Chapter

7

The Cold War: problems of international relations after the Second World War

SUMMARY OF EVENTS

Towards the end of the war, the harmony that had existed between the USSR, the USA and the British Empire began to wear thin and all the old suspicions came to the fore again. Relations between Soviet Russia and the West soon became so difficult that, although no actual fighting took place directly between the two opposing camps, the decade after 1945 saw the first phase of what became known as *the Cold War*. This continued, in spite of several 'thaws', until the collapse of communism in eastern Europe in 1989–91. What happened was that instead of allowing their mutual hostility to express itself in open fighting, *the rival powers attacked each other with propaganda and economic measures, and with a general policy of non-cooperation.*

Both superpowers, the USA and the USSR, gathered allies around them: between 1945 and 1948 the USSR drew into its orbit most of the states of eastern Europe, as communist governments came to power in Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Albania, Czechoslovakia and East Germany (1949). A communist government was established in North Korea (1948), and the Communist bloc seemed to be further strengthened in 1949 when Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-tung) was at last victorious in the long-drawn-out civil war in China (see Section 19.4). On the other hand, the USA hastened the recovery of Japan and fostered her as an ally, and worked closely with Britain and 14 other European countries, as well as with Turkey, providing them with vast economic aid in order to build up an anti-communist bloc.

Whatever one bloc suggested or did was viewed by the other as having ulterior and aggressive motives. There was a long wrangle, for example, over where the frontier between Poland and Germany should be, and no permanent settlement could be agreed on for Germany and Austria. Then in the mid-1950s, after the death of Stalin (1953), the new Russian leaders began to talk about 'peaceful coexistence', mainly to give the USSR a much-needed break from its economic and military burdens. The icy atmosphere between the two blocs began to thaw: in 1955 it was agreed to remove all occupying troops from Austria. However, relations did not improve sufficiently to allow agreement on Germany, and tensions mounted again over Vietnam and the Cuban missiles crisis (1962). The Cold War moved into a new phase in the later 1960s when both sides took initiatives to reduce tensions. Known as *détente,* this brought a marked improvement in international relations, including the signing of the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty in 1972. *Détente* did not end superpower rivalry, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 heightened international tensions once more. The Cold War came to an end in 1989–91 with the collapse of the Soviet Union.

7.1 WHAT CAUSED THE COLD WAR?

(a) Differences of principle

The basic cause of conflict lay in the differences of principle between the communist states and the capitalist or liberal-democratic states.

- *The communist system* of organizing the state and society was based on the ideas of Karl Marx; he believed that the wealth of a country should be collectively owned and shared by everybody. The economy should be centrally planned and the interests and well-being of the working classes safeguarded by state social policies.
- *The capitalist system*, on the other hand, operates on the basis of private ownership of a country's wealth. The driving forces behind capitalism are private enterprise in the pursuit of making profits, and the preservation of the power of private wealth.

Ever since the world's first communist government was set up in Russia (the USSR) in 1917 (see Section 16.2(d)), the governments of most capitalist states viewed it with mistrust and were afraid of communism spreading to their countries. This would mean the end of the private ownership of wealth, as well as the loss of political power by the wealthy classes. When civil war broke out in Russia in 1918, several capitalist states – the USA, Britain, France and Japan – sent troops to Russia to help the anti-communist forces. The communists won the war, but Joseph Stalin, who became Russian leader in 1929, was convinced that there would be another attempt by the capitalist powers to destroy communism in Russia. The German invasion of Russia in 1941 proved him right. The need for self-preservation against Germany and Japan caused the USSR, the USA and Britain to forget their differences and work together, but as soon as the defeat of Germany was clearly only a matter of time, both sides, and especially Stalin, began to plan for the post-war period.

(b) Stalin's foreign policies contributed to the tensions

His aim was to take advantage of the military situation to strengthen Russian influence in Europe. As the Nazi armies collapsed, he tried to occupy as much German territory as he could, and to acquire as much land as he could get away with from countries such as Finland, Poland and Romania. In this he was highly successful, but the West was alarmed at what they took to be Soviet aggression; they believed that he was committed to spreading communism over as much of the globe as possible.

(c) US and British politicians were hostile to the Soviet government

During the war, the USA under President Roosevelt sent war materials of all kinds to Russia under a system known as 'Lend-Lease', and Roosevelt was inclined to trust Stalin. But after Roosevelt died, in April 1945, his successor Harry S. Truman was more suspicious and toughened his attitude towards the communists. Some historians believe that Truman's main motive for dropping the atomic bombs on Japan was not simply to defeat Japan, which was ready to surrender anyway, but to show Stalin what might happen to Russia if he dared go too far. Stalin suspected that the USA and Britain were still keen to destroy communism; he felt that their delay in launching the invasion of France, the Second Front (which did not take place until June 1944), was deliberately calculated to

keep most of the pressure on the Russians and bring them to the point of exhaustion. Nor did they tell Stalin about the existence of the atomic bomb until shortly before its use on Japan, and they rejected his request that Russia should share in the occupation of Japan. *Above all, the West had the atomic bomb and the USSR did not.*

Which side was to blame?

During the 1950s, most western historians, such as the American George Kennan (in his *Memoirs, 1925–50* (Bantam, 1969)), *blamed Stalin.* During the mid-1940s Kennan had worked at the US embassy in Moscow, and later (1952–3) he was US Ambassador in Moscow. He argued that Stalin's motives were sinister, and that he intended to spread communism as widely as possible through Europe and Asia, thus destroying capitalism. Kennan advised a policy of 'containment' of the USSR by political, economic and diplomatic means. The formation of NATO (see Section 7.2(i)) and the American entry into the Korean War in 1950 (see Section 8.1) were the West's self-defence against communist aggression.

