

Chapter 39

The Cold War Expands

Were the methods used by the United States to contain communism justified?

39.1 Introduction

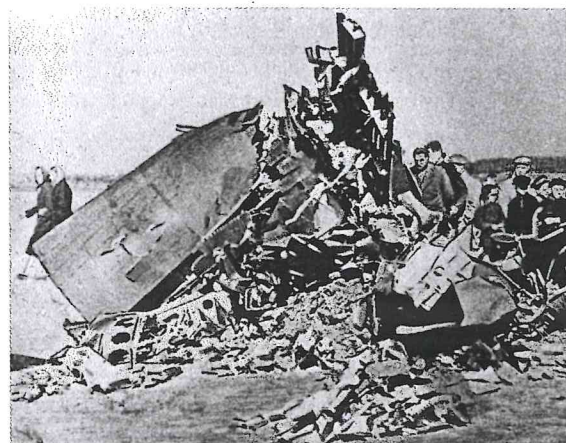
By the late 1950s, the United States and the Soviet Union were deeply involved in the Cold War. A key weapon in the struggle between the superpowers was espionage. Both sides used spies and secret agents—along with hidden cameras, listening devices, and other spy gear—to gather information about the enemy.

On May 1, 1960, the Soviets shot down a U.S. spy plane flying over the USSR. The plane was a U-2, a high-altitude, black aircraft known as the Black Lady of Espionage. Special cameras aboard the U-2 could photograph Soviet military installations from heights of 60,000 feet or more. By the time of the U-2's downing, U.S. pilots working for the CIA had been flying deep into Soviet airspace for nearly five years. They had taken photographs of Soviet missile bases, airfields, rocket-engine factories, and other military facilities.

On that May Day, Francis Gary Powers was flying the U-2. Like all U-2 pilots, he carried a deadly poison that he could take if the enemy captured him. After the Soviets hit his plane, Powers parachuted to safety. However, before he could drink the poison, Soviet troops grabbed him. Soviet officials later put Powers on trial in Moscow. They sentenced him to 10 years in prison.

Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev reacted to the U-2 incident with outrage, accusing the United States of conducting a vicious spying campaign against the Soviet Union. President Dwight D. Eisenhower first denied the charge, but later admitted that Powers had been on an intelligence-gathering mission. The president declared espionage a “distasteful necessity.”

The spy plane incident set back efforts to improve U.S.-Soviet relations. It occurred just weeks before Eisenhower and Khrushchev planned to meet in Paris. At that meeting, Khrushchev demanded that the United States stop its U-2 flights and asked the United States to apologize for them. Eisenhower agreed to end the flights but insisted on the United States' right to defend its interests. The talks ended almost as soon as they began, and the Cold War intensified.



Soviet forces recovered the wreckage of a U-2 spy plane shot down over the Soviet Union in May 1960. The U-2 incident enraged Soviet leaders and caused a further chilling in U.S.-Soviet relations. It also focused world attention on the espionage taking place during the Cold War.



During the Berlin Blockade, American planes brought vital food and supplies to city residents. The planes sometimes also dropped candy to eager children in the streets below, in an operation dubbed “Little Vittles.” This airlift played a key role in defeating the Soviet blockade.

39.2 Europe Feels the Heat of the Cold War

The U-2 incident came at the end of a decade marked by increasingly tense U.S.-Soviet relations. Like players in a chess game, leaders on each side studied the other’s moves. Each was alert to threats to its national security and stood ready to respond to such challenges. During this period, Europe was the Cold War’s main battleground. The Soviet Union tried to consolidate its control of Eastern Europe, while the United States tried to contain the USSR and limit its power.

The USSR Protests the Unification of West Germany One of the main issues causing Cold War tensions was the status of Germany. After the war, the Allies had divided Germany and its capital, Berlin, into four occupation zones. But they did not decide when and how the zones would be reunited. When three of the Allies took a step toward reunification, it prompted a Cold War crisis.

In March 1948, the United States, Great Britain, and France announced plans to merge their occupation zones to form a new country, the Federal Republic of Germany. The three Allies agreed that this reunited Germany would have a democratic government and a capitalist economy. Their decision angered the Soviets, who controlled both eastern Germany and access to the former German capital Berlin, which lay within the Soviet occupation zone.

On June 24, the Soviet Union imposed a blockade on Berlin, halting all land travel into the city from the Allied occupation zones. The Soviets believed that the **Berlin Blockade** would force the Allies to give up either Berlin or their plans for a West German state.

The United States did not respond as the Soviet Union expected. Instead, General Lucius Clay, the commander of U.S. forces in Germany, called for resistance to the Soviet blockade. “If we mean . . . to hold Europe against communism, we must not budge,” he said. “The future of democracy requires us to stay.” President Harry Truman agreed, fearing that the loss of Berlin would cause the fall of Germany to the communists. He ordered a massive airlift of food, fuel, and other vital supplies to defeat the Berlin Blockade.

Over the next ten and a half months, pilots made more than 270,000 flights into West Berlin, carrying nearly 2.5 million tons of supplies. The Berlin Airlift kept the hopes of the city’s 2 million residents alive and became a symbol of the West’s commitment to resisting communist expansion. By the spring of 1949, the Soviets saw that their policy had failed. They ended the blockade, and Germany officially became two countries: communist East Germany and democratic West Germany. Berlin also remained divided into East and West.

The Iron Curtain Falls on Czechoslovakia By the time of the Berlin crisis, the Soviet Union controlled most of Eastern Europe. Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, and Hungary had all established pro-Soviet communist governments. Just weeks before the Berlin crisis, Czechoslovakia became the last major country to fall.

After World War II, the Czechs had formed an elected government dominated by communists but also including noncommunist parties. In February 1948, Joseph Stalin amassed Soviet troops on the Czech border and demanded the formation of an all-communist government. Shortly afterward, communists seized control, ending the Czech experiment in postwar democracy.

This sudden government takeover, or *coup d'état*, alarmed Truman. It showed that Stalin would not accept a government in which power was shared with noncommunists and that he was prepared to use force to achieve his ends.

