The Cold War was a period that began after the conclusion of World War Two. It had several causes, initially fuelled by a stark ideological difference of political viewpoints – a competition between the merits and beliefs of Communism versus Capitalism. The fact that these two political systems were championed by the Soviet Union and the United States respectively, both who emerged as superpowers following the defeat of nazi Germany by 1945 meant that the power vacuum left in Euope created a competition. These systems were clearly not compatible and this led to a poor relationship between the two, despite being allies against the Nazis during the war. Historical mistrust developed between the two and a rivalry to establish spheres of influence ensued following the change in the balance of power in Europe. Neither side was prepared to go to war, but each side tried hard to extend their influence in Europe making this era a period of tension.

Communism and capitalism are polar opposites in terms of political viewpoints. Capitalism had been a major driving force based on economics since the age of imperialism during the mid-1800’s to the start of World War One.. Communism was a relatively new political format, with its birth in the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. Capitalist governments feared the likely spread of communism because it was based on an egalitarian system of redistributing wealth. Capitalism on the other hand, thrived on economic competition. Therefore the capitalist governments of Western Europe and the United States took measures to try to destroy this new political system in Russia at its birth; an action that was to make communists fear the direct threat that capitalism brought to their beliefs and system. This action and many more actions of mistrust that were to follow, laid the foundation of suspicion that was to last for the following decades of the 20th Century, manifesting itself in the era termed as the Cold war, chiefly between the Soviet Union and the USA and their respective allies.

When the Nazis were finally defeated iduring 1945, communist Soviet Union and capitalist United States had conveniently forgotten their historical mistrust. They had become allies in a grand alliance against a common more dangerous foe. Once the Nazis were vanquished, a power vacuum was created in central Europe that both superpowers chose to try and fill. It was at this instance that each remembered the concerns they had regarding their now opposing regime. Neither side could agree on what to do with Germany; each feared that a Germany in the hands of their opponent would tip a balance of power away from them. Neither communist nor capitalist had the appetite to go to war again, yet neither wanted to see the opposing regime take a stance that was more superior, so a long period of mistrust, competition, rivalry and propaganda began – The Cold War.

Spheres of influence were important for each side. The Soviets feared that the capitalist west was still intent on destroying it that the Soviet leadership, under stalin, decided to help install communist friendly governments in all of the eastern European nations that ran along their western border as a kind of ‘buffer zone’. This was interpreted by the capitalist west that communism was spreading westwards across the European continent in a wave of communisation. To prevent this spread, the US and their west European allies forged a foreign policy of containment, t prevent anymore westward spread of communist regimes. In turn, the Soviets saw this as a western measure to try and encroach on their buffer zone. The competition for spheres of influence took pace, each vying for influence; each trying to deter the influence of the other. Neither side chose to act in a direct military manner, even though the competition had developed into an arms race, complete with nuclear weapons by 1953. The use of such weapons would have ensured a mutually assured destruction (MAD), thus, here was another element that added to the Cold war atmosphere yet prevented the Cold War becoming a more direct military conrfotation, or Hot War.