

The Cold War (1945–1989) – Full text

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Introduction

The Cold War was a lengthy struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union that began in the aftermath of the surrender of Hitler's Germany. In 1941, Nazi aggression against the USSR turned the Soviet regime into an ally of the Western democracies. But in the post-war world, increasingly divergent viewpoints created rifts between those who had once been allies.

The United States and the USSR gradually built up their own zones of influence, dividing the world into two opposing camps. The Cold War was therefore not exclusively a struggle between the US and the USSR but a global conflict that affected many countries, particularly the continent of Europe. Indeed, Europe, divided into two blocs, became one of the main theatres of the war. In Western Europe, the European integration process began with the support of the United States, while the countries of Eastern Europe became satellites of the USSR.

From 1947 onwards, the two adversaries, employing all the resources at their disposal for intimidation and subversion, clashed in a lengthy strategic and ideological conflict punctuated by crises of varying intensity. Although the two Great Powers never fought directly, they pushed the world to the brink of nuclear war on several occasions. Nuclear deterrence was the only effective means of preventing a military confrontation. Ironically, this 'balance of terror' actually served as a stimulus for the arms race. Periods of tension alternated between moments of détente or improved relations between the two camps. Political expert Raymond Aron perfectly defined the Cold War system with a phrase that hits the nail on the head: 'impossible peace, improbable war'.

The Cold War finally came to an end in 1989 with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe.

I. Towards a bipolar world (1945–1953)

The end of the Second World War did not signal a return to normality; on the contrary, it resulted in a new conflict. The major European powers that had been at the forefront of the international stage in the 1930s were left exhausted and ruined by the war, setting the scene for the emergence of two new global superpowers. Two blocs developed around the Soviet Union and the United States, with other countries being forced to choose between the two camps.

The USSR came out of the war territorially enlarged and with an aura of prestige from having fought Hitler's Germany. The country was given a new lease of life by its heroic resistance to the enemy, exemplified by the victory at Stalingrad. The USSR also offered an ideological, economic and social model extending as never before to the rest of Europe. Furthermore, the Red Army, unlike the US army, was not demobilised at the end of the war. The Soviet Union thus had a real numerical superiority in terms of men and heavy weapons.

The United States was the great victor of the Second World War. Its human and material losses were relatively low, and even though the US Army was almost completely demobilised a few months after the end of hostilities, the United States remained the world's leading military power. Its navy and air force were unrivalled, and until 1949 it was the only country with the capacity to produce nuclear weapons. It also confirmed its status as the world's leading economic power, in terms of both the volume of trade and industrial and agricultural production. The US now owned more than two thirds of the world's gold reserves and the dollar

became the primary international currency.

The conflicts of interest between the new world powers gradually multiplied, and a climate of fear and suspicion reigned. Each country feared the newfound power of the other. The Soviets felt surrounded and threatened by the West and accused the United States of spearheading ‘imperialist expansion’. For their part, the Americans were concerned at Communist expansion and accused Stalin of breaching the Yalta Agreement on the right of free peoples to self-determination. The result was a long period of international tension interspersed with dramatic crises which, from time to time, led to localised armed conflicts without actually causing a full-scale war between the United States and the USSR. From 1947, Europe, divided into two blocs, was at the heart of the struggle between the two superpowers. The Cold War reached its first climax with the Soviet blockade of Berlin. The explosion of the first Soviet atomic bomb in the summer of 1949 reinforced the USSR in its role as a world power. This situation confirmed the predictions of Winston Churchill, who, in March 1946, had been the first Western statesman to speak of an ‘Iron Curtain’ that now divided Europe in two.

A. A missed opportunity for peace

The Second World War completely changed the face of the world. The toll in both human and material terms was the heaviest that mankind had ever known. Europe was on its knees; it was in ruins and reduced to total confusion: factories and transport links had been destroyed, traditional trade links had been cut off and shortages in raw materials and foodstuffs were prevalent.

Even before the Axis countries surrendered, the three Great Powers — the United States, the British and the Russians — got together to address the question of how to organise the world after the war. The Teheran Conference that ran from 28 November to 2 December 1943 was the first summit meeting between Winston Churchill, Joseph Stalin and Franklin D. Roosevelt. It set out the major guidelines for post-war international politics. The leaders discussed the Normandy invasion, which at that point was scheduled to take place on 1 May 1944, as well as the fate of Germany and its possible dismemberment and how the world should be organised after the conflict. They decided to entrust the study of the German question to a European Consultative Commission. Two other Allied conferences were subsequently held, one in Yalta (from 4 to 11 February 1945) and the other in Potsdam (from 17 July to 2 August 1945).

However, the close wartime alliance soon gave way to a climate of mistrust. At the peace conferences, the three Great Powers quickly realised that the Western and Soviet spheres were divided by increasingly divergent views. Age-old antagonisms that had been buried during the war resurfaced, and the Allied powers were unable to reach agreement on a peace treaty.

1. The Yalta Conference

From 4 to 11 February 1945, Winston Churchill, Joseph Stalin and Franklin D. Roosevelt met in Yalta, in the Crimea on the Black Sea, to settle the questions raised by the inevitable German defeat. Roosevelt was particularly anxious to secure the cooperation of Stalin, while Churchill was apprehensive of the Soviet power. He wanted to avoid the Red Army exerting too widespread an influence over Central Europe. At this time, the Soviet troops had already reached the centre of Europe, whereas the British and Americans had not yet crossed the Rhine.

The three Great Powers first of all agreed on the arrangements for the occupation of Germany: the country would be divided into four zones of occupation, with France allocated a zone of occupation to be carved out in part from the British and US zones. Berlin, situated in the Soviet zone, would also be divided into four sectors.

The USSR secured the extension of the eastern German border to the Oder-Neisse line, placing nearly all of Silesia, part of Pomerania, part of eastern Brandenburg and a small area of Saxony within Poland. The northern part of East Prussia, around the city of Königsberg (renamed Kaliningrad), was incorporated into the USSR. Stalin managed to secure use of the Curzon line as the eastern border of Poland, thereby keeping all Ukrainian and Belorussian territories within Moscow's sphere of influence. The three Heads of Government also signed a 'Declaration on the policy to be followed in the liberated regions', a text which envisaged free elections being held and democratic governments taking office.

The United States obtained the USSR's agreement to enter the fight against Japan, and Roosevelt saw the successful conclusion of his plan for the formation of a United Nations organisation, which was to be created on 25 April 1945.

Yalta seemed to be the final attempt to reorganise the world on a basis of cooperation and agreement. The world was not yet divided into two hemispheres of influence, but the Western Powers were obliged to accept Stalin's role in the territories liberated by Soviet tanks. Central and Eastern Europe were henceforth under the exclusive control of the Red Army.⁻

2. The Potsdam Conference

The last of the Allied conferences took place from 17 July to 2 August 1945 in Potsdam, near Berlin. Six months earlier, in the Crimea, Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin had laid the preparations for the post-war period, but the promises made in Yalta were unable to stand up to the balance of power on the ground. The climate had changed significantly in the intervening period: Germany had surrendered on 8 May 1945 and the war in Europe had come to an end. Japan stubbornly resisted US bomb attacks but the United States had a final trump card: on 16 July, the first atomic bomb test explosion took place in the desert in New Mexico. At the Potsdam Conference, Harry Truman replaced Franklin D. Roosevelt, who had died on 12 April 1945, and Clement Attlee took over as head of the British delegation after Winston Churchill's defeat in the general elections of 26 July. Only Joseph Stalin was personally present at all the Allied conferences.

The atmosphere was much more tense than at Yalta. A few weeks before the surrender of the Reich, the Red Army had quickly occupied the eastern part of Germany, part of Austria and all of Central Europe. Stalin, aware of this territorial advantage, took the opportunity to install Communist governments in the countries liberated by the Soviets. With the Western powers protesting at their lack of control over the elections held in the countries occupied by the Red Army, Stalin completely redrew the map of Eastern Europe. Pending the conclusion of peace treaties, the British and Americans provisionally accepted the Soviet annexations and the new borders set at the Oder-Neisse line. The Potsdam Agreements also endorsed vast movements of population.

The three Heads of State did nonetheless agree on the practical arrangements for Germany's complete disarmament, the abolition of the National Socialist Party, the trial of war criminals

and the amount that should be paid in reparations. Negotiations also confirmed the need to dismantle German industry and the sequestration of the powerful *Konzerns*, which were to be broken up into smaller independent companies. Previous agreements on the occupation regimes for Germany and Austria were confirmed.

