East, West, North, South

International Relations since 1945
Some Old and New Theories about the Cold War

Why did antagonism develop between East and West after the Second World War? There are nearly as many answers to that question as there are scholars who have researched the subject. Nonetheless, their answers could long be grouped into three rather loose schools of thought. Representatives of these main schools are often called traditionalists (Herbert Feis, William McNeill, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.), revisionists (William Appleman Williams, Gabriel Kolko, Lloyd Gardner), and post-revisionists (John Lewis Gaddis, Daniel Yergin). All three schools are represented among scholars today, although they have dominated during different periods. The traditionalists held sway almost alone until the mid-1960s. Then a strong revisionist wave took hold, to be succeeded by post-revisionism in the course of the 1970s. Later a number of leading revisionists came to be drawn towards post-revisionism (Thomas Paterson and Melvyn Leffler).

The scholarly debate on the origins of the Cold War was long dominated by Americans. Soviet writings tended to reflect official attitudes. In Western Europe, the number of generalized accounts long greatly exceeded the number of specialized studies. Most of these accounts were clearly traditionalist in tone (André Fontaine, Raymond Aron, Desmond Donnelly, Wilfrid Knapp), although a few showed revisionist inclinations (Claude Julien). A variety of post-revisionist ideas emerged during the 1970s and 1980s (Wilfried Loth, Geir Lundestad), but post-revisionism was an even more complex phenomenon in Western Europe than in the United States. The present account is written in a post-revisionist spirit.
Many factors distinguish the three schools. Three questions are particularly pertinent in defining them: Who was responsible for the Cold War? Who was most active in the years immediately following the Second World War? What are the primary motivating forces, particularly for US foreign policy?

Few people, if any, maintain that all the blame can be placed solely on one side. After all, this is a question of interplay among several actors. However, the traditionalists hold the Soviet Union primarily accountable for the Cold War. The revisionists place the responsibility on the United States, whereas the post-revisionists either do not say much about this question, or they stress the mutual accountability of the two countries more than the other two schools do.

The question of blame is closely linked to an analysis of which side was most active in the years immediately following the Second World War. According to the traditionalists, US policy was characterized by passivity. Washington emphasized international cooperation within bodies such as the UN and attempted to a certain extent to negotiate between the two major antagonists, Britain and the Soviet Union. Demobilization of the armed forces was effected at a rapid pace. Not until 1947 did Washington change its course, and then as a response to Soviet expansion in Eastern Europe. The Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan were the turning points.

The revisionists present an entirely different picture. Even before the war had ended, the United States had tried to limit the influence of the Soviet Union and of leftist forces throughout the world. The United States had such wide-ranging goals that it came into conflict even with the United Kingdom. In order to attain their goals, the Americans employed a number of different instruments, from atomic bombs to loans and other forms of economic support. The Soviet Union is considered defensive in orientation. Soviet policies in Eastern Europe were to a great extent a response to American ambitions in the area.

The post-revisionists agree with the revisionists that important elements in US policy had fallen into place before the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan. They also agree that the United States implemented a number of different measures to promote its interests. But they maintain that the revisionists are too eager to perceive the use of these measures as motivated only by anti-Soviet considerations. They also reject the idea that Soviet policy in Eastern Europe can be considered a result of US ambitions.

With regard to the motivating forces behind US policies, the traditionalists emphasize the US need to defend its own and Western Europe's legitimate security interests in the face of an expansive Soviet Union. These security interests coincide with the defense of democratic rights. The revisionists, however, perceive US policy as determined primarily by the needs of capitalism and a fundamental anti-Communism. The post-revisionists claim that all these motivating forces played a part. They also include a number of additional factors, such as the role played by public opinion, the Congress, and various pressure groups. The relative significance attributed to the different
factors varies from author to author, but the post-revisionists consider economic conditions less significant than the revisionists do. On the other hand, they disagree with the traditionalists’ almost total dismissal of such motivating forces for US policy.

Perception of the motivating forces behind Soviet policies does not distinguish the schools to the same degree as attitudes toward the United States do. There is, however, a tendency for traditionalists to perceive Soviet policy as motivated by considerations of ideology and expansionism, whereas the revisionists place greater emphasis on the security needs of the Soviet Union. Once more the post-revisionists stress plurality, emphasizing that one type of explanation need not exclude the other.