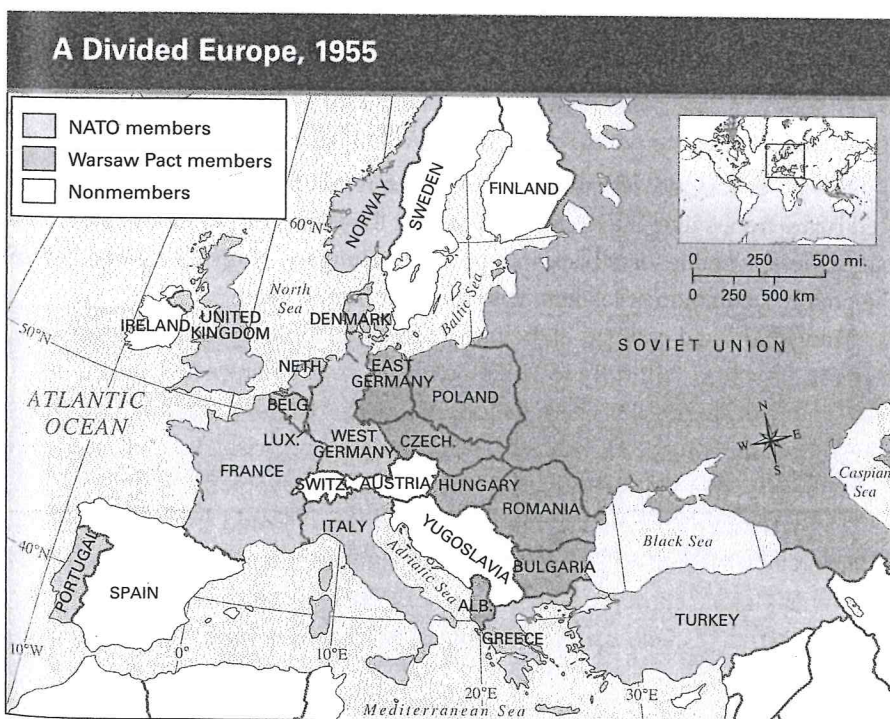
The Czech coup d'état brought drastic changes to the country's political and economic life. Czechoslovakia was now a one-party state, and communist leaders arrested, tried, and jailed all those who opposed them. They suppressed basic rights, including freedom of the press and free speech, as well. They also forced farmers to give up their land and work on state-owned collective farms.

Europe Is Divided: NATO Versus the Warsaw Pact Czechoslovakia was not the only country to feel Soviet pressure. In the late 1940s, the USSR tightened its grip on all its **satellite nations**, or countries under one nation's control.

As divisions increased in Europe, the superpowers also formed new military alliances. In 1949, the United States, Canada, and 10 countries of Western Europe formed the **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)**. The founding European members of NATO were France, Luxembourg, Belgium, the Netherlands, Iceland, Italy, Britain, Denmark, Norway, and Portugal. Greece and Turkey joined NATO in 1952, and West Germany followed in 1955.

NATO members agreed to a plan for collective security. They pledged to consider an attack on any member as an attack on all and formed a standing army to defend Western Europe in the event of a Soviet invasion. The United States played a key role in NATO, providing money, troops, and leadership. By joining this alliance, the United States took another step away from isolationism.

The creation of NATO prompted the Soviet Union to form its own security alliance in 1955. Under the **Warsaw Pact**, the Soviet Union, Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Romania joined forces for mutual defense. NATO and Warsaw Pact members began to see each other as enemies. Europe was now formally divided into two armed camps.



By 1955, two military alliances—the Warsaw Pact and NATO—had further divided Europe. On one side were the Soviet-backed states of Eastern Europe. On the other were the non-communist states of Western Europe.

Hungary's attempt to break free of Soviet control brought a strong Soviet reaction. In November 1956, the Soviet Union invaded Hungary and crushed the rebellion. In 1958, the communist government put reform leader Imre Nagy on trial and then executed him.



Hungary Tests the Limits of Containment Not long after the signing of the Warsaw Pact, upheaval in Hungary tested the West's anticommunist resolve. In October 1956, thousands of Hungarians took part in a brief revolt against the communist government. The protesters marched through the streets of Hungary's capital, Budapest, waving flags and calling for democracy.

The leaders of the revolt formed a government led by Imre Nagy, a reform-minded communist. He aimed to free Hungary from Soviet domination. He boldly declared that Hungary would withdraw from the Warsaw Pact and become a neutral country, and he appealed to Western nations to help stave off Soviet aggression. In a speech to the Hungarian people, he said,

This fight is the fight for freedom . . . against the Russian intervention and it is possible that I shall only be able to stay at my post for one or two hours. The whole world will see how the Russian armed forces, contrary to all treaties and conventions, are crushing the resistance of the Hungarian people . . . Today it is Hungary and tomorrow, or the day after tomorrow, it will be the turn of other countries because the imperialism of Moscow does not know borders.

—Imre Nagy, November 4, 1956

Soviet leaders moved quickly to crush the revolt by sending tanks and Red Army troops into Budapest. After killing thousands of protesters, the troops put Soviet-backed leaders back into power in Hungary. Nagy stood trial before the country's communist leaders, who then put him to death.

Hungarians had counted on help from the United States. Before the revolt, many had listened faithfully to U.S.-sponsored radio broadcasts beamed into the country from Europe. There they heard speakers urging them to resist the spread of communism. Through these programs, Hungarians learned of the Eisenhower administration's goal of freeing "captive peoples."

Many Hungarians believed that the United States would support its bid for independence by sending troops and weapons to aid them in their fight against the Soviet Union. They were shocked when American forces failed to come. One Hungarian resident recalled, "People had been watching from rooftops hoping to see U.S. planes arriving." Eisenhower, however, was unwilling to risk war with the Soviet Union to free one of its satellites.

39.3 Choosing Sides: The Cold War Turns Hot in Asia

The superpowers did not confine their rivalry to Europe. Before long, Cold War conflicts erupted around the globe. Asia was one of the first affected regions. By the 1950s, both China and Korea had become arenas in the Cold War struggle.

