



Council of Ministers of the Government of the Soviet Union (1950)

Introduction

The Council of Ministers of the Government of the Soviet Union face a challenging international climate. While American imperialists oppose Soviet ideology and military expansion from the West, cracks are beginning to form in the friendship between the Soviet Union and its communist allies. Members of the Council must consider to what extent they are willing to involve themselves in a burgeoning conflict on the Korean peninsula to expand communist control across the world. Furthermore, the Soviet Union must also consider how to consolidate their own leadership within the Eastern bloc and combat opposition from within socialist circles.

Committee Description

Brief History of the Soviet Union

In order to understand your role as Soviet Ministers, it is first necessary to understand what the Soviet Union is and some of its history. The Soviet Union, or the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics (USSR), is a communist socialist state made up of several unique republics.¹ Though in name, it was a union of separate nations, in practice the USSR was a highly-controlled unitary state consolidated under a centralized government.²

Origins

The Soviet Union emerged after the October Revolution of 1917, during which Bolshevik revolutionaries -- led by Vladimir Lenin -- overthrew the Russian provisional government that replaced Tsar Nicholas II.³ This put an end to the Russian Empire and the Romanov dynasty. The Bolshevik Revolution was followed by several years of civil war. From 1918 to 1920, the "Reds" and the "Whites" fought for control over what was formerly Russia. The Reds were composed of the communist Bolshevik government, while the Whites were a loose alliance of monarchists, capitalists, and supporters of non-Bolshevik forms of socialism.⁴ During this period, the "Red Terror" took place, in which the Bolshevik secret police led a state-sanctioned campaign of executions and imprisonments aimed at their political enemies.⁵

In 1922, the communist Reds were victorious in the civil war. A treaty was signed that year establishing the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), unifying the Soviet Socialist

¹ <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-hccc-worldhistory2/chapter/formation-of-the-soviet-union/>

² Ibid

³ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17858981>

⁴ <https://www.history.com/topics/russia/history-of-the-soviet-union>

⁵ <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/red-terror-set-macabre-course-soviet-union>

Republics (SSRs) of the Russian SFSR, Transcaucasian SSR, Ukrainian SSR, and Byelorussian SSR. Vladimir Lenin became Premier, the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the Soviet Union. The capital city was established in Moscow.



Map of the USSR circa 1950⁶

The USSR adopted a communist ideology inspired by the works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. In short, Marx and Engels proposed that capitalism is an economic system doomed to collapse under the weight of its own contradictions. By consolidating wealth in the hands of owners (the *bourgeoisie*), rather than distributing it among the workers (the *proletariat*), the workers would become dissatisfied and eventually revolt against their owners (the *revolution*). This revolution would enshrine a communist economic system, one in which all wealth was equally distributed among the proletariat.

Following the Bolshevik revolution, Lenin's government implemented a series of Marxist-Leninist reforms. They redistributed land from the church, nobles, and landlords to peasants, improved working conditions (including limiting the workday to eight hours), provided evening classes for workers unable to receive an education, and set up a Women's Rights Department.⁷ During this time, all political activities that were conducted outside of the Communist Party — the Bolshevik Party's new name — were quickly suppressed. All newspapers not under state control were banned, as well as the opposition Liberal and

⁶ http://gorhistory.com/hist111/WWII_EasternFront.html

⁷ <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/lenins-implementation-leninism-russia-and-changes-made>

Constitutional Democrat parties. Additionally, a secret police force called the Cheka was established. Their job was to report to Lenin on all anti-communist activities.

Joseph Stalin and his Rise to Power

Joseph Stalin was born in Gori, Georgia (then part of the Russian Empire) on December 18, 1878 to peasant parents who had been serfs at his time of birth. During his youth, Stalin studied Orthodox Christianity and was on track to become a priest. However, at seminary school, Stalin was involved with the Marxist Russian Social Democratic Labour Party and subsequently expelled in 1899.⁸ He edited the party's newspaper alongside raising money to fund Lenin's Bolshevik Revolution. After the October Revolution concluded in 1917, Stalin became a member of the governing Politburo.

In 1924, Vladimir Lenin died of a stroke, leaving a power vacuum that Premier Joseph Stalin would come to fill.⁹ Joseph Stalin had been made General-Secretary of the Communist Party in April, 1922, and was considered the favorite to take Lenin's place after his death. Stalin did not rise to power without some concern. Before his death, Lenin had been suffering from a series of strokes, and a *troika* of Grigory Zinoviev of the Ukrainian SSR, Lev Kamenev of the Russian SFSR, and Stalin of the Transcaucasian SFSR emerged to lead the party. Their leadership was designed to prevent Leon Trotsky of the Russian SFSR from taking power. During this time, Lenin authored a letter referred to as "Lenin's Testament" which urged that Stalin be removed from his position as General Secretary. However, Stalin kept Lenin in isolation and gradually established control of the Communist Party before consolidating influence, taking control, and transforming the Soviet Union into a totalitarian state.¹⁰

Stalin is well-known for his desire to transform the Soviet Union into an industrial and military superpower. This has been achieved thus far through a series of Five Year Plans. The first Five Year Plan aimed to collectivize agriculture and increase industrial production, while the second focused on building up the military and armaments.¹¹ As part of his attempt to collectivize agriculture, Stalin's government rounded up thousands of higher-income farmers, called kulaks, and executed them. Then, their property was confiscated. Rural peasants were also forced to give up their land and instead work on collective farms.