On the other hand, Soviet historians, and during the 1960s and early 1970s some American historians, argued that *the Cold War ought not to be blamed on Stalin and the Russians.* Their theory was that Russia had suffered enormous losses during the war, and therefore it was only to be expected that Stalin would try to make sure neighbouring states were friendly, given Russia's weakness in 1945. They believe that Stalin's motives were purely defensive and that there was no real threat to the West from the USSR. Some Americans claim that the USA should have been more understanding and should not have challenged the idea of a Soviet 'sphere of influence' in eastern Europe. The actions of American politicians, especially Truman, provoked Russian hostility unnecessarily. This is known among historians as the *revisionist* view; one of its leading proponents, William Appleman Williams, believed that the Cold War was mainly caused by the USA's determination to make the most of its atomic monopoly and its industrial strength in its drive for world hegemony.

The main reason behind this new view was that during the late 1960s many people in the USA became critical of American foreign policy, especially American involvement in the Vietnam War (see Section 8.3). This caused some historians to reconsider the American attitude towards communism in general; they felt that American governments had become obsessed with hostility towards communist states and they were ready to take a more sympathetic view of the difficulties Stalin had found himself in at the end of the Second World War.

Later a third view – known as the *post-revisionist* interpretation – was put forward by some American historians, and this became popular in the 1980s. They had the benefit of being able to look at lots of new documents and visit archives which had not been open to earlier historians. The new evidence suggested that the situation at the end of the war was far more complicated than earlier historians had realized; this led them to take a middle view, arguing that *both sides should take some blame for the Cold War.* They believe that American economic policies such as Marshall Aid (see Section 7.2(e)) were deliberately designed to increase US political influence in Europe. However, they also believe that although Stalin had no long-term plans to spread communism, he was an opportunist who would take advantage of any weakness in the West to expand Soviet influence. The crude Soviet methods of forcing communist governments on the states of eastern Europe were bound to lend proof to claims that Stalin's aims were expansionist. With their entrenched positions and deep suspicions of each other, the USA and the USSR created an atmosphere in which every international act could be interpreted in two ways. What was claimed as necessary for self-defence by one side was taken by the other as evidence of aggressive intent, as the events described in the next section show. But at least open war was avoided, because the Americans were reluctant to use the atomic bomb again unless attacked directly, while the Russians dared not risk such an attack.

When the Cold War came to an end with the collapse of eastern European communism and the Soviet Union in 1989–91, a number of new Cold War histories appeared reviewing both its causes and effects. In 2006 John Lewis Gaddis restated his belief that Russian attempts to dominate the world had been the cause. American policy had been right because it ended in victory, for which Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher must take much of the credit: 'the universal acceptance of capitalism, the discrediting of dictatorships and the globalisation of democratisation under benevolent American leadership'. In the same year O. A. Westad set out the rival view: he pointed out that the collapse of communism stemmed from the decision of the Chinese communists to abandon socialist economics and change to a form of capitalism, albeit a different one from that in the West. The Chinese had been pressurising other communist states to do the same; it was this, together with the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan from 1979 onwards, that weakened and finally brought down the USSR.

7.2 HOW DID THE COLD WAR DEVELOP BETWEEN 1945 AND 1953?

(a) The Yalta Conference (February 1945)

This was held in Russia (in the Crimea) and was attended by the three Allied leaders, Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill, so that they could plan what was to happen when the war ended (see Illus. 7.1). *At the time it seemed to be a success, agreement being reached on several points.*

Illustration 7.1 **Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin at Yalta, February 1945**

- A new organization – to be called *the United Nations* – should be set up to replace the failed League of Nations.
- *Germany was to be divided into zones* – Russian, American and British (a French zone was included later) – while Berlin (which happened to be in the middle of the Russian zone) would also be split into corresponding zones. Similar arrangements were to be made for Austria.
- Free elections would be allowed in the states of eastern Europe.
- Stalin promised to join the war against Japan on condition that Russia received the whole of Sakhalin Island and some territory in Manchuria.

However, there were ominous *signs of trouble over what was to be done with Poland.* When the Russian armies swept through Poland, driving the Germans back, they had set up a communist government in Lublin, even though there was already a Polish government-in-exile in London. It was agreed at Yalta that some members (non-communist) of the London-based government should be allowed to join the Lublin government, while in return Russia would be allowed to keep a strip of eastern Poland which she had annexed in 1939. However, Roosevelt and Churchill were not happy about Stalin's demands that Poland should be given all German territory east of the rivers Oder and Neisse; no agreement was reached on this point.

(b) The Potsdam Conference (July 1945)

The atmosphere here was distinctly cooler. The three leaders at the beginning of the conference were Stalin, Truman (replacing Roosevelt, who had died in April) and Churchill, but Churchill was replaced by Clement Attlee, the new British Labour prime minister, after Labour's election victory.

The war with Germany was over, but no agreement was reached about her long-term future. The big questions were whether, or when, the four zones would be allowed to join together to form a united country again. She was to be disarmed, the Nazi party would be disbanded and its leaders tried as war criminals. It was agreed that the Germans should pay something towards repairing the damage they had caused during the war. Most of these payments (known as 'reparations') were to go to the USSR, which would be allowed to take non-food goods from their own zone and from the other zones as well, provided the Russians sent food supplies to the western zones of Germany in return.

It was over Poland that the main disagreement occurred. Truman and Churchill were annoyed because Germany east of the Oder–Neisse Line had been occupied by Russian troops and was being run by the pro-communist Polish government, which expelled some five million Germans living in the area; this had not been agreed at Yalta (see Map 7.1). Truman did not inform Stalin about the exact nature of the atomic bomb, though Churchill was told about it. A few days after the conference closed, the two atomic bombs were dropped on Japan and the war ended quickly on 10 August without the need for Russian help (though the Russians had declared war on Japan on 8 August and invaded Manchuria). They annexed south Sakhalin as agreed at Yalta, but they were allowed no part in the occupation of Japan.