The “Fall of China” to Communism During World War II, Chinese communists led by Mao Zedong and the Nationalists led by Chiang Kai-shek had joined forces to fight Japan. With Japan’s surrender in 1945, however, the two groups turned on each other and waged a civil war for control of China. The United States backed the Nationalists, even though Chiang was not a popular leader. At times, both allies and adversaries saw him as corrupt or ineffective. In 1949, the communists defeated the Nationalists. Chiang and his followers fled to Formosa, an island off the coast of China, which they renamed Taiwan. There, Chiang led a small Nationalist holdout against communism.

The fall of China to the communists ended U.S. hopes that the country would become a powerful, noncommunist ally in Asia. Some Americans reacted to the event with anger and looked for a scapegoat. In public speeches and on the floor of Congress, they asked bitterly, “Who lost China?” Some Republican leaders pointed accusing fingers at President Truman.

U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson denied that the administration held responsibility for China’s acceptance of communism. “Nothing this country did or could have done within the reasonable limits of its capabilities,” he said, “could have changed the result.” Many China scholars agreed, noting the unpopularity of Chiang and the broad public support for Mao Zedong.

Many U.S. leaders feared that China and the Soviet Union would form an alliance and pose an even greater threat to U.S. interests around the world. Most Americans viewed communist China as similar to the Soviet Union both in its attitude toward the West and its desire to spread communism around the world. Nevertheless, although China remained a key ally of the Soviet Union for years, it pursued its own interests and rejected Soviet control.

The communist takeover of China prompted the United States to seek a new ally in Asia, and Japan was the logical choice. The United States gradually lifted restrictions on industrial and economic growth imposed on Japan after World War II. Eventually, Japan became an economic powerhouse and a strong U.S. partner in the region.



In October 1949, the Chinese communist Red Army defeated Nationalist forces and took control of China. The new People’s Republic of China, led by Mao Zedong, established communist rule in China. The United States viewed communist China as a major Cold War threat.



Chinese Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek (also known as Jiang Jieshi) fled to Taiwan after his defeat in China's civil war. The United States remained a staunch ally of Chiang's government, however, and worked to isolate communist China.

Containment by Isolation: The U.S. Ends Relations with China Meanwhile, the United States adopted a stern policy toward China. When Mao formed the People's Republic of China in 1949, the United States refused to recognize the new state. Instead, it continued to refer to the Nationalists in Taiwan as China's legitimate government. The United States also cut off all trade with China and opposed its admission to the United Nations. The U.S. government meant for these steps to contain China by isolating it from the world community.

Not all American officials favored this tough policy, however. Some felt that improving U.S. relations with China might weaken China's ties to the Soviet Union. But U.S. officials faced strong pressure from Congress and the public to treat China as an enemy. Many Americans felt that Mao and Stalin were equally reprehensible. Forging a better relationship with either one seemed unthinkable.

Until the 1970s, the United States continued to recognize Taiwan and bar China from the UN. The United States did not resume formal relations with China until 1979.

Containment by Armed Force: The Korean War Like China, Korea was freed from Japanese control when World War II ended. At that time, Soviet troops occupied the Korean Peninsula north of the 38th parallel, while U.S. troops held the area to the south. In the north, the Soviet Union put a pro-Soviet communist government in power. In the south, U.S. officials supported the existing anticommunist government. However, this arrangement masked deep tensions, which erupted in June 1950 in the **Korean War**.

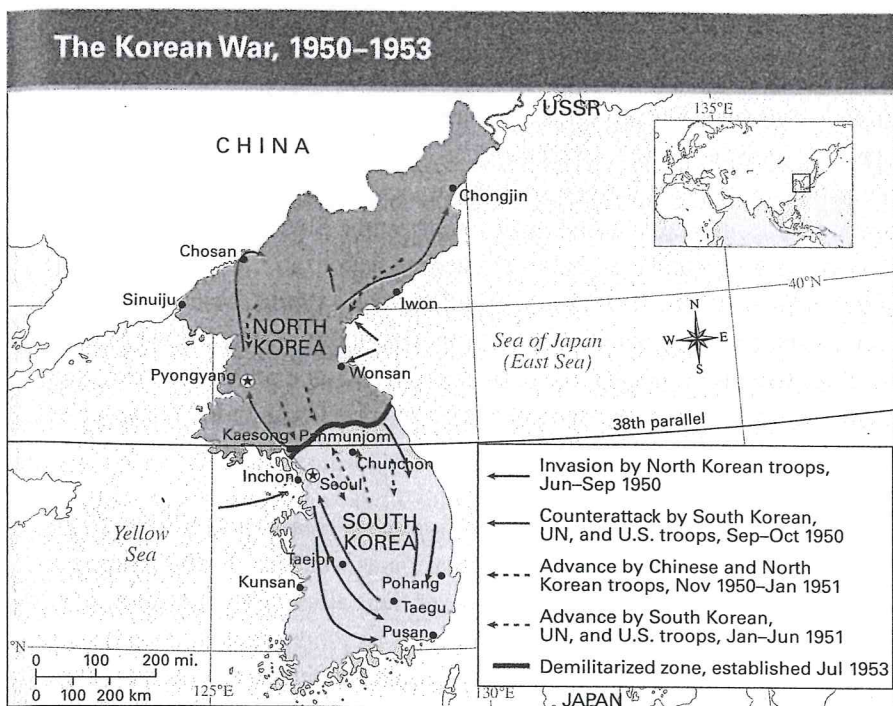
The war began when North Korean troops armed with Soviet weapons invaded South Korea. Their aim was to unite all of Korea under communist rule. Truman, viewing the invasion as a test of American will, ordered U.S. forces to help South Korea repel the invaders.

Truman turned to the United Nations for support. A UN resolution condemned the North Korean invasion and called on member states to aid South Korea. Troops from 15 nations joined the UN force, with the vast majority of the soldiers coming from the United States. According to another UN resolution, the purpose of this joint force was to create a "unified, independent and democratic Korea." Officials selected American general Douglas MacArthur to lead the troops. Under his command, the army invaded North Korea and fought its way northward, nearly reaching the Chinese border along the Yalu River.