In recent years the debate on the origins of the Cold War has become increasingly complex. While the three main schools of interpretation are still very much alive, certain new trends are noticeable. First, the emphasis has shifted from a post-revisionist towards a more traditionalist direction again. Post-revisionism was felt to be too vague; it contained both left- and right-of-center elements. The material more lately made available by the Russian side served to underline the links between domestic and foreign policy. The surprise for many was the extent to which Stalin and other Russian leaders saw almost everything in ideological terms, including in their own internal debates and presentations. This renewed emphasis on ideology, and particularly on a Soviet ‘revolutionary–imperial’ paradigm, has moved the debate to the right again and was seen both with well-established scholars (John Lewis Gaddis, Vojtech Mastny) and with some scholars of Russian origins (Vladislav Zubok, Constantine Pleshakov, Vladimir Pechatnov).

Second, a whole series of new perspectives has been developed. The role of Britain has emerged again after an extended period of emphasis on the two superpowers (David Reynolds). Historians from a range of other countries have also added their respective national perspectives. Non-European actors have been analyzed more in general as well (Odd Arne Westad). The local scene was often of greater importance than earlier analyses suggested. This multilingual and multinational new Cold War history liked to see itself as transcending the old historiographical schools, although it was often not particularly difficult to fit the new wine into the old bottles.

Some Structural Explanations for the Cold War

Historians can describe what happened and suggest explanations as to why certain events occurred. Causal explanations, in particular, often contain an element of attributing blame or responsibility. But any discussion of blame and responsibility is also influenced by the author’s appraisal of how advantageous the outcome of a situation was. Whether the outcome was good or bad is, however, a
political conclusion. In such appraisals the judgement of historians is no better than anyone else’s. In line with that reasoning, this post-revisionist presentation will describe US and Soviet policies and attempt to say something about the motivating forces behind those policies. The question of blame will not be explicitly considered, despite the place it has been granted in historians’ writings.

The outbreak of the Cold War can be analyzed on several different levels. A number of features were determined by the international system as such, while others were linked to ideologies, nations, and individuals. The more general explanations will be considered here; the more specific ones will be dealt with in the section on motivating forces behind the superpowers’ policies.

According to the theory of political science realism, conflicts are inevitable in the international system. The normal state is rivalry rather than harmony. The international community differs from the domestic situation within individual nations in that there is no effective central power having more or less a monopoly of the use of force. Of course major powers can cooperate, but when they do so it is most often to face a joint threat. When the threat no longer exists, cooperation normally dissipates. In this perspective the antagonism between East and West is a new variation on a familiar theme.

There is a lot to be said for this general theory, but it should be remembered that in the course of history there have been long periods in which the tension was kept at a relatively low level. The years from 1815 to 1914 may serve as an example of this. The coalition between the United States, the Soviet Union, and the United Kingdom was dissolved after Germany and Japan were defeated in 1945. A similar situation pertained after the Napoleonic wars and after the First World War. But the objection can be raised that the tension between East and West after the Second World War reached a higher level than after earlier, corresponding conflicts.

Other structural conditions may shed light on the high level of tension. The changes that resulted from the Second World War were enormous. The most important change was the vacuum created by the defeat of Germany and Japan. This theory is most clearly presented by Louis Halle in his book *The Cold War as History*:

> the decision to eliminate German power from Europe rather than make ... peace was the basic cause of the Cold War. ... It is evident that such a vacuum can hardly persist, even for a week. It had to be filled by something.

Both the United States and the Soviet Union were capable of filling the vacuums in Europe and Asia, and the two new superpowers were both drawn into them. Since there was no mutually acceptable way of filling them, conflict was the inevitable result.

Ever new vacuums would arise during the postwar period. Conditions in Central Europe and Eastern Asia were scarcely stabilized before the colonial empires began to crumble. As the new nations of Asia and Africa suffered from a lack of domestic
stability and as the former colonial powers were often unable to fill the vacuums which arose, the stage was laid once more for a conflict between the two super-powers, the United States and the Soviet Union. To an increasing degree, the most important conflicts between East and West took place in Asia and Africa.

The tension between the United States and the Soviet Union was naturally also affected by the fact that the two countries had differing political and economic systems. The systems were not only different; the two countries mutually denounced each other’s system. The ideological gap made cooperation difficult and a sober analysis of the adversary nearly impossible. This had been evident even before the Second World War. Relations between the United States and the Soviet Union were poor then, too. The new element was that the two powers now confronted each other face to face in several parts of the world.