This decision resulted in a drop in agricultural productivity, which led to devastating food shortages. Millions died of starvation in a period known as "The Great Famine." Ukraine was especially impacted; the *Holodomor* claimed the lives of 3.9 million people from 1932 to 1933, 13% of Ukraine's population at the time. Many consider the Holodomor to be genocide, exacerbated by Stalin's brutal policies which punished any and all opposition, including purging Ukrainian intellectuals and nationalists.¹² During the famine, Soviet officials and secret police began ramping up a campaign known as the Great Purge, which reached its peak in 1936. During the Great Purge, Stalin conducted a terror campaign to eliminate opposing members of the Communist Party and anyone else he considered a threat.¹³ More than a million Soviet citizens

⁸ <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/joseph-stalin>

⁹ <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-hccc-worldhistory2/chapter/formation-of-the-soviet-union/>

¹⁰ https://assets.cambridge.org/97813165/03690/excerpt/9781316503690_excerpt.pdf

¹¹ <https://www.history.com/topics/russia/history-of-the-soviet-union>

¹² <https://newrepublic.com/article/145953/stalin-starved-ukraine>

¹³ <https://www.history.com/topics/russia/great-purge>

were sent to the *gulags*, or labor camps, while at least 600,000 are estimated to have been executed. The history of Stalin's rise to power is a history of bloodshed, much of it actuated by Stalin himself.¹⁴

Stalin's personality has been the subject of historians and political scientists alike. He was born into poverty with two joined toes and a webbed left foot. A childhood accident left him with a withered arm and smallpox left him with a scarred face. He is ideological, a believer of the notion that violence is necessary for success.¹⁵ He is known for being a charismatic leader in the Weberian¹⁶ sense – authority in the Soviet government is sourced from the cult of personality surrounding its leader. Members of the USSR's Cabinet must reckon with this as they attempt to advise Stalin on the best course of action for the Soviet Union as it navigates empire-building and expansion.

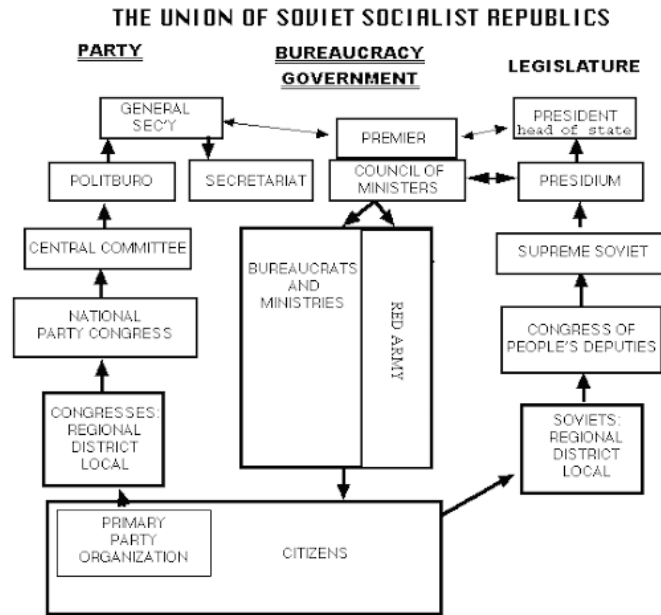
Description of the Cabinet

The official body this Cabinet will be replicating is the Council of Ministers of the Government of the Soviet Union, formally known as the All-Union Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The government is led by a Chairman, known by outsiders as the Premier – this is Joseph Stalin. The Chairman is nominated by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), the ruling party, and elected by delegates at the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union. The Supreme Soviet is the ruling legislative body of the Soviet Union charged with appointing the USSR's Head of State, its Council of Ministers, and Supreme Court members. The Supreme Soviet is a bicameral legislature with two chambers: the Soviet of the Union, with delegates elected on the basis of population, and the Soviet of the Nation, with delegates elected to represent specific ethnic populations. At this time, the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet is Nikolai Shvernik. In practice, the Supreme Soviet does little more than approve decisions already made by the Communist Party.

¹⁴<https://www.sciencespo.fr/mass-violence-war-massacre-resistance/en/document/nkvd-mass-secret-operation-n-00447-august-1937-november-1938.html>

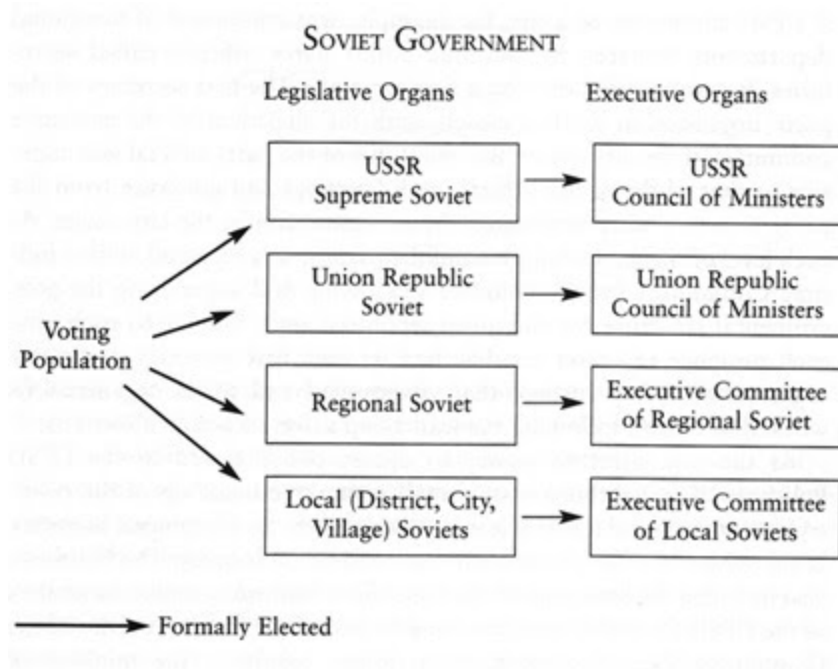
¹⁵ <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/11/understanding-stalin/380786/>

¹⁶ Max Weber, a famous sociologist, posited that there are three primary forms of political authority. *Traditional authority* is derived from long-standing customs and traditions. *Charismatic authority* is derived from the personality qualities of a leader. *Legal-rational* authority resides in bureaucracy and institutionalism.