At Potsdam, the three Great Powers were divided by their increasingly contradictory viewpoints. The overriding aim was no longer to unite to defeat Nazism, but rather to prepare for the post-war era and to divide up the ‘spoils’. Just a few months after the Yalta communiqué that had promised so much, deep divisions were already beginning to form between the West and the Soviets.

B. The United States and the Western bloc

From 1947 onwards, the Western powers were increasingly concerned at the advance of Communism: in several European countries, Communist parties played an active role in coalition governments (for example in Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, France, Belgium and Italy), sometimes even excluding other parties from power. Greece was in the midst of a civil war since the autumn of 1946, and Turkey was threatened in turn.

1. The Truman Doctrine

In this tense international atmosphere, US President Harry S. Truman broke with the policy of his predecessor Franklin D. Roosevelt and redefined the country’s foreign policy guidelines. On 12 March 1947, in a speech to the US Congress, the President presented his doctrine of containment, which aimed to provide financial and military aid to the countries threatened by Soviet expansion. Clearly aimed at stopping the spread of Communism, the Truman Doctrine positioned the United States as the defender of a free world in the face of Soviet aggression. An aid package of around 400 million dollars was granted to Greece and Turkey. This new doctrine provided a legitimate basis for the United States’ activism during the Cold War.

Applying the doctrine of containment, the Americans encouraged Turkey to resist Soviet claims to rights over naval bases in the Bosphorus. They also secured the withdrawal of Russian troops from Iran. In the meantime, since March 1947, efforts to crack down on Soviet espionage had been coordinated and the United States set up its Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). These changes to external policy marked a real turnaround in the history of the United States, which had previously remained on the sidelines of European disputes. For the US, isolationism was no longer an option.

2. The Marshall Plan and the establishment of the OEEC

At the same time, the US Secretary of State, George C. Marshall, was concerned at the economic difficulties in Europe. In the aftermath of the Second World War, intra-European trade was hindered by a lack of foreign exchange and the absence of an international economic authority capable of effectively organising worldwide trade.

The United States, whose interests lay in promoting such trade in order to increase its own exports, decided to help the European economy via a large-scale structural recovery programme. The United States wanted to protect American prosperity and stave off the threat of

national overproduction. But its desire to give Europe massive economic aid was also politically motivated. The fear of Communist expansion in Western Europe was undoubtedly a decisive factor that was just as important as that of conquering new markets. The Americans therefore decided to fight poverty and hunger in Europe, factors which they felt encouraged the spread of Communism.

In a speech made on 5 June 1947 at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, General George C. Marshall proposed the granting of economic and financial assistance to all the countries of Europe, subject to closer European cooperation. This was the Marshall Plan or European Recovery Program (ERP).

France and Great Britain were very keen, convening a conference three weeks later in Paris, to which they also invited the USSR, in order to elaborate a common programme in response to General Marshall's offer. But Vyacheslav Molotov, the Soviet Foreign Minister, categorically refused to countenance any international control and opposed economic aid for Germany.

The Soviet Union rejected the Marshall Plan and persuaded its satellite countries and neighbouring Finland to refuse US aid. Those countries that had been interested, such as Poland and Czechoslovakia, had to give in. This rejection deepened the split between Eastern and Western Europe.

Ultimately, 16 countries signed up to the Marshall Plan: Austria, Belgium, Denmark (with the Faroe Islands and Greenland), France, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy (and San Marino), Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal (with Madeira and the Azores), Sweden, Switzerland (with Liechtenstein), Turkey and the United Kingdom. They immediately set up a Committee of European Economic Cooperation (CEEC) which drew up a report establishing the priorities for the European economy. But the Americans insisted that these countries should control the management and distribution of the funds themselves. The CEEC therefore set up a permanent agency for this purpose. On 16 April 1948, in Paris, the 16 countries signed a convention to establish the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC). West Germany and the territory of Trieste joined in 1949. The colonies and overseas territories of the OEEC countries were represented by their parent state, and the United States and Canada, even though they did not belong to the Organisation, were also involved in its work. The OEEC was therefore a de facto worldwide organisation. In 1960, when the United States and Canada joined, it became the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which later expanded even further.

In April 1948, the United States passed a law covering foreign aid and created the Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA) to manage the Marshall Plan. They decided to send a permanent representative to Europe and to set up a special agency in each of the countries involved. Bilateral agreements were concluded between the United States and each country.

The programme for European recovery was divided into subsidies and loans amounting to a total of approximately 13 billion dollars distributed between April 1948 and June 1951. Apart from being invested in modernisation schemes, US aid was primarily used to purchase items indispensable to the European economies: food and agricultural products, raw materials, tools and industrial equipment. The United States also allocated money to developing the production of strategic goods in European colonies where the Americans wanted to stop the spread of Communism. In October 1948, the OEEC set up a Committee for Overseas Territories (COT), which, through a special fund, encouraged European countries to cooperate with the United

States in the development of Africa.

The political importance of the Marshall Plan cannot be overestimated. Through this aid, US President Harry Truman wanted to help the free nations of Europe solve their economic problems. But it was also a question of stopping Communism, which was a threat in countries such as France and Italy. This policy paid off. In the April 1948 elections, the Christian Democrat Party defeated the Italian Communist Party, which had previously been so influential. Intense propaganda campaigns also formed part of the Marshall Plan. For example, a ‘train for Europe’, filled with food supplies and staple goods, travelled through the recipient countries to publicise the work in progress and the results already obtained. The press, radio and television were also called in to help. The programme for recovery in Europe was undoubtedly a weapon in the Cold War. But the Marshall Plan also marked the entry of Western Europe into the consumer age, symbolised, for example, by Coca-Cola and Hollywood films. In 1948, the OEEC negotiated a multilateral agreement on intra-European payments. That was followed, in 1949, by a trade liberalisation scheme. From July 1950 to December 1958, a European Payments Union (EPU) restored the convertibility of European currencies and removed quantitative trade restrictions. The OEEC also promoted economic productivity in Europe via the European Agency for Productivity, which it set up in 1953 to study and disseminate information about technical advances in the industrial sector. As an initial umbrella organisation for European democratic countries with a free-market economy, the OEEC was in fact an important forerunner of a united Europe. Yet it remained an organisation for intergovernmental cooperation that was unable to create a customs union.

C. The USSR and the Eastern bloc

In August 1949, the USSR exploded its first atomic bomb, then, in 1953, its first hydrogen bomb. Its claim to be a world power could no longer be disputed. In the Soviet Union, Stalin continued to govern alone. Liberalising tendencies which had appeared during the war disappeared once again, and Stalin’s personality cult reached its height. A further wave of repression was interrupted, however, by the death of Stalin on 5 March 1953.

1. The creation of the Soviet buffer zone

Territorially enlarged, the USSR came out of the war with an aura of prestige from having fought Hitler’s Germany. Although in 1945 the Communist world was limited to the Soviet Union, it rapidly spread to Central and Eastern Europe, forming a protective buffer zone for the USSR. Communist propaganda was greatly helped by the presence of the Soviet army in the countries that it had liberated in Central and Eastern Europe.

The leaders of non-Communist parties were progressively removed: they were either discredited, intimidated or subjected to show trials leading to their imprisonment or even execution. Three years was enough for the USSR to establish people’s democracies ruled by Communist parties. Poland, Hungary, Romania and Czechoslovakia were more or less brutally forced into the Soviet embrace. Nevertheless, the refusal in 1948 of the Yugoslav Communists to follow the line decreed by the Cominform showed that the USSR had some difficulty keeping control of all its satellite countries.

2. The Zhdanov Doctrine and the Cominform

On 22 September 1947, delegates from the Communist Parties of the Soviet Union, Poland, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Italy and France gathered near Warsaw and created the Cominform, an information bureau located in Belgrade. It quickly became the Communist movement's agent for spreading its ideology through its newspaper *For a lasting peace, for a people's democracy*. Presented as a 'revival' of the Comintern, the Cominform actually served as an instrument for the USSR to keep close control over Western Communist parties. The aim was to close ranks around Moscow and to ensure that European Communists were in line with Soviet policies. Tito's Yugoslavia, accused of deviationism, would soon be excluded from the Cominform.

Andrei Zhdanov, the Soviet delegate, ideologist in the CPSU and Stalin's right-hand man, persuaded the participants in the constitutive meeting to approve the doctrine according to which the world was now divided into two irreconcilable camps: an 'imperialist and anti-democratic' camp led by the United States and an 'anti-imperialist and democratic' camp led by the USSR. This doctrine was the Soviet response to the Truman Doctrine. Zhdanov condemned imperialism and colonisation but advocated 'new democracy'. He emphasised the fact that the anti-imperialist bloc across the world relied on the democratic workers' movement, on Communist parties and on those involved in liberation movements in colonial countries. In 1947, the world therefore became bipolar, divided into two conflicting blocs.

