

**"A Brief History of the Cold War"**  
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**Description:** This lecture series examines the origins, developments, and sudden end of the Cold War - the battle for hearts and minds between the United States and the Soviet Union - as the dominant factor of the history of international relations since 1945. Both sides appreciated the need to avoid a final battle between the two blocs at the cost of their survival.

**Week 1**

**From San Francisco to the Truman Doctrine**

Understanding the Cold War

Historiographical Debate

The Origins and Development of the Cold War

The United Nations

The history of international relations since 1945 was dominated, down to the 1990s by the origins, development, and sudden end of the Cold War. The new post-war system that emerged in 1945 was, for the first time in modern history, dominated by the two extra-European powers - the United States and the Soviet Union. The initial failure to agree on how to resolve their rivalries arose in part from the wartime alliance shift.

The origins of the Cold War remain a matter of long-standing historical dispute and the arguments are generally not mutually exclusive. The Cold War was not essentially a reaction by one side to the actions of the other; its origins need explaining in terms of conflicting ambitions and the differing perceptions of what kind of post-war order was necessary to reconcile such ambitions and interests with order and stability.

President F. D. Roosevelt has always been a supporter of the world order and international cooperation based on a general international organization for the

maintenance of peace and security (United Nations) and he won his allies' support for it. President Truman, with a US monopoly of the atomic bomb, appeared ready to embark on a more confrontational approach towards Moscow and his speech on 12 March 1947 (the Truman Doctrine) universalized the simmering conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union.

## **Week 2**

### **The Cold War Intensifies**

The Marshall Plan

The Extension of the Soviet and US Influence in Europe

The Division of Germany

Rearming for Cold War

The Emergence of China and the Korean War

By the end of 1947 the establishment of two opposing blocs was largely in place. Whether this was essentially an ideological, economic, or military confrontation is still a matter of contention. The Marshall Plan was, without doubt, a key turning point in the development of the Cold War.

The Atlantic Pact was formally signed on 4 April 1949 and was clearly directed against the Soviet Union. The West now portrayed an ideological conflict over the political and economic shape of the post-war world, as a military effort to defend strategically important territory. The whole American approach to the Cold War was debated in 1949 and the famous NSC 68 memorandum was the culmination of that debate, which signalled a victory for the aggressive Cold War fighters.

The Korean War (1950-53) and the civil war in China were far more than an extension of a European confrontation into a more global one centred on American-Soviet rivalry. Korea provided an example of how a Cold War, which raged as a civil war, developed into a regional hot one once the United States, acting on behalf of the United Nations, then became engaged in a major war with China.

## **Week 3**

### **The Floodgates Were Open**

India and Decolonization

The Congo Crisis

The Question of Palestine

The Arab-Israeli Conflict

The challenges to colonial rule in Africa and Asia during the early years of the Cold War constituted another crucial element of the new international order after the Second World War. The transfer of power in India in 1947 had revealed an important rationale for the end of empire which was to figure in future decolonization. The liberation of Asia necessarily had substantial consequence for Africa as well.

As both the United States and the Soviet Union were trying to recruit allies in the incipient Cold War, non-alignment became an attractive option for Asian and African nationalists. The Bandung Conference in 1955, the major achievement of non-alignment, demonstrated a common front against colonial rule and demanded rapid decolonization.

The influx of newly independent African and Asian countries radically altered the entire character of the United Nations. This massive group of Third World nations was not beholden to the West; it was encouraged but not controlled, by the Soviet bloc.

The United Nations had contributed to the decolonization of the majority of Arab countries and the creation of the state of Israel, but it still had not resolved the decolonization of Palestine, nor had it succeeded in managing the Arab-Israeli conflict. In 1947 the British decided to refer the question of Palestine to the United Nations, where a majority approved a partition plan. Ultimately the Arab-Israeli dispute over Palestine became the most contentious international issue in the Middle East and one of the major conflicts in world history after 1945.

