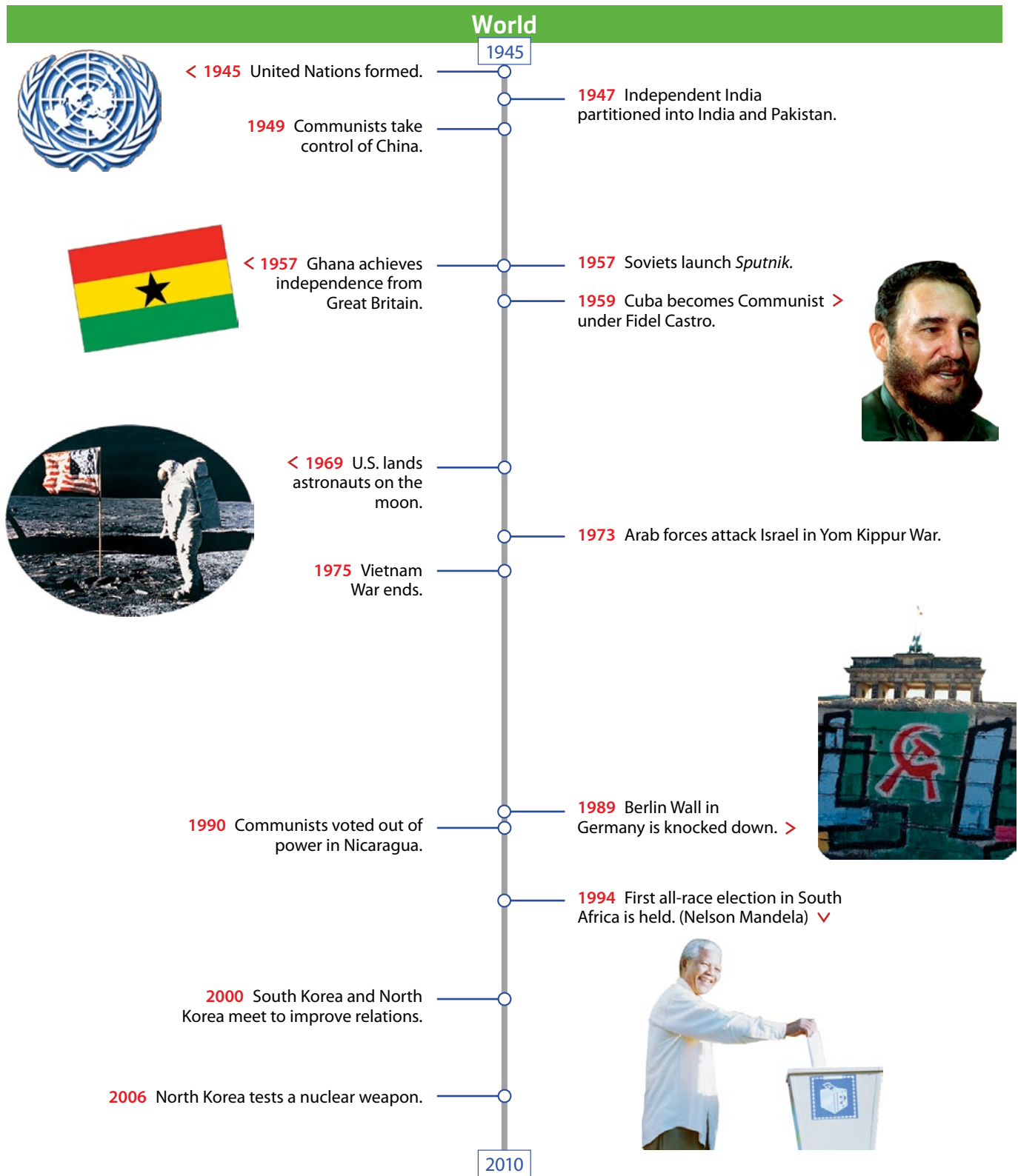


Timeline of Events 1945–Present

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Cold War: Superpowers Face Off

The Big Idea

The opposing economic and political philosophies of the United States and the Soviet Union led to global competition.

Why It Matters Now

The conflicts between the United States and the Soviet Union played a major role in reshaping the modern world.