Then in January 1949, in response to the Marshall Plan, the USSR created a programme of economic cooperation with the Soviet bloc countries known as the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA or Comecon).

D. The division of Germany

During 1945, the Allies began organising their respective occupation zones in Germany. The Americans occupied the South, the British the West and North, France the South-West, and the Soviets Central Germany. The Eastern part was administered by Poland, except the town of Königsberg (renamed Kaliningrad) and its surrounding area, which were annexed by the USSR. On 30 August 1945, the Inter-Allied Control Council was founded. Berlin was divided into four sectors and placed under the administrative control of the Allied *Kommandatura*. In 1946, the main war criminals were tried in Nuremberg by Allied judges. In the same year, the fate of the German satellite states and of Italy, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Finland was determined in Paris by separate peace treaties.

On 28 July 1946, the United States proposed a plan for economic unification of the occupied zones. Faced with the refusal of France and the Soviet Union, the British and Americans decided to unite their zones economically and, in December of the same year, created the Bizonal. On 1 August 1948, the French occupation zone joined the Bizonal, which then became the Trizone. Gradually, relations between the Allies deteriorated, and the quadripartite structures became unmanageable. In March 1948, the Inter-Allied Control Council ceased to operate, as did, in June 1948, the *Kommandatura*.

1. The Berlin Blockade

Germany rapidly became a sparring ground for the Cold War. After having politically reorganised their occupation zones in defeated Germany, the British and Americans wanted to revive the German economy, which implied radical monetary reform. On 20 June 1948, the Western Allies introduced a new unit of account. The German mark, the *Deutsche Mark* (DM), was introduced in all the Western zones and replaced the *Reichsmark*, which had lost all its value. This monetary reform enabled the shops to be filled once again with goods that had, until then, only been obtainable on the black market. While the Communists took over nearly all the command posts in the Eastern zone, the ideas of the former Allies about the economic and political organisation of Germany became more at odds with each other every day.

Hoping to keep Berlin united in the heart of the Soviet zone, and denouncing what it called the Anglo-American policy of acting without consultation, the USSR reacted to this initiative on 24 June 1948 by imposing a total blockade of the Western sectors of Berlin. The city lay in the Soviet zone, but the Americans, the British and the French were established in their respective occupation zones. Access to Berlin by road, rail and water was impossible until 12 May 1949. Food supplies and electricity were cut. The introduction of the DM in the Western sectors of Berlin was the official cause, but the Soviet Union probably wanted to capture the capitalist island in its occupation zone by making the British, French and Americans leave Berlin. The latter reacted swiftly: the Allied airlift, introduced by General Lucius D. Clay, was to be the appropriate American counter-measure.

Each day, thousands of aircraft (more than 270 000 flights in total) brought food, fuel and other essential goods to the beleaguered city. In all, over 13 000 tonnes of goods were delivered every day. Berlin became one of the main theatres of confrontation between East and West. The division of Europe into two blocs was confirmed. The city became a symbol of freedom for the West. The inhabitants of the city were no longer thought of as former Nazis to be punished but as victims of the Soviet threat. When Stalin decided to lift the blockade on 12 May 1949, the political division of the city was firmly established. Two municipal administrations were put in place, and the Soviets began to merge the Social Democratic and Communist Parties. In contrast, democratic elections were held in West Berlin in December 1948. The outcome was a victory for the anti-Communist Social Democratic Party. The success of the Berlin Airlift enabled Western opinion to accept the inevitable partition of Germany. On either side of the Iron Curtain, the divided city of Berlin became the showcase for the Western and Soviet models. Confronted with the Soviet threat, the idea of German rearmament and the country's integration into a united European structure became more and more vital in Western eyes.

2. The foundation of the FRG

On 2 December 1946, the British and Americans decided to merge their respective occupation zones. With the addition of the French zone in 1948, West Germany became the Trizone. From 20 April to 2 June 1948, the three powers met in London to discuss the future of the country and decided to call a constituent assembly, the German Parliamentary Council. Its members were appointed by the parliaments of the federal states, the *Länder*. These federal entities were created by the occupying powers, on more or less historical lines. For example, whilst the State of Prussia was abolished by the Allies, Bavaria was retained. On 1 September 1948, the Parliamentary Council started work in Bonn. It elected a Christian Democrat, Konrad Adenauer, to lead it and formulated the Basic Law which was promulgated on 23 May 1949. This Law became the provisional Constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). Its adoption after a referendum gave rise to the first legislative elections for the entire Trizone.

Bonn was chosen ahead of Frankfurt to be the provisional capital. The city of West Berlin became a *Land* but remained under Allied control. West Berlin had to be shown to be part of the FRG in spite of its special status. Economic development was encouraged by the granting of subsidies to companies and civil servants who decided to move there.

Even if the right of supervision enjoyed by the Western Allied powers limited German sovereignty, the FRG was seen as the only rightful heir to the German Reich, dissolved in 1945 when Germany unconditionally surrendered. The election of the Bundestag in August 1949 confirmed the victory of the Christian Democrats (CDU) over the Socialists (SPD) led by Kurt Schumacher, whose Marxist tendencies scared the Western occupying powers. The Communists and the Liberals made few gains. The CDU, led by Konrad Adenauer, confirmed its role as the champion of a return to a free-market economy. Adenauer, who was the preferred partner of the Americans, became the first Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany.

3. The foundation of the GDR

As a response to the foundation of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) in Bonn, in October 1949 the USSR encouraged the proclamation of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in Berlin. East Berlin became the capital of the GDR. The West refused to recognise this State which, following the example of the FRG, presumed to speak for all of Germany. The Communist Wilhelm Pieck became President of the GDR and Otto Grotewohl, a former Social Democrat, was made head of the government. However it was Walter Ulbricht, leader of the Communist Party, who played the crucial role. Since 1946, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) of the Soviet zone had had to merge with the Communist Party (KPD) to form the Socialist Unity Party (SED). This Stalinist party, led by Communists, dominated the political scene in the GDR until the end of the Communist era in 1989.

E. The strengthening of alliances

On 22 January 1948, Ernest Bevin, British Foreign Secretary, gave an address in the House of Commons in which he denounced the Soviet threat. He affirmed his resolve to develop Britain's cooperation with France and the Benelux countries within a Western Union.

A few days later, the coup d'état in Prague on 25 February 1948, in which the Communists took power in Czechoslovakia by force, heightened the climate of international tension and danger that prevailed during the Cold War. On 17 March 1948, in Brussels, five countries signed the Treaty establishing Western Union, which aimed no longer merely to guard against a potential German threat but to prevent any armed aggression in Europe.

This treaty was amended by the Paris Agreements of 23 October 1954, founding Western European Union (WEU) shortly after the failure of the proposed European Defence Community (EDC).

The five European signatories to the Brussels Pact soon realised that alone they would be incapable of mounting any effective resistance to an attack from the USSR.

On 11 June 1948, the US Congress passed the Vandenberg resolution, which put an end to American isolationism by authorising the United States to be involved in international alliances

even in peacetime. This paved the way for the Atlantic Alliance. On 4 April 1949, twelve Foreign Ministers signed the North Atlantic Treaty in Washington, thereby establishing the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). The Five of Western Union were joined by the United States, Canada, Denmark, Iceland, Italy, Norway and Portugal.

The creation of a Euro-American alliance was strongly contested by Communists across the world. Negotiations on the North Atlantic Treaty were marred by threats and barely veiled intimidation from the Kremlin towards the Western powers. But the climate of fear surrounding the ratification of the accession treaties by the Western Parliaments only served to speed up the process. The North Atlantic Treaty came into force on 23 August 1949 and established a transatlantic framework for the defence of Western Europe.

In 1953, the new US President Dwight D. Eisenhower and his Secretary of State John Foster Dulles extended the Truman Doctrine by introducing the ‘rollback’ policy, which aimed not merely to contain Communism but to actively drive it back. This required the formation of military alliances with countries threatened by Communist expansion. The early 1950s were characterised by a phenomenon termed ‘pactomania’. Several treaties similar to the North Atlantic Treaty were signed: the ANZUS Treaty (Australia, New Zealand and the United States) in 1951, SEATO (the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation) in 1954 and the Baghdad Pact in 1955.

The USSR responded in 1955 with the creation of the Warsaw Pact. Following the FRG’s accession to the North Atlantic Treaty on 9 May 1955, the Socialist countries of Eastern Europe also united to form a military alliance. The members of this mutual defence pact to counter aggression were the USSR, Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, the GDR, Hungary, Poland and Romania.

F. The first confrontations

From 1947 onwards, the Cold War gave rise to localised conflicts that opposed the two camps without triggering an outright war between the United States and the USSR.