In fact, to truly understand the government structure of the Soviet Union, one must also understand the structure of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). The governing party of the CPSU is the Party Congress. The Party Congress elects a Central Committee, and the Central Committee elects the Politburo and a Secretariat. The Politburo is the highest policy-making authority in the CPSU, while the Secretariat executes the CPSU's day-to-day functions. The Politburo in turn elects the General Secretary, the highest-ranking member of the CPSU, who also serves as the USSR's Chairman and Head of State. In theory, the Central Committee holds supreme power; however, in reality, the General Secretary rules from the top down.

It is also important to recognize that each Soviet Social Republic, or sub-unit of the Soviet Union, possesses its own government and party apparatuses. In 1950, the Republics of the USSR include the Armenian SSR, Azerbaijan SSR, Byelorussian SSR, Estonian SSR, Georgian SSR, Kazakh SSR, Kirghiz SSR, Latvian SSR, Lithuanian SSR, Moldavian SSR, Tajik SSR, Turkmen SSR, Ukrainian SSR, Uzbek SSR, Karelo-Finnish SSR, and the Russian SFSR. The Russian SFSR is where the Supreme Soviet is located, as it is the home of Moscow. It is also the largest and most populous of the Soviet Republics.



The Council of Ministers of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, also known as the Council of Ministers and the Soviet of Ministers, is the main executive and administrative agency of the USSR. It consists of the Premier, several First Deputies, Deputies, ministers, Chairmen of the state committees and the Chairmen of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Republics. It is accountable to the Supreme Soviet and, in practice, the Central Committee of the CPSU. The following are official responsibilities of the Council of Ministers:

- Management of the national economy and economic development;
- Researching, composing, and proposing Five Year Plans;
- Defending the interests of the state and socialism;
- Ensuring state security;
- Crafting general policies for the Soviet armed forces¹⁷ and Soviet foreign relations.¹⁸

Background Information

There are several historical moments and trends that all Council members should understand. This history from World War II to the Cold War provides context for the current situations and incidents the Cabinet will confront in 1950 and onwards.

World War II

¹⁷ Those looking for more information on the structure of the Soviet armed forces can find so here: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1023&context=dodmilintel>. I recommend anyone with a military-facing Ministry or position give this a quick look for information you may be interested in knowing.

¹⁸ <https://www.departments.bucknell.edu/russian/const/1936toc.html>

The significance of World War II to the Soviet Union's situation as of 1950 is mostly determined by the changing nature of mid-war and post-war alliances, as related to how the war reshaped the geopolitical order.¹⁹

World War II was in part caused by aggression on the part of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, who both sought to use military conquest to establish dominance over Europe and East Asia. The site of this aggression which catalyzed the beginning of the war — after years of appeasement on the part of the British — took place on September 1, 1939, when the Nazis invaded Poland after securing a pact of non-aggression with comrade Stalin.²⁰ In response, Great Britain and France declared war on Germany two days later.²¹

Key to Nazi Germany's ideology and practice was its policy of racial superiority, and, consequently, racial elimination and genocide. The Nazis and their leader, Führer Adolf Hitler, were driven by the concept of lebensraum ("living space"), which signified their desire to expand and purify all lands they encountered until, eventually, they "Germanized" the entire European continent, believing they were racially superior to all others.²² As such, Nazi Germany systematically purged peoples they found inferior, including Jewish people, the Romani, homosexuals, and the disabled. Jewish people were especially targeted, with an estimated 6 million of them dying in a genocide known as the Holocaust, a state-sponsored campaign of torture and murder, one which led to the construction of concentration camps.²³ The horrors of the Holocaust and the Nazi regime would define World War II as one of moral, not just military, proportions.

There were two opposing alliances who became the main belligerents in the war. The first was the Axis Powers, made up of Germany, Italy, and Japan, who formally allied by signing the Tripartite Pact in 1940.²⁴ The second was the Allied Powers, composed of a "Big Three" of Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union, aided by China and France (until it was occupied by Nazi Germany in 1940).²⁵ The United States, led by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, joined the war in December of 1941, after the Japanese empire attacked Pearl Harbor, a naval base near Honolulu, Hawaii.²⁶ The Soviet Union was pushed to join the war on June 22, 1941, after being subject to a surprise invasion by Nazi Germany.²⁷

¹⁹ The events and analysis listed below are simplified to provide the most important information necessary to understand these relevant themes and Cold War context; this is not a comprehensive history of World War II.

²⁰ <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/world-war-ii-in-depth>

²¹ http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwtwo/ww2_summary_01.shtml

²² <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/lebensraum>

²³ <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/documenting-numbers-of-victims-of-the-holocaust-and-nazi-persecution>

²⁴ <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/why-we-call-axis-powers-axis-powers-180960980>

²⁵ <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/big-three>

²⁶ <https://visitpearlharbor.org/didnt-american-initially-join-war/>

²⁷ <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/invasion-of-the-soviet-union-june-1941>



FIGURE 1²⁸

The entrance of the United States and the Soviet Union would prove pivotal to the outcome of World War II. The Nazi and Japanese empires found themselves spread thin, unable to deal with the superior force of the new entrants. Nazi Germany surrendered on May 8, 1945, after losing the Battle of Normandy to the Allied invasion and liberation of northern France.²⁹ The fate of the Japanese empire was sealed in August, 1945 after the United States ended the war by dropping two atomic bombs on Japan, first on Hiroshima, then on Nagasaki.³⁰ Imperial Japan surrendered on August 14, 1945.³¹

