

# The spread of communism outside Europe and its effects on international relations

## SUMMARY OF EVENTS

Although the first communist state was set up in Europe (in Russia in 1917), communism was not confined to Europe; it later spread to Asia where several other communist states emerged, each with its own brand of Marxism. As early as 1921, encouraged by the Russian Revolution, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) had been formed. At first it co-operated with the Kuomintang (KMT), the party trying to govern China and to control the generals, who were struggling among themselves for power. As the KMT established its control over more of China, it felt strong enough to do without the help of the communists and tried to destroy them. Civil war developed between the KMT and the CCP.

The situation became more complex when the Japanese occupied the Chinese province of Manchuria in 1931 and invaded other parts of China in 1937. When the Second World War ended in the defeat and withdrawal of the Japanese, the KMT leader Chiang Kai-shek, with American help, and the communists under their leader Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-tung), were still fighting it out. At last, *in 1949, Mao triumphed*, and Chiang and his supporters fled to the island of Taiwan (Formosa); the second major country had followed Russia into communism (see Section 19.4). In 1951 the Chinese invaded and occupied neighbouring Tibet; an uprising by the Tibetans in 1959 was crushed, and the country has remained under Chinese rule ever since.

*Meanwhile communism had also gained a hold in Korea*, which had been controlled by Japan since 1910. After the Japanese defeat in 1945, the country was divided into two zones: the north occupied by the Russians, the south by the Americans. The Russians set up a communist government in their zone, and since no agreement could be reached on what government to have for the whole country, Korea, like Germany, remained divided into two states. *In 1950 communist North Korea invaded South Korea*. United Nations forces (mostly American) moved in to help the south, while the Chinese helped the north. After much advancing and retreating, the war ended in 1953 with South Korea still non-communist.

In **Cuba**, early in 1959, Fidel Castro drove out the corrupt dictator Batista. Although Castro was not a communist to begin with, the Americans soon turned against him, particularly in 1962 when they discovered that Russian missiles were based on the island (see Section 7.4(b)). These were later removed after a tense Cold War crisis which brought the world to the brink of nuclear war.

In **Vietnam**, a similar situation to that in Korea occurred after the Vietnamese had won their independence from France (1954): the country was divided, temporarily it was thought, into north (communist) and south (non-communist). When a rebellion broke out in the south against a corrupt government, communist North Vietnam gave military assistance to the rebels; the Americans became heavily involved, supporting the South Vietnamese government to stop the spread of communism. In 1973 the Americans withdrew from the struggle, following which the South Vietnamese forces



rapidly collapsed, and the whole country became united under a communist government (1975). Before the end of the year, neighbouring **Cambodia** and **Laos** had also become communist.

In **South America**, which had a tradition of right-wing military dictatorships, communism made little headway, except in **Chile**, where in 1970 a Marxist government was democratically elected, with Salvador Allende as president. This was an interesting but short-lived experiment, since in 1973 the government was overthrown and Allende killed.

**Africa** saw the establishment of governments with strong Marxist connections in **Mozambique** (1975) and **Angola** (1976), both of which had just succeeded in winning independence from Portugal. This caused more western alarm and interference (see Sections 24.6(d) and 25.6).

During the second half of the 1970s a more consistent thaw in the Cold War began, with *the period known as détente (a more permanent relaxation of tensions)*. There were several hiccups, however, such as the Russian invasion of Afghanistan (1979), before Mikhail Gorbachev (who became Russian leader in March 1985) made a really determined effort to end the Cold War altogether, and some arms limitations agreements were signed.

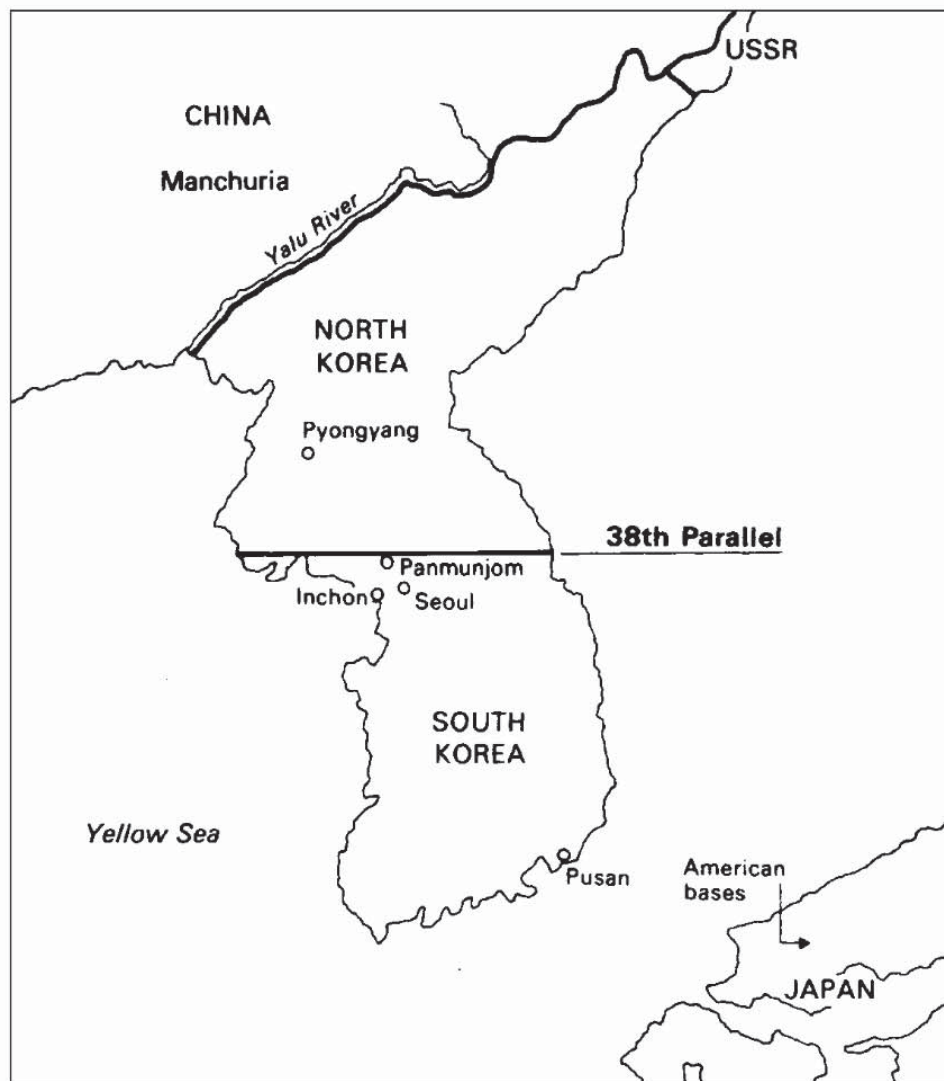
*Then the international situation changed dramatically:* in 1989 communism began to collapse in eastern Europe; by 1991 the communist bloc had disintegrated and East and West Germany were re-united. Even the USSR split up and ceased to be communist. Although communism still remained in China, Vietnam and North Korea, the Cold War was well and truly over.

## 8.1 THE WAR IN KOREA AND ITS EFFECTS ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

### (a) Background to the war

The origins of the war lay in the fact that Korea had been under Japanese occupation since 1910. When the Japanese were defeated (August 1945), the USA and the USSR agreed to divide the country into two zones along the 38th parallel (the 38-degree-north line of latitude), so that they could jointly organize the Japanese surrender and withdrawal – Russia in the north (which had a frontier with the USSR) and the Americans in the south. As far as the Americans were concerned, it was not intended to be a permanent division. The United Nations wanted free elections for the whole country and the Americans agreed, believing that since their zone contained two-thirds of the population, the communist north would be outvoted. However, the unification of Korea, like that of Germany, soon became part of Cold War rivalry: no agreement could be reached, and the artificial division continued (see Map 8.1).

Elections were held in the south, supervised by the UN, and *the independent Republic of Korea, or South Korea* was set up with Syngman Rhee as president and its capital at Seoul (August 1948). The following month, the Russians created *the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, or North Korea* under the communist government of Kim Il Sung, with its capital at Pyongyang. In 1949 Russian and American troops were withdrawn, leaving a potentially dangerous situation: most Koreans bitterly resented the artificial division forced on their country by outsiders, but both leaders claimed the right to rule the whole country. Before very long it was clear that Syngman Rhee was a ruthless authoritarian, while Kim Il Sung was even worse: he seemed to be modelling himself on Stalin, arresting and executing many of his critics. Without warning, North Korean troops invaded South Korea in June 1950.