(c) Communism established in eastern Europe

In the months following Potsdam, the Russians systematically interfered in the countries of eastern Europe to set up pro-communist governments. This happened in Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Albania and Romania. In some cases their opponents were imprisoned

Map 7.1 **Europe after 1945**

or murdered; in Hungary for example, the Russians allowed free elections; but although the communists won less than 20 per cent of the votes, they saw to it that a majority of the cabinet were communists. Stalin frightened the West further by a widely reported speech in February 1946 in which he said that communism and capitalism could never live peacefully together, and that future wars were inevitable until the final victory of communism was achieved. However, Russian historians have claimed that the speech was reported in

Map 7.2 **Central and eastern Europe during the Cold War**

Source: D. Heater, *Our World This Century* (Oxford, 1992), p. 129

the west in a misleading and biased way, especially by George Kennan, who was the US *chargé d'affaires* in Moscow.

Churchill responded to all this in a speech of his own at Fulton, Missouri (USA), in March 1946, in which he repeated a phrase he had used earlier: 'From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, *an iron curtain has descended across the continent*' (see Map 7.2). Claiming that the Russians were bent on 'indefinite expansion of their power and doctrines', he called for *a Western alliance* which would stand firm against the communist threat. The speech drew a sharp response from Stalin, who revealed his fears about Germany and the need to strengthen Soviet security. The rift between East and West was steadily widening and Stalin was able to denounce Churchill as a 'warmonger'. But not everybody in the West agreed with Churchill – over a hundred British Labour MPs signed a motion criticizing the Conservative leader for his attitude.

(d) The Russians continued to tighten their grip on eastern Europe

By the end of 1947 every state in that area with the exception of Czechoslovakia had a fully communist government. Elections were rigged, non-communist members of coalition governments were expelled, many were arrested and executed and eventually all other political parties were dissolved. All this took place under the watchful eyes of secret police and Russian troops. In addition, Stalin treated the Russian zone of Germany as if it were Russian territory, allowing only the Communist Party and draining it of vital resources.

Only Yugoslavia did not fit the pattern: here the communist government of Marshal Tito had been legally elected in 1945. Tito had won the election because of his immense prestige as leader of the anti-German resistance; it was Tito's forces, not the Russians, who had liberated Yugoslavia from German occupation, and Tito resented Stalin's attempts to interfere.

The West was profoundly irritated by Russia's treatment of eastern Europe, which disregarded Stalin's promise of free elections, made at Yalta. And yet they ought not to have been surprised at what was happening: even Churchill had agreed with Stalin in 1944 that much of eastern Europe should be a Russian sphere of influence. Stalin could argue that friendly governments in neighbouring states were necessary for self-defence, that these states had never had democratic governments anyway, and that communism would bring much-needed progress to backward countries. It was Stalin's methods of gaining control which upset the West, and they gave rise to the next major developments.

(e) The Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan

1 The Truman Doctrine

This sprang from events in Greece, where communists were trying to overthrow the monarchy. British troops, who had helped liberate Greece from the Germans in 1944, had restored the monarchy, but they were now feeling the strain of supporting it against the communists, who were receiving help from Albania, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. Ernest Bevin, the British Foreign Minister, appealed to the USA and Truman announced (March 1947) that the USA 'would support free peoples who are resisting subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures'. Greece immediately received massive amounts of arms and other supplies, and by 1949 the communists were defeated. Turkey, which also seemed under threat, received aid worth about $60 million. The Truman Doctrine made it clear that the USA had no intention of returning to isolation as she had after the First World War; she was committed to *a policy of containing communism*, not just in Europe, but throughout the world, including Korea and Vietnam.

2 The Marshall Plan

Announced in June 1947, this was an economic extension of the Truman Doctrine. American Secretary of State George Marshall produced his *European Recovery Programme (ERP)*, which offered economic and financial help wherever it was needed. 'Our policy', he declared, 'is directed not against any country or doctrine, but against hunger, poverty, desperation and chaos.' Western Europe was certainly suffering from all of these problems, exacerbated by the coldest winter for almost 70 years (1947–8). One of the aims of the ERP was to promote the economic recovery of Europe, but there was more behind it than humanitarian feeling. A prosperous Europe would provide lucrative markets for American exports; but its main aim was probably political: communism was less likely to gain control in a flourishing western Europe. By September, 16 nations (Britain, France, Italy, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Austria, Greece, Turkey, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland and the western zones of Germany) had drawn up a joint plan for using American aid. During the next four years over $13 billion of Marshall Aid flowed into western Europe, fostering the recovery of agriculture and industry, which in many countries were in chaos because of war devastation. During the same period the communist parties in western Europe suffered electoral defeat, most notably in France and Italy, which had seemed the most likely states to go communist.

Most American historians have claimed that Europe's rapid recovery from impending economic and political disaster was due entirely to the Marshall Plan, which was held up as a perfect example of humanitarian intervention. In his history of the Plan, published in 2008, Greg Behrman follows the same line: Marshall and his assistants were heroes and America saved Europe from economic disaster and a communist takeover. In another 2008 publication, Nicolaus Mills also sees the Plan as a model of how to go about helping states struggling with exhaustion, poverty and economic chaos. However, he admits that European leaders themselves played an important part in their countries' recovery. In fact, European historians have rejected the view that Europe was saved solely by the Marshall Plan. They point out that European economies recovered so quickly after 1947 that the conditions for recovery must already have been in place. Although $13 billion sounds an awful lot of money, Marshall Aid averaged only about 2.5 per cent of the total national income of the 16 countries involved. This raises the question: if Marshall Aid had not been available, would western Europe have turned communist, either from electoral choice or by Soviet invasion? The overwhelming evidence suggests that the communists' popularity was already in decline before American aid began to arrive. And most historians agree that Stalin was more concerned to protect Soviet security than to start launching wholesale invasions of western Europe.