Key Terms and People

United Nations
iron curtain
containment
Truman Doctrine
Marshall Plan
Cold War
NATO
Warsaw Pact
brinkmanship

Setting the Stage

In late 1943, as World War II raged, leaders of the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union met together at Tehran, the capital of Iran, to discuss a joint strategy for defeating Germany and to open discussion about how to set national borders after the war. Starting in June 1944, the Soviet army marched west, and the American army, joined by other European allies, marched east. When the two forces met at the Elbe River in Germany on April 25, 1945, they embraced each other warmly because they had defeated the Nazis. Their national leaders, however, regarded each other much more coolly. This animosity caused by competing political philosophies would lead to a nearly half-century of conflict called the Cold War.

Long-term Consequences of World War II

World War II was the most destructive war in history. The death toll of military personnel and civilians in Europe, Africa, and Asia during the conflict may have reached over 60 million. The total represented almost 3 percent of the world's population at the time. Loss of life was only one short-term consequence of the war. Massive land and property destruction, environmental changes, social issues, and problems involving hunger and disease also occurred. These problems would have a long-term impact on the continent.

Demographic and Social Consequences World War II was the first war in which civilian deaths outnumbered military ones. Many civilian deaths occurred in connection with battles, bombings, or enemy occupations. Several ethnic groups, such as Jews and Roma, were singled out for destruction, and their elimination changed the demographic makeup of countries such as Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary. In addition, the fighting and destruction as well as

Reading Check
Analyze Effects
What demographic changes did Europe undergo as a result of World War II?

changes in national borders caused millions of civilians to abandon their homes and property and move to new areas. Families were often split up, and many fathers died. Hunger and disease also took their toll on populations in the long term. Medical experts noted increased incidences of diabetes, depression, and heart disease following the war. Many soldiers and civilians also suffered adverse health effects as a result of exposure to chemical, biological, and atomic weapons.

Economic and Environmental Consequences Tank battles and bombing raids during the war caused a great deal of destruction both to the infrastructure (buildings, bridges, and roads) of countries and to the physical environment. Forests were depleted, and farmland was destroyed. It would take several years for crop production to reach prewar levels again. Countries began rebuilding soon after the war, and economies improved in most Western European nations. Countries under Soviet control took longer to rebound during the Cold War, as you will read below.

Allies Become Enemies

Even before World War II ended, the U.S. alliance with the Soviet Union had begun to unravel. The United States was upset that Joseph Stalin, the Soviet leader, had signed a nonaggression pact with Germany in 1939. Later, Stalin blamed the Allies for not invading German-occupied Europe earlier than 1944. Driven by these and other disagreements, the two allies began to pursue opposing goals.

Yalta Conference: A Postwar Plan The war was not yet over in February 1945. But the leaders of the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union met again at the Soviet Black Sea resort of Yalta. There, they agreed to divide Germany into zones of occupation controlled by the Allied military forces. Germany also would have to pay the Soviet Union to compensate for its loss of life and property during the war. Stalin agreed to join the war against Japan once Germany surrendered. He also promised that Eastern Europeans would have free elections. A skeptical Winston Churchill predicted that Stalin would keep his pledge only if the Eastern Europeans followed “a policy friendly to Russia.” Events after the war proved Churchill right, as the Soviet Union under Stalin never permitted free elections.

Winston Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Joseph Stalin meet at Yalta in 1945.



Creation of the United Nations and Geneva Conventions In June 1945, the United States and the Soviet Union temporarily set aside their differences. They joined 48 other countries in forming the **United Nations** (UN). This international organization was intended to protect the members against aggression. It was to be based in New York.

The new peacekeeping organization included a large General Assembly, in which each UN member nation could vote on a broad range of issues. An 11-member body called the Security Council had the real power to investigate and settle disputes, though. Its five permanent members were Britain, China, France, the United States, and the Soviet Union (now Russia). Each could veto any council action. This provision was intended to prevent any members of the council from voting as a bloc to override the others.

Many nations also joined together after the war in adopting a series of treaties on the treatment of civilians, prisoners of war (POWs), and those injured during wartime. Known as the Geneva Conventions, the treaties were adopted in 1949, added to in later years, and are still in force today.

Differing U.S. and Soviet Philosophy and Goals Despite agreement at Yalta and their presence on the UN Security Council, the United States and the Soviet Union split sharply after the war. The two “superpowers” were leaders both in military strength and in political and economic influence among the world’s nations. The United States promoted the capitalist economic philosophy, while the Soviet Union promoted communism.