The Korean War was the first major conflict to take place during the Cold War. Several million Koreans died, along with some 54,000 American soldiers. In the end, the fighting resolved little. Korea remained divided between the communist north and the noncommunist south.



The Granger Collection, New York



For much of the Korean War, the fighting saw back and forth across the 38th parallel, the dividing line between North and South Korea. At times, however, both sides pushed deep into the other's territory.

Alarmed by the approach of UN forces, China sent tens of thousands of soldiers streaming over the border into North Korea. An army of more than 400,000 Chinese and North Korean troops forced the UN army back to the 38th parallel. MacArthur then called for an expansion of the conflict. He wanted to blockade China's ports and bomb major Chinese industrial centers.

President Truman rejected MacArthur's plan, however. In fact, once China entered the conflict, the president began looking for a way out of it. He feared the onset of another global war. But MacArthur would not back down. In an angry letter to a friend, he wrote, "I believe we should defend every place from communism . . . I don't admit that we can't hold communism wherever it shows its head." When MacArthur publicly questioned the president's decision, Truman fired him.

The final two years of the war became a stalemate, with most of the fighting taking place near the 38th parallel. Finally, in 1953 the two sides signed an armistice ending hostilities. The agreement left the Korean Peninsula divided along the 38th parallel and created a buffer zone, called the **demilitarized zone (DMZ)**, between the two countries. No military forces from either North Korea or South Korea were allowed to enter the DMZ.

The war left all of Korea ailing. It destroyed homes, factories, roads, hospitals, and schools throughout the peninsula. About 3.5 million North Korean and South Korean soldiers died or suffered injuries. As many as 2 million Korean civilians may have lost their lives. More than 54,000 American soldiers also died in the war.

After the war's end, North Korea turned inward, becoming increasingly isolated from the rest of the world. South Korea, in contrast, continued to develop strong economic and political ties with the United States. In time, South Korea's economy flourished. As the economic gap between the two Koreas widened, hopes for a "unified, independent and democratic Korea" faded away.



The United States Information Agency produced various types of propaganda during the Cold War. One of its most effective forms of propaganda was radio broadcast. The anti-communist messages of Radio Free Europe aimed to stir up anticommunist sentiment in Eastern Europe. Here, a young Czech refugee speaks during a 1952 broadcast beamed into communist Czechoslovakia.

39.4 Fighting the Cold War in Other Parts of the World

By the mid-1950s, the Cold War had effectively divided the world into three groups of nations. One group, known as the First World, included the developed, capitalist countries, also known as the West: the United States, Canada, the nations of Western Europe, and Japan. Another group, the Second World, or the East, consisted of communist countries: the Soviet Union, the nations of Eastern Europe, and China. Poor, developing nations in Latin America, Africa, and Asia made up the final group, called the **Third World**. Many Third World nations had recently gained freedom from colonial rule. The United States and the Soviet Union competed to win their support. Some of the countries aligned themselves with one of the superpowers. Others, such as India, remained independent and nonaligned.

United States Information Agency: Influencing Hearts and Minds In the Cold War, nations used words and persuasion as weapons. Both superpowers utilized propaganda to exert influence over their allies and to persuade others to join their side. The United States designed its propaganda to raise fears of communism and highlight the benefits of capitalist democracy. This propaganda took many forms, from books and news articles to films and radio broadcasts. To carry out this war of words, the government created the United States Information Agency, or USIA, in 1953.

One of the USIA's main jobs was to beam radio broadcasts into the Soviet bloc. It used three networks to carry out this task: Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, and Radio Liberty. The CIA funded these last two services. Radio Free Europe broadcast to Eastern Europe in Czech, Polish, and other local languages. Radio Liberty broadcast to the Soviet Union in Russian. Many of the staff members of these services had fled Eastern Europe to escape communist rule. The families they left behind often faced harsh treatment from communist governments due to their relatives' ties to the radio networks.

Soviet and Eastern European leaders tried to isolate their citizens from Western news and ideas by banning radio programs from the West. They disrupted the broadcasts by jamming the signals and filling the airwaves with mechanical shrieks, howls, and other loud noises.

Foreign Aid: Supporting Friendly Governments Nations also used foreign aid as a Cold War weapon. Both the United States and the Soviet Union gave money and assistance to other countries to gain new allies. In a message to Congress in 1949, President Truman explained why foreign aid was a crucial part of the Cold War struggle:

The grinding poverty and the lack of economic opportunity for many millions of people in . . . Africa, the Near and Far East, and certain regions of Central and South America, constitute one of the greatest challenges of the world today . . . If [the people] are frustrated and disappointed, they may turn to false doctrines which hold that the way of progress lies through tyranny.

—Harry S. Truman, from a speech on June 24, 1949

Some U.S. aid helped the poor by providing funds for agriculture, health care, and other social and economic programs. However, much of it took the form of military assistance to friendly Third World governments. Pro-American states such as Turkey, Pakistan, and South Korea received help, while more independent nations often did not. In some countries, such as Nicaragua and Haiti, the United States gave support to anticommunist dictators. These leaders used the aid to tighten their grip on power—often at the expense of their people. Many citizens in those countries bitterly resented the aid, which seemed to contradict the U.S. goal of promoting democracy.

At times, the United States withheld aid to punish nations that failed to support its policies. In the 1950s, Egyptian leader Gamal Abdul Nasser began building trade ties with communist nations. In 1956, Egypt bought tanks and other weapons from communist Czechoslovakia, in defiance of U.S. wishes. In response, the United States and Britain withdrew their offers to help Egypt finance the building of the much-needed Aswan Dam on the Nile River. Nasser reacted by seizing control of the Suez Canal from Britain. This led Britain, France, and Israel to invade Egypt, hoping to regain control of the canal. The Soviet Union then threatened to back up Egypt with military force. To prevent war, the United States stepped in, persuading all sides to withdraw and thus ending the crisis.