The Russians were well aware that there was more to Marshall Aid than pure benevolence. Although in theory aid was available for eastern Europe, Russian Foreign Minister Molotov denounced the whole idea as 'dollar imperialism'. He saw it as a blatant American device for gaining control of western Europe, and worse still, for interfering in eastern Europe, which Stalin considered to be Russia's sphere of influence. The USSR rejected the offer, and neither her satellite states nor Czechoslovakia, which was showing interest, were allowed to take advantage of it. *The 'iron curtain' seemed a reality*, and the next development only served to strengthen it.

(f) The Cominform

This – the Communist Information Bureau – was the Soviet response to the Marshall Plan. Set up by Stalin in September 1947, it was an organization to draw together the various European communist parties. All the satellite states were members, and the French and Italian communist parties were represented. Stalin's aim was to tighten his grip on the

satellites: to be communist was not enough – *it must be Russian-style communism*. Eastern Europe was to be industrialized, collectivized and centralized; states were expected to trade primarily with Cominform members, and all contacts with non-communist countries were discouraged. When Yugoslavia objected she was expelled from the Cominform (1948), though she remained communist. In 1947 *the Molotov Plan* was introduced, offering Russian aid to the satellites. Another organization, known as *Comecon (Council of Mutual Economic Assistance)*, was set up to co-ordinate their economic policies.

(g) The communist takeover of Czechoslovakia (February 1948)

This came as a great blow to the Western bloc, because it was the only remaining democratic state in eastern Europe. There was a coalition government of communists and other left-wing parties, which had been freely elected in 1946. The communists had won 38 per cent of the votes and 114 seats in the 300-seat parliament, and they held a third of the cabinet posts. The prime minister, Klement Gottwald, was a communist; President Beneš and the foreign minister, Jan Masaryk, were not; they hoped that Czechoslovakia, with its highly developed industries, would *remain as a bridge between east and west*.

However, a crisis arose early in 1948. Elections were due in May, and all the signs were that the communists would lose ground; they were blamed for the Czech rejection of Marshall Aid, which might have eased the continuing food shortages. The communists decided to act before the elections; already in control of the unions and the police, they seized power in an armed coup. All non-communist ministers with the exception of Beneš and Masaryk resigned. A few days later Masaryk's body was found under the windows of his offices. His death was officially described as suicide. However, when the archives were opened after the collapse of communism in 1989, documents were found which proved beyond doubt that he had been murdered. The elections were held in May but there was only a single list of candidates – all communists. Beneš resigned and Gottwald became president.

The western powers and the UN protested but felt unable to take any action because they could not prove Russian involvement – the coup was purely an internal affair. However, there can be little doubt that Stalin, disapproving of Czech connections with the West and of the interest in Marshall Aid, had prodded the Czech communists into action. Nor was it just coincidence that several of the Russian divisions occupying Austria were moved up to the Czech frontier. The bridge between East and West was gone; *the 'iron curtain' was complete*.

(h) The Berlin blockade and airlift (June 1948–May 1949)

This brought the Cold War to its first great crisis. It arose out of *disagreements over the treatment of Germany*.

1 At the end of the war, as agreed at Yalta and Potsdam, *Germany and Berlin were each divided into four zones*. While the three western powers did their best to organize the economic and political recovery of their zones, Stalin, determined to make Germany pay for all the damage inflicted on Russia, treated his zone as a satellite, *draining its resources away to Russia*.
2 *Early in 1948 the three western zones were merged to form a single economic unit*, whose prosperity, thanks to Marshall Aid, was in marked contrast to the poverty of the Russian zone. The West wanted all four zones to be re-united and given self-government as soon as possible; but Stalin had decided that it would be safer for

Russia if he kept the Russian zone separate, with its own communist, pro-Russian government. The prospect of the three western zones re-uniting was alarming enough to Stalin, because he knew they would be part of the Western bloc.

3 *In June 1948 the West introduced a new currency and ended price controls in their zone and in West Berlin.* The Russians decided that the situation in Berlin had become impossible. Already irritated by what they saw as an island of capitalism a hundred miles inside the communist zone, they felt it impossible to have two different currencies in the same city, and they were embarrassed by the contrast between the prosperity of West Berlin and the poverty of the surrounding area.

The Russian response was immediate: *all road, rail and canal links between West Berlin and West Germany were closed*; their aim was to force the West to withdraw from West Berlin by reducing it to starvation point. The western powers, convinced that a retreat would be the prelude to a Russian attack on West Germany, were determined to hold on. They decided to fly supplies in, rightly judging that the Russians would not risk shooting down the transport planes. Truman had thoughtfully sent a fleet of B-29 bombers to be positioned on British airfields. Over the next ten months, 2 million tons of supplies were airlifted to the blockaded city in a remarkable operation which kept the 2.5 million West Berliners fed and warm right through the winter. In May 1949 the Russians admitted failure by lifting the blockade.

The affair had important results:

- The outcome gave a great psychological boost to the western powers, though it brought relations with Russia to their worst ever.
- It caused the western powers to co-ordinate their defences by the formation of NATO.
- It meant that since no compromise was possible, Germany was doomed to remain divided for the foreseeable future.

(i) The formation of NATO

The formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) took place in April 1949. The Berlin blockade showed the West's military unreadiness and frightened them into making definite preparations. Already in March 1948, Britain, France, Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg had signed *the Brussels Defence Treaty*, promising military collaboration in case of war. Now they were joined by the USA, Canada, Portugal, Denmark, Iceland, Italy and Norway. All signed *the North Atlantic Treaty*, agreeing to regard an attack on any one of them as an attack on them all, and placing their defence forces under a joint NATO command organization which would co-ordinate the defence of the west. This was a highly significant development: the Americans had abandoned their traditional policy of 'no entangling alliances' and for the first time had pledged themselves in advance to military action. Predictably Stalin took it as a challenge, and tensions remained high.