The assertion has even been made that these were different types of people confronting each other: on the one side the Russians, who have often been described as insecure, fearful of the outside world, and with a clear inferiority complex towards the West; on the other side the Americans, who supposedly represented the opposite qualities – optimistic, superior, and expansive.

This factor cannot be discounted, although many historians are skeptical about explanations based on distinctive national characteristics. The picture was certainly not uncomplicated. The Americans may well have felt that they were God’s chosen people, but the fear of evil was also present, as the Communist witch hunt showed. The isolationism of the period between the wars did not indicate a strong feeling of confidence towards the rest of the world. However, the political climate was far different from that of the Soviet Union. ‘Enemies’ of the United States lost their reputations; ‘enemies’ of the Soviet state lost their lives.

The differing political and economic systems are a more concrete factor than the various personality types. The fact that the United States was capitalist and the Soviet Union communist was highly significant. A few comments are needed, however, to shed light on the fact that there were certain complications involved in even this apparently obvious explanation of the antagonism between the United States and the Soviet Union.

In the first place, social democracy did not necessarily represent a sort of middle course that could tone down the conflict, even though many people were convinced that this was so. Relations between Britain and the Soviet Union were no better than between the United States and the Soviet Union. Until the spring of 1946, the Labour government in London was more sharply criticized by Moscow than the Truman administration in Washington was. On several vital issues regarding Germany and Poland, antagonism was even greater between Britain and the Soviet Union than between the United States and the Soviet Union, although the two Western powers had relatively close ties. And, as we shall see, many of the new initiatives in US policy – such as the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, and NATO – were measures that were eagerly
applauded by the British government. In fact, they were not only endorsed, but even to a certain degree initiated or at least encouraged by the British. 

In the second place, the alliance during the war had created an atmosphere which influenced the climate in the postwar years. The Soviet attitude towards the United States – as expressed during the war in Stalin’s declarations, in his correspondence with Roosevelt, and in the Soviet press – mellowed somewhat. Even so, this shift was quite insignificant compared to the change in the United States. A minority continued to be extremely suspicious of the Soviet Union, but the vast majority changed their minds dramatically. The American press regularly printed articles praising the Soviet Union. The conservative weekly *Life* magazine proclaimed that Lenin was ‘perhaps the greatest man of modern times.’ Nor was there any reason to fear the Soviet Union, because the Russians ‘look like Americans, dress like Americans, and think like Americans.’ 

In 1943 and early in 1944, nearly all the experts on the Soviet Union who had been skeptical of Moscow before the war felt that it should be possible to cooperate after the war. Gallup polls showed that as late as August 1945, 54 per cent of the American population believed that the Soviet Union was to be trusted and felt that the USSR would cooperate with the United States. This was only 1 per cent less than the highest level during the entire war, which was registered in February 1945. Thirty per cent said that the Soviet Union could not be trusted, while 16 per cent had no opinion. 

Thus a majority believed that it would be possible to continue to cooperate after the war. Even more, no doubt, hoped to avoid conflict. The transition from war to Cold War is sometimes made too automatic. It was politically impossible to go directly from one to the other. Only gradually did leaders and public opinion lose this optimism and prepare themselves for a new conflict. 

The past bound East and West together, but only parts of the past. For there were also other experiences, which in the short term had limited influence but which would soon become more important. For the Soviet Union, in a long-term perspective these included all the invasions from the West, from the Vikings to Hitler, and in a more short-term perspective all the unfulfilled promises of the Second Front in 1942, as well as what Stalin considered suspicious contacts between the Western powers and Hitler’s Germany. Moscow’s conclusion was that in order to ensure its own security the Soviet Union would have to rely solely on itself. 

The Americans were equally interested in what they could learn from the war. An important lesson was that aggression had to be contained as early as possible; encouraged by previous successes, Hitler’s ambitions had grown continually. Feelings of guilt in the United States about their former isolationism reinforced this way of thinking. 

The war had definitively ended American isolationism. Pearl Harbor had shown that the United States was vulnerable to attack. The Pacific and Atlantic oceans did not make an attack on the United States impossible. New long-distance
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bombers and new weapons, not least the atomic bomb, made the world even smaller. The United States had to play an active part in order to prevent new wars and to create a world in accordance with American interests.