Despite their military alliance, the “Big Three” shared differing political aims and visions of the postwar order; these differences would lead to the rising tensions and eventual divide between the United States and the Soviet Union, the centerpiece of the Cold War. Throughout World War II, Stalin was suspicious of Winston Churchill, Great Britain’s Prime Minister, and President Roosevelt, fearing that they would quash any of his attempts to expand Soviet influence in Eastern Europe once the war was over.³² These suspicions would lead to disagreements between the leaders at meetings meant to determine the post-war order, disagreements that would define the newly antagonistic relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union.³³

²⁸ <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/static/neh/interactives/wwiidiplomacymap/>

²⁹ <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/world-war-ii-in-depth?series=18028>

³⁰ <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/nukevault/ebb525-The-Atomic-Bomb-and-the-End-of-World-War-II/>

³¹ <https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/d-dayhttps://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/nukevault/ebb525-The-Atomic-Bomb-and-the-End-of-World-War-II/>

³² <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/big-three>

³³ <https://www.cvce.eu/en/education/unit-content/-/unit/55c09dcc-a9f2-45e9-b240-eaef64452cae/45f91816-9281-4051-9d34-e9f3b5ae058e>

The second of these meetings was the Yalta Conference, which took place from February 4 to 11, 1945. Here, Stalin, Churchill, and Roosevelt agreed upon the terms of their occupation of Germany, where both Germany and Berlin, the capital city, would be divided into four zones of control under the United Kingdom, United States, Soviet Union, and France (FIGURE 2). Furthermore, the United States was able to secure the Soviet Union's commitment against Japan and an agreement between the three powers to see through the creation of the United Nations.³⁴

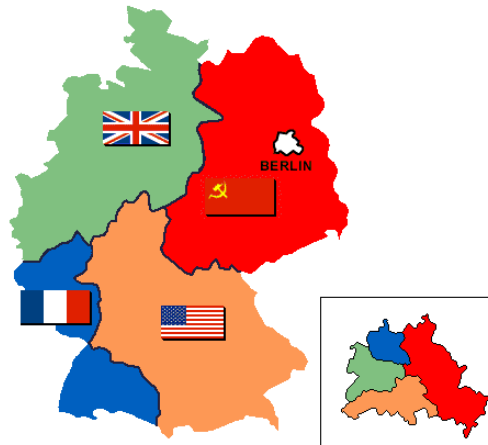


FIGURE 2

This sense of potential cooperation fell apart at the Potsdam Conference, which was held from July 17 to August 2, 1945. By this time, Roosevelt had died and been succeeded by President Harry Truman. Churchill's Conservative government also lost its election to the Labour Party and new Prime Minister Clement Attlee halfway through the conference. The conditions on the ground had also changed; Germany's surrender was secured, creating a lack of a common enemy and a lack of an urgent need for cooperation.³⁵ Several disagreements arose at Potsdam. Stalin wanted to extract extreme economic reparations from Germany; Truman did not want to demand such a dramatic amount of reparations because he feared a repeat of the Treaty of Versailles, after which Germany's post-World War I economic destruction led to the rise of Hitler.

The future of Poland was also a significant point of contention throughout Potsdam and Yalta. Stalin insisted that the government he installed in Poland during the war — which the USSR occupied — remain in control of the territory. He also pushed for each of the Soviet Union's satellite republics to each receive their own votes at the United Nations. The Western powers complied with Stalin's demands, under the condition that elections were held in Poland. The West's capitulation to Soviet demands in Poland would further increase fear of communist expansion in Eastern Europe.

The end of the war, consequently, created two spheres of influence on the European continent — and in the rest of the world — each led by one of the victors of World War II. On one side, the United States emerged from the war as an economic and military superpower, the only country

³⁴ <https://www.cvce.eu/en/education/unit-content/-/unit/55c09dcc-a9f2-45e9-b240-eaef64452cae/2d612dc-a-8360-46a1-9ea8-c5a0c191b8be>

³⁵ <https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/how-the-potsdam-conference-shaped-the-future-of-post-war-europe>

able to produce nuclear weapons, and the leader of the new economic order.³⁶ On the other side, the USSR emerged from the war with an aura of prestige, having expanded its territory and number of satellites under its control. It also had a large, conventional land military, one of, if not the most, powerful in the world. Each superpower was afraid of the other, leading to the formation of opposing international ideological and military blocs.³⁷

The Cold War

After the end of World War II, the U.S. and USSR's transition from allies to enemies was quick. On February 9, 1946, Josef Stalin made his first radio address since the war had ended in a speech known as his "Election Speech." In it, Stalin argued that the First and Second World Wars were a result of the crises of capitalism, claiming that the communist social and economic system emerged victorious in World War II, placing the Soviet Union in sharp ideological

contrast with the United States and its allies.³⁸ A couple of weeks later, George Kennan, an American diplomat in the Soviet Union, sent his "long telegram" to the U.S. State Department, in which he wrote that "world communism is like a malignant parasite which feeds only on diseased tissue."³⁹ The telegram became the basis for the State Department's policy of containment, which supposed that the United States must prevent the spread of communism, as it was like a parasite, capable of infecting and destroying the rest of the world. This tension was exacerbated in 1947, when President Harry Truman delivered a speech to a joint session of Congress in which he established the Truman Doctrine: the United States would provide political, military, and economic assistance to all democratic nations under threat from internal and external military opposition. The Truman Doctrine marked a foreign policy shift for the United States in which it committed directly to intervention, rather than isolation, in global affairs.