(j) The two Germanies

Since there was no prospect of the Russians allowing a united Germany, the western powers went ahead alone and set up *the German Federal Republic, known as West Germany (August 1949)*. Elections were held and Konrad Adenauer became the first Chancellor. The Russians replied by setting up their zone as *the German Democratic*

Republic, or East Germany (October 1949). Germany remained divided until the collapse of communism in East Germany (November–December 1989) made it possible early in 1990 to re-unite the two states into a single Germany (see Section 10.6(e)).

(k) More nuclear weapons

When it became known in September 1949 that the USSR had successfully exploded an atomic bomb, an arms race began to develop. Truman responded by giving the go-ahead for the USA to produce *a hydrogen bomb* many times more powerful than the atomic bomb. His defence advisers produced a secret document, known as NSC-68 (April 1950), which shows that they had come to regard the Russians as fanatics who would stop at nothing to spread communism all over the world. They suggested that expenditure on armaments should be more than tripled in an attempt to defeat communism.

It was not only the Russians who alarmed the Americans: *a communist government was proclaimed in China (October 1949)* after the communist leader Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-tung) had defeated Chiang Kai-shek, the nationalist leader, who had been supported by the USA and who was now forced to flee to the island of Taiwan (Formosa). *When the USSR and communist China signed a treaty of alliance in February 1950*, American fears of an advancing tide of communism seemed about to be realized. It was in this atmosphere of American anxiety that the Cold War spotlight now shifted to Korea, where, in June 1950, troops from communist North Korea invaded non-communist South Korea (see Section 8.1).

7.3 TO WHAT EXTENT WAS THERE A THAW AFTER 1953?

There is no doubt that in some ways East–West relations did begin to improve during 1953, though there were still areas of disagreement and the thaw was not a consistent development.

(a) Reasons for the thaw

1 The death of Stalin

The death of Stalin was probably the starting point of the thaw, because it brought to the forefront new Russian leaders – Malenkov, Bulganin and Khrushchev – who wanted to improve relations with the USA. Their reasons were possibly connected with the fact that by August 1953 the Russians as well as the Americans had developed a hydrogen bomb: the two sides were now so finely balanced that international tensions had to be relaxed if nuclear war was to be avoided.

Nikita Khrushchev explained the new policy in a famous speech (February 1956) in which he criticized Stalin and said that *'peaceful coexistence' with the West was not only possible but essential*: 'there are only two ways – either peaceful coexistence or the most destructive war in history. There is no third way.' This did not mean that Khrushchev had given up the idea of a communist-dominated world; this would still come, but it would be achieved when the western powers recognized the superiority of the Soviet economic system, not when they were defeated in war. In the same way, he hoped to win neutral states over to communism by lavish economic aid.

2 McCarthy discredited

Anti-communist feelings in the USA, which had been stirred up by Senator Joseph McCarthy, began to moderate when McCarthy was discredited in 1954. It had gradually become clear that McCarthy himself was something of a fanatic, and when he began to

accuse leading generals of having communist sympathies, he had gone too far. The Senate condemned him by a large majority and he foolishly attacked the new Republican President Eisenhower for supporting the Senate. Soon afterwards Eisenhower announced that the American people wanted to be friendly with the Soviet people.

(b) How did the thaw show itself?

1 The first signs

- The signing of the peace agreement at Panmunjom ended the Korean War in July 1953 (see Section 8.1(c)).
- The following year the war in Indo-China ended (see Section 8.3(c–e)).

2 *The Russians made important concessions in 1955*

- They agreed to give up their military bases in Finland.
- They lifted their veto on the admission of 16 new member states to the UN.
- The quarrel with Yugoslavia was healed when Khrushchev paid a visit to Tito.
- The Cominform was abandoned, suggesting more freedom for the satellite states.

3 The signing of the Austrian State Treaty (May 1955)
This was the most important development in the thaw. At the end of the war in 1945, Austria was divided into four zones of occupation, with the capital, Vienna, in the Russian zone. Unlike Germany, she was allowed her own government because she was viewed not as a defeated enemy but as a state liberated from the Nazis. The Austrian government had only limited powers, and the problem was similar to the one in Germany: whereas the three western occupying powers organized the recovery of their zones, the Russians insisted on squeezing reparations, mainly in the form of food supplies, from theirs. No permanent settlement seemed likely, but early in 1955 the Russians were persuaded, mainly by the Austrian government, to be more co-operative. They were also afraid of a merger between West Germany and western Austria.

As a result of the agreement, all occupying troops were withdrawn and Austria became independent, with her 1937 frontiers. She was not to unite with Germany, her armed forces were strictly limited and she was to remain neutral in any dispute between East and West. This meant that she could not join either NATO or the European Economic Community. One point the Austrians were unhappy about was the loss of the German-speaking area of the South Tyrol, which Italy was allowed to keep.

(c) The thaw was only partial

Khrushchev's policy was a curious mixture, which western leaders often found difficult to understand. While making the conciliatory moves just described, he was quick to respond to anything which seemed to be a threat to the East, and he had no intention of relaxing Russia's grip on the satellite states. The Hungarians discovered this to their cost in 1956 when *a rising in Budapest against the communist government was ruthlessly crushed by Russian tanks* (see Sections 9.3(e) and 10.5(d)). Sometimes he seemed to be prepared to see how far he could push the Americans before they stood up to him:

- *The Warsaw Pact (1955)* was signed between Russia and her satellite states shortly after West Germany was admitted to NATO. The Pact was a mutual defence

agreement, which the West took as a gesture against West Germany's membership of NATO.