The CIA: Containing Communism Through Covert Action In the 1950s, the CIA played a growing part in the Cold War. During this period, it expanded its role from intelligence gathering to **covert action**. A covert action is a secret political, economic, or military operation that supports foreign policy. Agents try to shape events or influence affairs in foreign countries while hiding their role in those events.

During the Cold War, both superpowers used spies, satellite photography, wiretapping, and other covert methods to gather information about or influence events in other countries. Francis Gary Powers's U-2 flight was a covert CIA operation. At times, CIA agents also bribed foreign leaders, supported political parties, or funded supposedly independent radio stations.

The United States often used covert action to overthrow unfriendly or leftist governments. For example, in 1953 it helped topple Mohammed Mossadegh, Iran's premier. Mossadegh had nationalized a British oil company, establishing government control over the formerly private company. He also hinted that he might seek Soviet aid. CIA agents worked with Iran's military leaders to overthrow Mossadegh and reinstate the Iranian monarch, Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. As absolute ruler with close ties to the United States, the shah ruled Iran for almost 30 years.

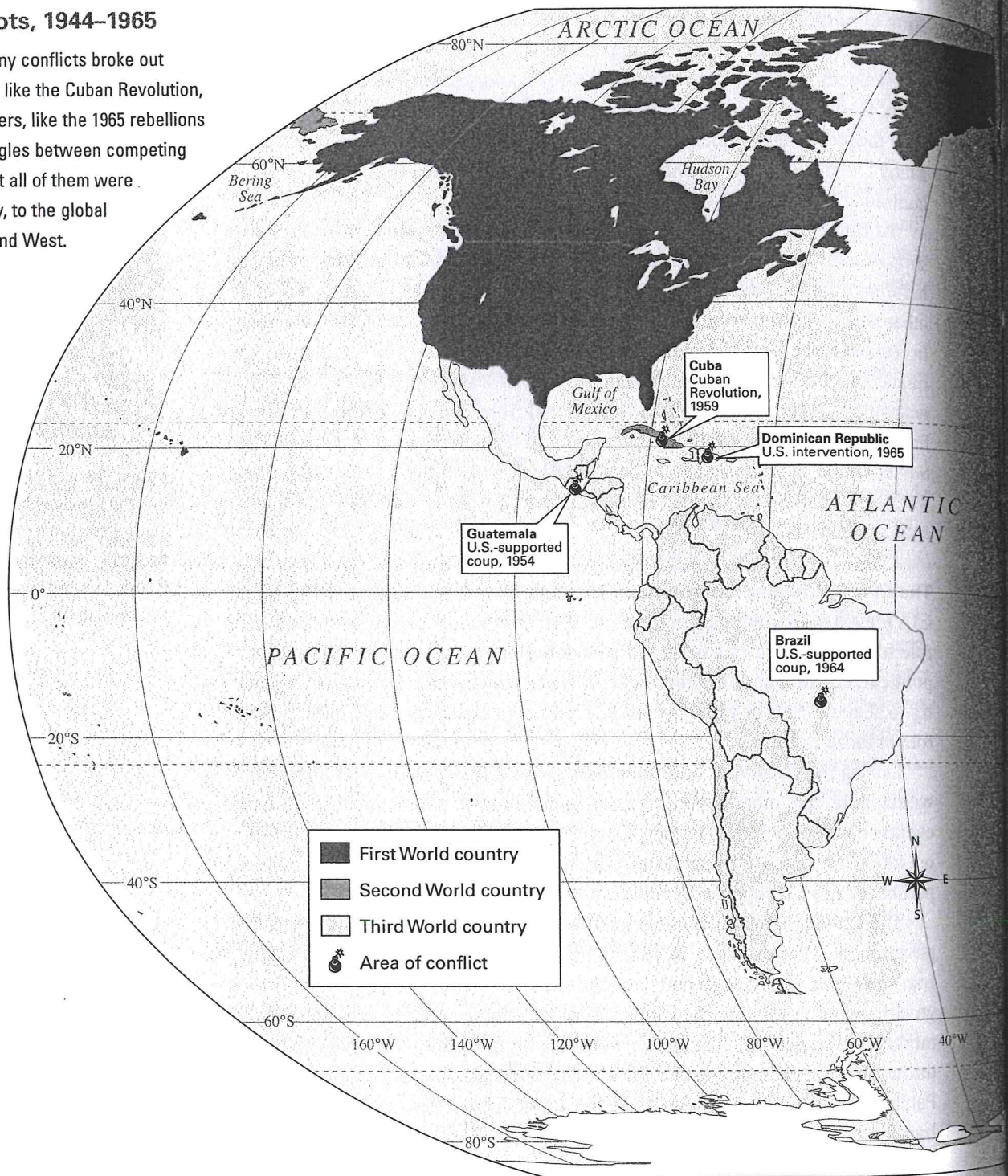
In Central America, the United States also relied on covert action to achieve its goals. In 1954 in Guatemala, for example, CIA agents helped overthrow the elected president, Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán. Both U.S. economic interests and Cold War concerns motivated this action. The United Fruit Company, a U.S. firm with operations in Guatemala, opposed certain social reforms laid out by the Guatemalan government. In particular, United Fruit objected to a government plan to hand over thousands of acres of company