Map 8.1 The war in Korea

### (b) Why did the North Koreans invade the South?

Even now it is still not clear how the attack originated, or whose idea it was. *The following suggestions have been offered:*

- It was Kim Il Sung's own idea, possibly encouraged by a statement made by Dean Acheson, the American Secretary of State, earlier in 1950. Acheson was talking about which areas around the Pacific the USA intended to defend, and for some reason he did not include Korea.
- Kim Il Sung may have been encouraged by the new Chinese communist government, who were at the same time massing troops in Fukien province facing Taiwan, as if they were about to attack Chiang Kai-shek.
- Perhaps Stalin and the Russians were responsible, wanting to test Truman's determination; they had supplied the North Koreans with tanks and other equipment. A communist takeover of the south would strengthen Russia's position in the Pacific and be a splendid gesture against the Americans, to make up for Stalin's failure in West Berlin.
- The communists claimed that South Korea had started the war, when troops of the 'bandit traitor' Syngman Rhee had crossed the 38th parallel.



Probably the most widely accepted view nowadays is that Kim Il Sung himself pressed the idea of a campaign to unify the peninsula, and that both the USSR and China approved the plan and promised help in the way of war materials, but made it clear that they had no desire themselves to become directly involved.

### **(c) The USA takes action**

*There were several reasons for President Truman's decision to intervene:*

- He was convinced that the attack was Stalin's doing; he took it as a deliberate challenge and saw it as part of a vast Russian plan to spread communism as widely as possible.
- Some Americans saw the invasion as similar to Hitler's policies during the 1930s. Appeasement of the aggressors had failed then, and therefore it was essential not to make the same mistake again.
- Truman thought it was important to support the United Nations Organization, which had replaced the League of Nations. The League had failed to preserve peace because the great powers – and especially the USA – had not been prepared to back it. Truman was determined that the USA should not repeat that fatal mistake.
- Truman was a Democrat president, and he and his party were coming under severe criticism from the Republicans for their failure to take action against what they saw as the dangerous spread of world communism. A Republican senator, Joseph McCarthy, claimed that the State Department was 'infested' with communists who were, in effect, working for the USSR (see Section 23.3). Truman was anxious to show that this claim was preposterous.

American policy therefore changed decisively: instead of just economic help and promises of support, Truman decided it was essential for the West to take a stand by supporting South Korea. American troops in Japan were ordered to Korea even before the UN had decided what action to take. The UN Security Council called on North Korea to withdraw her troops, and when this was ignored, asked member states to send help to South Korea. This decision was reached in the absence of the Russian delegation, who were boycotting meetings in protest against the UN refusal to allow Mao's new Chinese regime to be represented, and who would certainly have vetoed such a decision. In the event, the USA and 14 other countries (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Nationalist China, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Colombia, Greece, Turkey, Panama, the Philippines, Thailand and Britain) sent troops, though the vast majority were Americans. All forces were under the command of American General MacArthur.

Their arrival was just in time to prevent the whole of South Korea from being overrun by the communists. By September, communist forces had captured the whole country except the south-east, around the port of Pusan. UN reinforcements poured into Pusan and on 15 September, American marines landed at Inchon, near Seoul, 200 miles behind the communist front lines. Then followed an incredibly swift collapse of the North Korean forces: by the end of September UN troops had entered Seoul and cleared the south of communists. Instead of calling for a ceasefire, now that the original UN objective had been achieved, Truman ordered an invasion of North Korea, with UN approval, aiming to unite the country and hold free elections. The Chinese Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai (Chou En-lai) warned that China would resist if UN troops entered North Korea, but the warning was ignored. By the end of October, UN troops had captured Pyongyang, occupied two-thirds of North Korea and reached the River Yalu, the frontier between North Korea and China.



*The Chinese government was seriously alarmed:* the Americans had already placed a fleet between Taiwan and the mainland to prevent an attack on Chiang, and there seemed every chance that they would now invade Manchuria (the part of China bordering on North Korea). In November therefore, the Chinese launched a massive counter-offensive with over 300 000 troops, described as ‘volunteers’; by mid-January 1951 they had driven the UN troops out of North Korea, crossed the 38th parallel and captured Seoul again. MacArthur was shocked at the strength of the Chinese forces and argued that the best way to defeat communism was to attack Manchuria, with atomic bombs if necessary. However, Truman thought this would provoke a large-scale war, which the USA did not want, so *he decided to settle for merely containing communism*; MacArthur was removed from his command. In June UN troops cleared the communists out of South Korea again and fortified the frontier. Peace talks opened in Panmunjom and lasted for two years, ending in July 1953 with an agreement that the frontier should be roughly along the 38th parallel, where it had been before the war began.

#### **(d) The results of the war were wide-ranging**

- 1 For Korea itself it was a disaster: the country was devastated, about four million Korean soldiers and civilians had been killed and five million people were homeless. The division seemed permanent; both states remained intensely suspicious of each other and heavily armed, and there were constant ceasefire violations.
- 2 Truman could take some satisfaction from having contained communism and could claim that this success, plus American rearmament, dissuaded world communism from further aggression. However, many Republicans felt that the USA had lost an opportunity to destroy communism in China, and this feeling contributed towards some of the later excesses of McCarthyism (see Section 23.3).
- 3 The UN had exerted its authority and reversed an act of aggression, but the communist world denounced it as a tool of the capitalists.
- 4 The military performance of communist China was impressive; she had prevented the unification of Korea under American influence and was now clearly a world power. The fact that she was still not allowed a seat in the UN seemed even more unreasonable.
- 5 The conflict brought a new dimension to the Cold War. American relations were now permanently strained with China as well as with Russia; the familiar pattern of both sides trying to build up alliances appeared in Asia as well as Europe. China supported the Indo-Chinese communists in their struggle for independence from France, and at the same time offered friendship and aid to under-developed Third World countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America; ‘peaceful coexistence’ agreements were signed with India and Burma (1954).

Meanwhile the Americans tried to encircle China with bases: in 1951 defensive agreements were signed with Australia and New Zealand, and in 1954 these three states, together with Britain and France, set up *the South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO)*. However, the USA was disappointed when only three Asian states – Pakistan, Thailand and the Philippines – joined SEATO. It was obvious that many states wanted to keep clear of the Cold War and remain uncommitted.

Relations between the USA and China were also poor because of the Taiwan situation. The communists still hoped to capture the island and destroy Chiang Kai-shek and his Nationalist Party for good; but the Americans were committed to defending Chiang and wanted to keep Taiwan as a military base.



## 8.2 CUBA

### (a) Why did Castro come to power?

The situation which resulted in Fidel Castro coming to power in January 1959 had built up over a number of years.

- 1 *There was long-standing resentment among many Cubans at the amount of American influence in the country.* This dated back to 1898 when the USA had helped rescue Cuba from Spanish control. Although the island remained an independent republic, American troops were needed from time to time to maintain stability, and American financial aid and investment kept the Cuban economy ticking over. In fact there was some truth in the claim that *the USA controlled the Cuban economy*: American companies held controlling interests in all Cuban industries (sugar, tobacco, textiles, iron, nickel, copper, manganese, paper and rum), owned half the land, about three-fifths of the railways, all electricity production and the entire telephone system. The USA was the main market for Cuba's exports, of which sugar was by far the most important. All this explains why the American ambassador in Havana (the Cuban capital) was usually referred to as the second most important man in Cuba. The American connection need not have been resented so much if it had resulted in an efficiently run country, but this was not so.
- 2 *Though Cuba was prosperous compared with other Latin American countries, she was too dependent on the export of sugar, and the wealth of the country was concentrated in the hands of a few.* Unemployment was a serious problem; it varied from about 8 per cent of the labour force during the five months of the sugar harvest to over 30 per cent during the rest of the year. Yet there was no unemployment benefit, and the trade unions, dominated by workers who had all-the-year-round jobs in sugar mills, did nothing to help. The poverty of the unemployed was in stark contrast to the wealth in Havana and in the hands of corrupt government officials; consequently *social tensions were high*.
- 3 *No effective political system had been developed.* In 1952, Fulgencio Batista, who had been a leading politician since 1933, seized power in a military coup and began to rule as a dictator. He introduced no reforms, and according to historian Hugh Thomas, 'spent a lot of time dealing with his private affairs and his foreign fortunes, leaving himself too little time for affairs of state'. As well as being corrupt, his regime was also brutal.
- 4 *Since there was no prospect of a peaceful social revolution,* the feeling grew that violent revolution was necessary. The leading exponent of this view was Fidel Castro, a young lawyer from a middle-class background, who specialized in defending the poor. Before he came to power, Castro was more of a liberal nationalist than a communist: he wanted to rid Cuba of Batista and corruption, and to introduce limited land reforms so that all peasants would receive some land. After an unsuccessful attempt to overthrow Batista in 1953, which earned him two years in jail, Castro began a campaign of guerrilla warfare and sabotage in the cities. The rebels soon controlled the mountainous areas of the east and north and won popular support there by carrying through Castro's land reform policy.
- 5 *Batista's reaction played into Castro's hands.* He took savage reprisals against the guerrillas, torturing and murdering suspects. Even many of the middle classes began to support Castro as the most likely way of getting rid of a brutal dictator. Morale in Batista's poorly paid army began to crumble in the summer of 1958, after an unsuccessful attempt to destroy Castro's forces. The USA began to feel



embarrassment at Batista's behaviour and cut off arms supplies; this was a serious blow to the dictator's prestige. In September a small rebel force under Che Guevara, an Argentinian supporter of Castro, gained control of the main road across the island and prepared to move on Santa Clara. On 1 January 1959 Batista fled from Cuba, and a liberal government was set up with Castro at its head.

