

Chapter 18: The Promises and Realities of Decolonization: 18-5 The End of the Cold War
Book Title: The Earth and Its Peoples: A Global History 7th Edition Update, AP® Edition
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18-5 The End of the Cold War

After the end of World War II, competition between the alliances led by the United States and the Soviet Union created a polarized world (see [Chapter 17](#)). Every conflict, no matter how local its origins, had the potential of engaging the attention of one or both of the superpowers. The Korean War, decolonization in Africa, the Vietnam War, the Cuban Revolution, and hostilities between Israel and its neighbors all increased tension between the nuclear-armed superpowers. Given this succession of provocations, politics everywhere was dominated by arguments over the relative merits of the competing systems.

Few in 1980 predicted the startling collapse of the Soviet Union. Western observers tended to see communist nations as both more uniform in character and more subservient to the Soviet Union than was true. Long before the 1980s, deep divisions had appeared among communist states. Similarly, nationalism had reappeared as a powerful force among the once-independent nations and ethnic groups brought together within the Soviet Union itself. By the late 1980s these forces threatened the survival of this communist world power.

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