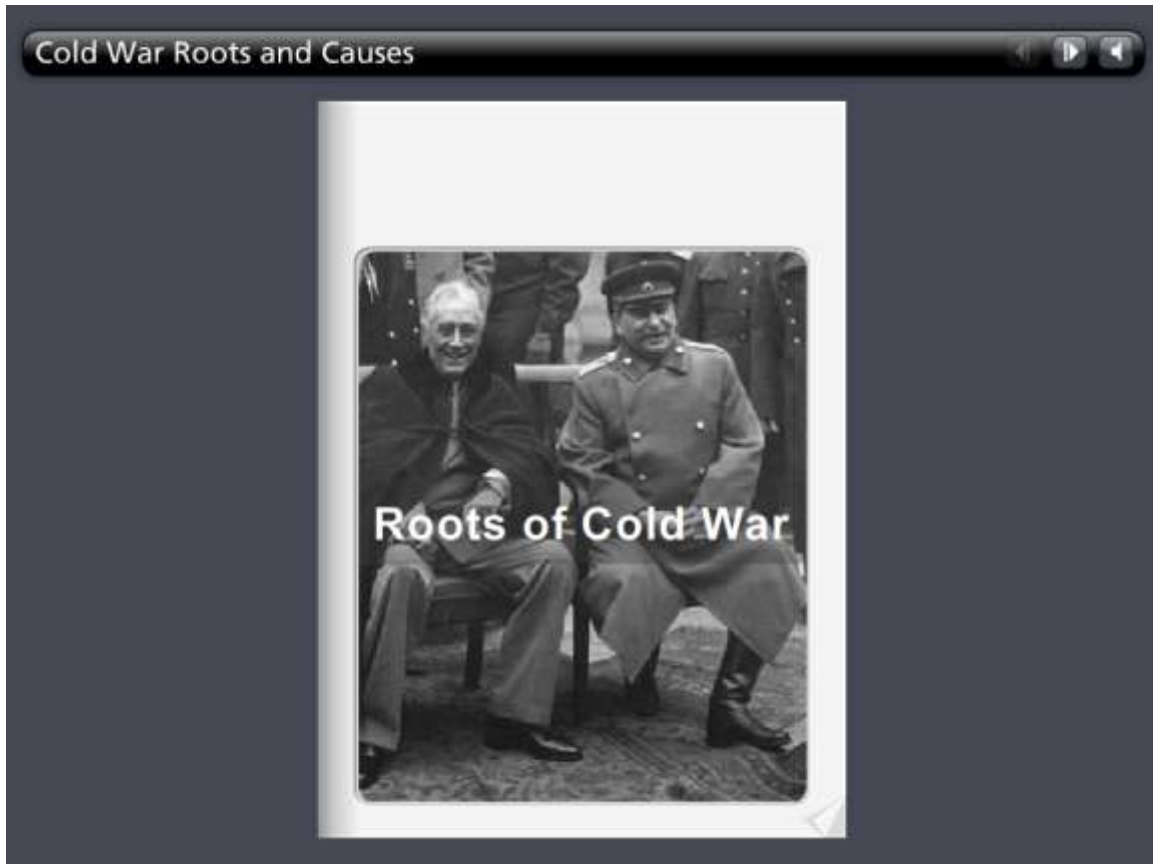


Module 10: The Cold War
Topic 1 Content: Cold War Roots and Causes




Tensions at Yalta

Cold War Roots and Causes

Tensions at Yalta

The Yalta Conference February 4-11, 1945

- Soviet Union - installed provisional government in Poland
- Stalin agreed to join the U.N. and help fight the war in the Pacific after the defeat of Germany.
- Democracy for liberated countries
- Germany divided among Allies



Big Three at Yalta

In February of 1945, the Allied powers met in Yalta to talk about what they planned to do with Europe after they won World War II. Germany had not lost the war yet, but they were fighting a war on two fronts and close to defeat. Although they fought as allies during the war, tensions were high at the conference as each of the leaders of the big three, Great Britain, the U.S. and the Soviet Union tried to impose their vision of what Europe should look like after the war was over.

