

01 | The origins of the Cold War, 1941–58

The Soviet Union and the USA had fought on the same side against Hitler's Germany in the Second World War. Once the war was over and Germany was defeated, problems started. The two countries found that they could not work together. The main problem was that the USA was capitalist and the Soviet Union was communist. They did not trust each other.

Instead of being allies, they drifted into a 'cold' war. This was war where both sides threatened each other with words, spied on each other and built nuclear weapons. However, they never actually fought each other.

When the Second World War ended, Europe was split into two halves. The West was capitalist and the East was communist, controlled by the Soviet Red Army. The Soviet Union tried to strengthen its control in Europe while the USA tried to weaken the control the Soviet Union had over eastern European countries.

Learning outcomes

In this chapter you will find out:

- how ideological differences helped bring about the Cold War and how they affected attempts to reach agreement on how Europe should be governed
- how US / Soviet rivalry in the years 1947–49 led to the division of Europe into 'two camps'
- how the development of the atomic bomb led to an arms race
- how opposition to Soviet control led to an unsuccessful uprising in Hungary.

1.1 Early tensions between East and West

Learning outcomes

- Know about the political outlooks* of the communist Soviet Union and capitalist USA.
- Understand how, as allies during the Second World War, the Soviet Union, the USA and Britain formed plans for the future government of Europe.
- Understand how the alliance turned to rivalry and distrust when the Second World War was over.

During the Second World War, the Soviet Union*, the USA and Britain were allies fighting against Nazi Germany. Britain's prime minister, Winston Churchill, nicknamed this alliance 'The Grand Alliance'. As soon as it became clear that Hitler would be defeated, tension and rivalry between the Soviet Union and the other allies began to grow. This became the Cold War*.

Ideological differences between East and West

The Soviet Union, Britain and the USA were ruled according to very different ideologies*. Britain and the USA were capitalist*. The Soviet Union was communist*.

Key terms

Political outlook*

The way a government believes their country should be run.

Soviet Union*

Known as the USSR. It was a group of communist countries. It was controlled by Russia.

Ideology*

A set of shared beliefs. In 1941, the USA and the Soviet Union had different ideologies concerning how a country should be run.

Capitalism*

Capitalists believe everyone should be free to own property and businesses and make money. The USA was a capitalist country.

Communism*

Communists believe that all property, including homes and businesses, should belong to the state, to ensure that every member of society has a fair share. The Soviet Union was communist.

Timeline

East-West relations, 1941–49

June 1941 Hitler attacks the Soviet Union, which makes an alliance with Britain and USA	
	November 1943 Tehran Conference
February 1945 Yalta Conference	May 1945 Victory in Europe (VE) Day – end of the Second World War in Europe
July 1945 Potsdam Conference	August 1945 USA drops atom bombs
February 1946 Kennan's Long Telegram	March 1946 Churchill's 'Iron Curtain' speech
September 1946 Novikov Telegram	
	January 1947 Poland becomes communist
February 1948 Czechoslovakia becomes communist	
	May 1949 Hungary becomes communist

Key term

Cold War*

A war where the sides threaten each other but do not actually fight.

Differences between leaders


Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin (the leaders of the USA, Britain and the Soviet Union in 1941) are often called 'the Big Three'. Churchill and Roosevelt did not trust Stalin, and he did not trust them. The differences in the leaders' personal political beliefs were a major factor in the breakdown of relations as the Second World War ended.

Differences between nations


During the 1930s, both the USA and Britain had criticised the way in which Stalin had tried to turn the Soviet Union into an industrialised country. Many people had died in the process. However, Stalin was a strong opponent of Germany and so the USA and Britain needed to work with the Soviet Union to defeat Hitler. Once the war came to an end, however, the ideological differences between them meant it was impossible to agree on how post-war Europe should be governed.

Summary of the differences between the Soviet Union and the West

	Soviet Union	USA and Britain
Politics	Only one party	Free elections with a choice of parties
Social structure	Everyone is equal	Some people have more power than others (because of family background or wealth)
Economy	All property owned by the state, not individuals	Private ownership of property
Rights	Not many individual rights	More individual freedoms



Franklin D. Roosevelt
President of the USA: 1933-45
 He believed strongly in democracy. He did not trust Stalin but he was not always as tough in negotiations* with Stalin as Churchill would have liked. Roosevelt believed any long-term settlement would only be possible if the Soviet Union was accepted as a superpower*.