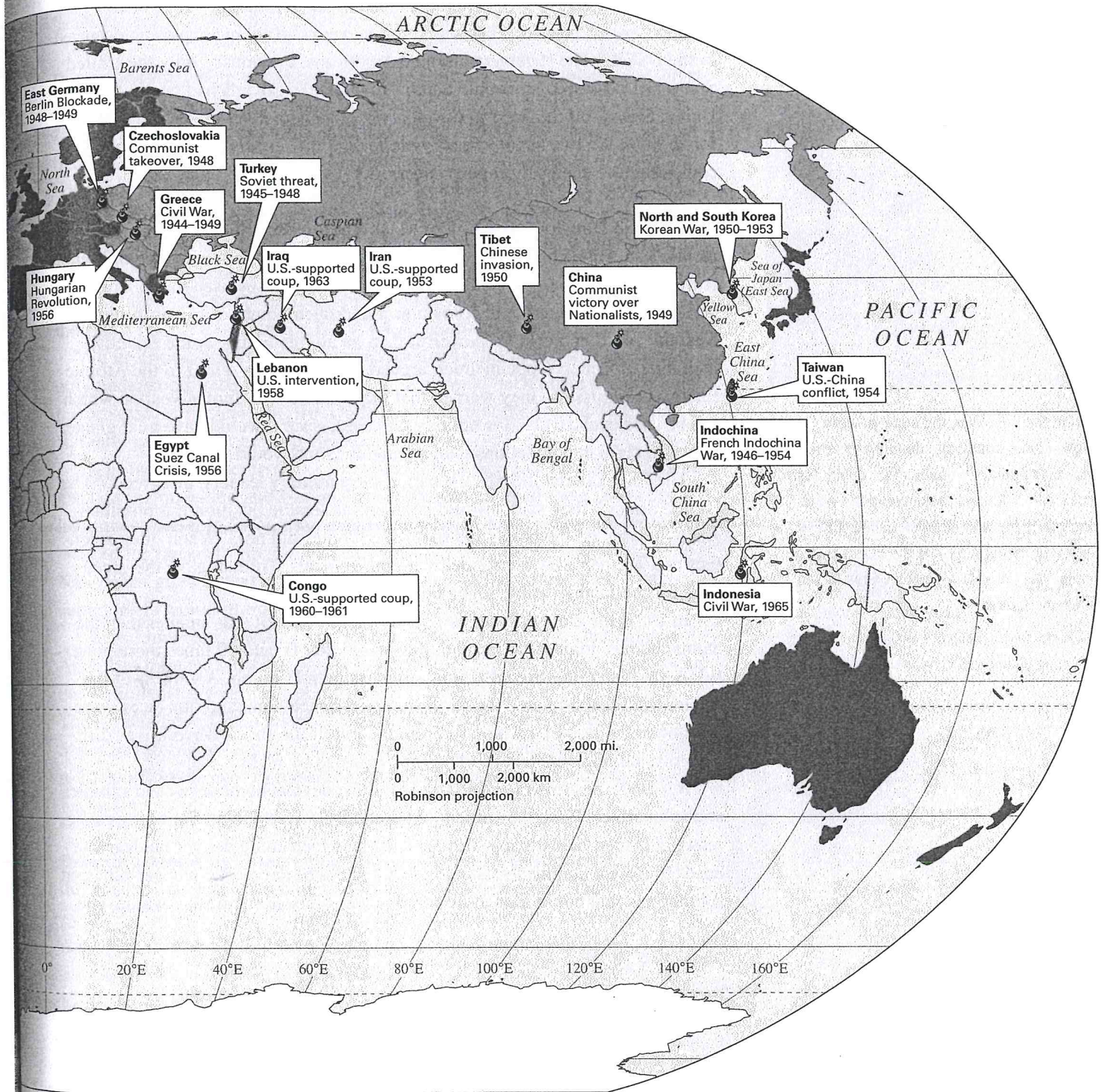
During the Cold War, many people believed that the best way to fight communism in the Third World was to provide aid for social and economic development. According to this theory, extreme poverty gave rise to unrest and revolution.

Cold War Hot Spots, 1944–1965

During the Cold War, many conflicts broke out around the world. Some, like the Cuban Revolution, were guerrilla wars. Others, like the 1965 rebellions in Indonesia, were struggles between competing factions in a country. But all of them were tied, directly or indirectly, to the global struggle between East and West.



land to the country's landless peasants. Concerned that Guatemala might turn communist, the United States ordered the CIA to support a military coup. Arbenz was overthrown, and a military government took charge. It returned United Fruit lands, shelved other reforms, and jailed many of its critics. The U.S. role in Guatemala caused many Latin Americans to view the United States as an enemy of social reform.



Sometimes the United States intervened more aggressively. In 1962, voters in the Dominican Republic elected a noncommunist reformer, Juan Bosch, as president. Seven months after he had taken office, a military coup toppled Bosch. In 1965, his supporters started a civil war to return him to power. Fearing that many of his supporters were communists, the United States sent troops to crush the revolt and keep Bosch from regaining power.



During the Cold War, the superpowers engaged in a costly and deadly arms race. They built nuclear weapons that could destroy entire cities. Among these weapons were long-range nuclear missiles called ICBMs. Here visitors get a look at the first ICBM, on display in 1959 at New York's Coney Island amusement park.

In the late 1950s, the United States began building nuclear-powered submarines that could also launch nuclear missiles. The USS *Patrick Henry*, which took to sea in 1959, was the second of these submarines to be built. It carried 16 Polaris missiles and could stay submerged for more than two months at a time.

39.5 An Arms Race Threatens Global Destruction

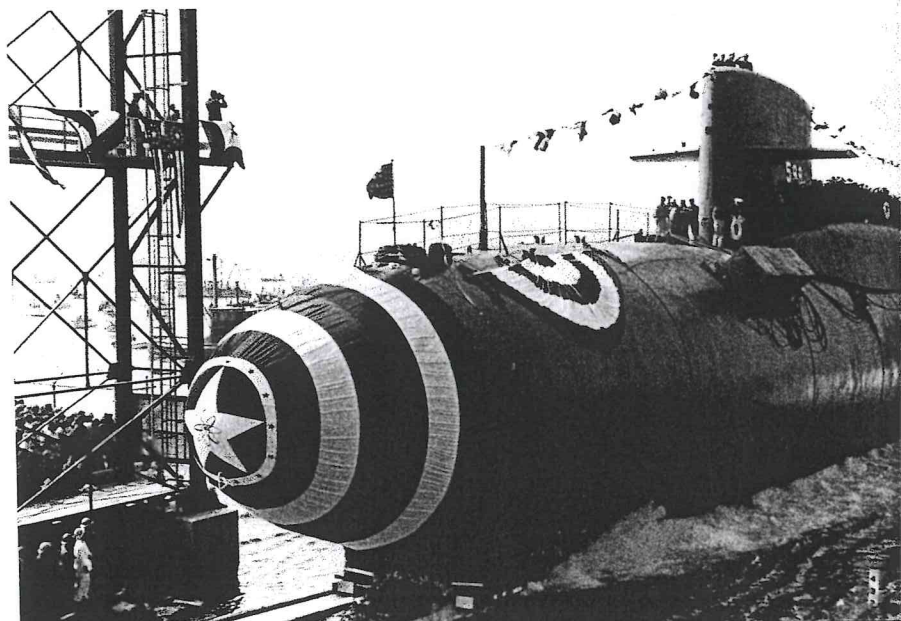
On September 23, 1949, President Truman made a grim announcement. "We have evidence," he said, "that within recent weeks an atomic explosion occurred in the USSR." The statement alarmed Americans. Previously, only the United States had possessed an atomic bomb. Now that the Soviets had one as well, the United States felt the need to develop weapons with even greater destructive force. Soon the two superpowers were locked in a deadly **arms race**, or a competition to achieve weapons superiority.