## **Week 4**

### **Maintaining the Spheres of Influence**

Uniting for Peace

Latin America and the United States

Guatemala and the Cuban Revolution

The Cuban Missile Crisis

By the mid-1950s, Great Britain was clearly declining in hard power terms as measured by military and economic strength and was desperate to preserve its power in terms of status and prestige. However, the Suez Crisis, the Israeli-British-French plan in October 1956 to undermine Nasser, the key challenger to the idea that Britain had a special role in the Middle East, symbolized the end of British domination.

US relations with Latin America had long been characterized by intervention and a determination, evidenced as soon as the 1890s, to exclude other powers from the region. The end of democracy and reform in Guatemala in 1954 represented the danger that capitalism's failure in Latin America could lead to the adoption of more radical solutions and closer links to Moscow, but dictators like Batista produced revolutionaries like Fidel Castro.

In October 1962, during the Cuban Missile Crisis, the world stood on the brink of nuclear war between the superpowers. The United States decided to install missiles in Turkey and Italy which could threaten cities in the Soviet Union and the Soviet Union decided secretly to install missiles in Cuba which could threaten cities in most of the United States. After the crisis new approaches had to be adopted to the Cold War and Soviet-American relations.

## Week 5

### **Making Friends is Cheaper than Fighting Wars**

The Vietnam War

The Dominican Crisis

Alexander Dubček and Czecho-Slovakia

*Détente*

The Vietnam War was one of the United States' most controversial and divisive wars. To Americans, the Vietnam War was a conflict that lasted more than two decades, beginning with their first involvement of American military advisors in the 1950s and ending with the fall of Saigon to North Vietnamese troops in 1975. For the Vietnamese people, however, the Vietnam War was the final chapter in a protracted, century-long quest to reclaim their national identity.

The Dominican intervention in 1965 showed that the United States remained ready to use its economic and military might to defend its ideological and economic interests in the Americas. For Latin American states, who were more interested in long-term problems such as development and trade, and anxious to achieve more equality with their northern neighbour, the intervention confirmed both their relative powerlessness and the limited significance of the Alliance for Progress.

In 1968, Czecho-Slovakia, led by Alexander Dubček, embarked on a path of reforms toward "Socialism with human face." Dubček and his reforms soon became of deep concern to Moscow. The Soviet-led invasion, launched on 20-21 August 1968, had a detrimental impact on emerging *détente*.

Down to 1972, as the United States and the Soviet Union moved fitfully towards *détente*, more certain progress was made in Europe. The groundwork was laid by President de Gaulle and then the West German *Ostpolitik*. But *détente* can also be seen as fighting the Cold War by means other than the diplomatic deadlock, commercial freeze, and nuclear threats.

## **Week 6**

### **The Revival and End of Cold War**

An Arc of Crisis

Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan

Perestroika and Mikhail Gorbachev

The End of History?

One central problem with the *détente* process between the United States and the Soviet Union, of course, was that each superpower had different interests in pursuing it. American critics of Soviet policy, like Brzezinski, viewed in an 'arc of crisis' - stretching from Africa, through the Middle East to Central Asia - evidence of Soviet trouble-making. In fact, both superpowers used allies to advance their influence in the less developed world.

The 1980s saw a remarkable change in international relations. Global reaction to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was far worse than Moscow feared. The decade began in atmosphere of revived Cold War confrontation with the Western economies in depression. The early years of the Reagan administration produced concern in Western Europe about the President's anti-communist rhetoric.

The most common reason provided for a fundamental change in Cold War attitudes centres on the influence of Mikhail Gorbachev and Pope John Paul II. Gorbachev, elected as Soviet leader in March 1985, provided a different approach to East-West relations as part of his reformist agenda.

By early 1990, Mikhail Gorbachev had transformed the Soviet Union's political landscape and its foreign policy, but on 25 December 1991 he resigned, and the Soviet Union ceased to exist. The end of the Cold War was expected to end the conflict between two contrasting ways of life, the confrontation of opposing blocs, and the emphasis on a bipolar world of competition. However, instead of world order, many found it difficult to discern any pattern or system to international relations.