The symbolic divide between capitalist and communist states would eventually become manifest. Such an idea was articulated by Winston Churchill in his 1946 speech, "The Sinews of Peace," in which he stated that "an iron curtain has descended across [Europe]."⁴⁰ In referencing an iron curtain, Churchill rhetorically split Europe in two. To the West, there were the capitalist, democratic countries such as the United States, Great Britain, and France, newly democratic under the Fourth Republic after its occupation during World War II by Nazi Germany (the "Western Bloc"). Countries falling under this categorization would eventually form a military alliance in 1949 called the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), in which each member committed themselves to "safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilisation of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law."⁴¹ To the East, there was the Soviet Union and its satellite states, including Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary (the "Eastern Bloc"). These countries were united under a communist ideology and the central control of the USSR.

³⁶ <https://www.npr.org/sections/money/2019/07/30/746337868/75-years-ago-the-u-s-dollar-became-the-worlds-currency-will-that-last>

³⁷ <https://www.cvce.eu/en/education/unit-content/-/unit/55c09dcc-a9f2-45e9-b240-eaef64452cae/1dc7e103-8078-45e1-b8ac-2199a9be5783>

³⁸ <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116179>

³⁹ <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116178.pdf>

⁴⁰ <https://winstonchurchill.org/resources/speeches/1946-1963-elder-statesman/the-sinews-of-peace/>

⁴¹ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm

Eventually, the tensions between these two blocs would come to be known as the “Cold War,” a concept first articulated by Bernard Baruch in 1947.⁴² This idea of a Cold War is significant because it underscores the multifaceted nature of the conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. This war was not only fought by each superpowers’ respective militaries. Instead, it was characterized by a variety of tensions — diplomatic hostility, espionage, propaganda — all measures which fell short of open warfare. Though the Cold War has only recently become relevant, as the year is 1950, the tensions it references characterize the world’s geopolitical power structure at this time. There is a bipolar order, a situation in international relations in which two states are dominant in military, economic, and cultural capabilities — in this case, the United States and the Soviet Union.

The Cold War was fought on several fronts around the world. The first significant one was Europe, specifically Germany, in the remains of World War II. As mentioned earlier, the occupation configuration agreed upon at the Yalta Conference split Germany into four zones controlled by the United States, United Kingdom, France, and Soviet Union. On January 1, 1947, the United States and the United Kingdom decided to merge their zones of occupation, creating the Bizone. (France would eventually join to create the Trizone in August, 1948.) The British⁴³ and Americans sought to economically revitalize their zone of occupation, with a plan to eventually consolidate West Germany into its own independent state. The Soviet Union was⁴⁴ fearful of these plans, as they had twice been invaded by a German state and feared the ascent of a new one, especially one allied with the rival Western bloc.

These tensions eventually erupted into the Berlin blockade, referred to by some historians as the “first battle of the Cold War.” Only hours before the United States and United Kingdom were⁴⁵ set to release a new currency for West Germany, on June 24, 1948, Soviet authorities ordered their military to impose a blockade around the Western-occupied sectors of Berlin. This meant that West Berlin, situated in Soviet-controlled East Germany, was cut off from food, electricity, and supplies by road, water, and rail. The United States and United Kingdom would counter this with an airlift (the “Berlin Airlift”). Thousands of aircraft brought thousands of tons of food and supplies to West Berlin until the blockade was lifted on May 12, 1949. The effects of this series of events were significant: the airlift was a defeat for the Soviets, as it hastened the independence plans for West Germany and the creation of NATO. Furthermore, the blockade laid down the iron curtain alluded to by Winston Churchill. The Cold War had finally boiled over.

⁴² <https://www.politico.com/story/2010/04/bernard-baruch-coins-term-cold-war-april-16-1947-0358>

⁴³ <https://www.cyce.eu/en/education/unit-content/-/unit/55c09dcc-a9f2-45e9-b240-eaef64452cae/43750634-b7c4-47a8-ba6c-f46e632f3d5d>

⁴⁴ <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/bomb-blockade/>

⁴⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/1973/04/29/archives/visions-and-revisions-of-the-cold-war-then-marshall-plan.html>

Current Situation

With an understanding of the previous historical context, we can now move into understanding several of the current situations Joseph Stalin and his Council of Ministers must acknowledge and confront through the course of the year. These individual situations will be the main topics discussed by the Council throughout their meeting and consist of the most important issues facing the Soviet Union.

The Conflict in Korea

At the time this Cabinet meeting is scheduled to take place, the Korean peninsula is host to burgeoning tensions between North and South — and the Eastern and Western blocs. These tensions have potential to escalate into a larger conflict as disagreements become increasingly irreconcilable.

Korea has long been a contested territory due to its strategically significant location. Situated as a peninsula separating the Yellow Sea from the Sea of Japan, it shares a border with the Manchuria region of mainland China and the Soviet Union, connecting these two powerful countries with islands in the Pacific Ocean and the rest of Southeast Asia. These islands include Japan, Taiwan, and the Philippines.

Prior to the Cold War, the Second World War, even the First World War, the Korean peninsula had been subject to decades of occupation and exploitation. By defeating the Russian Empire in the Russo-Japanese War in 1905, the Japanese empire proved themselves to be the most dominant power in East Asia. As part of its victory, written in the Treaty of Portsmouth, the Empire pushed back the Russians from Korea and secured control of the territory as a protectorate. This protectorate status expanded to full settler colonization in 1910.⁴⁶ Consequently, from 1910 to 1945, Korea was a territory of the Japanese empire. As a colonizing power, Japanese rule over Korea was often brutal. The Japanese empire ruled directly through its military, crushing all signs of Korean dissent. During World War II, Koreans were forced to⁴⁷ work in Japanese factories and fight as soldiers for the Japanese army.