## **(b) How were Cuba's foreign relations affected?**

*Cuban relations with the USA* did not deteriorate immediately; Castro was thought to be, at worst, a social democrat, and so most Americans were prepared to give him a chance. Before long, however, he outraged the USA by *nationalizing American-owned estates and factories*. President Eisenhower threatened to stop importing Cuban sugar, forcing Castro to sign a trade agreement with Russia. In July 1960 when the Americans carried out their threat, the USSR promised to buy Cuba's sugar, and Castro confiscated all remaining American property. As Cuba's relations with the USA worsened, those with the USSR improved: in January 1961 the USA broke off diplomatic relations with Cuba, but the Russians were already supplying economic aid. For what happened next – the Bay of Pigs invasion and the missiles crisis – see Section 7.4(b). After the missiles crisis, relations between the USA and Cuba remained cool. The attitude of other Latin American states, most of which had right-wing governments, was one of extreme suspicion; in 1962 they expelled Cuba from the Organization of American States (OAS), which only made her more dependent on the USSR.

## **(c) Castro and his problems**

Cuba was heavily dependent on the USA – and later the USSR – buying most of her sugar exports; the economy relied far too much on the sugar industry and was at the mercy of fluctuations in world sugar prices. The whole government and administration were riddled with corruption, and in addition there was serious unemployment and poverty. The new government launched itself into tackling the problems with enthusiasm and dedication. Historian David Harkness writes that, during his first ten years, Castro took this poor and backward country by the scruff of the neck and shook it into new and radically different patterns of life. Agricultural land was taken over by the government and collective farms were introduced; factories and businesses were nationalized; attempts were made to modernize sugar production and increase output, and to introduce new industries and reduce Cuba's dependence on sugar. Social reform included attempts to improve education, housing, health, medical facilities and communications. There was equality for black people and more rights for women. There were touring cinemas, theatres, concerts and art exhibitions. Castro himself seemed to have boundless energy; he was constantly travelling around the island, making speeches and urging people to greater efforts.

By the end of the 1970s the government could claim considerable success, especially in the area of social reform. All children were now receiving some education (instead of fewer than half before 1959); sanitation, hygiene and health care were much improved, unemployment and corruption were reduced, and there was a greater sense of equality and stability than ever before. The government seemed to be popular with the vast majority of people. These successes were achieved against a background of continual harassment and attempts at destabilization by the USA. These included a trade embargo, bomb attacks on Cuban factories, oil refineries and sugar refineries. Under President Nixon (1969–74) the campaign intensified to such an extent that it amounted to US government-sponsored state terrorism. During the 1990s the economic embargo on Cuba became more stringent than ever. It was condemned by the European Union, but the Clinton administration rejected this 'interference'.



Undeterred by all this, Castro and his supporters, especially Che Guevara, did their best to spread their revolution, first into Che's native Argentina. In early 1964 this attempt was crushed by the Argentinian army. The Cubans turned their attention to Africa, helping rebels to seize power in Algeria and then becoming unsuccessfully involved in the civil war in the former Belgian Congo. In 1966 Che Guevara tried to organize a revolution in Bolivia but his expedition ended in disaster when he was captured and executed in October 1967. Turning their attention back to Africa, the Cubans backed the Marxist MPLA in Angola (1975) (see Section 25.6) and the Marxist leader Mengistu in Ethiopia (1977) (see Section 25.9). Castro was now seen as a hero by most Third World countries, though his popularity slumped when he declared his support for the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.

The US destabilization policy and the economic embargo meant that some of Castro's economic policies had little success: the attempt to diversify industrial and agricultural output was disappointing, and so the island's economy still depended unhealthily on the quality of the sugar harvest, the world price of sugar and the willingness of the USSR and her satellites to buy up Cuba's exports. In 1980 the sugar crop was reduced by a fungus infection, while the tobacco crop was seriously affected by another fungus. This plunged the island into an economic crisis, unemployment rose again and thousands of people began to emigrate to the USA. Food rationing was introduced and the whole economy was being heavily subsidized by the USSR. By 1991 when the USSR split up and ceased to be communist, Cuba had lost its most powerful supporter.

However, the Castro regime continued to survive. During the closing years of the twentieth century the economy was boosted by a growth in tourism. Castro continued to enjoy good relations with Venezuela: in October 2000 the Venezuelan government agreed to provide Cuba with oil at favourable prices. Nevertheless, most Latin American states still viewed her as an outcast; Cuba was the only country in the Americas not invited to the third Summit of the Americas, held in Quebec in 2001. A new economic crisis developed in 2002, caused partly by drought and the consequent poor sugar harvest in 2001, and partly because the terrorist attacks of September 2001 in the USA adversely affected tourism. In February 2008 ill health forced Castro (aged 80) to hand over the presidency to his younger brother Raúl (aged 78). Since then there have been some modest improvements. In March 2008 the use of mobile phones was legalized – a measure designed to appeal to the young. Peasants are now allowed to cultivate unused land on collective farms and there have been improvements in the pricing of agricultural products that led to farmers bringing more food to market. Unfortunately hurricanes in the autumn of 2008 caused extensive damage and held up progress.

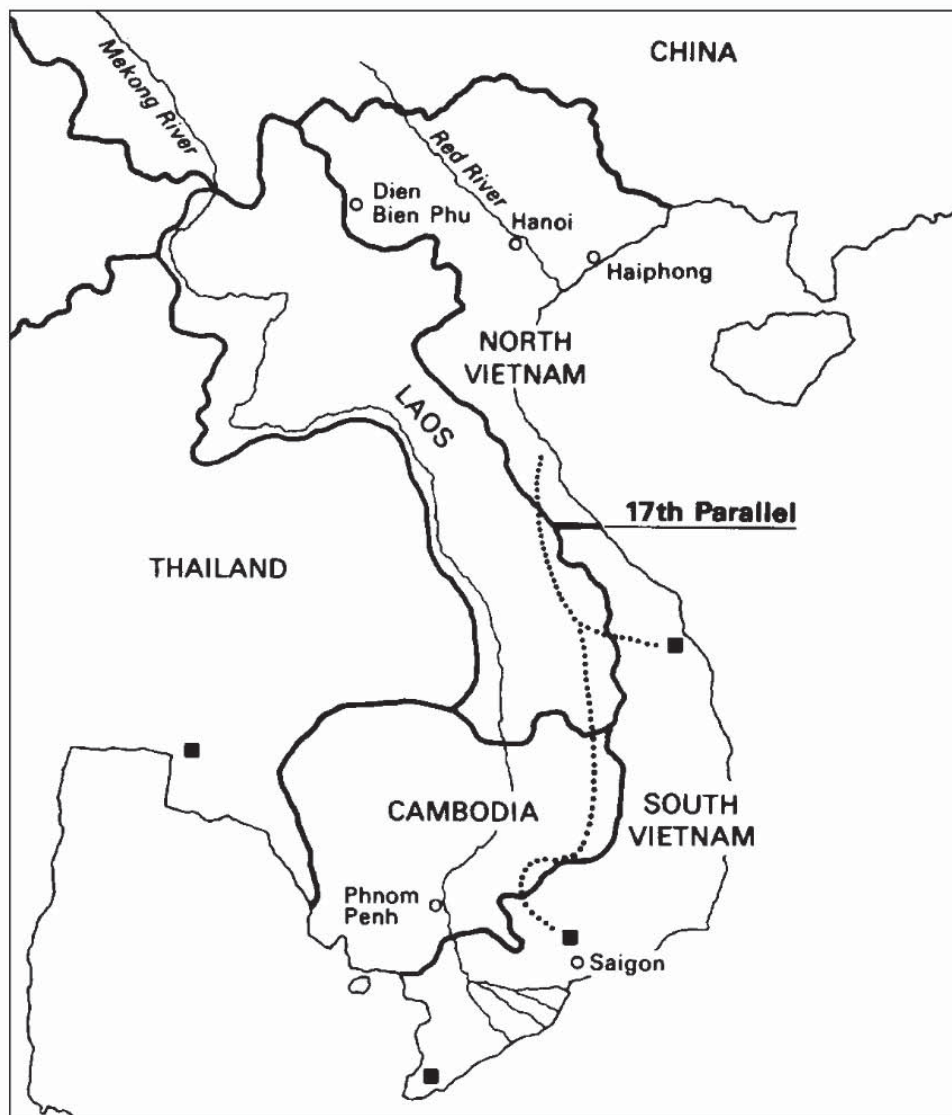
### **8.3 THE WARS IN VIETNAM, 1946–54 AND 1961–75**

Indo-China, which consisted of three areas, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, was part of the French empire in south-east Asia, and was the scene of almost non-stop conflict from the end of the Second World War. In the first phase of the conflict the peoples of these areas fought for and won their independence from the French. The second phase (1961–75) began with civil war in South Vietnam; the USA intervened to prevent the further spread of communism, but eventually had to admit failure.