Greece was in the midst of a civil war since the autumn of 1946, and after initially having let the United Kingdom act alone, the United States later intervened actively to help the anti-Communist forces. In China, American aid was given to the Nationalist Chang Kai-Shek, but that failed to halt the advance of the Communists, supported by the Soviet Union. The Cold War reached its first climax with the Soviet blockade of Berlin. In June 1950 the stage moved from Europe to South-East Asia as Communist North Korean troops invaded South Korea. The region became a bloody ideological battleground, pitting the West against the Communist world. This indirectly precipitated the rearmament of the Federal Republic of Germany.

1. The Civil War in Greece

In the years following the Second World War in Greece, the Communists engaged in violent conflicts against the government forces who were receiving massive military and financial aid from Britain and, later, from the USA. These countries feared that Greece, the last of the Balkan states to resist Soviet domination, would in turn fall to the Communists. As a neighbour of Turkey, Greece was an area of prime importance from an economic and strategic viewpoint for

preventing Soviet domination of the Eastern Mediterranean and protecting Middle East oil supplies. The United States was therefore committed to preserving the independence and territorial integrity of the kingdom and encouraged the authorities to establish a government of national unity and to undertake a series of economic reforms. By launching a campaign that would culminate in victory for the royalist armies within two years, the United States assumed the position of undisputed leader of the ‘free world’. Greece enjoyed the benefits of the Marshall Plan and gradually became part of the Western system, joining the Council of Europe in 1949 and NATO in 1951. The defeat of the Communist revolt in Greece, in which more than 50 000 people died, marked the end of the spread of Soviet influence in Europe.

2. The Revolution in China

In the spring of 1946, civil war broke out in China. The Communists led by Mao Tse-tung, hardened by resistance to the Japanese, promised to redistribute land to the peasants. In spite of American aid, which had by now begun to focus more on Europe, the National Government of General Chiang Kai-shek had to leave the mainland in 1950 and take refuge on the island of Formosa. On 1 October 1949, the People’s Republic of China was proclaimed, and Mao became President. The Communists held all the key jobs in the government. Opponents were systematically arrested or executed. This victory greatly strengthened the position of world Communism, which now spread from the China Sea to the Elbe. But Communist China, which had certainly needed Soviet economic aid in the early years of the People’s Republic, was not a mere satellite of the Soviet Union. It joined forces with the USSR in some Cold War conflicts but did not become part of the Soviet bloc.

3. The Korean War

On 25 June 1950, Communist troops from North Korea crossed the 38th parallel, which since 1945 had been the military demarcation line between the North of the country (under Soviet influence) and the South (under US influence). The confrontations along the border and the invasion of the South of the peninsula would mark the beginning of the Korean War. The United States, determined to support the authorities in the South, were able to take advantage of a moment when the Soviet delegate was temporarily absent from a United Nations Security Council meeting to commit the United Nations (UN) to defending South Korea. They called on the UN to apply the principle of collective security and to vote for sanctions against North Korea. In June 1950, US air and naval forces landed on the peninsula. Sixteen countries, including the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg, were involved in the creation of an international force under US command. North Korea, on the other hand, enjoyed the diplomatic support of the Soviet Union and military aid from Communist China.

Although his forces had been able to drive the North Korean troops back to the Chinese border, US General Douglas MacArthur was confronted by a massive counter-attack led by Chinese reinforcements from the beginning of 1951. He therefore put to the US President, Harry Truman, a proposal to bomb Communist China, resorting to atomic weapons if need be. The situation became truly dramatic — a new world conflict seemed imminent. But Truman refused to use the atomic bomb and the war continued, despite constant diplomatic efforts to broker a ceasefire. An armistice was finally signed in July 1953 in the climate of international détente brought about by the death of Stalin four months earlier. However, as the United States continued to offer substantial economic aid to South Korea, whilst the Soviet Union supported

North Korea, the reunification of the country would clearly be impossible for some time to come.

There is little doubt that the Cold War reached its apogee during this conflict. Indeed, it led to an obsessive fear of Communism in the United States and also had an effect on Western Europe, which felt increasingly weak compared with the two Great Powers on the international stage.

II. From peaceful coexistence to the paroxysms of the Cold War (1953–1962)

After the death of Stalin in March 1953, his successors adopted a more conciliatory attitude to the West. From 1955, Nikita Khrushchev, the new First Secretary of the CPSU, developed a policy of peaceful coexistence. Boosted by the advances that it had made in thermonuclear power and the space race, the USSR wanted to use the new climate of peace in the world to take the rivalry between itself and the United States onto a purely ideological and economic level.

In the United States, President Eisenhower had to make allowance for the risk of escalation and the hazards of direct nuclear confrontation with the Soviets. In 1953 he opted for the so-called ‘new look’ strategy. This combined diplomacy with the threat of massive retaliation. To complicate matters further, the United States was no longer the only country with nuclear weapons. It had to come to terms with technological progress made by the Soviet Union, which tested its first atomic weapon in 1949, with the first hydrogen bomb following in 1953.

The first tangible consequence of the new Soviet policy was the agreement on Austria in May 1955. The Austrian State Treaty officially put an end to the war in the Alpine country and gave it back its independence, subject to its permanent neutrality.

But despite certain encouraging signs, the distrust and ideological opposition between the two blocs continued. In Central and Eastern Europe, the populations of several satellite states attempted to cast off the Russian yoke, and the Cold War reached its peak in the early 1960s. In Europe, the status of the city of Berlin remained a major stumbling block for the two superpowers. The construction of the Berlin Wall in the summer of 1961 closed the last crossing point between West and East. Elsewhere in the world, the tension surrounding Cuba culminated in a trial of strength played out between John F. Kennedy and Nikita S. Khrushchev in October 1962 over the stationing of Soviet nuclear missiles on the island.

By the mid-1950s, East-West relations had certainly evolved and were characterised by the principle of peaceful coexistence, but the Cold War was not over and the ideological tensions between the two blocs prevailed.

A. The agreement on Austrian neutrality

On 15 May 1955, the USSR, together with the three Western powers occupying Austria (USA, Great Britain and France), signed a treaty which officially put an end to the state of war in the Alpine country. Post-war Austria often served as a forward post for the Americans and the Soviets when they wanted to prove their readiness to talk to one another. In accordance with the new State Treaty, the Austrian Government had to proclaim the country’s military neutrality in exchange for the withdrawal of the occupation forces. The Soviet occupation zone in eastern

Austria, together with Finland, northern Norway and the Danish island of Bornholm, was the only region in Europe from which the Red Army finally agreed to withdraw. That same year, Austria joined the United Nations (UN) and the Council of Europe.

B. The ‘Geneva spirit’

From 18 to 23 July 1955, the Heads of Government of the four Great Powers (the United States, the United Kingdom, France and the USSR) met in Geneva. It was their first summit meeting for ten years. The negotiations focused on European security, disarmament and East-West relations. Although the four powers did not reach agreement, especially as far as the fate of Germany was concerned, the meeting closed in a climate of détente between the various protagonists. There was even talk of a new ‘Geneva spirit’, referring to the peaceful climate which had inspired the League of Nations in the interwar years.

Other signs that hinted at this desire for peaceful coexistence included the visit of FRG Chancellor Konrad Adenauer to Moscow in 1955, the trip by Khrushchev to the United States in 1959 and his meeting with US President John F. Kennedy in Vienna in 1961.

But despite these encouraging signs, the distrust and ideological opposition between the two blocs continued.

C. The repression of the Hungarian Uprising

In Central and Eastern Europe, with the death of Stalin and the start of de-Stalinisation launched by the new Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev, the populations of several satellite states attempted to free themselves from Soviet rule. In Poland, despite several violent clashes in Poznan, Władysław Gomułka, the former General Secretary of the Workers’ Party, was rehabilitated after being arrested in 1951. In October 1956 he became the new First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party. He managed in extremis to prevent a Soviet military intervention aimed at suppressing riots by workers and an attempted takeover in October 1956.

The situation in East Germany and Hungary was very different. The Soviet military intervened in both countries — in June 1953 and November 1956 respectively — Moscow being determined to crush the popular uprisings and reassert full control over its satellite states.

In Hungary, intellectuals and students embittered by the Communist regime demanded the withdrawal of Soviet troops and the organisation of free, multi-party elections. In the 1950s, the people began to protest more and more openly against the fall in their standard of living and the renunciation of national independence.

