

The Cold War

By August 1945, World War II was over. What now? This question had been addressed in February 1945 at the Yalta Conference in Crimea. The Big Three – FDR, Churchill, and Stalin – met to discuss what would happen after the fall of Germany. The main questions were:

- ★ What would be the fate of the countries of Eastern Europe that were occupied by the Soviet Union;
- ★ How would Germany be treated;
- ★ How would an effective peace-keeping body be created (the United Nations)?

Western Europe could do little about Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe. Stalin promised free elections in Eastern Europe. These were just words. He wanted sympathetic governments in Eastern Europe as buffer states against the West. In reality, he established a Russian empire, controlling all of Eastern Europe.

Initially, Germany was to be de-Nazified and then allowed to reunite. However total reunification did not occur. Germany was divided into zones of occupation – American, British, French and Russian. The Soviet Union created a puppet state in East Germany. In 1946, Churchill, realized the danger posed by the Soviet Union. In a speech in Fulton, Missouri, Churchill described Stalin's expansion of Communist totalitarian regimes as an "Iron Curtain" that separated the captive peoples of Eastern and Central Europe from the rest of the world.

The Berlin Airlift — Ultimately, Stalin wanted the Allies out of Berlin, which was in the heart of the Soviet zone. In 1948, he blockaded the Allies zones in Berlin, and in response, the United States organized the Berlin Airlift. It sent supplies – food, medicine, fuel – into the city by plane. The only way for the Soviets to stop the airlift would have been open war, and Stalin was unwilling to take this step. The airlift lasted one year with planes constantly taking off and landing. Finally, the Soviets lifted the blockade. In 1949, the Allies abandoned their goal of a unified Germany and agreed to unify their three zones. This area became West Germany – the Federated Republic of Germany. Later that year, the Soviet Union proclaimed that East Germany would be known as the German Democratic Republic. East Germany remained a Soviet satellite, and Berlin remained a divided city in the middle of East Germany.

The United Nations — To lessen the threat of future world wars, the United Nations was created. Its charter went into effect on 2 October, 1945. The U.N. consisted of a General Assembly of all member nations, and a Security Council of Allies (U.S., Britain, U.S.S.R., France, China) and a few elected nations that rotated. Although the United Nations could deploy military peacekeeping forces, the permanent members of the Security Council could exercise their vetoes on such actions. The Soviets used their veto 103 times between 1946 and 1964 compared to the 4 or less vetoes employed by the other permanent members.

The Third World

Soon after World War II, the two competing blocs emerged: the Soviet Bloc with its satellites of puppet governments in Eastern and Central Europe and the Western Bloc or the Free World, the democracies led by the United States. Over time, with the

collapse of European colonial empires, a third bloc emerged. It consisted of newly independent nations, that is, nations that had been freed from colonial domination after WW II.

The collapse of European colonial empires was a sudden development. Sadly, most of the newly independent states did not long enjoy either freedom or democratic rule. Often these countries started out as democracies with Western-style constitutions, but many of the new states were not really viable and ended up wracked by poverty, ethnic conflicts and inexperience with self-rule. This left them open to dictatorships or one-party rule. Freedom from foreign rule did not guarantee political freedom.

Third World “Proxy” Conflicts

These Third World nations often served as a battleground for the conflict between the East and the West – for the Cold War. Early in 1947 Greece experienced attacks by native Communist guerrilla bands that were receiving aid from Communist nations to the north. In the same year demands were made upon Turkey by the Soviet Union for the granting of military bases and for concessions in the Dardanelles, the strait that is part of the waterway connecting the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. President Harry Truman reacted to the situation by delivering an address to Congress in March, 1947, requesting an appropriation of \$400 million for economic and military aid to bolster the governments of Greece and Turkey. Congress complied and the assistance proved effective. Truman's message was, however, more far-reaching than a request for aid to Greece and Turkey.

The Truman Doctrine

When Truman went before Congress in 1947 to ask for support in Greece, he enunciated what became known as the Truman Doctrine. The doctrine stated that the U.S. would devote its energies to containing Communism, fighting wars wherever it spilled over outside of the Iron Curtain, but leaving those areas that the Soviets had already brought under their control (like Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary) alone. The “father” of Truman’s new policy was an American diplomat and Russia specialist named George Kennan. In a long telegram from Moscow, where Kennan was on the U.S. Embassy staff, in 1946, and in the subsequent 1947 article “The Sources of Soviet Conduct,” Kennan argued that the Soviet regime was inherently expansionist and that its influence had to be “contained” in areas of vital strategic importance to the United States. Kennan further argued that the Russians would consider any Western incursion into those already held areas as a violation of Soviet security, but the Soviets would be more ready to give up and go home when challenged in new areas of Communist expansion. Logically, then, Soviet international influence and the spread of Communism should be practiced wherever the Soviets tried to expand their influence.

Truman enunciated the new doctrine of “containment” in his 1947 “Greece Speech.” The President called for the containment of Soviet expansion and pledged the use of American economic and military resources to help the “free peoples” of Europe resist Communist aggression, whether by direct attack or subversion. This policy became known as the Truman Doctrine. In providing the ground for the principle of containment, the Truman Doctrine can be regarded as the basis for the American position in the Cold War.