#### **(a) 1946–54**

From 1946 until 1954 the Vietnamese were fighting for independence from France. Indo-China was occupied by the Japanese during the war. Resistance to both Japanese and





..... Ho Chi Minh Trail  
 ■ American bases

Map 8.2 The wars in Vietnam

French was organized by *the League for Vietnamese Independence (Vietminh)*, led by the communist Ho Chi Minh, who had spent many years in Russia learning how to organize revolutions. The Vietminh, though led by communists, was an alliance of all shades of political opinion that wanted an end to foreign control. At the end of the war in 1945, Ho Chi Minh declared the whole of Vietnam independent. When it became clear that the French had no intention of allowing full independence, hostilities broke out, beginning an eight-year struggle which ended with the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu (May 1954). The Vietminh were successful partly because they were masters of guerrilla tactics and had massive support from the Vietnamese people, and because the French, still suffering from the after-effects of the world war, failed to send enough troops. The decisive factor was probably that from 1950 the new Chinese communist government of Mao Zedong supplied the rebels with arms and equipment. The USA also became involved: seeing the struggle as part of the Cold War and the fight against communism, the Americans supplied the French with military and economic aid; but it was not enough. However, the Americans were determined to take France's place in order to prevent the spread of communism throughout south-east Asia.



By the Geneva Agreement (1954), Laos and Cambodia were to be independent; Vietnam was temporarily divided into two states at the 17th parallel (see Map 8.2). Ho Chi Minh's government was recognized in North Vietnam. South Vietnam was to have a separate government for the time being, but elections were to be held in July 1956 for the whole country, which would then become united. Ho Chi Minh was disappointed at the partition, but was confident that the communists would win the national elections. As it turned out, *the elections were never held*, and a repeat performance of the Korean situation seemed likely. A civil war gradually developed in South Vietnam which eventually involved the North and the USA.

**(b) What caused the civil war in South Vietnam and why did the USA become involved?**

- 1 The South Vietnamese government under *President Ngo Dinh Diem* (chosen by a national referendum in 1955) refused to make preparations for the elections for the whole of Vietnam. The USA, which was backing his regime, did not press him for fear of a communist victory if the elections went ahead. US President Eisenhower (1953–61) was just as worried as Truman had been about the spread of communism. He seemed to become obsessed with *the 'domino theory'* – if there is a line of dominoes standing on end close to each other and one is pushed over, it will knock over the next one in the line, and so on. Eisenhower thought this could be applied to countries: if one country in a region 'fell' to communism, it would quickly 'knock over' all its neighbours. However, the US attitude was a violation of the Geneva Agreement.
- 2 Although Ngo began energetically, his government soon lost popularity: he came from a wealthy Roman Catholic family, whereas three-quarters of the population were Buddhist peasants who thought themselves discriminated against. They demanded land reform of the type carried out in China and North Vietnam. Here land had been taken away from wealthy landowners and redistributed among the poorer people; but this did not happen in South Vietnam. Ngo also gained a reputation, perhaps not wholly deserved, for corruption, and he was unpopular with nationalists, who thought he was too much under American influence.
- 3 In 1960 various opposition groups, which included many former communist members of the Vietminh, formed *the National Liberation Front (NLF)*. They demanded a democratic national coalition government which would introduce reforms and negotiate peacefully for a united Vietnam. A guerrilla campaign began, attacking government officials and buildings; Buddhist monks had their own special brand of protest – committing suicide in public by setting fire to themselves. Ngo's credibility declined further when he dismissed all criticism – however reasonable – and all opposition as communist inspired. In fact the communists were only one section of the NLF. Ngo also introduced harsh security measures. He was overthrown and murdered in an army coup in November 1963, after which the country was ruled by a succession of generals, of whom President Nguyen Van Thieu lasted the longest (1967–75). The removal of Ngo left the basic situation unchanged and the guerrilla war continued.
- 4 When it became clear that Ngo could not cope with the situation, the USA decided to increase their military presence in South Vietnam. Under Eisenhower they had been supporting the regime since 1954, with economic aid and military advisers, and they accepted Ngo's claim that communists were behind all the trouble. Having failed to defeat communism in North Korea and Cuba, they felt a strong stand must be made. Both Kennedy and his successor Lyndon Johnson were prepared to go





**Illustration 8.1 A Vietcong suspect is executed in Saigon by Police Chief Nguyen Ngoc Loan, 1968**

further than just economic aid and advisers. In public the Americans said their intervention was to protect the independence of the Vietnamese people, but the real reason was to keep the country securely in the non-communist bloc.

- 5 The Americans were strengthened in their resolve by the knowledge that *the Vietcong* (as the guerrillas were now known) (see Illus. 8.1) were receiving supplies, equipment and troops from North Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh believed that such aid was justified: it was the USA and the South who were refusing to be bound by the Geneva agreements; given South Vietnam's refusal to agree to national elections, only force could unite the two halves of the country.
- 6 The Americans' involvement in Vietnam was different from their role in Korea where they fought as part of a UN coalition. In the intervening period, many new members, mostly former colonies of European powers, had joined the UN. These new states were critical of what they considered to be unjustified US interference in what should have been an independent country. They could not be relied on to support US action via the UN, and therefore the US had to act on its own, without UN participation.

### **(c) The phases of the war**

These correspond to successive American presidencies, each of which saw the introduction of new policies.

- 1 *John F. Kennedy* (1961–3) tried to keep American involvement down to an anti-guerrilla campaign. He sent about 16 000 'advisers' plus helicopters and other



equipment and introduced *the 'safe village' policy*, in which local peasants were moved en masse into fortified villages, leaving the Vietcong isolated outside. This was a failure because most of the Vietcong were peasants, who simply continued to operate inside the villages.

- 2 *Lyndon Johnson (1963–9)* was faced with a situation, according to reports from American advisers in 1964, where the Vietcong and the NLF controlled about 40 per cent of South Vietnamese villages and the peasant population seemed to support them. He assumed that the Vietcong were controlled by Ho Chi Minh and he decided to bomb North Vietnam (1965) in the hope that Ho would call off the campaign. Many historians have blamed Johnson for committing the USA so deeply in Vietnam, calling it 'Johnson's War'. Recent assessments have taken a more sympathetic view of Johnson's predicament. According to Kevin Ruane, 'far from being the hawk of legend, historians now tend to see Johnson as a man wracked with uncertainty about which direction to take on Vietnam'. He was afraid that American intervention on a large scale would bring China into the war. His real interest was his campaign for social reform – his 'great society' programme (see Section 23.1(d)). However, he inherited the situation from decisions taken by the two previous presidents – he was the unfortunate one who felt he had no alternative but to honour their commitments.

Over the next seven years *a greater tonnage of bombs was dropped on North Vietnamese cities than fell on Germany during the Second World War*. In addition, over half a million American troops arrived in the South. In spite of these massive efforts, the Vietcong still managed to unleash an offensive in February 1968 which captured something like 80 per cent of all towns and villages. Although much ground was lost later, this offensive convinced many Americans of the hopelessness of the struggle. Great pressure was put on the government by public opinion in the USA to withdraw from Vietnam. Some of his military experts told Johnson that the USA could not win the war at any reasonable cost. On 31 March 1968 Johnson therefore announced that he would suspend the bombing of North Vietnam, freeze troop levels and seek a negotiated peace. In May, peace talks opened in Paris – but no quick compromise could be reached, and the talks went on for another five years.

- 3 *Richard Nixon (1969–74)* realized that a new approach was needed, since public opinion would hardly allow him to send any more American troops. Early in 1969 there were half a million Americans, 50 000 South Koreans and 750 000 South Vietnamese against 450 000 Vietcong plus perhaps 70 000 North Vietnamese. *Nixon's new idea was known as 'Vietnamization'*: the Americans would rearm and train the South Vietnamese army to look after the defence of South Vietnam; this would allow a gradual withdrawal of American troops (in fact about half had been sent home by mid-1971). On the other hand, Nixon began the heavy bombing of North Vietnam again, and also began to bomb *the Ho Chi Minh Trail* through Laos and Cambodia, along which supplies and troops came from North Vietnam.