In late October 1956, following the news of the Polish rebellion against Soviet hegemony, Hungary’s political opposition also demonstrated its discontent by marching peacefully through the streets of Budapest before organising armed conflict. Some members of the Hungarian army fought on the side of the rebels. A new Hungarian government, led by Imre Nagy, supported the rebels. It called for the withdrawal of Soviet troops and abolished the one-party system before announcing Hungary’s unilateral withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact and proclaiming the country’s neutrality.

On 1 November 1956, the Red Army seemed to be withdrawing. In reality, however, it continued to keep an eye on the country, which was foundering in a ‘counter-revolution’. Between 4 and 8 November 1956, Nikita S. Khrushchev ordered the Red Army to put down the Hungarian Uprising by force. Soviet troops attacked en masse and abolished the independent national government.

Hungary was immediately subjected to merciless repression, and hundreds of thousands of Hungarians fled to the West. The new Hungarian Government, bankrolled by Moscow, restored a dictatorial regime in the country and closed all the borders again. This forceful intervention, which trampled democracy underfoot, resulted in the USSR’s standing in the countries of Western Europe falling to its lowest level since the Second World War. But the moment chosen by the Soviets was very favourable to them because the Western powers were deeply divided and weakened by the **Suez Crisis**, which was happening at the same moment. The West was in no position to react appropriately and was forced to stand helplessly by as the Russians returned to Hungary.

D. The building of the Berlin Wall

During the 1950s, the City of Berlin was still divided into a Western zone, consisting of the American, British and French sectors, and a Soviet zone. Berlin constituted a thermometer during every international crisis, registering the degree of seriousness of the crisis. The Western Allied powers were determined to uphold their rights in the former capital of the Reich. For the Communist Government of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), West Berlin was a constant provocation, as it was an easy escape route for many East Germans who wanted to flee the country.

In 1953, production levels in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) were poor. In order to stimulate production, the Socialist Unity Party (SED), led by the Stalinist Walter Ulbricht, imposed increasingly severe working conditions on the workforce. However, he did not offer in exchange any prospect of an improvement in the people’s standard of living. East Berliners noted with envy the ever-increasing economic prosperity in the Western sectors.

On 16 and 17 June 1953, strikes broke out in East Berlin and spread rapidly throughout East Germany. These uprisings, however, were brutally put down by Soviet troops, leaving many dead and injured. The defeat of the June 1953 riots resulted in several hundred thousand East Germans fleeing to the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). More than two million people had crossed from East to West in less than ten years.

In order to stop this mass exodus, which particularly weakened the country’s economy, the GDR finally prevented people crossing to the West. During the night of 12 to 13 August 1961, East German workers, flanked by soldiers, built a wall between East and West Berlin that made passage impossible.

The Western powers, resigned, could only register their verbal protests. During a visit to Berlin on 26 June 1963, US President John F. Kennedy expressed his sympathy for West Berlin by declaring ‘Ich bin ein Berliner’.

In practice, it was virtually impossible to cross the ‘wall of shame’. This closed border became

the most tangible symbol of the Cold War and the division of Europe.

E. The Cuban Crisis

In 1962, a new trial of strength unfolded in Cuba: for two weeks, the world teetered on the brink of nuclear war.

Since the overthrow of Fulgencio Batista's military dictatorship in January 1959, Cuba had been ruled by Fidel Castro. In the course of agricultural reform, Castro nationalised the Cuban property of American undertakings on the island, thereby incurring the wrath of Washington. In response, the pro-Communist Cuban leader moved closer to the USSR, which was delighted to find a new ally in the western hemisphere and inside the American security zone. The Cuban and Soviet regimes signed successive agreements on trade and military cooperation. In April 1961, the United States attempted to overthrow the new regime by arranging for anti-Castro exiles to land in the Bay of Pigs. The operation failed and ultimately only strengthened Castro's position. He enticed many Latin American revolutionaries to Cuba, which was the only Communist country in the Americas, and threatened the United States' prestige in the region. Khrushchev decided to secretly provide the Cubans with intermediate-range offensive missiles that could pose a direct threat to the territory of the United States.

On 14 October 1962, after Soviet freighters carrying missiles had been identified on their way to Cuba, American spy planes also photographed launchers for Soviet intermediate-range rockets.

The US President, John F. Kennedy, therefore decided to impose a naval blockade, closing off access to Cuba. Any attempt by Soviet ships to force their way through could have ignited the powder keg, provoking open conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. Europe, and in particular Germany, would inevitably have then become a theatre of war.

However, at the eleventh hour, and after repeated contact between Moscow and Washington, largely through the intermediary of the United Nations, a compromise emerged: the Soviet ships agreed to turn back, and the Americans undertook not to invade Cuba and to remove their rockets from Turkey. On 28 October, the world avoided nuclear war by a whisker and the two Great Powers returned to disarmament negotiations. In Europe, Franco-German links were strengthened by the crisis.

III. From détente to renewed tensions (1962–1985)

Having narrowly avoided nuclear war, the United States and the USSR drew conclusions from the Cuban Crisis. This direct clash between the two superpowers brought about a sort of truce in the Cold War. In 1963, a direct line — the famous 'red telephone' — was established between Washington and Moscow and the two Great Powers opened discussions on limiting the arms race. There were other reasons behind the moderate approach adopted by the two parties. The United States was finding it increasingly difficult to finance its global military presence, and its growing involvement in the Vietnam War from 1964 onwards met with strong criticism from the general public. In Europe, all eyes now turned to the Ostpolitik: the Federal Republic of Germany was developing closer relations with the German Democratic Republic, Poland, Czechoslovakia and the USSR. As Europe remained at the heart of the East-West confrontation,

it sought to promote détente between the two military blocs. It also contributed to the maintenance of world peace and raised hopes of a reunification of the continent at the Helsinki Summit in 1975.

However, the attempt by Alexander Dubček to liberalise the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia was crushed in August 1968 by the troops of the Warsaw Pact. In the late 1970s, the two superpowers sought to extend their respective influence. The Soviet policy in Africa and the USSR's invasion of Afghanistan led to a cooling of relations between the US and the USSR. In the United States, the 'America is back' rhetoric adopted by new President Ronald Reagan set the tone for the Cold War in the 1980s. This period was marked by a new arms race.

A. Willy Brandt's Ostpolitik

The year 1969 marked a turning point in the political life of West Germany. For the first time since the foundation of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1949, the Christian Democrats were excluded from the government. The Social-Liberal coalition headed by Willy Brandt from October of that year sought a new direction for foreign policy and to break the existing taboos. The major powers were keeping a close eye on the East-West rapprochement policy pursued by the new Chancellor, but they did not intervene.

The balance therefore began to shift, though existing alliances were never called into question. The main architects of the new German policy in favour of détente in Europe were the German Chancellor, Willy Brandt, and his senior diplomatic adviser, Egon Bahr.

On 28 November 1969, the FRG signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty with the USSR. This policy of normalising relations and openness towards the East, known as 'Ostpolitik', was established within the overall context of East-West détente and sought to restore the economically powerful West Germany to its rightful place on the international stage.

The key to the East-West rapprochement lay in the treaties with the East, the *Ostverträge*, of which the first was concluded between the FRG and the USSR in Moscow on 12 August 1970. This treaty formed the basis for the Ostpolitik by opening the way for diplomatic relations and confirming the peacetime territorial status quo. It ruled out any use of force between the two states and stipulated respect for territorial integrity and the existing borders. It was rapidly followed by a number of trade agreements — the FRG was the largest Western importer of Soviet goods — and the leaders of the two countries began to meet more and more frequently.

On 3 September 1971, a quadripartite Allied agreement between the United States, France, the USSR and the United Kingdom laid down conditions for travel by West Berliners and the Allies on the transit routes.

West Germany subsequently recognised the new western borders of Poland, known as the Oder-Neisse Line, which it had hitherto rejected. After the signing of the treaty with the USSR, the FRG went on to sign a treaty with Poland in Warsaw on 10 December 1970 which included a clause allowing Polish nationals of German origin to settle in the FRG.

The treaty with Czechoslovakia posed more difficulties, mainly because of the disputes arising from the Munich Agreements of 1938 and the deportation, immediately following the Second

World War, of a German minority settled in the Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia.

On 21 December 1972, in East Berlin, the two Germanys signed the Basic Treaty in which the two states recognised one another and established normal political and trade relations. The diplomatic status quo and the inviolability of the border dividing the two German states were recognised, although reunification remained a long-term goal. This opened the way for recognition of the GDR by the Western countries, and both Germanys were admitted to the United Nations (UN) in September 1973.