Key terms

Negotiations*
 When leaders of different countries meet to discuss an issue.

Superpower*
 A country which is unusually strong and influences other countries. The USA and the Soviet Union were both superpowers.



Winston Churchill
Prime minister of Britain: 1940-45, 1951-55
 Churchill did not trust Stalin. He saw his role as trying to stop the Soviet Union from taking control of eastern Europe.





Joseph Stalin
Leader of the Soviet Union: 1920s-1953
 Stalin strengthened communist rule in the Soviet Union. He believed that the West wanted to destroy communism, so the Soviet Union had to stand firm in any negotiations with the Western 'superpower', the USA, and its close ally, Britain.



Figure 1.1 Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt.



Figure 1.2 US and Soviet thinking after the Second World War.

A new world order

The Second World War changed world politics. The 'old powers', like Britain and France, were now less important than they had been. Two new 'superpowers', the Soviet Union and the USA had replaced them. Their military and economic strength were responsible for the defeat of Germany but their strength also made the Soviet Union and the USA rivals.

The Grand Alliance

In the Second World War, the Grand Alliance was formed between the USA, the Soviet Union and Britain to defeat Germany and Japan. Although the three countries had formed an alliance*, there was no real change in how they viewed each other. The USA and Britain, in particular, distrusted communism, and Stalin realised that the West would not want to take any actions that made the Soviet Union stronger in the long run.

The leaders of The Grand Alliance nations met three times during the war: at Tehran (1943), Yalta (February 1945) and Potsdam (July 1945).

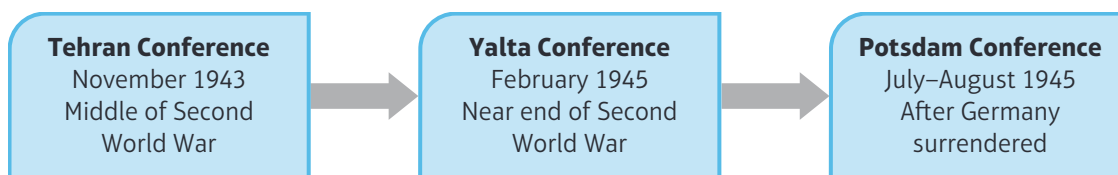


Figure: The Grand Alliance conferences, 1943–45

The significance of the Tehran, Yalta and Potsdam conferences

Tehran, November 1943

The Grand Alliance first met in Tehran to plan a winning strategy to end the war.

Key terms

Democracy*

A political system in which a nation's leaders are chosen in free elections.

Satellite state*

Countries that came under the control of the Soviet Union after the Second World War.

Alliance*

When two or more countries agree to work together.

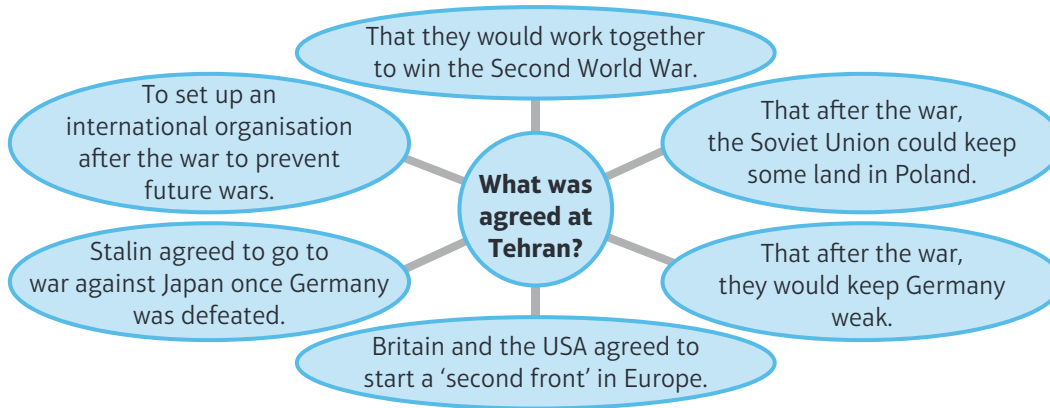
Key term

Second front*

This was Stalin's demand that Britain and the USA should invade Europe to make Germany fight on two sides.