It was all to no avail: at the end of 1972 the Vietcong controlled the entire western half of the country. By now Nixon was under pressure both at home and from world opinion to withdraw. Several factors caused a revulsion of feeling against the war:

- the terrible bombing of North Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia;
- the use of chemicals to destroy jungle foliage and of inflammable napalm jelly, which burned people alive; the after-effects of the chemicals caused many babies to be born deformed and handicapped;
- the deaths of thousands of innocent civilians. The most notorious incident took place in March 1968, when American soldiers rounded up the inhabitants of



the hamlet of My Lai, including old people carrying young children; they were all shot, and buried in mass graves; between 450 and 500 people were killed.

Nixon eventually acknowledged that there was no monolithic communist plan to dominate the world. In fact relations between China and the USSR were extremely strained and there were numerous border clashes between the two in Mongolia. Nixon seized his chance to improve relations with China: trade and travel restrictions were removed, and so were the US navy patrols in the Taiwan Straits. On the Chinese side, some of Mao's generals had told him that it was time to unfreeze relations with the USA. In February 1972, Nixon paid a successful visit to Beijing.

Eventually *a ceasefire was arranged for January 1973*. It was agreed that all American troops would be withdrawn from Vietnam, and both North and South would respect the frontier along the 17th parallel. However, the Vietcong continued their campaign and without the Americans, President Thieu's government in Saigon soon collapsed as his badly led armies crumbled. In April 1975 Saigon was occupied by the North Vietnamese and Vietcong. *Vietnam was at last united and free from foreign intervention – under a communist government*. In the same year communist governments were also established in Laos and Cambodia. *The American policy of preventing the spread of communism in south-east Asia had ended in complete failure*.

#### **(d) Why did the USA fail?**

- 1 The main reason was that the Vietcong and the NLF had widespread support among ordinary people, who had genuine grievances against an inefficient government which failed to introduce necessary reforms. When the NLF was formed in 1960 the communists were only one of several opposition groups; by ignoring the rightness of the NLF case and choosing to prop up such an obviously deficient regime in their obsession with the fight against communism, the Americans actually encouraged the spread of communism in the South.
- 2 The Vietcong, like the Vietminh before them, were experts at guerrilla warfare and were fighting on familiar territory. The Americans found them much more difficult to deal with than the conventional armies they faced in Korea. With no distinguishing uniform, guerrillas could easily merge into the local peasant population. It proved impossible to stop supplies and reinforcements moving down the Ho Chi Minh Trail.
- 3 The Vietcong received important help from North Vietnam in the way of troops, and from China and Russia, who supplied arms. After 1970 the Russian contribution was vitally important and included rifles, machine-guns, long-range artillery, anti-aircraft missiles and tanks.
- 4 The North Vietnamese were dedicated to eventual victory and the unification of their country. They showed amazing resilience: in spite of appalling casualties and damage during the American bombings, they responded by evacuating city populations and rebuilding factories outside the cities.

#### **(e) The effects of the war were wide-reaching**

Vietnam was united but the cost was appalling. Between one and two million Vietnamese civilians had lost their lives and around 18 million were left homeless. The North Vietnamese army probably lost as many as 900 000 men, while the South lost 185 000.



About 48 000 American servicemen lost their lives, with a further 300 000 wounded. Around a third of the South was severely damaged by explosives and defoliants. The problems of reconstruction were enormous, and the new government's policies had unpleasant aspects such as concentration camps for opponents and no freedom of speech.

As well as being a blow to American prestige, this failure had a profound effect on American society; involvement in the war was seen in many circles as a terrible mistake, and this, together with the Watergate scandal, which forced Nixon to resign (see Section 23.4), shook confidence in a political system that could allow such things to happen. War veterans, instead of being treated as heroes, often found themselves shunned. Future American governments would have to think very carefully before committing the country so deeply in any similar situation. The war was a victory for the communist world, though both the Russians and Chinese reacted with restraint and did not boast about it to any great extent. This perhaps indicated that they wished to relax international tensions, though they now had another powerful force on their side in the Vietnamese army.

## **8.4 CHILE UNDER SALVADOR ALLENDE, 1970–3**

In September 1970 Salvador Allende, a Marxist doctor of medicine from a middle-class background, won the presidential election as leader of a left-wing coalition of communists, socialists, radicals and social democrats; it called itself Unidad Popular (UP). It was a narrow victory, with Allende winning 36 per cent of the votes against the 35 per cent of his nearest rival. But it was enough to make him president, the world's first Marxist leader to be voted into power through a democratic election. Although it lasted only three years, Allende's government is worth looking at in some detail because it is still the only one of its kind and it shows the sort of problems likely to be faced by a Marxist government trying to function within a democratic system.

### **(a) How did Allende come to be elected?**

Chile, unlike most other South American states, had a tradition of democracy. There were three main parties or groups of parties:

- the Unidad Popular, on the left;
- the Christian Democrats (also left-inclined);
- the National Party (a liberal/conservative coalition).

The army played little part in politics, and the democratic constitution (similar to that of the USA, except that the president could not stand for re-election immediately) was usually respected. The election of 1964 was won by Eduardo Frei, leader of the Christian Democrats, who believed in social reform. Frei began vigorously: inflation was brought down from 38 per cent to 25 per cent, the rich were made to pay their taxes instead of evading them, 360 000 new houses were built, the number of schools was more than doubled, and some limited land reform was introduced: over 1200 private holdings which were being run inefficiently were confiscated and given out to landless peasants. He also took over about half the holdings in the American-owned copper mines, with suitable compensation. The American government admired his reforms and poured in lavish economic aid.

By 1967, however, the tide was beginning to turn against Frei: the left thought his land reforms too cautious and wanted full nationalization of the copper industry (Chile's most important export), whereas the right thought he had already gone too far. In 1969 there was a serious drought in which a third of the harvest was lost; large quantities of food had to



be imported, causing inflation to soar again. There were strikes of copper miners demanding higher wages and several miners were killed by government troops. Allende made skilful use of this ammunition during the 1970 election campaign, pointing out that Frei's achievements fell far short of his promises. Allende's coalition had a much better campaign organization than the other parties and could get thousands of supporters out on the streets. Allende himself inspired confidence: elegant and cultured, he appeared the very opposite of the violent revolutionary. Appearances were not deceptive: he believed that communism could succeed without a violent revolution. In the 1970 election 36 per cent of the voters were in favour of trying his policies.

### **(b) Allende's problems and policies**

The problems facing the new government were enormous: inflation was running at over 30 per cent, unemployment at 20 per cent, industry was stagnating and 90 per cent of the population lived in such poverty that half the children under 15 suffered from malnutrition. Allende believed in a redistribution of income, which would enable the poor to buy more and thereby stimulate the economy. All-round wage increases of about 40 per cent were introduced and firms were not allowed to increase prices. The remainder of the copper industry, textiles and banks were nationalized, and Frei's land redistribution speeded up. The army was awarded an even bigger pay rise than anybody else to make sure of keeping its support. In foreign affairs, Allende restored diplomatic relations with Castro's Cuba, China and East Germany.

Whether Allende's policies would have succeeded in the long run is open to argument. Certainly he retained his popularity sufficiently for the UP to win 49 per cent of the votes in the 1972 local elections and to slightly increase their seats in the 1973 elections for Congress. However, the Allende experiment came to an abrupt and violent end in September 1973.

### **(c) Why was he overthrown?**

Criticism of the government gradually built up as Allende's policies began to cause problems.

- *Land redistribution caused a fall in agricultural production*, mainly because farmers whose land was due to be taken stopped sowing and often slaughtered their cattle (like the Russian *kulaks* during collectivization – see Section 17.2(c)). This caused food shortages and further inflation.
- Private investors were frightened off and *the government became short of funds to carry out social reforms* (housing, education and social services) as rapidly as it would have liked.
- *Copper nationalization was disappointing*: there were long strikes for higher wages, production went down and the world price of copper fell suddenly by about 30 per cent, causing a further decrease in government revenue.
- Some communists who wanted a more drastic Castro-style approach to Chile's problems grew impatient with Allende's caution. They refused to make allowances for the fact that he did not have a stable majority in parliament; they formed the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR), which embarrassed the non-violent UP by seizing farms and evicting the owners.
- The USA disapproved strongly of Allende's policies and did everything in their power to undermine Chile's economy. Other South American governments were nervous in case the Chileans tried to export their 'revolution'.