The end of World War II saw the defeat of the Japanese empire and the Axis Powers in the Pacific theater. After the Japanese surrender on August 15, 1945, Korea was divided into two zones of occupation, one controlled by the Soviet Union to the north of the 38th parallel, and one controlled by the United States to the south. The northern region of Korea was more industrialized than the south because it had served as a base for the Japanese empire's war preparations. In contrast, the south had a more developed agricultural sector, giving leftist⁴⁸ causes more influence due to continuous debates between Japanese landlords and Korean tenants. This was a cause of concern for the U.S. planners, as they worried the Soviet Union's communist ideology would hold sway over the Koreans.

⁴⁶ <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1899-1913/portsmouth-treaty>

⁴⁷ http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/main_pop/kpct/kp_korea imperialism.htm

⁴⁸ <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/43111427.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Ad0f34b83e763882ae609f786d447>

Despite the USSR's favorable political situation, the U.S. government still attempted to assume control over Korea and the establishment of its independent government. It developed two different plans to maintain U.S. authority over Korea: one was to make Korea a trustee of the United States (headed by the State Department); the other was to create a U.S.-led governmental and administrative agency in Korea (headed by the U.S. Army Military Government in Korea — USAMGIK). However, both these plans were considered unfeasible, and thus were unable to be carried out, due to Soviet and Korean disapproval of them.⁴⁹

Consequently, the United States went to the United Nations to achieve their aims. On November 14, 1947, the U.N. General Assembly adopted Resolution 112. It called for a general election in Korea under the supervision of the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK), a new body created to oversee the elections. The Soviet Union opposed this plan⁵⁰ and would not allow the UNTCOK to access the zone of Korea it occupied. In spite of this development, the U.N. still chose to hold elections in the parts of Korea where the UNTCOK was allowed access, south of the 38th parallel.

The lead-up to these elections was chaotic. The United States chose to support Syngman Rhee for President, the leader of the Korean Provisional Government-in-exile during Japanese imperial control. He was a right-wing politician who supported many of the same values as the U.S. government, including free-market capitalism, anti-communism, and a strong federal government, and had lived in the United States for many years, making communication with Western officials easier. The choice of Rhee was opposed by many Koreans, who saw him as⁵¹ yet another puppet of foreign control. Some also feared that Rhee's anti-communist stance would make reconciliation of the Korean peninsula under one government impossible and further inflame tensions with the Soviet Union. In addition, non-communist nationalists to the left of Rhee were also excluded from government, further diminishing the legitimacy of Rhee to the Korean populace at large.

These elections occurred on May 10, 1948, and afterwards, the path to Rhee's victory was not certain. Rhee's National Association (NAARKI) party only won 55 out of 200 available seats in the Korean Constitutional Assembly, with independents winning 85 of the seats. Still, in July, the Assembly ratified a new constitution deeply influenced by the U.S. constitution, though it gave heightened powers to the executive branch, and elected Syngman Rhee as the President of the Republic of Korea. This signaled the end of the American Military Government's occupation of South Korea.⁵²

On the other side of the 38th parallel, the Provisional People's Committee of North Korea controlled political life, centralizing power in North Korea. The Committee was led by its Soviet-appointed chairperson, Kim Il-sung.⁵³ On March 23, 1946, Kim issued a 20-Point Platform specifying the desired economic, political, and cultural reforms for North Korea, including centralized price and market management, collectivized land reform, and state-controlled art and education.⁵⁴ This was followed by a series of land reforms which

⁴⁹<https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2145848.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A43087598870377cc9092f285bf7762>

⁵⁰ <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/theme/cold-war-history>

⁵¹ <https://koreanwarlegacy.org/chapters/significance-of-the-may-1948-election/>

⁵² https://www.jstor.org/stable/42703994?seq=3#metadata_info_tab_content

⁵³ https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/j.ctt7s1ss.6.pdf?ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search%2Fcontrol

⁵⁴ <http://www.korea-dpr.com/lib/9003.pdf>

confiscated land from Japanese organizations, landowners, and religious institutions and redistributed it to hundreds of thousands of households.⁵⁵

In response to the declaration of the Republic of Korea, a “national election” was held and the Communist Party of Korea formally established the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) on September 9, 1948. Kim il-Sung was made Premier.⁵⁶ Consequently, the Korean peninsula hosted two governments, each of whom desired unification of the territory under their sole control.

Though both the RoK and DPRK exist, from the Soviet Union’s perspective, there is a favorable imbalance between the two. At the time of the U.S. military exit, the North remained more politically stable, with Rhee facing opposition from the Korean Democratic Party, who sought to mitigate his power through the National Assembly.⁵⁷ Furthermore, North Korean troops sent to China to fight on behalf of the communists have returned and North Korea and the Soviet Union signed a major arms pact in 1949.⁵⁸

Tensions between the RoK and the DPRK have already begun to manifest in violent conflict, one which has the potential to escalate to a full-scale war if one side were to invade the other. Beginning in 1948, DPRK-backed communist insurgencies and uprisings have occurred in South Korea; these uprisings have led to tens of thousands of deaths and brutal ROK-based government suppression.⁵⁹ Border conflicts have also broken out along the 38th parallel, including one incident on August 4, 1949, when South Korean troops occupying territory to the north of the border were routed by the DPRK’s army.⁶⁰

Regardless, there are reasons to see the RoK as a ripe target for invasion – and why the USSR would support such an invasion. American resources are spread thin. Post World War II, the United States significantly downsized its army, with defense spending as a percentage of GDP shrinking from 41% to 10% between the years of 1945 and 1949.⁶¹ Furthermore, due to the extent of U.S. commitment in Europe through the Marshall Plan⁶², the need to deter further Soviet expansion in Europe, the diplomatic battle over whether or not to recognize the People’s Republic of China, Syngman Rhee being generally uncooperative with UNTCOK officials, and Rhee’s unpopularity among U.S. officials, the Soviet Union has reason to believe North Korea could easily defeat the South with help. Without U.S. involvement and with enough aid from allies, if the DPRK was to invade tomorrow, its victory would be all but certain.