Stalin did not trust the other two leaders and demanded that the Soviets have direct influence over Poland as well as some of its territory. The Soviets were already in control of much of Eastern Europe after the German troops retreated. The Soviet Union wanted Poland as a buffer zone in the event that Western Europe attempted an invasion. Churchill was the only holdout for democracy in Poland. Roosevelt believed that he could work with Stalin to build the peace. The Soviets claimed they would quickly hold elections in Poland.

In return, Stalin agreed to join the United Nations and help fight the war in the Pacific after Germany was defeated. The three leaders also agreed that democratic governments would be established in all of the liberated countries at the end of the war, with the exception of Germany. Germany and its capital, Berlin, were to be divided among the Allies and occupied until new governments were established, and the country's military capabilities neutralized.

Two Superpowers


Cold War Roots and Causes

Two Superpowers

Satellite State - country that is formally independent, but under heavy political and economic influence or control by another country.

U.S.S.R. had established control over Eastern Europe by 1948

Two superpowers: U.S. and U.S.S.R.



Following the war, when it became clear that Stalin had no intention of relinquishing control over Poland, and would keep even more territories in Eastern Europe, the specter of another war loomed over Europe. By 1948, the Soviet Union had established satellite states throughout the region. These countries were formally independent, but in reality, were under the influence of the Soviet Union and had little freedom to pursue their own policies.

With most of Europe battling back from the brink of destruction, that left only the United States in any position to check the Soviet's move. There were now only two major powers, or superpowers. The rivalry between these nations would define much of world history over the next 40 years.

[Map courtesy Mosedschurte.]

Competing Ideologies

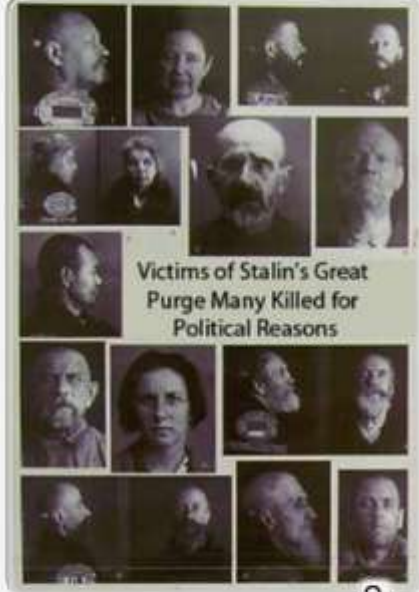
Cold War Roots and Causes

Competing Ideologies

- U.S.S.R. - Communism/Dictatorship
- U.S. - Capitalism/Democracy

Communism
- Gov't owns the major forces of production
- No private property

Only one party, the Communist Party, and no free elections.



Victims of Stalin's Great Purge Many Killed for Political Reasons

The differences between the Soviet Union and the United States were based in ideas about government and economics. America, and much of Western Europe, had democratically-elected governments and capitalist economies. The Soviets, and much of Eastern Europe, had dictatorships and communist economies.

Remember that communism is an economic system whereby the government owns the major forces of production. Individuals cannot own private property, such as real estate or businesses. Under communism, the government determines what goods are produced, how many are produced, and what these items cost. In practice, the government uses most of a country's industry to build items for its purposes, such as military hardware, or certain types of crops, rather than building things that people want. If you wanted to buy a car in the Soviet Union, you would have had much fewer choices than you would in the U.S. The stated goal of the Soviet government was to build a society where wealth was distributed equally among the citizens. In reality, this wasn't the case, as some made more than others.

The Soviet Union severely limited peoples' freedoms. Those people who criticized the government were punished, imprisoned, and perhaps killed. There was only one political party, the Communist Party, and there were no free elections.

Capitalism and Democracy

Cold War Roots and Causes


Capitalism and Democracy

Capitalism

- Based in private property
- Supply and demand
- Unequal distribution of wealth

Democracy

- Most citizens over 18 can vote
- Any number of political parties
- Citizens have broad individual freedoms



Civil Rights March on Washington

In contrast, the capitalist, or free enterprise, economies of the U.S. and much of Western Europe are based in private property. People can own real estate or companies and can make profits. Businesses operate on the basis of supply and demand in which companies produce goods that people want, or they go out of business. The government regulates some industries to prevent monopolies, but it doesn't control the entire economy as in a communist economy. Wealth is not distributed equally in a capitalist society. Some people have more than they can spend, and others don't have enough to live on. The government does play some role in re-distributing wealth between rich and poor to try and alleviate suffering.