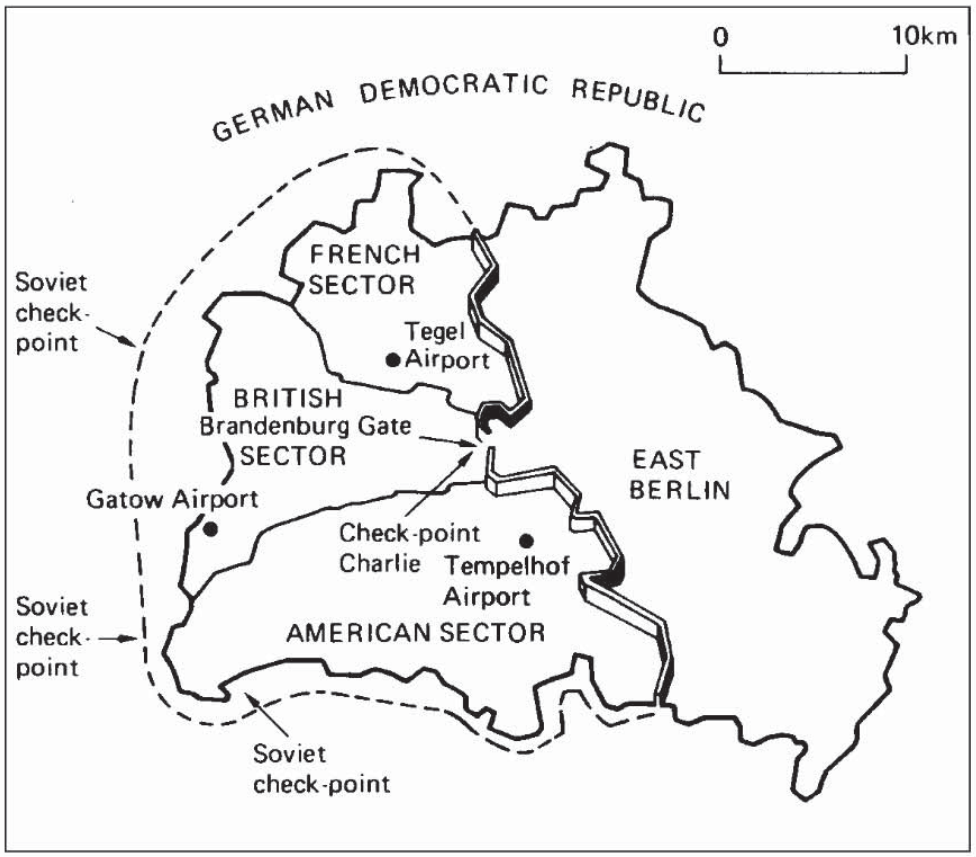
- The Russians continued to build up their nuclear armaments (see next section).
- The situation in Berlin caused more tension (see below).
- The most provocative action of all was when Khrushchev installed Soviet missiles in Cuba, less than a hundred miles from the American coast (1962).

The situation in Berlin

The western powers were still refusing to give official recognition to the German Democratic Republic (East Germany), which the Russians had set up in response to the creation of West Germany in 1949. In 1958, perhaps encouraged by the USSR's apparent lead in some areas of the nuclear arms race, Khrushchev announced that the USSR no longer recognized the rights of the western powers in West Berlin. When the Americans made it clear that they would resist any attempt to push them out, Khrushchev did not press the point.

In 1960 it was Khrushchev's turn to feel aggrieved when an American U-2 spy plane was shot down over a thousand miles inside Russia. President Eisenhower declined to apologize, defending America's right to make reconnaissance flights. Khrushchev stormed out of the summit conference which was just beginning in Paris, and it seemed that the thaw might be over.

In 1961 Khrushchev again suggested, this time to the new American president, John F. Kennedy, that the West should withdraw from Berlin. The communists were embarrassed at the large numbers of refugees escaping from East Germany into West Berlin – these averaged about 200 000 a year and totalled over 3 million since 1945. When Kennedy refused, *the Berlin Wall was erected (August 1961)*, a 28-mile-long monstrosity across the entire city, effectively blocking the escape route (see Map 7.3 and Illus. 7.2).



Map 7.3 **Berlin and the wall, 1961**

Illustration 7.2 **The Berlin Wall: an 18-year-old East Berliner lies dying after being shot during an escape attempt (*left*); he is carried away by East Berlin guards (*right*)**

7.4 THE NUCLEAR ARMS RACE AND THE CUBAN MISSILES CRISIS (1962)

(a) The arms race begins to accelerate

The arms race between East and West arguably began in earnest towards the end of 1949 *after the Russians had produced their own atomic bomb.* The Americans already had a big lead in bombs of this type, but the Russians were determined to catch up, even though the production of nuclear weapons placed an enormous strain on their economy. When *the Americans made the much more powerful hydrogen bomb* towards the end of 1952, the Russians did the same the following year, and had soon developed a bomber with a range long enough to reach the USA.

The Americans remained well ahead in numbers of nuclear bombs and bombers, but it was the Russians who took the lead in August 1957 when they produced *a new type of weapon – the intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM).* This was a nuclear warhead carried by a rocket so powerful that it could reach the USA even when fired from inside the USSR. Not to be outdone, the Americans soon produced their version of an ICBM (known as Atlas), and before long they had many more than the Russians. The Americans also began to build nuclear missiles with a shorter range; these were known as Jupiters and Thors, and they could reach the USSR from launching sites in Europe and Turkey. When *the Russians successfully launched the world's first earth satellite (Sputnik 1) in 1958*, the

Americans again felt that they dared not be left behind; within a few months they had launched an earth satellite of their own.

