

CHAPTER  
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Summary

CHAPTERS IN BRIEF *Restructuring the Postwar World,  
1945–Present*

**CHAPTER OVERVIEW** *The United States and Soviet Union opposed each other as they tried to achieve different goals. Communists won a civil war in China, making it the world's second Communist nation. The United States fought two wars in Asia trying to contain communism. The Cold War also spread to Latin America and elsewhere. The superpowers later began to enjoy better relations.*

## ❶ Cold War: Superpowers Face Off

**KEY IDEA** *The conflicting aims of the United States and the Soviet Union led to global competition.*

The United States and the Soviet Union were allies during World War II. In February 1945, they agreed that Germany would be divided into separate zones. Each zone would be occupied by the soldiers of one of the main Allied powers. They also agreed that Germany would have to repay the Soviet Union for damage and loss of life. Soviet leader Joseph Stalin, in turn, promised free elections in Eastern Europe and to declare war on Japan. These allies also were among 50 countries that formed the United Nations in 1945. This new world body was pledged to save the world from war.

Still, the two superpowers had sharp political and economic differences. They also had different goals after the war. The United States wanted to encourage democracy and trade. It wanted to put the different zones of Germany back together to make one nation. The Soviet Union had these goals: to promote communism, to take advantage of raw materials in Eastern Europe and rebuild its own economy, and to keep Germany divided and weak.

After the war, Stalin made sure Communist governments were in place in Eastern Europe. This divided Europe between the Communist East and the democratic West. This division was called the “iron curtain.” U.S. President Harry Truman then began a policy of containment to block further Soviet expansion. As part of this policy, the United States adopted the Marshall Plan in 1947. The plan donated food and materials such as machines to European countries, helping them rebuild from war.

In 1948, the Soviets and Americans clashed over Germany. France, Britain, and the United States agreed to pull their troops out of Germany and let the three zones that they occupied unite. The Soviets refused to leave their zone, however. Then

they cut off all highway and train traffic into Berlin, which was deep within the Soviet zone. The United States and British responded with the Berlin Airlift. They flew food and supplies into the city for 11 months. Finally, the Soviets lifted the blockade.

The growing struggle between Americans and Soviets came to be called the Cold War. Many other countries allied with one superpower or another. The United States, Canada, and several countries in Western Europe formed the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). In this military alliance, each nation promised to defend any other member that was attacked. The Soviets and the countries of Eastern Europe made a similar agreement. It was called the Warsaw Pact.

In 1949, the Soviet Union announced that it, like the United States, had developed an atomic bomb. Three years later, both superpowers had a newer, even more deadly weapon—the hydrogen bomb. Soon both nations were involved in an arms race, as they produced growing numbers of nuclear weapons and developed new ways to deliver them.

In 1957, Soviet scientists shocked the world by launching *Sputnik*, the world's first human-made satellite. Many Americans felt that the Soviets were far ahead in science and technology. The United States then began spending huge amounts of money to improve science education.

## ❷ Communists Take Power in China

**KEY IDEA** *Chinese Communists defeated Nationalist forces, and two separate Chinas emerged.*

Nationalists and Communists fought for control of China in the 1930s. When Japan invaded China, the two sides joined to fight the common enemy. After World War II, they began fighting each other again. Their renewed war lasted from 1946 to 1949. The Communists won because their

troops were well-trained in guerrilla war. They also enjoyed the backing of the peasants to whom they had promised land. In 1949, Jiang Jieshi and other Nationalist leaders fled to the island of Taiwan. The United States helped Jiang set up a new government there. The Nationalists called their land the Republic of China. The Soviets helped Mao Zedong and his government, the People's Republic of China.

Mao began to rebuild China. He seized land and gave it to the peasants. But he also forced the peasants—in groups of 200 to 300 households—to join collective farms. The people on each of these farms were given the land as a group. He also took control of China's industries. Under Mao's plan, production of industrial products went up.

With this success, Mao launched the "Great Leap Forward." He wanted to make the collective farms larger and more productive. The plan failed. People did not like strong government control. Planning by the government was not good. Poor weather produced a famine that killed millions.

After this failure, Mao played a smaller role in the government. He grew unhappy with the direction the country was taking, however. In 1966, he launched the Cultural Revolution. Using young students formed into groups called Red Guards, Mao tried to revive the revolutionary spirit in China. The Red Guards struck at teachers, scientists, and artists. They shut down schools and sent intellectuals to the country to work on farms. They killed thousands of people who resisted. China was in chaos, with factories shut down and farm production dropping. Eventually, Mao finally put an end to the Cultural Revolution.

### ③ Wars in Korea and Vietnam

**KEY IDEA** *In Asia, the Cold War flared into actual wars supported mainly by the superpowers.*

After World War II, Korea was divided into a Soviet-backed north and an American-supported south. On June 25, 1950, North Korea invaded the South. President Truman fought this move with United Nations help. The United States and other countries sent troops to assist South Korea. At first, the North Korean army captured almost all of South Korea. Then the UN army began a bold counterattack. In just two months, it had pushed the North Koreans far back, nearly to

China. The Chinese then entered the war and drove the UN forces back. Bitter fighting continued until 1953. That year, the two Koreas agreed to a cease-fire. The earlier boundary splitting North and South Korea at the 38th parallel remained the same.

