

The Cold War 1945 – 1991

Origins of the Cold War

- **Traditional/Orthodox Perspective** (post WWII):
 - Soviet expansion into Europe was key cause of conflict
 - Supported US policy of containment
 - Situation in Central and Eastern Europe after WWII allowed for Soviet expansion
 - USA forced to move from “traditional” isolationist to interventionism
 - “The brave and essential response of free men to Communist aggression” Schlesinger
 - “Soviet Union . . . beginning to revert to their revolutionary effort throughout the world” Feis
- **Revisionist School Perspective** (1970s and 80s):
 - USSR in 1945 no position to threaten the West
 - USA had overwhelming military, technological and economic strength
 - Soviet policy in Central and Eastern Europe was cautious and defensive – friendly buffer to prevent German resurgence
 - American capitalism and its insatiable demand for new markets and raw materials turned USA into expansionist power – foreign policy linked to needs of American capitalism
 - “American diplomatic activities were signed not to contain communist aggression but promote commercial penetration” Williams
 - “Basic source of the world crisis was an expansive American foreign policy” Joyce
- **Post – Revisionist School** (1990s reaction to excesses of revisionism):
 - Less concerned with placing blame on either power – both contributed to Cold War
 - Geopolitical vacuum after WWII – USA and USSR motivated by security interests rather than expansionism
 - USSR responded to security interests but Soviet expansion threatened European balance of power and required US response
 - Soviet archives: Stalin hoped communism would spread to Western Europe and Asia
 - USSR: search for security, role of ideology, post – war reconstruction needs, Stalin’s personality
 - US: self – determination, fear of communism, illusion of omnipotence fostered by economic and military strength
 - “neither side can bear sole responsibility for the onset of the Cold War” Gaddis
 - “traditions, belief systems . . . all combined to stimulate antagonism, and almost no factor operated in either country to hold it back” May

1.1 1945 Conferences and the Emergence of the Superpowers

- **Tehran Conference**, December 1943
 - Big 3 met to resolve potential conflict between the allies during the war
 - Confirmed unconditional surrender of Germany as Allied objective
 - Agreed on establishing international organisation to secure world peace after defeat of Axis Powers = endorsement of UN Security Council
 - Agreed Soviets would control outer Mongolia and Manchuria
 - West open second front in 1944; once Germany defeated USSR would declare war on Japan
 - Discussions over boundaries of post – war Poland: Churchill suggested Russians keep areas of eastern Poland seized in 1939, while Poland compensated by receiving territory from her western border in Germany
- **Yalta Conference**, February 1945
 - Disagreements concerning Poland and Germany were discussed and settled: Eastern provinces of Poland absorbed into Soviet Union while it would gain parts of Germany
 - Stalin agreed to take a few London Poles into newly established Lublin government, but participation in democratic process seriously restricted with arrest of 16 leaders of Polish underground movement
 - Soviet pledge that elections would be held in Eastern Europe after WWII
 - Germany to be divided into four zones of occupations: US, UK, USSR, France
 - Reparations would be paid by Germany
 - Japan return territory taken from Russia in 1905 Russo – Japanese war
 - Alliance between US, USSR and UK = planned creation of United Nations
 - USSR agreed to declare war against Japan within 3 months of German surrender
- **Potsdam Conference**, July 1945
 - Meeting between Truman, Churchill/Attlee and Stalin
 - Germany, Berlin and Austria divided into four zones of occupations
 - Reparations: USSR receive 25% of industry in Western Germany and anything in Soviet zone, while Soviets were to send food, coal and raw materials from their zone to the West, valuing 60% of industry received from the West
 - Reshaping of Poland concluded: set line of Oder – Neisse rivers as Poland’s temporary western boundary, eastern parts absorbed
 - Truman mentioned to Stalin a weapon of “unusually destructive force” = offsetting conventional offensive power of Red Army
 - Called for unconditional surrender of Japanese if they wished to avoid ‘prompt and utter destruction’

"An economic division of Germany could lead to a political division of Germany. This deal laid the basis for an Eastern and a Western Germany" LaFeber

"vagueness and lack of agreement of protocols on such central issue was an indication of difficulty with which big 3 encountered in making a settlement" – Schlesinger on Potsdam

"because they could not agree on how to govern Europe, they began to divide it" Yergin

1.2 Emerging Differences between the Superpowers

Long Term

- **Ideology – democracy vs dictatorship**
 - United States: liberal democracy where citizens were granted civil liberties such as freedom of speech and right to vote
 - o US desired a reunified Germany
 - USSR: Communist dictatorship with centrally planned socialist economy founded upon the principles of Marxism, where citizens enjoyed few freedoms and rights
 - o USSR sought control and domination of Eastern Europe
- **Economics – capitalism vs communism**
 - United States: market economy, private ownership of means of production, self-interest is central motivator – focused on profits and consumerism to drive economic growth
 - o US wanted to help war – torn capitalist nations in Europe (Marshall Plan) and build up their capitalist economies
 - USSR: command economy, profits theoretically shared amongst whole population
 - o USSR wanted to lead world to communism – leader of international communism
- **Propaganda**
 - United States: portrayed communism as unstoppable force – shadow spreading across the world
 - USSR: restricted access to the West – foreigners and foreign ideas perceived as enemies of Soviet Union
- **Religion**
 - United States: Christian society
 - USSR: atheist society

Short Term

- **Power Conflict**
 - United States: sought control of new democratic capitalist world after WW2 – rebuilding of Western Europe and maintenance of economic and military dominance
 - USSR: advance communism – gradually dominated Eastern Europe – used as buffer zone
 - o Red Army used to consolidate political influence
 - o Gradual tightening of political control accompanied by process of linking economies of Eastern Europe to USSR = dependency
 - Western bloc vs Eastern bloc
 - o **1949 North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)** - joint defence of Western Europe vs **1955 Warsaw Pact** – consolidated Eastern bloc supporters

- Espionage
 - United States: National Security Council in 1947 and CIA to coordinate the “gathering of intelligence”
 - USSR: KGB conducted surveillance of its citizens
- Emerging Differences:
 - Poland
 - US backed Polish government in exile based in London
 - USSR recognised friendly puppet government in Poland
 - Germany
 - US desired German reunification and determined to keep Stalin out of West Germany
 - Stalin wanted high reparations from Germany
 - Eastern Europe
 - US disagreed with Communist subjugation of Eastern Europe but did not physically interfere
 - USSR salami tactics: subjugating Eastern Europe to communism by beginning with broad alliance of anti – fascist parties – gradually sliced away from governmental power one party after another until all that remained was communist core loyal to Moscow
- Post – WWII
 - USA
 - Unique position of power, with its “allies exhausted and its rivals defeated” – Painter
 - Much of the world’s manufacturing capacity, food surpluses and financial reserves resided in their borders
 - They “possessed the world’s mightiest military machine” – Spellman
 - USSR
 - Economy, environment, people heavily damaged
 - Severe damage to “crop land, farm animals, factories, mines, transportation networks and housing stock” – Gorlizki
 - Possessed formidable armed forces – world’s most powerful army
 - Occupied most of central and Eastern Europe

“Both sides built Empires after WW2 but not the same kind.” – Gaddis

“The West formed NATO to directly confront communism and totalitarianism – an attack on one NATO member would equate to an attack on all” Bell

“The crude Soviet methods of forcing communist government on the states of eastern Europe were bound to lend credence to the claims that Stalin’s aims were clearly expansionist” - Lowe