B. Improvements in East–West relations

On 1 August 1975, the Final Act of the Helsinki Summit closed the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), which had opened on 3 July 1973. The CSCE was a standing forum for negotiation that, without being institutionalised, sought to enhance cooperation between long-standing foes and, indirectly, to overcome the division of Europe into two major blocs on either side of the Berlin Wall. Based on a Euro-Atlantic approach, all states whose territory was partly or wholly located in the continent of Europe were entitled to participate as full members, as were the United States and Canada. Only Albania declined to attend the CSCE. The 35 participants, including members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the Warsaw Pact, as well as non-aligned states, recognised the de facto borders established in Europe following the Second World War. The Helsinki Agreement covered non-interference in internal affairs, military issues, economic, technical and scientific cooperation, democratic principles and even environmental protection.

The early 1970s were also marked by the two superpowers' wish for détente. In the SALT I (Strategic Arms Limitation Talks) Treaty of 26 May 1972 on limiting strategic weapons, they agreed not to manufacture strategic weapons for a period of five years, not to construct land-based launchers and to limit the number of ABM anti-missile missiles. However, the agreement did nothing to limit the power of the United States and the USSR, since each retained a nuclear arsenal with multiple overkill capability; in other words, the two countries had enough nuclear weapons to destroy one another many times over.

Another sign of détente was the partial lifting by the US of the trade embargo imposed on the USSR in 1949 and the signing with Moscow of a trade agreement in October 1972. Leonid Brezhnev's visit to the United States in June 1973 was the occasion for the signing of a treaty on the prevention of nuclear war. A third summit between Leonid Brezhnev and Richard Nixon in Moscow and the Crimea in June and July 1974 was less successful, since superpower relations were adversely affected by the Yom Kippur War between Israel and an Arab coalition led by Egypt and Syria.

Paradoxically, the SALT I agreement fuelled the arms race: development of missiles with multiple nuclear warheads, tactical weapons, bombers and the 'neutron bomb' was stepped up because these weapons were not covered by the 1972 agreement. This meant that negotiations for a second SALT agreement dragged on and Soviet and US military expenditure increased. The SALT II agreement, which limited the number of missile launchers and bombers, was finally signed on 18 June 1979. It did not enter into force because of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. Moreover, it did not prevent the deployment of new Soviet medium-range missiles, the SS-20s, in Europe: the late 1970s saw the start of the Euromissile crisis.

C. The crushing of the Prague Spring

The climate of détente resulted in a less turbulent period for international relations, but crises remained. The break in relations between Moscow and China was confirmed in 1962 and sparked military clashes around the Sino–Soviet border in 1969. In the East, opposition to the Soviet bloc mainly came from Czechoslovakia. The Communist Party had held power in Czechoslovakia since the 1948 Prague coup. In January 1968, the Stalinist Antonín Novotný was overruled and replaced by Alexander Dubček, a liberal Communist who sought to reconcile Socialism and freedom. The liberalisation of the regime began in the spring of 1968. Censorship was abolished, and Czech citizens were permitted to travel abroad. The First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), Leonid Brezhnev, expressed his dissatisfaction, but Prague refused to comply. In fact, as the pressure increased, so did the liberalisation.

On 21 August 1968, troops from the Warsaw Pact countries, with the exception of Romania, took advantage of extended training operations to invade Czechoslovakia and arrest the ‘deviant’ leaders. Although Dubček retained his post for a while after his release, he was soon to be replaced by the pro-Soviet Gustáv Husák, who oversaw a return to normality.

The USSR had demonstrated once more that it would grant only limited sovereignty to its Socialist brothers.

The Western powers and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) reacted to the invasion of Czechoslovakia only with declarations of regret.

D. The Vietnam War

The period of détente was not without localised conflicts, but these did not directly jeopardise relations between the United States and the USSR. The most notable of these was the Vietnam War, which hung heavily over the 1960s and early 1970s. It was part of the overall Cold War confrontation and the American struggle against the spread of Communism in the world, but did not involve a direct confrontation between the two superpowers. The US justified its military intervention in Vietnam by the domino theory, which stated that if one country fell under the influence of Communism, the surrounding countries would inevitably follow. The aim was to prevent Communist domination of South-East Asia.

In 1961, President John F. Kennedy, convinced that Communist China was actively supporting North Vietnam, approved a US military campaign in Vietnam to help the nationalist government stave off the Communist rebellion. His successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, who was keen to see peace in South-East Asia and to maintain America’s economic and political interests in the region, stepped up his country’s involvement, massively expanding the American presence from 23 000 troops in 1965 to over 540 000 in 1969. The Viet Cong Communist rebels, supported by the North Vietnamese Army, were supplied along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, which consisted of a network of paths, tunnels and bunkers that the Americans tried in vain to destroy. This only led the USSR and China to intensify their assistance to the Communist National Liberation Front (NLF), which they supplied with arms and food; however, they did not intervene directly. In February 1965, the United States began bombing military and industrial targets in North Vietnam. This was followed by a protracted guerrilla

war, despite some fruitless attempts at international mediation.

In January 1968, the Communist *Têt* (New Year) offensive caused the conflict to escalate, plunging into doubt the Americans who had long been confident of ultimate victory. The American public, shocked by the daily television coverage and the heavy loss of life, became increasingly hostile to the war, forcing the country to withdraw and cut its military expenditure.

Following new carpet bombing raids carried out by the US Air Force on the orders of President Nixon, peace negotiations began in Paris in May 1968. The Paris Agreements of 27 January 1973 finally provided the United States with an opportunity to pull out from the conflict. Their South Vietnamese ally would stand alone for only two years before falling to the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese. The fall of Saigon on 30 April 1975 marked the true end of the Vietnam War. The American military intervention in the Vietnamese quagmire weighed heavily on US policy and caused serious damage to the country's international standing, especially in Western Europe.

E. Soviet expansionism

Although the improved relations between the two superpowers resulted in a strategic U-turn, the United States continued to defend their zones of influence throughout the world. Through the Camp David Agreements of 17 September 1978, which provided for Israel's withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula, US President Jimmy Carter was able to bring Egypt back into the American fold.

Meanwhile, the USSR was benefiting from the decolonisation process and gaining its own new spheres of influence. Since the time of James Monroe, President of the United States from 1817 to 1825, the Central American country of Nicaragua had been a zone of American influence. The Sandinista Liberation Front took advantage of President Carter's lack of interest in Nicaragua to overthrow the dictator Anastasio Somoza. Very rapidly, Cuba and the USSR became the Sandinista regime's new allies.

The USSR also profited from the settlement of the Vietnam conflict in 1975 to gain a foothold in Africa, particularly in Guinea, Mozambique and Angola. The fall of the Ethiopian imperial regime of Haile Selassie in September 1974 and the immediate establishment of a Communist dictatorship in the oldest African state only emphasised the Soviet hold over Africa, at China's expense. Initially, the United States' response to the Soviet advance in a series of Socialist-oriented States was restrained and sporadic. For example, the United States supported the anti-Communist guerrillas in Angola.

However, the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet army on 24 December 1979 provoked a much more vigorous reaction from the Western world. The USSR was seeking to support the ruling Communists against increasingly threatening counter-revolutionary guerrillas. President Carter ordered a boycott of the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow and an embargo on grain exports to the USSR. The UN adopted a resolution condemning this military invasion. The United States' response did not stop at diplomatic condemnation. During the ten years of the conflict, the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) offered assistance and financial support to the Afghan resistance, or Mujahideen.

F. The arms race and ‘Star Wars’

In the United States, the Watergate scandal led to the resignation of President Richard Nixon on 8 August 1974. This affair discredited the institution of the Presidency in a country that was already traumatised by defeat in the Vietnam War and a loss of international influence. Five years later, on 4 November 1979, in an Iran led by Ayatollah Khomeini, Iranian students occupied the US Embassy in Tehran and held more than 50 people hostage. The United States seemed incapable of settling the matter, and in April 1980 the US military operation to save the hostages ended in fiasco, discrediting President Carter further still. On top of this came the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, which had a major impact on US public opinion.

In 1980, after all these failures and humiliations, the Americans voted in a man who was determined to restore the image of the United States in the world. New President Ronald Reagan used the term ‘evil empire’ to describe the USSR and relaunched the arms race. Reagan’s Presidency was particularly marked by a rise in military spending and a significant increase in the budget for the armed forces. The arms race reached such a scale that the term ‘balance of terror’ was coined to describe the global situation. Détente was forgotten and the number of direct and indirect interventions increased: the United States supported the United Kingdom in the Falklands War (1982), offered its support to counter-revolutionaries in Latin America (for example the *Contras* in Nicaragua) and overthrew the pro-Soviet regime in Grenada (1983).