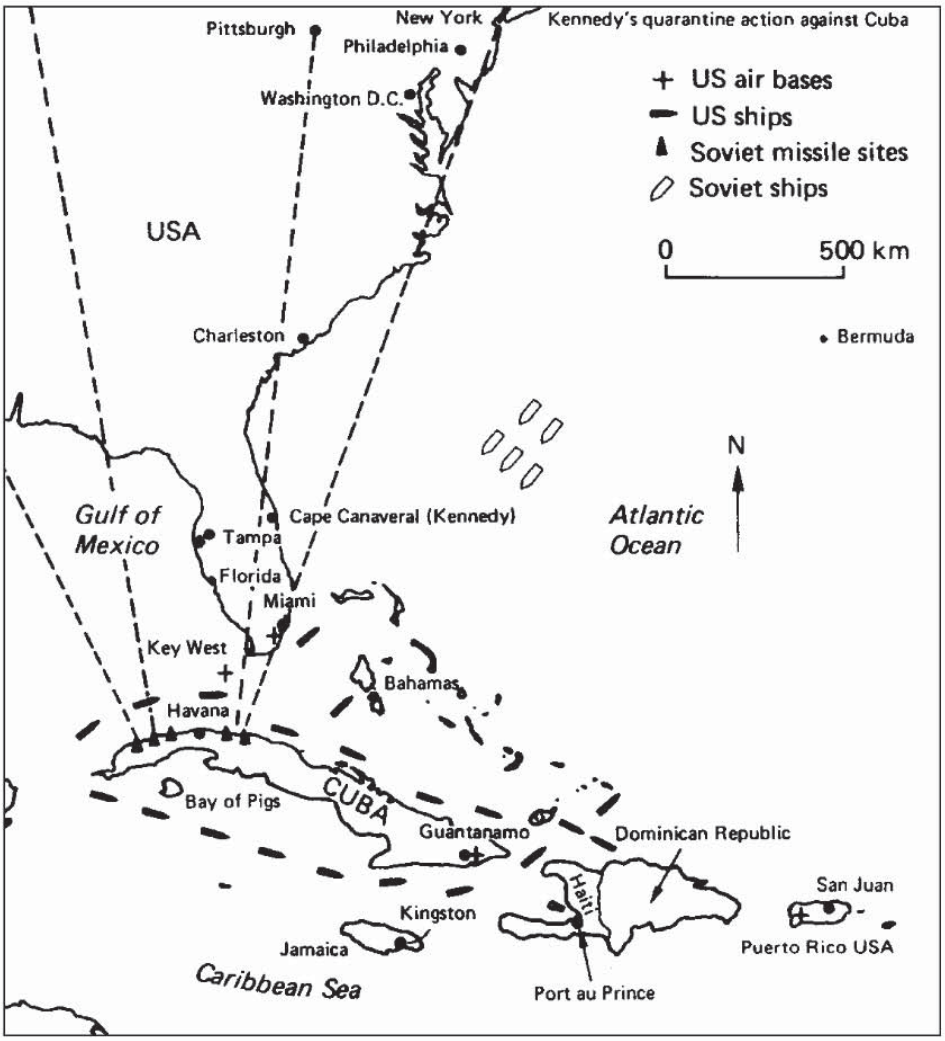
(b) The Cuban missiles crisis, 1962

Cuba became involved in the Cold War in 1959 when Fidel Castro, who had just seized power from the corrupt, American-backed dictator Batista, outraged the USA by nationalizing American-owned estates and factories (see Section 8.2). As Cuba's relations with the USA worsened, those with the USSR improved: in January 1961 *the USA broke off diplomatic relations with Cuba*, and the Russians increased their economic aid.

Convinced that Cuba was now a communist state in all but name, the new US president, John F. Kennedy, approved a plan by a group of Batista supporters to invade Cuba from American bases in Guatemala (Central America). The American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), a kind of secret service, was deeply involved. There was a general view in the USA at this time that it was quite permissible for them to interfere in the affairs of sovereign states and to overthrow any regimes which they felt were hostile and too close for comfort (see Chapter 26). The small invading force of about 1400 men landed at *the Bay of Pigs* in April 1961, but the operation was so badly planned and carried out that Castro's forces and his two jet planes had no difficulty crushing it. Later the same year, *Castro announced that he was now a Marxist and that Cuba was a socialist country.* Kennedy continued his campaign to destroy Castro, in various ways: Cuban merchant ships were sunk, installations on the island were sabotaged and American troops carried out invasion exercises. Castro appealed to the USSR for military help.

Khrushchev decided to set up nuclear missile launchers in Cuba aimed at the USA, whose nearest point was less than a hundred miles from Cuba. He intended to install missiles with a range of up to 2000 miles, which meant that all the major cities of the central and eastern USA such as New York, Washington, Chicago and Boston would be under threat. This was a risky decision, and there was great consternation in the USA when in October 1962, photographs taken from spy planes showed a missile base under construction (see Map 7.4). *Why did Khrushchev take such a risky decision?*

- The Russians had lost the lead in ICBMs, so this was a way of trying to seize the initiative back again from the USA. But it would be wrong to put all the blame for the crisis on the USSR.
- In 1959 the Americans had signed an agreement with Turkey allowing them to deploy Jupiter nuclear missiles from bases in Turkey. This was *before* any top-level contacts between Castro and the Russians had taken place. As Khrushchev himself put it in his memoirs, 'the Americans had surrounded our country with military bases, now they would learn what it feels like to have enemy missiles pointing at you'.
- It was a gesture of solidarity with his ally Castro, who was under constant threat from the USA; although the Bay of Pigs invasion had been a miserable failure, it was not the end of the US threat to Castro – in November 1961 Kennedy gave the go-ahead for a secret CIA operation known as Operation Mongoose which aimed to 'help Cuba overthrow the Communist regime'. Hopefully, the Russian missiles would dissuade such an operation; if not, they could be used against invading American troops.
- It would test the resolve of the new, young, American President Kennedy.
- Perhaps Khrushchev intended to use the missiles for bargaining with the West over removal of American missiles from Europe, or a withdrawal from Berlin by the West.



Map 7.4 **The Cuban missiles crisis, 1972**

Kennedy's military advisers urged him to launch air strikes against the bases. General Maxwell Taylor urged Kennedy to launch a full-scale invasion of Cuba; but he acted more cautiously: he alerted American troops, began a blockade of Cuba to keep out the 25 Russian ships which were bringing missiles to Cuba and demanded the dismantling of the missile sites and the removal of those missiles already in Cuba. The situation was tense, and the world seemed to be on the verge of nuclear war. The Secretary-General of the UN, U Thant, appealed to both sides for restraint.