Looming above everything else was the question of *what would happen in September 1976 when the next presidential election was due*. Under the constitution, Allende would not be able to stand, but no Marxist regime had ever let itself be voted out of power. The opposition feared, perhaps with justification, that Allende was planning to change the constitution. As things stood, any president finding his legislation blocked by Congress could appeal to the nation by means of a referendum. With sufficient support Allende might be able to use the referendum device to postpone the election. It was this fear, or so they afterwards claimed, which caused the opposition groups to draw together and take action before Allende did. They organized a massive strike, and having won the support of the army, the right staged a military coup. It was organized by leading generals, who set up a military dictatorship in which *General Pinochet* came to the fore. Left-wing leaders were murdered or imprisoned and Allende himself was reported to have committed suicide. However, the cause of death has been controversial, many of his supporters claiming that he was gunned down in the presidential palace. In 2011 Chilean TV reported that a newly discovered document proved beyond doubt that he had been assassinated. The American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), helped by the Brazilian government (a repressive military regime), played a vital role in the preparations for the coup, as part of its policy of preventing the spread of communism in Latin America. There is evidence that the CIA had been considering a coup as soon as Allende won the election in 1970. There is no doubt that the Nixon administration had done its best to destabilize the Allende government over the next three years by undermining the economy. Nixon himself was reported as saying that they must 'make the Chilean economy scream'.

*The new Chilean regime soon provoked criticism from the outside world for its brutal treatment of political prisoners and its violations of human rights.* However, the American government, which had reduced its economic aid while Allende was in power, stepped up its assistance again. The Pinochet regime had some economic success and by 1980 had brought the annual inflation rate down from around 1000 per cent to manageable proportions. Pinochet was in no hurry to return the country to civilian rule. He eventually allowed presidential elections in 1989, when the civilian candidate he supported was heavily defeated, winning less than 30 per cent of the votes. Pinochet permitted the winner, Christian Democrat leader Patricio Aylwin, to become president (1990), but the constitution (introduced in 1981) allowed Pinochet himself to remain Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces for a further eight years. During his 17 years as president, around 3000 people were killed or 'disappeared', while tens of thousands were tortured, imprisoned or driven into exile.

Pinochet duly stepped down in 1998, but his retirement did not work out as he had planned. On a visit to London later that year, he was arrested and held in Britain for 16 months after the Spanish government requested his extradition to face charges of torturing Spanish citizens in Chile. He was eventually allowed to return to Chile on medical grounds in March 2000. However, one of his most bitter opponents, Ricardo Lagos, had just been elected president (January 2000) – the first socialist president since Allende. Pinochet soon found himself facing over 250 charges of human rights abuses, but in July 2001 the Chilean Court of Appeal decided that the general, now aged 86, was too ill to stand trial. He died in 2006 at the age of 91. (For further developments in Chile see Section 26.4(e).)

## 8.5 MORE UNITED STATES INTERVENTIONS

Vietnam, Cuba and Chile were not the only countries in which the USA intervened during the first half of the Cold War. Working through the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the American State Department was active in an astonishing number of states in the cause of preserving freedom and human rights, and above all, preventing the spread of communism.



Often the regimes that were labelled as communist and targeted for removal were simply pursuing policies which went against American interests. US activities were carried out sometimes in secret, leaving the American people largely unaware of what was going on, or, as in the case of major military interventions, were presented as necessary surgical actions against the cancer of communism. Techniques included attempts to carry out assassinations, rigging of elections, organizing and financing acts of terrorism, economic destabilization and, in the last resort, full-scale military intervention.

Recently several former members of the State Department and the CIA, for example William Blum and Richard Agee, and a number of other writers, including the internationally renowned linguistics expert Noam Chomsky, have produced detailed accounts of how the leaders of the USA tried to build up their influence and power in the world by exercising control over such countries as Iran, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Indonesia, Guyana, Iraq, Cambodia, Laos, Ecuador, the Congo/Zaire, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Ghana, Uruguay, Bolivia, East Timor, Nicaragua and many more. There is insufficient space to examine all these cases, but a few examples will illustrate how US influence reached out into most parts of the world. (For US involvement in Latin America, see Section 26.1.)

### (a) South-east Asia

The area known as Indo-China consists of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. All three states gained their independence from France by the Geneva agreements of 1954 (see Section 8.3 for what happened in Vietnam).

In *Laos* after independence, there was conflict between the right-wing government backed by the USA, and various left-wing groups led by the Pathet Lao, a left-wing nationalist party which had fought in the struggle against the French. At first the Pathet Lao showed itself willing to take part in coalition governments in an attempt to bring about peaceful social change. The USA saw the Pathet Lao as dangerous communists: the CIA and the State Department between them arranged a series of interventions which by 1960 had removed all left-wingers from important positions. The left turned to armed force and the CIA responded by gathering an army of 30 000 anti-communists from all over Asia to crush the insurgents. Between 1965 and 1973 the US air force carried out regular bombing raids over Laos, causing enormous casualties and devastation. It was all to no avail: American intervention strengthened the resolve of the left; following the American withdrawal from Vietnam and south-east Asia, and the communist takeover in Cambodia, the Laotian right gave up the struggle and their leaders left the country. In December 1975 the Pathet Lao took control peacefully and the Lao People's Democratic Republic was proclaimed (see Section 21.4).

In *Cambodia* there was American involvement in a coup that overthrew the regime of Prince Sihanouk in 1970; the bombing campaigns which preceded the coup left the Cambodian economy in ruins. American intervention was followed by five years of civil war, which ended when Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge took power (see Section 21.3). During the Vietnam War of 1965–73 the USA used *Thailand* as a base from which the bombing of North Vietnam took place. Eventually the American presence in Thailand was so massive that they seemed to have taken the country over. There was considerable opposition from Thais who resented the way in which their country was being used, but all criticism was treated as communist-inspired; over 40 000 American troops were active in trying to suppress opposition guerrilla fighters and in training Thai government forces. In August 1966 the *Washington Post* reported that in US government circles there was a strong feeling that 'continued dictatorship in Thailand suits the United States, since it assures the continuation of American bases in the country, and that, as a US official put it bluntly, "is our real interest in this place"'.



## **(b) Africa**

The USA took a great interest in Africa, where the late 1950s and 1960s was the era of decolonization and the emergence of many newly independent states. At the end of the Second World War the Americans had put pressure on the European states that still owned colonies, to grant them independence as soon as possible. They claimed that in view of the growing nationalist movements in Africa and Asia, attempts to hang on to colonies would encourage the development of communism. Another reason for the US attitude was that Americans viewed the newly emerging nations as potential markets in which they could trade and establish both economic and political influence. In the Cold War atmosphere, the worst crime any new government could commit, in American eyes, was to show the slightest hint of left-wing or socialist policies and any sympathy with the USSR.

In June 1960 *the Congo* (formerly the Belgian Congo) became an independent state with Patrice Lumumba as prime minister. The country depended heavily on its exports of copper, but the copper-mining industry, situated mainly in the eastern province of Katanga, was still controlled by a Belgian company. Some leading Americans also had financial interests in the company. Lumumba talked about 'economic independence' for the Congo, which the Belgians and Americans took to mean 'nationalization'. The Belgians and the CIA encouraged Katanga to declare itself independent from the Congo so that they could keep control of the copper industry. Lumumba appealed for help first of all to the UN and then to the USSR. This was a fatal mistake: the CIA and the Belgians encouraged Lumumba's opponents, so that he was dismissed and later assassinated (January 1961); the CIA was deeply involved. After 1965 the USA supported the corrupt and brutal regime of General Mobutu, several times sending troops to suppress rebels. It seemed that no internal excess was too much, provided Mobutu acted as a friend of the USA. He remained in power until May 1997 (see Section 25.5).

*Ghana* became independent in 1957 under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah. He was socialist in outlook and wanted to steer a middle way between the western powers and the communist bloc. This meant forming good relations with both sides. When he began to forge links with the USSR, China and East Germany, alarm bells rang in Washington. The CIA was active in Ghana and was in contact with a group of army officers who opposed Nkrumah's increasingly undemocratic style. In 1966, while Nkrumah was away on a visit to China, the army, backed by the CIA, launched a coup and he was forced into exile (see Section 25.2).

## **(c) The Middle East**

The Middle East was an important area, serving as a sort of crossroads between the western nations, the communist bloc and the Third World countries of Asia and Africa. Its other importance is that it produces a large proportion of the world's oil. The USA and the states of western Europe were anxious to maintain some influence there, both to block the spread of communism and to keep some control over the region's oil supplies. The Eisenhower administration (1953–61) issued a statement which became known as the Eisenhower Doctrine, declaring that the US was prepared to use armed force to assist any Middle Eastern country against armed aggression from any country controlled by international communism. At different times since 1945 the USA has intervened in most of the Middle East states, destabilizing or overthrowing governments which it chose to define as 'communist'.