The late 1970s saw the start of the Euromissile crisis. The focus of this tense diplomatic battle was the installation by the United States of Pershing II cruise missiles and rockets in Europe as a counterbalance to the threat posed by the deployment of Soviet SS-20. On 28 October 1977, the West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt gave an address at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London in which he deplored the threat hanging over Western Europe as a result of the deployment of Soviet SS-20s, which put all the NATO countries and Western bases at risk. The USSR was seeking to establish its regional superiority over Europe. Moreover, the military consolidation of the Warsaw Pact and its superiority over NATO in terms of equipment and manpower raised doubts as to the Atlantic Alliance’s ability to implement a strong traditional defence. Helmut Schmidt’s address therefore called for a reassessment of US nuclear involvement in Europe. Once again, the Old Continent became the focus of the struggle between the two blocs. The Soviet SS-20s increased the potential of the Warsaw Pact’s nuclear forces and was one element that led to NATO’s decision on 12 December 1979 to install 572 US missiles (108 Pershing II and 464 cruise missiles) in Europe.

The actual deployment of US missiles in some countries in Western Europe from 1983 onwards (the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy and the FRG) led to the failure of the disarmament negotiations in Geneva, which had been under way since June 1982, following a decision from Moscow. The Euromissile crisis gave rise to large-scale campaigns by European pacifists demonstrating against the deployment of nuclear weapons.

This period of tension between East and West fuelled the arms race, the focus of which was the ‘Star Wars’ programme devised by US President Reagan.

On 23 March 1983, Ronald Reagan announced the launch of a vast technological programme known as the ‘Strategic Defense Initiative’ (SDI), or ‘Star Wars’: the United States would be

protected from enemy nuclear weapons by a space-based shield that would detect and destroy enemy ballistic missiles as soon as they were launched.

The US project (which would never come to fruition) drew the USSR into a frenzied arms race which led the country to the brink of financial and economic collapse. It was only in 1985, with the arrival of Mikhail Gorbachev in power in the USSR and his domestic reforms to democratise the Soviet regime, that Moscow decided to put an end to this reckless arms race that was ruining the country. Gorbachev openly displayed his wish to develop closer relations with the West and to resume talks with the United States. On 8 December 1987, the United States and the Soviet Union signed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, which provided for the destruction of all nuclear and conventional ground-launched missiles with ranges between 500 and 5 500 km, including the famous SS-20s and Pershing IIs, within three years. This treaty is seen as the first real nuclear disarmament agreement and marked the end of the arms race between the two superpowers.

IV. Towards the end of the Cold War (1985–1989)

The late 20th century was a time of major geopolitical upheaval in Eastern Europe. The fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 put an end to the Cold War and its divisions, which dated back to the Second World War. The fall of the Communist bloc brought about the end of a bipolar world built around the rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. Economic and military structures such as Comecon (the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance) and the Warsaw Pact were dissolved in 1991. The events of the late 1980s marked the beginning of improved relations between two parts of the continent that had long been divided.

A. The Eastern bloc in the throes of change

The political events and economic changes in Eastern Europe at the end of the 1980s radically altered the geopolitical situation in Europe and transformed existing institutions and structures. Aspirations to freedom, democracy and the defence of human rights, which had long been stifled by the authoritarian regimes of the Soviet bloc, were expressed more and more openly, thanks in particular to the reforms introduced in the Soviet Union by Mikhail Gorbachev and his policy of gradually opening up to the West.

Communist governments, already weakened, quickly collapsed, encouraging the reawakening of national identities and minorities in the USSR's satellite states and then in the Soviet Union itself. Demonstrations and strikes in support of political and economic reform became increasingly frequent. The fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 further accelerated the removal of the Communist regimes. After Poland and Hungary, authoritarian governments gave way to elected multi-party coalitions in Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic (GDR), Romania and Bulgaria. The democratic revolutions also put an end to the Warsaw Pact and the Comecon planned economy system. The Soviet Union imploded and was unable to prevent the wave of national independence in the Baltic states and in most of the republics making up the USSR. In 1991, a group of conservative Communists, fiercely opposed to the turn of events, mounted an unsuccessful coup to overthrow President Gorbachev. The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), incorporating some of the former republics, replaced the old Soviet Union. The former satellite states of the Soviet Union, keen to defend

human rights and adopt the principles of the market economy, immediately turned to Western structures.

1. Gorbachev's 'perestroika' and 'glasnost'

On 11 March 1985, at the age of 54, Mikhail Gorbachev, an apparatchik of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), was appointed General Secretary of the CPSU by the Central Committee. He aimed to carry out a root-and-branch reform of the Soviet system, the bureaucratic inertia of which constituted an obstacle to economic reconstruction ('perestroika'), and, at the same time, to liberalise the regime and introduce transparency ('glasnost'), i.e. a certain freedom of expression and information.

In order to implement this ambitious policy successfully, Gorbachev had to limit the USSR's international commitments and reduce its military expenditure so as to curb the country's moral and economic decline. This resulted in a resumption of dialogue between the Americans and the Soviets concerning nuclear arms and the establishment of closer relations with the European Community. At the same time, Gorbachev terminated Soviet involvement in other parts of the world, withdrawing from Afghanistan, where the Russian army was bogged down, exerting pressure on the Vietnamese to withdraw from Cambodia and restoring Sino-Soviet relations, withdrawing Soviet support for the Mengistu regime in Ethiopia and for Cuban troops in Angola, ending economic aid to Cuba and withdrawing Soviet troops from the island, restoring diplomatic relations with Israel and condemning Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Gorbachev's policy of disengagement would be even more marked in Europe, with regard to the former satellite states of the USSR.

Although popular with the West, Gorbachev was far less so in his own country, where his reforms resulted in the disruption of the centralised planning system without the implementation of any real market mechanisms. This resulted in reduced production, shortages and social discontent, which led to strikes. This discontent could be all the more strongly expressed within the system of 'transparency'; all previously withheld information concerning the activities of the state and its administrative bodies might henceforth be disclosed and publicly debated. The lifting of the taboos imposed by the Communist regime, of which intellectuals and liberated dissidents took full advantage, allowed critical judgment to be passed on the history of the Soviet Union and on its political, economic and social structure.

2. The collapse of the Communist bloc

Mikhail Gorbachev's reformist policies in the Soviet Union fuelled opposition movements to the Communist regimes in the Soviet bloc countries. Demonstrations became more frequent. Governments were forced to accept measures — recommended, moreover, by Gorbachev — towards liberalisation. However, these measures were not deemed to be sufficient.

Hopes of freedom, long suppressed by the Communist regimes in the countries of the Soviet bloc and in the USSR itself, were inevitably fuelled by Mikhail Gorbachev's attempted reforms in the Soviet Union and his conciliatory policy towards the West. It proved impossible to maintain reformed Communist regimes. They were entirely swept away by the desire for political democracy and economic liberty. Within three years, the Communist regimes collapsed and individual nations gained freedom, initially in the USSR's satellite countries and

then within the Soviet Union itself. The structures of the Eastern bloc disintegrated with the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and Comecon. The Soviet Union broke up into independent republics.

In Poland, economic reforms led to strikes in the spring and summer of 1988. The Solidarity movement ('Solidarność') called for trade union pluralism. During the Round Table negotiations, which enabled the gradual creation of the Third Polish Republic, the Polish Communist leaders recognised the social movement in April 1989. Solidarność was therefore able to take part in the first semi-legal elections since the Second World War. The elections, held on 4 and 18 June, saw the collapse of the Communist Party, and Tadeusz Mazowiecki became the first non-Communist head of government in Eastern Europe. He was appointed on 19 August 1989 and endorsed by an overwhelming majority by the Polish Sjem on 8 September 1989 as a result of a coalition between Solidarity, the agricultural party and the Democratic party. In December 1989, Lech Wałęsa, symbolic leader of Solidarność, replaced General Jaruzelski of the Polish United Workers' Party as President. The victory of the trade union's candidates in these elections triggered a wave of peaceful anti-Communist revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe.

In Hungary, demonstrations against the regime increased during 1987 and 1988. The Opposition became more organised, and reformers entered the government in June 1988. On 18 October 1989, the Stalinist Constitution was abandoned, and Hungary adopted political pluralism. Earlier that year, in May, the 'Iron Curtain' separating Hungary from Austria had been dismantled, enabling many East Germans to flee to the West.

In Czechoslovakia, a programme of reforms inspired by those of the USSR was adopted in December 1987 but was not widely implemented. The regime became more oppressive and suppressed demonstrations in 1988.

The fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989 further accelerated the demise of the Communist governments. In Czechoslovakia, the Opposition leader, Václav Havel, was unanimously elected interim President of the Republic by the parliament of the Socialist Republic on 29 December 1989. In the same vein, the anti-establishment Civic Forum movement won the first free parliamentary elections on 8 June 1990 and reappointed Václav Havel as President of the Republic in July of that year. In Hungary, the parliamentary elections held on 2 April 1990 resulted in the formation of the Democratic Forum government. On 9 December 1990, Lech Wałęsa became President of the Republic of Poland. In Bulgaria, a coalition government was formed on 7 December 1990, and a new Constitution was adopted on 9 July 1991. In Romania, following violent demonstrations, the Communist dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu was executed on 25 December 1989 and a new Constitution establishing pluralism was adopted on 8 December 1991.

This transformation proceeded, for the most part, in a peaceful manner. Nevertheless, in Romania, the revolution against the dictator Ceaușescu resulted in heavy bloodshed, and the fragmentation of Yugoslavia led to a long and bitter civil war.

The collapse of Soviet Communism led to dislocation of the Soviet Union, sapped by an ideological, political and economic crisis. This in turn precipitated the break-up of the empire, both cause and effect of the end of Communism. The organisations specific to 'Soviet federalism' hastened the implosion of the Soviet Union despite being primarily intended to consolidate it. One after another the Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs) proclaimed their

sovereignty in the summer of 1991. In December of the same year, some of these republics, which had become independent in the meantime, redefined their respective links by creating the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

B. The collapse of the GDR and the fall of the Berlin Wall

Whilst Gorbachev was liberalising the Soviet regime and the movements opposed to Communism were gathering strength in Central and Eastern Europe, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) appeared to be an invincible fortress, solidly constructed by the Communist Party, which was supported by the army and the secret police, the leaders of which were set against any change and counted on the support of the Soviet troops stationed in the GDR.

Nevertheless, there was a growing wave of opposition, supported by the Protestant churches, which in the autumn of 1988 called for a ‘society with a human face’, and subsequently in 1989 for a liberalisation of the regime. Large numbers of opponents gathered for ‘Monday prayers’, protesting against the police state and calling for democracy. Reform groups advocated ‘Socialism with a human face’, a third way between the Stalinist Socialism of the GDR and the liberal capitalism of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). This, they claimed, would ensure the survival of East Germany rather than its absorption into West Germany. However, the reformers soon found themselves overtaken by events. A series of vast demonstrations took place, calling for freedom of thought, freedom of the press and freedom of assembly. The people wanted more than simply a reform of the GDR and Socialism; they wanted a share of the prosperity enjoyed by West Germany, which had seen a massive influx of refugees from East Germany. They demonstrated in favour of a united Germany.

The East German Government, led by Erich Honecker, was counting on Soviet support to save the regime. But Gorbachev, wary of compromising his policy of rapprochement with the West, refused any sort of military intervention, and confirmed the fact to Helmut Kohl when he visited Bonn on 13 June 1989. Gorbachev tried to persuade the East German leaders to proceed with reforms, along the lines of perestroika. On 18 October, Honecker, who refused to yield, was stripped of his post and replaced as leader of the Communist Party by Egon Krenz, with Moscow’s approval. Hans Modrow, who was in favour of the reforms, became Head of Government. But it was too late. On 4 November, the new leaders were booed by a crowd of a million people gathered on Alexanderplatz in East Berlin. On 9 November, this led to the decision to authorise travel abroad. Immediately, thousands of people wanted to cross through the frontier posts in Berlin, which were forced to open up to the crowd. The demonstrators started to demolish the ‘Wall of Shame’. Several million East Germans visited West Berlin, the ‘shop window of the West’.

The following day, 10 November, the leaders of the GDR promised that ‘free and secret elections’ would take place in May 1990. However, continuing demonstrations forced them to bring the elections forward to 18 March. The Socialist reformers were defeated and the Christian Democrat Lothar de Maizière became Head of Government of the GDR, which on 12 April declared itself in favour of a unified Germany within NATO and the European Community.

C. The creation of new alliances

The collapse of Communism within the Eastern bloc and the break-up of the Soviet Union put an end to the Cold War. The new regimes soon declared their intention to turn to the countries of Western Europe for the necessary economic aid and assistance to facilitate the transition. The aspiration for ownership and modernity embodied by the European Union was a driving force behind the transformation of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEECs). But the European Union, tasked with this historic mission, also had to work to offer these states the prospect of access to its area of peace and prosperity, along with the means and method that would open up this area for them. The fall of the iron curtain also paved the way for the reunification of Germany and then of the whole of Europe. Europe's infrastructures also had to be enlarged and transformed so that they would be better suited to the new political order in Eastern Europe. From the end of the 1990s, the two former Cold War enemies embarked on a process of disarmament. The negotiations led to the signing of agreements for the progressive reduction of the number of conventional and nuclear weapons on European soil. Relations between the United States and the Russian Federation also began to normalise and the two countries embarked on bilateral negotiations on strategic arms reduction.

Finally, on 1 July 1991 in Prague, the seven member countries of the Warsaw Pact (USSR, Bulgaria, Romania, German Democratic Republic, Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia) decided to dissolve the Political Consultative Committee of the Warsaw Pact.

With the collapse of the Communist camp, which strengthened the conversion to Western values (political pluralism, market economy, the primacy of law), the role of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) could increase. At the request of Mikhail Gorbachev, a revival took place that was intended to consolidate democracy and accelerate disarmament. The Summit of the Heads of State or Government held in Paris on 19–21 November 1990 adopted the Charter of Paris for a New Europe, recalling the principles of the Helsinki Final Act. The Charter welcomed the end of an 'era of confrontation and division' and proclaimed the desire to 'build, consolidate and strengthen democracy as the only system of government'. It was decided at the Summit to make the CSCE into a permanent institution, without extending its powers and responsibilities. This would be achieved at the CSCE Council in Budapest in December 1994 with the creation of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

The **Visegrad Group** was created with the aim of moving away from Communism and implementing the reforms required for full membership of the Euro-Atlantic institutions. It was established on 15 February 1991 at a meeting attended by József Antall, Prime Minister of Hungary, Lech Wałęsa, President of Poland, and Václav Havel, President of Czechoslovakia, in the Hungarian town of Visegrád. Following the division of Czechoslovakia into two separate States on 1 January 1993, the Czech Republic and Slovakia became the third and fourth members of the group. The 'Visegrad Triangle' (Budapest, Prague and Warsaw) therefore became the 'Visegrad 4' or 'V4' (Budapest, Bratislava, Prague and Warsaw). These four countries developed close political and economic cooperation so that they would be better equipped to defend their common interests at European level. The concerted action of V4 rapidly contributed to the dismantling of the Warsaw Pact, the dissolution of Comecon and the consolidation of the transition to democracy.

One of the aims of the Visegrad Group was to stimulate trade between the signatory States. To this end, on 21 December 1991 in Kraków, the Heads of State or Government signed the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA), which came into force on 1 March 1993.

The countries of the former Warsaw Pact, concerned about the stability of their frontiers because of the revival of nationalism in Central Europe and a possible resurgence of Russian imperialism, needed a credible guarantee and found it not in the OSCE or in the European Union but in **NATO** and, through it, the United States. The Visegrad Group countries also asked to be formally integrated into NATO and affirmed, on 6 May 1992, that ‘their long-term objective was full membership of NATO’.

But there was no question of expanding the Atlantic Alliance towards Eastern Europe, since that would upset Russia. NATO adopted a new strategic concept.

There was no longer a global military threat in Europe. The danger now lay in regional conflicts arising from economic, social and political issues as well as from those concerning defence. This resulted in the need, while still maintaining the potential for collective defence, to develop dialogue and cooperation in order to contribute — along with the other organisations — to the peaceful resolution of the crises which were threatening European security. This resulted in the creation, on the initiative of the United States and Germany, of a North Atlantic Cooperation Council (**NACC**), which, on 20 December 1991, began to organise periodic meetings of ministers, ambassadors and military experts to discuss defence and security issues. The number of Member States began at 25 (the 16 from NATO, Russia representing the USSR, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and the three Baltic states). It expanded with the inclusion, in March 1992, of 11 other republics from the new Commonwealth of Independent States, to which were added Albania and Georgia. There were 38 members in total. Cooperation developed in all areas and intensified against the background of the Partnership for Peace (11 January 1994), which aimed to establish military cooperation with NATO (planning, joint exercises) in order to improve the capacity to successfully carry out United Nations and CSCE/OSCE peacekeeping missions, through the setting up of combined joint task forces at international level. This partnership, it was hoped, would play a crucial role in the process for the enlargement of NATO as now envisaged by the Alliance governments. This enlargement was to take place progressively, several years later. On 27 May 1997, in Paris, the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation was signed, creating the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council.

All these events clearly demonstrated that the struggle between East and West was a thing of the past and that the Cold War between the two superpowers had come to an end.