Khrushchev made the first move: he ordered the Russian ships to turn back, and eventually a compromise solution was reached. Khrushchev promised to remove the missiles and dismantle the sites; in return Kennedy promised that the USA would not invade Cuba again, and undertook to disarm the Jupiter missiles in Turkey (though he would not allow this to be announced publicly). Castro was furious with Khrushchev for 'deserting' him apparently without consulting the Cubans, and Cuban–Soviet relations were extremely cool for several years.

The crisis had only lasted a few days, *but it was extremely tense and it had important results*. Both sides could claim to have gained something, but most important was that both sides realized how easily a nuclear war could have started and how terrible the results would have been. It seemed to bring them both to their senses and produced a marked relaxation of tension. *A telephone link (the 'hotline') was introduced between Moscow and Washington* to allow swift consultations, and in July 1963, the USSR, the USA and Britain signed *a Nuclear Test Ban Treaty*, agreeing to carry out nuclear tests only underground to avoid polluting the atmosphere any further.

At first Kennedy's handling of the crisis was highly praised. Most American commentators argued that by standing up to the Russians and by resisting pressure from his own army Chiefs of Staff for a military response, Kennedy defused the crisis and achieved a peaceful settlement. The president's brother Robert was one of his chief supporters, particularly in his book *Thirteen Days* (1969). In order to lay all the blame for the crisis on the USSR, the Americans emphasized that Khrushchev and various Russian diplomats had repeatedly lied, insisting that they had no intention of building missile bases in Cuba. However, some later historians were more critical of Kennedy. A few accused him of missing a chance to solve the problem of Cuba once and for all – he ought to have called Khrushchev's bluff, attacked Cuba and overthrown Castro. Others criticized Kennedy for causing the crisis in the first place by placing nuclear missiles in Turkey and repeatedly trying to destabilize the Castro regime. It was also pointed out that since Soviet long-range missiles could already reach the USA from Russia itself, the missiles in Cuba did not exactly pose a new threat.

(c) The race continues into the 1970s

Although in public the Russians claimed the outcome of the missiles crisis as a victory, in private they admitted that their main aim – to establish missile bases near the USA – had failed. Even the removal of American Thors and Jupiters from Turkey meant nothing because the Americans now had another threat – *ballistic missiles (known as Polaris, later Poseidon) which could be launched from submarines (SLBMs)* in the eastern Mediterranean.

The Russians now decided to go all-out to catch up with the American stockpile of ICBMs and SLBMs. Their motive was not just to increase their own security: they hoped that if they could get somewhere near equality with the Americans, there would be a good chance of persuading them to limit and reduce the arms build-up. As the Americans became more deeply involved in the war in Vietnam (1961–75), they had less to spend on nuclear weapons, and slowly but surely the Russians began to catch up. By the early 1970s they had overtaken the USA and her allies in numbers of ICBMs and SLBMs. They had brought out a new weapon, *the anti-ballistic missile (ABM)*, which could destroy incoming enemy missiles before they reached their targets.

However, the Americans were ahead in other departments – they had developed an even more terrifying weapon, *the multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicle (MIRV)*; this was a missile which could carry as many as 14 separate warheads, each one of which could be programmed to hit a different target. The Russians soon developed their version of the MIRV, known as the SS-20 (1977). These were targeted on western Europe, but were not as sophisticated as the American MIRV and carried only three warheads.

At the end of the 1970s the Americans responded by developing *Cruise missiles, which were based in Europe*; the new refinement was that these missiles flew in at low altitudes and so were able to penetrate under Russian radar.

And so it went on; by this time both sides had enough of this horrifying weaponry to destroy the world many times over. The main danger was that one side or the other might be tempted to try and win a nuclear war by striking first and destroying all the other side's weapons before they had time to retaliate.

(d) Protests against nuclear weapons

People in many countries were worried at the way the major powers continued to pile up nuclear weapons and failed to make any progress towards controlling them. Movements were set up to try to persuade governments to abolish nuclear weapons.

In Britain *the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND)*, which was started in 1958, put pressure on the government to take the lead, so that Britain would be the first nation to abandon nuclear weapons; this was known as *unilateral disarmament* (disarmament by one state only). They hoped that the USA and the USSR would follow Britain's lead and scrap their nuclear weapons too. They held mass demonstrations and rallies, and every year at Easter they held a protest march from London to Aldermaston (where there was an atomic weapons research base) and back.

No British government dared take the risk, however. They believed that unilateral disarmament would leave Britain vulnerable to a nuclear attack from the USSR, and would only consider abandoning their weapons as part of a general agreement by all the major powers (*multilateral disarmament*). During the 1980s there were protest demonstrations in many European countries, including West Germany and Holland, and also in the USA. In Britain many women protested by camping around the American base at Greenham Common (Berkshire), where the Cruise missiles were positioned. The fear was that if the Americans ever fired any of these missiles, Britain could be almost destroyed by Russian nuclear retaliation. In the long run, perhaps the enormity of it all and the protest movements did play a part in bringing both sides to the negotiating table. And so the world moved into the next phase of the Cold War – *détente* (see Sections 8.6 and 8.7 for détente and the end of the Cold War).

FURTHER READING

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QUESTIONS

1 In what ways did the Marshall Plan, the dividing of Berlin, the communist takeover of power in Czechoslovakia, and the formation of NATO contribute to the development of the Cold War?

2 How accurate is it to talk about a 'thaw' in the Cold War in the years after 1953?

3 What were the causes of the Cuban missiles crisis? How was the crisis resolved and what were its consequences?

4 Assess the reasons why Berlin was a major source of tension in the Cold War from 1948 to 1961.
5 How important was the Marshall Plan in bringing about the recovery of Western Europe between 1947 and 1951?

 There is a document question about the causes of the Cold War on the website.