The war had affected the two superpowers very differently. The United States suffered 400,000 deaths, but its cities remained intact. The Soviet Union had at least 50 times as many fatalities. Also, many Soviet cities were demolished. These contrasting situations, as well as political and economic differences, affected the two countries’ postwar goals and decisions.

Reading Check

Summarize

Why did the United States and the Soviet Union split after the war?

Superpower Aims in Europe

United States	Soviet Union
Encourage democracy in other countries to help prevent the rise of Communist governments	Encourage communism in other countries as part of a worldwide workers’ revolution
Gain access to raw materials and markets to fuel booming industries	Rebuild its war-ravaged economy using Eastern Europe’s industrial equipment and raw materials
Rebuild European governments to promote stability and create new markets for U.S. goods	Control Eastern Europe to protect Soviet borders and balance the U.S. influence in Western Europe
Reunite Germany to stabilize it and increase the security of Europe	Keep Germany divided to prevent its waging war again

Analyze Charts

Contrast Which U.S. and Soviet aims in Europe conflicted?

Eastern Europe's Iron Curtain

A major goal of the Soviet Union was to shield itself from another invasion from the west. Centuries of history had taught the Soviets to fear invasion. Because it lacked natural western borders, Russia fell victim to each of its neighbors in turn. In the 17th century, the Poles captured the Kremlin. During the next century, the Swedes attacked. Napoleon overran Moscow in 1812. The Germans invaded Russia during World Wars I and II.

Soviets Build a Buffer As World War II drew to a close, the Soviet troops pushed the Nazis back across Eastern Europe. At war's end, these troops occupied a strip of countries along the Soviet Union's own western border. Stalin regarded these countries as a necessary buffer, or wall of protection. He ignored the Yalta agreement and installed or secured Communist governments in Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Poland, and Yugoslavia.

The Soviet leader's American partner at Yalta, Franklin D. Roosevelt, had died on April 12, 1945. To Roosevelt's successor, Harry S. Truman, Stalin's reluctance to allow free elections in Eastern European nations was a clear violation of those countries' rights. Truman, Stalin, and Churchill met at Potsdam, Germany, in July 1945. There, Truman pressed Stalin to permit free elections in Eastern Europe. The Soviet leader refused. In a speech in early 1946, Stalin declared that communism and capitalism could not exist in the same world.

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Compare Maps

Political boundaries may change over time. Which countries' boundaries were expanded and which were contracted following World War II? Which countries were divided? Which disappeared?

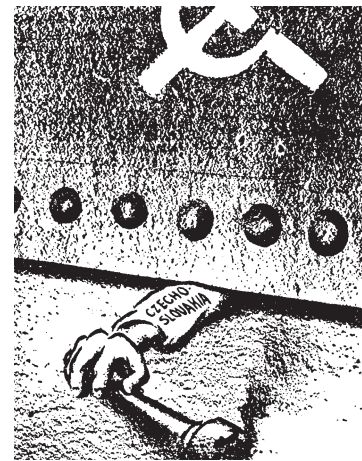
An Iron Curtain Divides East and West Europe now lay divided between East and West. Germany had been split into two sections. The Soviets controlled the eastern part, including half of the capital, Berlin. Under a Communist government, East Germany was named the German Democratic Republic. The western zones were occupied by forces and supporting personnel from the United States, Britain, and France. The population in West Germany, devastated by the war, relied on the Allies for goods and services. The Allies soon became concerned about the costs of continuing to support their German sectors and slowly began withdrawing from the country. In 1949, the united West German sectors officially became the Federal Republic of Germany.

Winston Churchill described the division of Europe following the war by referring to Soviet efforts to take control of its neighbors as establishing an “**iron curtain.**” Churchill’s phrase came to represent Europe’s division into mostly democratic Western Europe and Communist Eastern Europe.

“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. . . . All these famous cities and the populations around them lie in the Soviet sphere and all are subject in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and increasing measure of control from Moscow.”

—Winston Churchill,
“Iron Curtain” speech, March 5, 1946

Nine days after Churchill’s speech, Stalin responded angrily in an interview with the Soviet press. He said, “Mr. Churchill now stands as a firebrand of war.” The Soviet Union suffered much greater losses than either Great Britain or the United States, Stalin explained. “One can ask, therefore, what can be surprising in the fact that the Soviet Union, in a desire to ensure its security for the future, tries to achieve that these countries should have governments whose relations to the Soviet Union are loyal?”