The Council of Ministers must choose whether it is in favor of going ahead and supporting a North Korean invasion, or if it would prefer to sit on the sidelines. A communist Korea poses a tantalizing opportunity for the USSR – while the Soviet Union has conquered much of Eastern

⁵⁵ https://www.jstor.org/stable/651343?seq=2#metadata_info_tab_contents

⁵⁶ <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/theme/cold-war-history>

⁵⁷ https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/j.ctt7s1ss.6.pdf?ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search%2Fcontrol

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Gibby, Bryan (2012). *Will to Win: American Military Advisors in Korea, 1946–1953*. University Alabama Press. p. 72.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ The Korean War by Max Hastings

⁶² Marshall Plan = also known as the European Recovery Program; a plan for the United States to give massive amounts of aid to their European allies in order to facilitate post-WWII reconstruction and development

Europe, communist theory posits that all places in the world must be liberated. The Soviet Union sustains itself on expansion. Furthermore, reunifying Korea under a communist government would weaken the United States, both militarily and in the eyes of the international community, giving symbolic prestige to the USSR, considered the leader of the Eastern bloc. Finally, the USSR supporting a North Korean invasion would signal to countries around the world Soviet commitments to its allies. This could inspire communist revolutions across the globe, continuing to increase Soviet power and influence.

Relations with the Communist Bloc

The Soviet Union has a more natural inclination to nurture its relationship with its socialist partners over the Imperialist West. Thus far, the USSR has found a partner in the People's Republic of China (PRC). The PRC is the most powerful communist state that is not the USSR. It is also a historically and strategically important ally. China falling into communist hands was a significant defeat for the West, especially the United States, showing the power of communist thought to proliferate and govern internationally. Furthermore, for many years, the USSR and PRC engaged in friendly relations with one another. In his essay on Democratic Dictatorship, Mao Zedong, Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party and President of the PRC, envisioned an alliance not only with the Soviet Union, but a broader relationship with the Soviet bloc and the world proletariat. The USSR was Mao's model for developing the PRC in its early years and Mao further recognizes the influence the Soviet Union possesses as the world's first communist state.⁶³ However, it must be kept in mind that this relationship is one-sided. In 1945, Mao signed the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, later followed by the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance in 1949. These treaties provided that the Soviet Union would provide loans to the bankrupt Chinese government, in essence making the USSR the dominant communist power.

China was weak due to its specific geopolitical position. While World War II was raging in Europe, China was fighting a war of its own against the Japanese empire. And once World War II ended, China began fighting a different war — against itself. The origins of the Chinese Civil War date back to the collapse of the Qing dynasty and the Chinese empire in 1912. There were a variety of reasons that led to the Qing decline, notably⁶⁴ Great Britain's victories over China in the Opium Wars that took place in the mid-1800s. The Qing dynasty was forced to cede its territory of Hong Kong to Great Britain and open its ports to foreign traders, which led to the domestic unrest and foreign exploitation of resources that marked the Qing's slow decline. The collapse of the monarchical system left a power vacuum,⁶⁵ and warlords and local leaders vied for regional control.⁶⁶

The first phase of the Chinese Civil War began as a reaction to this instability. The looming threat of the Japanese empire convinced certain Chinese intellectuals of the country's relative weakness, leading to a period of self-scrutiny and political re-evaluation. Two visions for the⁶⁷

⁶³ <https://www.johndclare.net/China11.htm>

⁶⁴ <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199920082/obo-9780199920082-0029.x>

⁶⁵ <https://asiapacificcurriculum.ca/learning-module/opium-wars-china>

⁶⁶ https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/24910221.pdf?ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_SYC-5187%2Fcontrol&refreqid=search%3A106ec12e936fec6191856e44860a6189

⁶⁷ <https://s3.amazonaws.com/arena-attachments/730720/178b495888f00f22effc0be03eae0936.pdf> 76
<https://www.sjsu.edu/faculty/watkins/guomindang.htm>

future of China were formed. The first of these was the nationalist viewpoint propagated by Sun Yat-sen's Kuomintang (KMT) party. The KMT had originally been formed out of a Revolutionary Alliance of Chinese expatriates who opposed the Qing dynasty. It was organized around the principles of nationalism, democracy, and economy, specifically, a socialist and anti-feudal economic system. The second was the communist direction, anchored by the formation of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in 1920, whose members were drawn to the works of Karl Marx.

The CPC merged into the KMT in 1923 under the leadership of Sun Yat-sen to form the First United Front. This was because the Soviet Union pledged assistance in Chinese unification under the condition that the KMT, the larger and more popular party at the time, allow communists to join. This period of cooperation came to an end after the death of Sun Yat-sen in 1925, after which Chiang Kai Shek rose to prominence as the leader of the KMT's left wing. He feared being usurped by the party's communist members, and, consequently, began purging Communists from the KMT through arrests and executions. The communists who escaped to⁶⁸ the south of China consolidated under the leadership of Mao Zedong and began a campaign of uprisings against Chiang Kai Shek and the KMT in what is now known as the first phase of the Chinese Civil War.