The U.S. has a democratically-elected government. Most citizens who are over 18 years of age can vote, and there is no restriction on the number of political parties there can be. Citizens have broad individual freedoms, like the freedoms of speech and religion, including the right to criticize their leaders.

Arms Race

Cold War Roots and Causes


Arms Race

1949: Soviet Union tests first nuclear weapon

Dual development of hydrogen bombs

Deterrence - the idea that a country should reveal its destructive capacity in order to prevent or deter its enemy from attacking.

Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD)



The H-Bomb dropped over Bikini Atoll was over 1,000 times more powerful than any used in WWII

In 1949, the Soviet Union successfully tested its first nuclear weapon. This set off an arms race, which would become one of the defining characteristics of the Cold War. Shortly thereafter, both the U.S. and the Soviets developed hydrogen bombs which were far more destructive than the atomic bombs dropped on Japan.

The nuclear arms race between the two superpowers threatened not only the two rivals, but all of mankind, given the destructive capacities of these weapons. This arms race was based in the theory of deterrence. This was the idea that a country should show how powerful it was to its enemies in order to prevent or deter its enemy from attacking.


Both superpowers pursued this idea, building as many nuclear weapons as they could in an attempt to show their enemy that any attack would be met with a counter-attack of equal or greater force. This theory is sometimes referred to as Mutually Assured Destruction, or MAD. Whether this theory was successful is unproven. Neither side ever used nuclear weapons against each other; however, there were times during the Cold War when nuclear destruction was a strong possibility.

Containment

Cold War Roots and Causes

Containment

- The policy of containing communism by preventing its spread to new countries
- Truman Doctrine (1947) - the U.S. would support peoples who were threatened by subjugation from outside forces.
- One of the strategies that dominated U.S. foreign policy for the entire Cold War

A black and white portrait of President Harry Truman, wearing glasses and a suit, looking slightly to the right of the camera.

The U.S. did not want to fight the Soviets on the battlefield. The government knew that any war between the two would be lengthy and deadly, even if neither side used nuclear weapons. Instead of facing the Soviets head on, or trying to overthrow their government, the U.S. adopted a strategy of containment - they would try and contain communism by preventing its spread to other countries.

The first use of the containment strategy was in 1947 when President Harry Truman authorized the distribution of money and military supplies to defeat communist revolutions in Greece and Turkey. In the speech which announced this policy, the president laid out the Truman Doctrine, which stated that the U.S. would support any country that was threatened by control from outside forces. This was an obvious reference to the Soviet Union. Many historians refer to Truman's speech as the start of the Cold War.

Containment became one of the strategies that dominated U.S. foreign policy for the entire Cold War, although its influence was stronger and weaker at different points. The strategy also led the country into two major wars in Korea and Vietnam, which had limited effects on the spread of communism.

Military Alliances

Cold War Roots and Causes

Military Alliances

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)
Western Europe and U.S.
1949

Warsaw Pact
Soviet Union and satellite states
1955

Both alliances were formed to protect against invasion from the other.



The map illustrates the division of Europe into four categories: NATO (blue), Warsaw Pact (red), Neutral Countries (grey), and Communist Regimes (green). A thick black line, representing the Iron Curtain, runs through the center of Europe, separating the Western and Eastern blocs.

The Cold War did not just involve the Americans and the Soviets. At the end of World War II, each of these countries was the driving force behind opposing alliances. In 1949, much of Western Europe joined the U.S. to form the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, or NATO, which is still around. At first, NATO's primary function was to prevent aggression from the Soviet Union and its communist allies. This role has changed in recent times with the end of communism in Europe.

Meanwhile, behind the Iron Curtain in Eastern Europe, the communist satellite states of the Soviet Union joined together under the Warsaw Pact to prevent aggression from the United States and its allies in Western Europe. This alliance was formalized in 1955.

Although these alliances were formed to protect countries in case of war, they actually increased tensions between the two sides.

With all the countries lined up on opposite sides, the battle lines, both real and ideological, were clear. Although there were never any direct conflicts between these rivals, over the next forty years, the Cold War dominated the relationships between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. The tensions in these relationships brought the world to the verge of destruction.