The Iron Curtain is shown dropping on Czechoslovakia in this 1948 political cartoon.

United States Tries to Contain Soviets

U.S.-Soviet relations continued to worsen in 1946 and 1947. An increasingly worried United States tried to offset the growing Soviet threat to Eastern Europe. President Truman adopted a foreign policy called **containment**. It was a policy directed at blocking Soviet influence and stopping the expansion of communism. Containment policies included forming alliances and helping weak countries resist Soviet advances.

Reading Check

Draw Conclusions

What meanings do Churchill and Stalin hope to convey in using the phrases *iron curtain* and *firebrand of war*? Discuss this question with several classmates before writing your answer.

The Truman Doctrine In a speech asking Congress for foreign aid for Turkey and Greece, Truman contrasted democracy with communism:

“One way of life is based upon the will of the majority, and is distinguished by free institutions . . . free elections . . . and freedom from political oppression. The second way of life is based upon the will of a minority forcibly imposed upon the majority. It relies upon terror and oppression . . . fixed elections, and the suppression of personal freedoms. I believe it must be the policy of the United States to support free people . . . resisting attempted subjugation [control] by armed minorities or by outside pressures.”

—President Harry S. Truman,
speech to Congress, March 12, 1947

Truman’s support for countries that rejected communism was called the **Truman Doctrine**. It caused great controversy. Some opponents objected to American interference in other nations’ affairs. Others argued that the United States could not afford to carry on a global crusade against communism. Congress, however, immediately authorized more than \$400 million in aid to Turkey and Greece. The Truman Doctrine established an ongoing U.S. commitment to offer assistance to protect other democratic countries when it was deemed to be in the best interest of the United States.

The Marshall Plan Much of Western Europe lay in ruins after the war. There was also economic turmoil—a scarcity of jobs and food. In 1947, U.S. Secretary of State George Marshall proposed that the United States give aid to needy European countries. This assistance program, called the **Marshall Plan**, would provide food, machinery, and other materials to rebuild Western Europe. As Congress debated the \$12.5 billion program in 1948, the Communists seized power in Czechoslovakia. Congress immediately voted approval. The plan was a spectacular success. Even Communist Yugoslavia received aid after it broke away from Soviet domination.

The Berlin Airlift While Europe began rebuilding, the United States and its allies clashed with the Soviet Union over Germany. The Soviets wanted to keep their former enemy weak and divided. But in 1948, France, Britain, and the United States decided to withdraw their forces from Germany and allow their occupation zones to form one nation. The Soviet Union responded by holding West Berlin hostage.

Although Berlin lay well within the Soviet occupation zone of Germany, it too had been divided into four zones. The Soviet Union cut off highway, water, and rail traffic into Berlin’s western zones. The city faced starvation. Stalin gambled that the Allies would surrender West Berlin or give up their idea of reunifying Germany. But American and British officials flew food and supplies into West Berlin for nearly 11 months. In May 1949, the Soviet Union admitted defeat and lifted the blockade.

Reading Check
Make Inferences
What was Truman’s major reason for offering aid to other European countries?

History in Depth

Divided Germany, 1948–1949

The Berlin Airlift

From June 1948 to May 1949, Allied planes took off and landed every three minutes in West Berlin. On 278,000 flights, pilots brought in 2.3 million tons of food, fuel, medicine, and even Christmas gifts to West Berliners.



Reading Check

Summarize

What Soviet action led to the Berlin airlift?