Who was at Tehran?	Why did they have the meeting?	What did they want?
Roosevelt (USA) Churchill (Britain) Stalin (Soviet Union)	The three countries wanted to agree how they would work together to fight Nazi Germany.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stalin wanted Britain and the USA to open a 'second front'* to fight Germany in Europe. The USA wanted the Soviet Union to help it to fight Japan.

1.1 Early tensions between East and West



Stalin was pleased that Britain and the USA had agreed to open a 'second front' as this would help the Soviet Union, but there were tensions between Britain and the USA. Churchill had wanted to open the 'second front' in the Balkans*, but Roosevelt had agreed with Stalin that it would be in the West.

Figure: The Tehran agreement, 1943.

Key terms

Balkans*

Area in south-eastern Europe, including modern Albania, Bulgaria, Serbia and other countries.

Reparations*

Payments after a war from the losing country to the victors. Reparations are compensation for loss of life and damage to land and the economy.

United Nations*

An international organisation set up in 1945. Its aim was to keep peace around the world.

Yalta, February 1945

The Grand Alliance met two years later at Yalta.

Who was at Yalta?	Why did they have the meeting?	What did they want?
Roosevelt (USA) Churchill (Britain) Stalin (Soviet Union)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The 'second front' was pushing back German troops towards Berlin. The Soviet troops had defeated the German invasion of Russia and were also pushing back the German Army. The allies wanted to talk about winning the war and how they would run Europe after the war. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stalin wanted to make sure that he kept control of parts of Eastern Europe at the end of the war. Britain and the USA wanted to make sure that there was peace in Europe.

The leaders at Yalta and Tehran were the same.

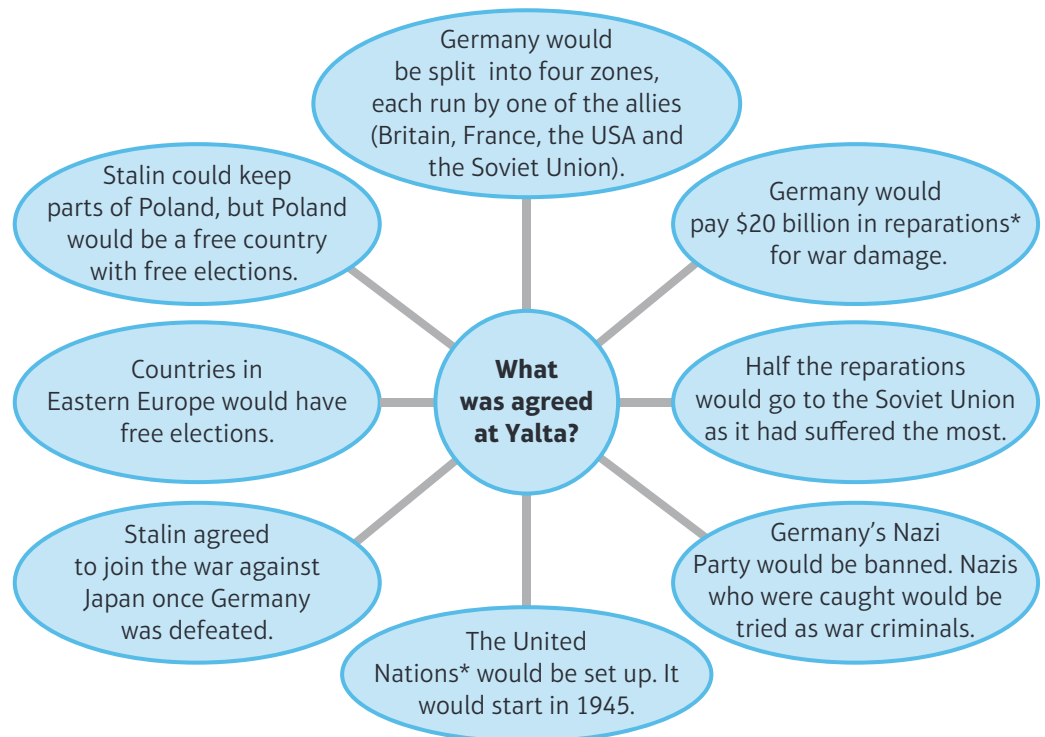


Figure: The Yalta agreement, 1945.