In 1950 the Shah (ruler) of *Iran* signed a defence treaty with the USA directed against the neighbouring USSR, which had been trying to set up a communist government in northern Iran. In 1953 the prime minister, Dr Mussadiq, nationalized a British-owned oil company. The USA and the British organized a coup, which removed Mussadiq and



restored the Shah to full control. He remained in power for the next 25 years, fully backed and supported by Washington, until he was forced out in January 1979 (see Section 11.1(b)).

*Iraq* came in for constant attention from the USA. In 1958 General Abdul Kassem overthrew the Iraqi monarchy and proclaimed a republic. He was in favour of reform and modernization, and although he himself was not a communist, the new atmosphere of freedom and openness encouraged the growth of the Iraqi Communist Party. This made Washington uneasy; the State Department was further perturbed in 1960 when Kassem was involved in setting up the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), which aimed to break the control of western oil companies over the sale of Middle East oil. The CIA had been trying to destabilize the country for several years – by encouraging a Turkish invasion, financing Kurdish guerrillas who were agitating for more autonomy and attempting to assassinate Kassem. In 1963 they were successful – Kassem was overthrown and killed in a coup backed by the CIA and Britain.

From 1979 the USA financed and supplied Saddam Hussein, who became Iraqi leader in 1968, backing him against the new anti-American government in Iran. After the long and inconclusive Iran–Iraq War (1980–8; see Section 11.9), Saddam's forces invaded and conquered Kuwait (August 1990), only to be driven out again by UN forces, of which by far the largest contingent was the American one (see Section 11.10). In 2003 the Americans, with British help, finally overthrew and captured Saddam (see Section 12.4(f) for further developments).

## 8.6 DÉTENTE: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS FROM THE 1970S TO THE 1990S

The word 'détente' is used to mean a permanent relaxation of tensions between East and West. The first real signs of détente could be seen in the early 1970s. With one or two blips along the way, détente eventually led on to the end of the Cold War.

### (a) Reasons for détente

As the nuclear arsenals built up, both sides became increasingly fearful of a catastrophic nuclear war in which there could be no real winner. Both sides were sickened by the horrors of Vietnam. In addition, countries had their own individual motives for wanting détente.

- *The USSR was finding the expense of keeping up with the Americans crippling.* It was essential to reduce defence spending so that they could devote more resources to bringing living standards up to western levels, both in the USSR and in the satellite states, all of which were suffering economic difficulties. In 1968 Russian troops were sent to Prague to deal with disturbing developments in Czechoslovakia, when Alexander Dubček tried to introduce 'communism with a human face'. There was unrest, especially in Poland in the early 1970s, which threatened to destabilize the communist bloc. At the same time the Russians were on bad terms with China, and did not want to be left out when relations between China and the USA began to improve in 1971.
- *The Americans were beginning to realize that there must be a better way of coping with communism than the one which was having so little success in Vietnam.* Clearly there were limits to what their military power could achieve. Some Congressmen and Senators were even beginning to talk of a return to 'isolationism'.



- *The Chinese were anxious about their isolation*, nervous about American intentions in Vietnam (after what had happened in Korea) and not happy about their worsening relations with the USSR.
- *The nations of western Europe were worried because they would be in the front line if nuclear war broke out.* Willi Brandt, who became Chancellor of West Germany in 1969, worked for better relations with eastern Europe, a policy known as *Ostpolitik*.

## (b) The USSR and the USA

They had already made progress with the 'hotline' telephone link and the agreement to carry out only underground nuclear tests (both in 1963). An agreement signed in 1967 banned the use of nuclear weapons in outer space. The first major breakthrough came in 1972 when the two countries signed *the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty, known as SALT 1*, which decided how many ABMs, ICBMs and SLBMs each side could have (see Section 7.4(a) and (c)); there was no agreement about MIRVs. The agreement did not reduce the amount of armaments but *it did slow down the arms race*. Presidents Brezhnev and Nixon had three summit meetings, negotiations opened for a further treaty to be known as SALT 2 and the USA began to export wheat to Russia.

Another important step was *the Helsinki Agreement (July 1975)*, in which the USA, Canada, the USSR and most European states accepted the European frontiers which had been drawn up after the Second World War (thus recognizing the division of Germany). The communist countries promised to allow their peoples 'human rights', including freedom of speech and freedom to leave the country.

*However, détente did not proceed without some setbacks.* This was especially true in 1979 when NATO became nervous at the deployment of 150 new Russian SS-20 missiles. NATO decided to deploy over 500 Pershing and Cruise missiles in Europe by 1983 as a deterrent to a possible Russian attack on western Europe. At the same time the US Senate decided not to accept a SALT 2 treaty which would have limited numbers of MIRVs. When the Russians invaded Afghanistan on Christmas Day 1979 and replaced the president with one more favourable to them, all the old western suspicions of Russian motives revived.

The next few years are sometimes referred to as 'the second Cold War'. *Both sides spent the first half of the 1980s building up their nuclear arsenals*, and US President Reagan (1981–9) apparently gave the go-ahead for a new weapons system, *the Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI), also known as 'Star Wars'*. This was intended to use weapons based in space to destroy ballistic missiles in flight.

*Détente gathered momentum again thanks to the determination of the new Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev (1985–91).* In November 1985 he had a meeting with Reagan in Geneva; this went well and they issued a joint statement that 'nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought'. The signs were that détente was back on course. Then in April 1986 there was a disastrous accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power station in the Ukraine. This caused a great wave of anti-nuclear feeling in the USSR and Gorbachev decided that measures to reduce nuclear dangers were absolutely vital. In October 1986 he invited Reagan to a summit meeting at Reykjavik and proposed a 15-year timetable for a 'step-by-step process for ridding the earth of nuclear weapons'. The Americans responded to some extent, though Reagan was not prepared to abandon his Star Wars project. At the next summit, held in Washington (December 1987), a historic breakthrough was made: *Reagan and Gorbachev formally signed the INF (Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces) Treaty.*



- All land-based intermediate-range (300 to 3000 miles) nuclear weapons were to be scrapped over the next three years. This meant 436 American and 1575 Soviet warheads, and would include all Russian missiles in East Germany and Czechoslovakia, and all American Cruise and Pershing missiles based in western Europe.
- There were strict verification provisions so that both sides could check that the weapons were actually being destroyed.

However, all this amounted, at most, to only 4 per cent of existing stocks of nuclear weapons, and there was the stumbling block of Reagan's Star Wars, which he was still not prepared to give up, even though it was only at the planning stage. Nor did the agreement include British and French weapons. The UK prime minister Margaret Thatcher was determined that Britain should keep its own nuclear arsenal, and planned to develop Trident missiles, which were more sophisticated than Cruise missiles. Nevertheless, *this INF Treaty was an important turning point in the nuclear arms race, since it was the first time any weapons had been destroyed.*

By 1985 the USSR was seriously embarrassed by its involvement in Afghanistan. Although there were over 100 000 Soviet troops in the country, they found it impossible to subdue the ferocious Islamic guerrillas; it was a drain on their resources and a blow to their prestige. The hostility of China, the suspicion of Islamic states all over the world and repeated condemnations by the UN convinced Gorbachev it was time to pull out. It was eventually agreed that the Russians would begin withdrawing their troops from Afghanistan on 1 May 1988, provided the Americans stopped sending military aid to the Afghan resistance movement. In June 1988 Reagan went to Moscow to discuss the timetable for implementing the INF Treaty.

### **(c) China and the USA**

China and the USA had been extremely hostile towards each other since the Korean War and seemed likely to remain so while the Americans backed Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalists in Taiwan, and while the Chinese backed Ho Chi Minh. However, in 1971 the Chinese unexpectedly invited an American table-tennis team to visit China. Following the success of that visit, the USA responded by calling off their veto of Chinese entry into the UN. *Communist China was therefore allowed to become a member of the UN in October 1971.* President Nixon, looking for a bold initiative for which his presidency would be remembered, decided he would visit China himself. Chairman Mao agreed to receive him and the visit took place in February 1972. Though Mao was reported to have told Zhou Enlai that the USA was 'like an ape moving towards becoming a human being', the meeting led to a resumption of diplomatic relations. President Ford also paid a successful visit to Beijing (Peking) in 1975. There was still the problem of Taiwan to sour the relationship: though Chiang himself died in 1975, his supporters still occupied the island, and the communists would not be happy until it was brought under their control. Relations improved further in 1978 when Democrat President Carter decided to withdraw recognition of Nationalist China. However, this caused a row in the USA, where Carter was accused of betraying his ally.