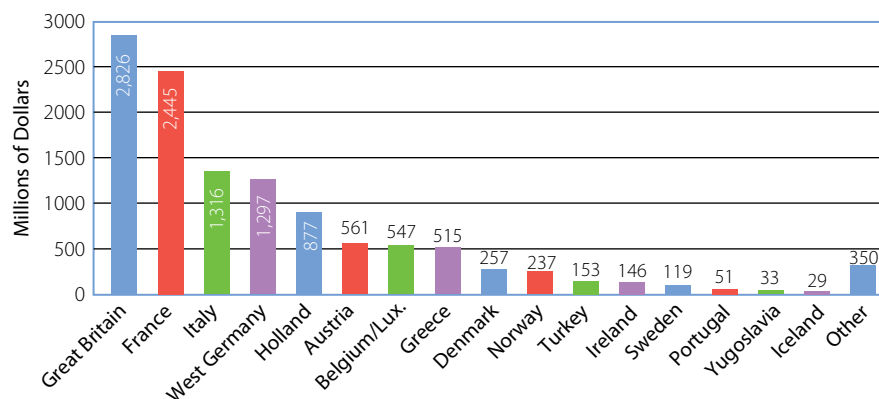
Assistance to Asian Nations The Marshall Plan was designed to help European nations recover from the war. President Truman also initiated a similar program to provide technical assistance for non-European nations, such as those in Southeast Asia as well as Pakistan, Israel, and Iran, which had been impacted by the war. The Point Four program provided technical expertise to help build up agriculture, public health, and education within affected countries. It gave rise to other assistance programs administered by an agency of the UN but funded largely by the United States.

The Cold War Divides the World

These conflicts marked the start of the **Cold War** between the United States and the Soviet Union. A cold war is a struggle over political differences carried on by means short of military action or war. Beginning in 1949, the superpowers used spying, propaganda, diplomacy, and secret operations in their dealings with each other. Much of the world allied with one side or the other. In fact, until the Soviet Union finally broke up in 1991, the Cold War not only dictated U.S. and Soviet foreign policy but influenced world alliances as well.

Superpowers Form Rival Alliances The Berlin blockade heightened Western Europe's fears of Soviet aggression. As a result, in 1949, ten western European nations joined with the United States and Canada to form a defensive military alliance. It was called the North Atlantic Treaty

Countries Aided by the Marshall Plan, 1948–1951



Source: *Problèmes Économiques* No. 306

Interpret Charts

- 1. Draw Conclusions** Which country received the most aid from the United States?
- 2. Make Inferences** Why do you think Great Britain and France received so much aid?

Organization (**NATO**). An attack on any NATO member would be met with armed force by all member nations.

The Soviet Union saw NATO as a threat and formed its own alliance in 1955. It was called the **Warsaw Pact** and included the Soviet Union, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and Albania. In 1961, the East Germans built a wall to separate East and West Berlin. The Berlin Wall symbolized a world divided into rival camps. However, not every country joined the new alliances. Some, like India, chose not to align with either side. And China, the largest Communist country, came to distrust the Soviet Union. It remained nonaligned.

In the Western Hemisphere, the United States pushed for the formation of an organization of countries in North, Central, and South America and the Caribbean. Formed in 1948, the Organization of American States (OAS) hoped to bring peace and security to its member nations and to increase economic and social cooperation.

The Threat of Nuclear War As these alliances were forming, the Cold War threatened to heat up enough to destroy the world. The United States already had atomic bombs, thanks to the work of scientists in America such as Italian-born Enrico Fermi, who directed early experiments in splitting atoms in the early 1940s. Fermi was one of the architects of the nuclear age. In 1949, the Soviet Union exploded its own atomic weapon. President Truman was determined to develop a more deadly weapon before the Soviets did. He authorized work on a thermonuclear weapon in 1950.

The hydrogen or H-bomb would be much more powerful than the A-bomb. Its power came from the fusion, or joining together, of atoms rather than the splitting of atoms, as in the A-bomb. Edward Teller, a Hungarian-born American nuclear physicist, was a leading proponent of the H-bomb and played an important role in its design. The team that



developed the new weapon was based in Los Alamos, New Mexico. In 1952, the United States tested the first H-bomb on a group of coral islands in the Pacific. It yielded an explosion equivalent to 10 million tons (10 megatons) of TNT, more than 600 times more powerful than the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima, Japan. The Soviets were also hard at work on their own H-bomb and exploded one in 1953.

Dwight D. Eisenhower became the U.S. president in 1953. He appointed the firmly anti-Communist John Foster Dulles as his secretary of state. If the Soviet Union or its supporters attacked U.S. interests, Dulles threatened, the United States would “retaliate instantly, by means and at places of our own choosing.” This willingness to go to the brink, or edge, of war became known as **brinkmanship**. Brinkmanship required a reliable source of nuclear weapons and airplanes to deliver them. So, the United States strengthened its air force and began producing stockpiles of nuclear weapons. The Soviet Union responded with its own military buildup, beginning an arms race that would go on for four decades.