The Race to Develop Weapons of Mass Destruction Shortly after the Soviet atomic test, American scientists began discussing plans for a new type of bomb. It would be based not on splitting atoms—the technology used in the atomic bomb—but on fusing them. Known as a hydrogen bomb, or **H-bomb**, this weapon would be far more powerful than an atomic bomb. Some scientists, including J. Robert Oppenheimer, argued against it. In a report to the Atomic Energy Commission, they warned that the H-bomb was "not a weapon which can be used exclusively" for military purposes, since it would have a far greater effect on civilian populations than an atomic bomb would.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff, the nation's top military leaders, disagreed. "The United States," they said, "would be in an intolerable position if a possible enemy possessed the bomb and the United States did not." When other scientists and Truman's advisers sided with the generals, Truman gave the green light for producing the hydrogen bomb.

In 1952, the United States tested its first H-bomb. It was smaller than the atomic bombs dropped on Japan during World War II but 500 times more powerful. A year later, the Soviet Union tested its own H-bomb. A witness at the Soviet test recalled how "the earth trembled beneath us, and our faces were struck like the lash of a whip . . . From the jolt of the shock wave it was difficult to stand on one's feet . . . Day was replaced by night."

By 1960, the arms race had also led to the development of nuclear missiles and submarines. First, the United States and the Soviet Union built long-range, intercontinental ballistic missiles, or ICBMs, which could deliver nuclear warheads to distant continents. Next, the United States developed nuclear-powered submarines that could launch up to 16 nuclear missiles from the water. The



Soviet Union soon followed with its own nuclear submarines. With these new weapons, citizens of both nations faced the frightening prospect of enemy warheads raining down on their cities from far away.

Brinkmanship: Using the Threat of War to Contain Communism The threat of nuclear war carried with it the prospect of utter annihilation, a threat the United States tried to use to its advantage. In the 1950s, the government developed a foreign policy known as **brinkmanship**—a willingness to go to the edge, or brink, of war. Brinkmanship was based on a simple, if dangerous, idea. According to Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, the Soviets had to believe that the United States would use its nuclear weapons if pushed too far. In a speech, Dulles declared, “You have to take chances for peace, just as you have to take chances in war. The ability to get to the verge without getting into the war is the necessary art . . . If you are scared to go to the brink, you are lost.”

To its critics, brinkmanship seemed foolhardy. It implied that the Soviets only understood force and assumed that they would back down if faced with the prospect of nuclear war. But Dulles believed that the United States had to be ready to go to war to keep the peace.

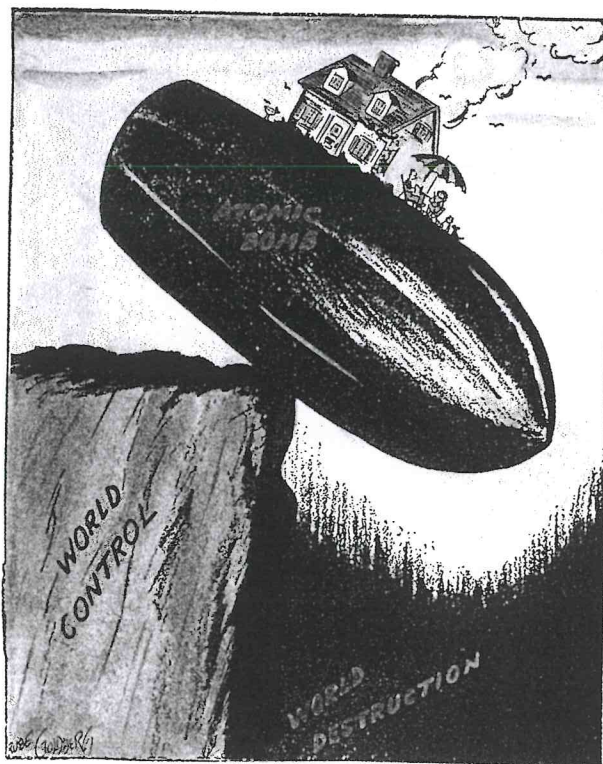
A growing conflict in Asia soon tested this policy. In China, both communists on the mainland and Nationalists in Taiwan claimed to be the nation’s legitimate rulers. In 1954, Mao decided to assert China’s claim to Taiwan and ordered his troops to fire on the nearby islands of Quemoy and Matsu. The Nationalist government claimed these islands and feared that their loss to the communists would prompt an invasion of Taiwan.

Eisenhower saw the shelling of Quemoy and Matsu as a challenge to American influence in Asia. As a result, the United States signed a treaty with the Nationalist government promising to protect Taiwan in case of attack. Three years later, China resumed its assault. This time the United States threatened to launch a nuclear attack on China, causing China to back off. In the eyes of the United States, this result was a victory for brinkmanship.

Detering Attack by Threatening Mutual Assured Destruction As the threat of nuclear war continued, Dulles developed a new strategy to reinforce brinkmanship and ensure American nuclear superiority. The strategy, called **deterrence**, revolved around developing a weapons arsenal so deadly that the Soviet Union would not dare to attack. Dulles also believed that warning the Soviets that any attack on the United States would be met with an even deadlier counterattack would reduce the threat of war.