The climax of détente between China and the USA came early in 1979 when *Carter gave formal recognition of the People's Republic of China*, and ambassadors were exchanged. Good relations were maintained during the 1980s. The Chinese were anxious that détente with the USA should continue, because of their conflict with Vietnam (Russia's ally), which had begun in 1979. In 1985 an agreement was signed on nuclear co-operation. Things suddenly took a turn for the worse in June 1989 when the Chinese



government used troops to disperse a student demonstration in Tiananmen Square, Beijing (Peking). The government was afraid that the demonstration might turn into a revolution which could overthrow Chinese communism. At least a thousand students were killed and many later executed, and this brought worldwide condemnation. Tensions rose again in 1996 when the Chinese held 'naval exercises' in the straits between the Chinese mainland and Taiwan, in protest at the Taiwanese democratic elections just about to be held.

#### **(d) Relations between the USSR and China**

Relations between the USSR and China deteriorated steadily after 1956. They had earlier signed a treaty of mutual assistance and friendship (1950), but later the Chinese did not approve of Khrushchev's policies, particularly his belief in 'peaceful coexistence', and his claim that it was possible to achieve communism by methods other than violent revolution. This went against the ideas of Lenin, leader of the 1917 Russian communist revolution, and so the Chinese accused the Russians of '*revisionism*' – *revising or reinterpreting the teachings of Marx and Lenin to suit their own needs*. They were angry at Khrushchev's 'soft' line towards the USA. In retaliation the Russians reduced their economic aid to China.

The ideological argument was not the only source of trouble: there was also a frontier dispute. During the nineteenth century Russia had taken over large areas of Chinese territory north of Vladivostok and in Sinkiang province, which the Chinese were now demanding back, so far without success. Now that China herself was following a 'softer' policy towards the USA, it seemed that the territorial problem was the main bone of contention. At the end of the 1970s both Russia and China were vying for American support, against each other, for the leadership of world communism. To complicate matters further, Vietnam now supported Russia. When the Chinese attacked Vietnam (February 1979), relations reached rock bottom. The Chinese attack was partly in retaliation for Vietnam's invasion of Kampuchea (formerly Cambodia) in December 1978, which overthrew the Khmer Rouge government of Pol Pot, a protégé of China, and partly because of a frontier dispute. They withdrew after three weeks, having, as Beijing put it, 'taught the Vietnamese a lesson'. *In 1984 the Chinese set out their grievances against the USSR:*

- the presence of Russian troops in Afghanistan;
- Soviet backing of the Vietnamese troops in Kampuchea;
- the Soviet troop build-up along the Chinese frontiers of Mongolia and Manchuria.

*Mikhail Gorbachev was determined to begin a new era in Sino-Russian relations.* Five-year agreements on trade and economic co-operation were signed (July 1985) and regular contact took place between the two governments. A formal reconciliation took place in May 1989 when Gorbachev visited Beijing. Also in 1989 Vietnam withdrew its troops from Kampuchea, and so their relations with China improved.

### **8.7 THE COLLAPSE OF COMMUNISM IN EASTERN EUROPE AND THE END OF THE COLD WAR: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS TRANSFORMED**

#### **(a) August 1988 to December 1991**

Remarkable events happened in eastern Europe in the period August 1988 to December 1991. Communism was swept away by a rising tide of popular opposition and mass demonstrations, far more quickly than anybody could ever have imagined.



- The process began in Poland in August 1988 when the 'Solidarity' trade union organized huge anti-government strikes. These eventually forced the government to allow free elections, in which the communists were heavily defeated (June 1989). Revolutionary protests rapidly spread to all the other Russian satellite states.
- Hungary was the next to allow free elections, in which the communists again suffered defeat.
- In East Germany, communist leader Eric Honecker wanted to disperse the demonstrations by force, but he was overruled by his colleagues; by the end of 1989 the communist government had resigned. Soon the Berlin Wall was breached, and, most astonishing of all, *in the summer of 1990, Germany was re-united*.
- Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Romania had thrown out their communist governments by the end of 1989, and multi-party elections were held in Yugoslavia in 1990 and in Albania in the spring of 1991.
- By the end of December 1991, the USSR itself had split up into separate republics and Gorbachev had resigned. Communist rule in Russia was over after 74 years.

(See Sections 10.6 and 18.3 for the reasons behind the collapse of communism in eastern Europe.)

## **(b) How were international relations affected?**

Many people in the west thought that with the collapse of communism in eastern Europe, the world's problems would miraculously disappear. But nothing could have been further from the truth and a range of new problems surfaced.

### *1 The Cold War was over*

The most immediate result was that the former USSR and its allies were no longer seen by the West as the 'enemy'. In November 1990 the countries of NATO and the Warsaw Pact signed a treaty agreeing that they were 'no longer adversaries', and that none of their weapons would ever be used except in self-defence. The Cold War was over, and Gorbachev must take much of the credit for bringing it to an end. His determination to work for disarmament broke the stalemate and impressed Reagan, who also deserves much credit for responding so positively to Gorbachev's initiatives. The end of the Cold War was an enormous step forward. However ...

### *2 New conflicts soon arose*

These were often caused by nationalism. During the Cold War, the USSR and the USA, as we have seen, kept tight control, by force if necessary, over areas where their vital interests might be affected. Now, a conflict which did not directly affect the interests of East or West would probably be left to find its own solution, bloody or otherwise. Nationalism, which had been suppressed by communism, soon re-emerged in some of the former states of the USSR and elsewhere. Sometimes disputes were settled peacefully, for example in Czechoslovakia, where Slovak nationalists insisted on breaking away to form a separate state of Slovakia. However, war broke out between Azerbaijan and Armenia (two former republics of the USSR) over disputed territory. There was fighting in Georgia (another former Soviet republic) where the people of the north wanted to form a separate state.

Most tragic of all was Yugoslavia, which broke up into five separate states – Serbia (with Montenegro), Bosnia–Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia and Macedonia. Soon a complex civil war broke out in which Serbia tried to grab as much territory as possible from Croatia. In Bosnia, Serbs, Croats and Muslims fought each other in an attempt to set up states of their own. This increasingly bitter struggle dragged on for almost four years



until a ceasefire was arranged in November 1995 (see Section 10.7). So at a time when the states of western Europe were moving into closer union with the European Community (see Section 10.8), those of eastern Europe were breaking up into even smaller national units.

### 3 *Supervision of nuclear weapons*

Another fear, now that the Russians and the USA were less willing to act as ‘policemen’, was that *countries with what the powers considered to be unstable or irresponsible governments might use nuclear weapons* – countries like, for example, Iraq, Iran and Libya. One of the needs of the 1990s therefore, was better international supervision and control of nuclear weapons, and also of biological and chemical weapons.

### 4 *Economic problems*

All the former communist states faced another problem – how to deal with the economic collapse and intense poverty left over from the communist ‘command’ economies, and how to change to ‘free-market’ economies. They needed a carefully planned and generous programme of financial help from the West. Otherwise it would be difficult to create stability in eastern Europe. Nationalism and economic unrest could cause a right-wing backlash, especially in Russia itself, which could be just as threatening as communism was once thought to be. There was clearly cause for concern, given the large number of nuclear weapons still in existence in the region. There was the danger that Russia, desperate to raise money, might sell off some of its nuclear weapons to ‘unsuitable’ governments.

### 5 *The re-unification of Germany created some problems*

The Poles were very suspicious of a united and powerful Germany, fearing that it might try to take back the former German territory east of the rivers Oder and Neisse, given to Poland after the Second World War. Germany also found itself providing refuge for people fleeing from disturbances in other states of Europe; by October 1992, at least 16 000 refugees a month were entering Germany. This gave rise to violent protests from right-wing neo-Nazi groups who believed that Germany had problems enough of its own – especially the need to modernize the industry and amenities of the former East Germany – without admitting foreigners.

### 6 *Relations between the western allies*

The disappearance of communism affected relations between the western allies, the USA, western Europe and Japan. They had been held together by the need to stand firm against communism, but now differences emerged over trade and the extent to which the USA and Japan were prepared to help solve the problems of eastern Europe. For instance, during the war in Bosnia, relations between the USA and the states of western Europe became strained when the USA refused to provide troops for the UN peacekeeping forces, leaving the burden to other member states. The overriding fact now was that the USA was left as the world’s only superpower; it remained to be seen how Washington would choose to play its new role on the world stage.

## FURTHER READING

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## QUESTIONS

- 1 (a) Explain why war broke out in Korea in June 1950 and why the USA became involved?  
(b) What were the outcomes and the effects of the war in Korea?
- 2 Why was there a period of détente during the 1970s and 1980s, and in what ways did détente manifest itself?
- 3 Explain why the Cold War came to an end, and show how this affected international relations.

 There is a document question about the USA and the war in Vietnam on the website.