North Korea developed as a Communist country following the war. It had a strong army and tight government control, but it also had many economic problems. South Korea's economy grew, in part because it received U.S. aid. However, for more than 30 years, dictators ruled the country. Free elections were held only after a new constitution was accepted in 1987.

The United States faced another war against Communists, this time in Vietnam. That area had been a French colony until Japan invaded it early in World War II. When Japan lost, the French returned. A Vietnamese nationalist named Ho Chi Minh wanted to win independence. First, he drove the French out of Vietnam. A peace conference split Vietnam in two, with Ho taking charge in North Vietnam. He made it a Communist state. Communist rebels—the Vietcong—stayed active in the South.

Seeing that the government of South Vietnam was threatened by Communists, the United States began to send large numbers of soldiers. First it sent advisers, later combat troops. By 1968, more than 500,000 U.S. troops were there. They could not win the war on the ground. The United States also tried bombing or burning forests in the South to drive the Vietcong from their hiding places. These actions made peasants in the South more likely to support the North. Many in the United States came to oppose the war.

In the late 1960s, President Richard Nixon began to cut the number of U.S. troops in Vietnam in order to turn the fighting over to the South Vietnamese. The last American troops left in 1973. Two years later, North Vietnam overran the South and made Vietnam one country again. About 1.5 million people fled Vietnam. Today, Vietnam remains Communist but is looking for other nations to invest in its economy.

Fighting in Vietnam spilled over into its neighbor Cambodia. Rebels there set up a brutal Communist government. It killed 2 million people and imposed its will. In 1978, the Vietnamese invaded the country, overthrowing the rebels. Vietnam withdrew in 1989. In 1993, Cambodia held free elections.

## 4 The Cold War Divides the World

**KEY IDEA** The superpowers supported opposing sides in Latin American and Middle Eastern conflicts.

After World War II, many nations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America had serious problems. They were plagued by ethnic conflict, lack of education and technology, poverty, and political unrest. Some of these countries tried to stay neutral in the Cold War. Others actively sought American or Soviet aid.

In Cuba, the United States supported a dictator in the 1950s. In 1959, a young lawyer, Fidel Castro, led a successful revolt. Castro then turned to the Soviets for aid. In 1962, the Soviets and Americans almost went to war over Soviet nuclear missiles placed in Cuba. The Soviets finally pulled the missiles out. Over time, the Cuban economy became more dependent on Soviet aid. When the Soviet Union dropped communism in 1991, this aid stopped. It was a serious blow to Cuba's economy.

The United States had also backed a dictator in Nicaragua. He fell in 1979 to Communist rebels. When the new government began helping leftist rebels in nearby El Salvador, the United States struck back. It began to support forces in Nicaragua that wanted to overthrow the Communists. The civil war lasted more than a decade. Finally, the different sides agreed to hold free elections.

The Middle East often saw conflict between those who wanted a modern, more Western-style society and those who wanted to follow traditional Islam. Such a struggle took place in Iran. In the 1950s, a group tried to take control of the government from the shah, or ruler, who was pro-West. The United States helped the Shah defeat them.

Over time, the Shah tried to weaken the influence of the Islamic religion in Iran. A Muslim leader, the Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini, led a successful revolt. In 1979, the Shah was forced to leave the country. Khomeini made Islamic law the law of the land and followed a foreign policy that was strongly against the United States. He also led his country to a long war with Iraq, its neighbor.

The Soviets gained influence in Afghanistan after 1950. In the 1970s, Islamic rebels threatened the country's Communist government. The Soviets sent in support troops. The United States felt its Middle East oil supplies were in danger and supported the rebels. In 1989, after a costly occupation, Soviet troops left Afghanistan.

## 5 The Cold War Thaws

**KEY IDEA** The Cold War began to thaw as the superpowers entered an era of uneasy diplomacy.

When Stalin died in 1953, Nikita Khrushchev became the Soviet leader. Soon protest movements in Eastern Europe challenged the Soviets' hold there. In 1956, protesters and the army toppled the Communist government of Hungary. Khrushchev sent Soviet tanks to put the Communists back in power. Similar events took place in Czechoslovakia in 1968. That time it was new Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev who sent the tanks.

The Soviets did not have the same control over their larger neighbor, China. Although the Soviet Union and China enjoyed friendly relations at first, they gradually grew apart.

In the early 1970s, President Richard Nixon began following a policy called *détente*. This was a lessening of tensions between the superpowers. He became the U.S. first president to visit Communist China and the Soviet Union. In 1972, Nixon and Brezhnev signed a treaty to limit the number of nuclear missiles each country could have.

The U.S. retreated from *détente* after the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979. In 1981, Ronald Reagan, a fierce anti-Communist, became president. Then the Soviets grew angry over U.S. support for the rebels fighting Communists in Nicaragua. Tensions increased until 1985 when the Soviet Union got a new leader.

## Review

### *Determining Main Ideas*

1. What factors divided the United States and the Soviet Union?
2. How did the two superpowers tangle in the Americas?
3. **Summarizing** Describe the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution.
4. **Analyzing Causes and Recognizing Effects** Why did the United States fight in Korea and Vietnam? What were the outcomes of these wars?
5. **Making Inferences** How did the Soviet Union act toward Eastern Europe?