The infighting was put on hold in 1937 when the Japanese empire invaded Manchuria, beginning the Second Sino-Japanese War and commencing World War II in Asia. A nominal alliance was created between the National and Communist forces while both were fighting the Japanese. During the war, the KMT was considered the official government of China and thus the leadership of a "great power" state by U.S. officials, receiving resources from the United States government to help push back the Japanese. However, the fighting left the Republic of⁶⁹ China (ROC), under control of the KMT, splintered and demoralized, vulnerable to the Communist forces, which had grown considerably since the beginning of the war. Relying on Soviet aid and weapons left behind by the Japanese, the CPC was able to defeat the Republic of China's army. On October 1, 1949, Mao Zedong declared the creation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) with Beijing as its capital. The Nationalist forces and KMT retreated to the⁷⁰ island of Taiwan.⁷¹ Outwardly, the Soviet Union still shows support of the People's Republic of China. To this date, the United States still recognizes the Republic of China as the legitimate Chinese government, and the Soviet Union is one of the only countries that has officially recognized the PRC. (Interestingly enough, the USSR has been joined by Pakistan, India, the Swiss Confederation, and the United Kingdom, though the PRC has refused U.K.'s request.) This dispute inspired the USSR's ongoing boycott of the United Nations – the U.N. has followed the United States' lead of recognizing the Taiwanese exiles as the legitimate Chinese government.

Even so, relations between the PRC and USSR are not entirely rosy. The PRC is the only element of the Soviet Union's great communist empire that Stalin does not directly control. Mao resents his position of weakness vis-a-vis the Soviet Union and believes that the USSR may be exploiting his country for support and ideological expansion. Furthermore, the two countries

⁶⁸ <https://www.sjsu.edu/faculty/watkins/guomindang.htm>

⁶⁹ <https://s3.amazonaws.com/arena-attachments/730720/178b495888f00f22effc0be03eae0936.pdf>

⁷⁰ <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/collection/175/chinese-civil-war-1945-1950>

⁷¹ Cook, Chris Cook. Stevenson, John. [2005] (2005). *The Routledge Companion to World History Since 1914*. Routledge. ISBN 0-415-34584-7. p. 376.

have different ideological interpretations of Marxism, with the PRC believing that the Soviet Union is too focused on its own empire-building at the expense of the global communist movement.

For now, the USSR and PRC are joined together out of necessity. However, as relations between the two continue to develop, there is a chance that a greater split emerges. This is especially possible if violence on the Korean peninsula escalates. Currently, the Soviet Union enjoys greater influence with Kim Il-sung, North Korea's Supreme Leader, due to its greater capacity to supply financial aid and more established status. However, the PRC is geographically on the North Korean border, meaning both countries have a greater stake in aiding each other. The Soviet Union must be careful to not lose its stranglehold over the communist bloc. Otherwise, its global influence and position as leader of the Eastern Bloc could be weakened.

Possible Solutions

As the Council of Ministers goes about navigating rising tensions of the Korean peninsula, alongside the other challenges that will emerge in 1950, its members must keep the following potential paths in mind.

First, the Council could take an aggressive, hawkish stance in terms of aiding the expansion of communism around the world. This would imply that the Soviet Union provide a significant amount of aid to Kim Il-sung and the North Koreans, even encouraging them to pre-emptively invade the South with the USSR's support. There are several potential benefits to this plan. The Soviet Union would have the chance to expand communist presence globally and potentially gain a foothold in East Asia to stem Chinese communist influence. Additionally, North Korea has a much stronger army and political position than South Korea – this means that the USSR could gain these benefits from a relatively low-risk endeavor. Should we pursue this course of action, we must evaluate how public we want our involvement to be. Strong overt support for the Koreans, and potentially our direct involvement, might deter the United States from opposing the invasion, but it may also risk greater escalation.

Alternatively, the members of the Council could opt for a more hands-off, or even dovish, approach in Korea. While there are potential advantages for helping the Kim regime, we must consider the risks of any interference in East Asia which would escalate tensions between ourselves and the United States. As a nuclear power with interests in Asia, and one licking its wounds after the loss of China, the United States may be prone to escalating any crisis beyond levels that we can risk.

Furthermore, the Soviet Union's foreign policy priority for a number of years has been expanding and entrenching communism in our European sphere of influence, so we must ask ourselves if we care to prioritize this new theater to the potential detriment of our European projects. For the last five years, the USSR increased its influence in states such as Czechoslovakia, much to the ire of the West, and came close to achieving communist victories in Italy, Greece, and Turkey. Tensions over Berlin have also come close to the breaking point on numerous occasions. We have been able to achieve these ends without provoking a major NATO response, but if a crisis in Asia were to arise, we can't be sure that it would stay contained.

Until the Soviet Union achieves its own nuclear capabilities, we must be concerned that the U.S. could seek to roll back our influence in multiple theaters. It may be best to keep a lower international profile and stay focused on Europe (where we have an advantage in conventional forces) as we grow in strength in the next few years.

Finally, it is important for the USSR to consider its positioning within the communist bloc if tensions between the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China continue to grow. If the Soviet Union were to opt not to support a successful North Korean invasion while China was to provide aid, that could give Mao leverage to build his own faction of the international communist bloc and oppose the USSR's hegemonic power.

Bloc Positions

The Council of Ministers stands united in favor of—and at the fervent service of—Joseph Stalin, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and the ideals of Marxism. There are no bloc positions to disclose, as there are no factions within our government.

Questions to Consider

- Should the Soviet Union support a North Korean invasion of the South? If so, to what extent? What kind of aid should the USSR provide to Kim Il-sung's regime?
- In its dealings with the Kim regime, how can the Soviet Union maintain its position as the dominant communist power? How can we maintain a high level of influence over the DPRK without being exploited by Kim?
- How should the Soviet Union navigate its relationships with the rest of the communist bloc? Should it attempt to repair its increasingly tense relationship with the People's Republic of China or consolidate sole control over the Eastern bloc?
- What actions can the Council take to ensure a more powerful communist presence globally and that communist influence continues to expand across the world?
- How cooperative should the Soviet Union be in regards to the United States, especially in East Asia? Is the current conflict in Korea the ideal time and place for a confrontation with the rest, or is it in our interest to preserve strategic stability?