The combination of deterrence and the willingness to use nuclear weapons came to be known as **Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD)**. It meant that either side would respond to a nuclear attack by launching its own missiles, with devastating results for both sides. Fear of a nuclear conflict made the United States and the Soviet Union more likely to step back from all-out war. However, while MAD may have helped prevent the Cold War from turning hot, it also kept the world in a state of heightened anxiety.

The Cold War arms race frightened many Americans, and people everywhere, with the prospect of nuclear destruction. Cartoonist Rube Goldberg conveyed this threat in his prize-winning cartoon of 1948, which shows American life balanced precariously on the atomic bomb.



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Current Connections

39.6 Looking at MAD Today

When Dulles first discussed MAD in the 1950s, tensions between the superpowers were very high. In the United States, schools prepared for possible nuclear attacks by holding classroom air-raid drills. Some families built backyard bomb shelters and stocked them with supplies. Eventually, however, fears of an attack diminished as both sides sought more productive ways to resolve Cold War conflicts.

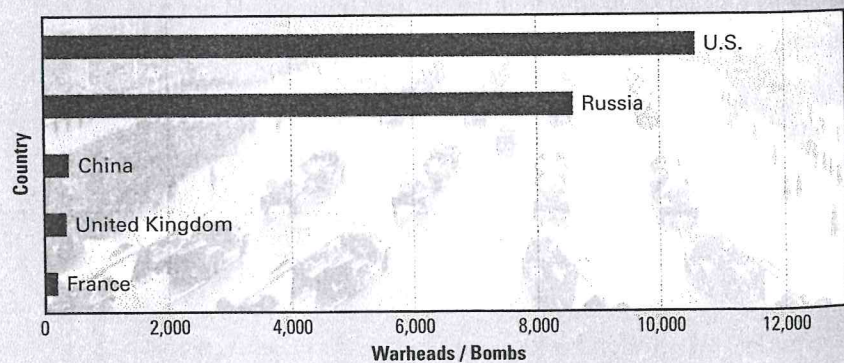
The Superpowers Step Down from MAD Starting in the 1960s, the United States and the Soviet Union took steps to slow down the arms race. In 1963, they signed the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, prohibiting aboveground testing of nuclear weapons. Later they worked to limit the weapons in their nuclear stockpiles. In 1972 and 1979, after negotiations known as the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT), the two sides signed treaties setting limits on the numbers of nuclear missiles and missile-launching sites. These treaties marked the start of nuclear disarmament, or the reduction of weapons.

During the 1980s, U.S. leaders began to look for alternatives to MAD as the only response to a nuclear attack. President Ronald Reagan called on the military to build a missile defense system that would keep enemy missiles from ever reaching the United States. Nicknamed Star Wars, his plan called for a network of land- and space-based missiles that would intercept and destroy incoming missiles while still in flight. Reagan's plan never got off the ground, but work on a more a limited missile defense system was begun under the administration of President George W. Bush.

In 1987, in Washington, D.C., the superpowers took another step away from MAD by signing the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. Under the INF Treaty, both sides agreed to reduce the total number of nuclear arms in their arsenals. By the early 1990s, the Soviet Union had collapsed and the Cold War was over. Facing economic and political problems, the new Russian state agreed to further reductions in nuclear weapons.

Various countries possess nuclear weapons today, with the five nations shown on the graph having the most. As you can see, the U.S. and Russian stockpiles are far larger than those of other countries.

Nuclear Stockpiles of Major Countries, 2002



Source: Robert S. Norris and Hans M. Kristensen, "Global Nuclear Stockpiles, 1945–2002," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, vol. 58, no. 6 (2002).

Defending Against Nuclear Attack in an Age of Terrorism Although the superpower arms race is over, today more than half a dozen countries have nuclear weapons or are in the process of developing them. The administration of President George W. Bush has referred to some of these countries, such as North Korea and Iran, as “rogue states.” This term is meant to describe countries that have weapons of mass destruction, such as nuclear and chemical weapons, and that sponsor terrorism. Many analysts fear that these countries might sell bombs or nuclear technology to terrorist groups. Various events since 2001, including the attack on the World Trade Center in New York and the Iraq war, have heightened these fears.

Many political analysts doubt that the policy of Mutual Assured Destruction can deter nuclear terrorism. Nuclear threats may come from small terrorist groups that have no fixed location and that often move from place to place. In addition, such groups would be unlikely to stage a conventional military attack, using fighter bombers or long-range missiles. As columnist George Will noted, “A nuclear weapon is much less likely to come to America on a rogue nation’s ICBM—which would have a return address—than in a shipping container, truck, suitcase, [or] backpack.” Under these circumstances, Americans may be debating how to keep the United States safe from nuclear weapons for years to come.

Summary

During the Cold War, the superpower conflict that began in Europe expanded to China and other parts of the world. The nuclear arms race added to Cold War tensions.

Berlin Blockade In 1948, the Soviet Union set up a blockade around Berlin to force the Allies to either abandon the city or cancel plans for the creation of West Germany. The Allies launched an airlift to bring supplies into Berlin and break the blockade. In the end, Germany was split between east and west.

NATO and the Warsaw Pact In 1949, the Western powers formed the North Atlantic Treaty Organization as a military alliance to counter Soviet aggression. The Soviets responded by forming their own military alliance, the Warsaw Pact, with Eastern European countries.

Korean War After the fall of China to communism, Cold War tensions flared up in Korea. In 1950, North Korean communists invaded South Korea, prompting a war with U.S. and UN forces. The Korean War ended in 1953, but Korea remained divided.

Third World During the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union tried to win friends and allies in the Third World—the developing nations of Latin America, Africa, and Asia. This battle for “hearts and minds” involved propaganda, aid, covert action, and military intervention.

Mutual Assured Destruction The invention of the H-bomb fueled a deadly arms race. In response, the United States developed various policies, including brinkmanship and deterrence, to manage the nuclear threat. In the end, it relied on the policy of Mutual Assured Destruction to limit the chances of all-out war.