The Marshall Plan

After Congress had provided assistance to Greece and Turkey, Secretary of State George C. Marshall recognized the need for the United States to support the economic and social recovery of Europe from the effects of World War II in order to preserve governments established on that continent. In June, 1947, in an address at Harvard University, Marshall pointed out that the United States was anxious to cooperate with Europe, if the nations of the continent were ready to formulate a program for mutual reconstruction. By declaring that American policy would be directed "not against any country or doctrine but against hunger, poverty, desperation, and chaos," Marshall made it clear that the Communist nations were welcome to participate in the program.

This offer was accepted by sixteen Western and Western-oriented nations, including Great Britain, France, Italy, Greece, and Turkey. In July, 1947, the participatory nations sent representatives to a conference in Paris, where details were worked out for international cooperation along economic lines.

The Soviet Union and its allies refused to send representatives. The Russians claimed that the entire program was an American imperialist plot for the economic enslavement of Europe, and refused to allow any Eastern states under Soviet control to take part. In December, 1947, Truman submitted to Congress a proposal entitled the European Recovery Program, which incorporated much from the report of the conference in Paris on Europe's needs. A few months later, and after much discussion, Congress approved a modified version of the Truman administration's European Recovery Program.

Popularly called the Marshall Plan, the program was in existence from 1948 to 1951.

Under the Marshall Plan the U.S. government provided Europe with aid totaling approximately \$15 billion, most of which was spent in the United States for foodstuffs, raw materials, and machinery. The impact of the Marshall Plan on the European nations was soon noticeable. It accomplished the following:

- ★ promoted strong economic recovery, permitting many nations to surpass prewar levels of production;
- ★ spurred cooperative economic enterprises among Western European nations, such as the customs union established by Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg;
- ★ promoted political stability;
- ★ stiffened the resistance of European nations to Communist expansionism.

Cold War International Security and Insecurity

In 1949, the Western powers formed NATO – the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. It consisted of the United States and eleven other nations. Its purpose was to rearm Western Europe and protect it against potential Soviet invasion. Soon after, West Germany joined, along with Greece and Turkey. Largely to counter NATO, by 1955, the Soviet Union had formed a series of military alliances of its own with its satellite nations. This was called the Warsaw Pact.

After 1948, the U.S.S.R. also acquired atomic weapons. As both sides built increasingly larger nuclear stockpiles and increasingly more destructive nuclear weapons, both sides began to embrace the notion that nuclear war could best be prevented if *neither* side could expect to survive a full scale nuclear exchange as a functioning state. This novel and terrifying notion became known as "MAD" — Mutually Assured Destruction, or

nuclear deterrence. The MAD doctrine assumes that each side has enough nuclear weaponry to destroy the other side and that either side, if attacked for any reason by the other, would retaliate with equal or greater force. The expected result is an immediate escalation resulting in both combatants' total and assured destruction. It is now generally hypothesized that the nuclear fallout or nuclear winter resulting from a large scale nuclear war would bring about worldwide devastation, though this was not a critical assumption to the theory of MAD. (By the way, the title of the famous American satirical magazine comes from this acronym. "What me Worry" its motto was a reference to the anxiety of the Cold War nuclear threat.)

The doctrine further assumes that neither side will dare to launch a first strike because the other side will launch on warning or with secondary forces resulting in the destruction of both parties. The payoff of this doctrine is expected to be a tense but stable peace.



Duck and Cover

The nature of the insecurity of the tense peace brought about by the MAD mentality in the United States might best be illustrated by the curious innovation of the "duck and cover" civil defense policy that was taught to school children in the early 1950s. At the time, it was believed the main dangers of a Hiroshima-type nuclear blast were from heat and blast damage and radiation was less dangerous than we know now it is. As a result, civilians were trained to duck under or behind something that provided protection from airborne debris and cover their head and neck to shield those areas from the blast. Obviously, the "duck and cover" strategy had less practical use than psychological use: to keep the danger of nuclear war high on the public mind, while also attempting to assure the American people that something could be done to defend against nuclear attack. To watch a Civil Defense film shown in schools, movie theatres and elsewhere in order to train the public, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ixy5FBLnh7o> .

Folks built fallout shelters in order to protect themselves from atomic attack. Families built "personal" shelters, outfitted with everything that the family might need for an extended stay underground. Perhaps the most "extreme" of these is parodied in a movie called *Blast from the Past* (1999) featuring Brendan Fraser as a kid who has been born and grown up in a sealed fallout shelter for 35 years while the world has gone by without them.

Proxy Wars

Since large scale war between the East and West would mean nuclear annihilation, tensions were played out in smaller scale wars where proxies for the United States and the Soviet Union duked it out – often with US and Soviet involvement. The United

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States was not always successful in containment. Although it did succeed in its first effort in Greece, China fell to communism by 1949. From 1950-1953, United States troops fought a war against communism in Korea, after nearly 4 years of war, an uneasy peace was established with North Korea left Communist, and South Korea free. Containment didn't always work! After a decade of war in Vietnam, the U.S. left South Vietnam which was shortly invaded and absorbed by the Communist North. A significant loss for U.S. containment policy was Cuba, which became a Communist nation under Fidel Castro in 1959. Now a Soviet puppet state existed just 90 miles from the U.S. Soviet attempts to set up atomic missiles there in 1962 led to the Cuban Missile Crisis, which nearly caused World War III. The Cold War continued from the late 1940s until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989 and perhaps, with the rise of an increasingly authoritarian system in Russia, it may go through a new stage in the future. Who knows?