spending on consumer goods.

The space programme had been very ambitious and very expensive. In 1975, Soviet and US astronauts and met in space, but that would be almost the last symbol of genuine superpower status for the Soviet Union.

Inside the Soviet Union, prices were controlled and subsidised. This was a heavy drain on the government’s budget. The weakness of the economy and the inefficiency of the Soviet industry had meant that the Soviet Union had increasingly come to rely on imports of food and technology from the West. This had to be paid for in foreign currency. The USSR became desperate for foreign exchange.

There was little incentive to workers to raise standards because everyone was guaranteed a job, cheap housing and public services. There was an immense black market in Western goods and currency. Tourists would be offered roubles at three or five times the official exchange rate.

Even Brezhnev had realised that something had to be done about spending on arms, but in the end the Afghanistan War destroyed all of his plans.

Why did the Communist bloc collapse?

While talks continued to reduce conventional forces (non-nuclear) the Eastern bloc disintegrated and the USSR were powerless to stop it. The spark was provided in Poland, where the trade union Solidarity had been campaigning since 1980. In 1989, price rises led to strikes and mass protests. The Communist Party gave in and allowed free elections, hoping to hang on to power. The plan went badly wrong and Solidarity took over the government.

The same thing happened in Hungary. In September 1989, Hungary opened its borders with Austria; East Germany also opened its borders with Austria. Massive numbers of refugees began to flood into the West. When the communist leaders appealed to Gorbachev for help, to told them that they must sort out their own futures.

Suddenly the peoples of Eastern Europe realised that they no longer needed to fear that they Red Army would crush opposition as it had done in Hungary in 1956. In November 1989, the communist governments of East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria all resigned and the Berlin Wall was torn down. In Romania in December, Nicolai Ceausescu, the Stalinist dictator, was murdered.

In December, Gorbachev met George Bush, the new US President, and they declared that the Cold War was over.

Why did the Cold War end so suddenly?

* The USSR had been bankrupt for years. There was no incentive in the state-run industries to improve productivity and the government were unable to pay for imports which were needed to revitalise the economy.
* The cost of supporting communist regimes e.g. Cuba and revolutions around the world put strain on Soviet finances.
* The Afghan War (1979-89) drained the USSR’s economy. It was the Soviet equivalent of Vietnam. Many families who had lost soldiers in the war also lost faith in the Soviet government. Gorbachev ordered the withdrawal of Soviet troops too late.
* Gorbachev refused to use force to keep control over Eastern Europe. He was not prepared to order the Red Army into Poland, Hungary or Czechoslovakia. Since the states of Eastern Europe had only been kept in the communist bloc by the threat o retribution from the Red Army, Gorbachev’s withdrawal of that threat meant the collapse of the Warsaw Pact, the destruction of the Iron Curtain and the end of the Cold War.