Who Acted Where?

The United States would come to play a part in politics throughout the world, although American influence was not equally pervasive in all parts of the globe. Soviet policy was less ambitious geographically, but the desire to dominate was even stronger in the areas which were most important to Moscow. The clash was between two different views. The United States and the Soviet Union, East and West, quite simply had conflicting interests in several countries and regions.

US Policy

The Americans had always considered themselves something special. In their own opinion, they represented principles that were not primarily in the interest of the United States, but rather in the interest of the entire world. These principles had been proclaimed by President Wilson in his Fourteen Points during the First World War. Even isolationism was a way of emphasizing the unique nature of the United States. The issues of European strife had no bearing on the country. The main dividing line in international politics was between the United States and all other major powers, not between groups of major powers. There was a constant fear that American ideals would be defiled by foreign influence. The strength of the United States was underestimated.

The war had shown that it did make a difference to the United States who controlled Europe. The country had closer ties with some powers than with others. But the belief that the United States had a special mission persisted. Wilson’s Fourteen Points were reiterated in modified versions in the Atlantic Charter of August 1941 and in the Declaration on Liberated Europe from the Yalta Conference in February 1945. They also formed part of the background for the new international organizations.

With the enthusiasm that new converts often have, the United States was going to create a new foundation for peace and cooperation between nations. America was going to protect the world against the power politics of the old major powers – politics that had drawn the world into so many conflicts. The key phrases were international cooperation, self-government by the people, anti-colonialism and freer trade between nations. In the political sphere the United Nations was to be the central body. It was to be supplemented by others, such as regular meetings between the foreign ministers of the major powers.
The United States would participate in international politics in an entirely different way than previously. No issue would be foreign to Washington any more. The so-called Bretton Woods institutions, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, were to be central actors in the economic sphere. Through an active lending policy and stable exchange rates they were to increase international trade, promote economic growth, and in so doing ostensibly contribute to ensuring world peace.

Although many leading Americans understood that the major powers would have unequal influence in various parts of the world, the overall ideology represented a sharp break with anything resembling the outdated policy of spheres of interest. As President Franklin D. Roosevelt expressed it in reference to the Yalta Conference: ‘It spells the end of the system of unilateral action, exclusive alliances, and spheres of influence, and the balance of power and all the other expedients which have been tried for centuries and have failed.’

Under this ideal surface, concrete policies were adapted to US interests and other practical realities. The UN system would be strongly dominated by the United States and its friends. Free trade intrinsically favors the country with the strongest economy. Despite its high ideals, the United States would both have its cake and eat it. There were not to be spheres of interest, but the United States would continue to have a high degree of control over Latin America. Colonies and mandates were to be placed under international supervision, with the exception of the areas the United States was to have command over. The Rhine and the Danube were to be internationalized, but not the Panama Canal. Free trade was to be combined with protectionism where this best suited the United States. The Soviet Union was to have little say in the occupation of Italy and Japan, but the United States tried to have more of a say in the former enemy countries of Eastern Europe.

The war had undoubtedly suppressed most of the skepticism about the Soviet Union. But there were always 20 per cent or more who maintained that the United States could not trust the Soviets. As early as in the autumn of 1944 there were obvious signs that the climate was changing. In the State Department, the experts on the Soviet Union recovered their old skepticism. The lack of Soviet support – and sympathy – for the Polish uprising against the Germans in Warsaw during the summer and autumn of 1944 was particularly important in this context. According to expert opinions, the Kremlin now seemed determined to gain control of Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria. The war had not after all altered the policies of the Soviet leaders. The experts on the Soviet Union were supported by the Secretary of the Navy, James Forrestal, although the military establishment was not at all among the most staunch critics of the USSR. During the course of 1945, the signs of tough Soviet policies in Eastern Europe became clearer. Skepticism of the Soviet Union was strengthened and spread to ever new parts of the administration.

President Roosevelt was one among many who hoped to achieve cooperation with the Soviet Union. He was also one of the few who understood that it would
be necessary to make considerable concessions to the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe in order to continue this cooperation. However, he did little to prepare public opinion for this type of concession. The general public wanted good relations with Moscow, but there were few indications that they were willing to sacrifice American ideals in Eastern Europe. In private, Roosevelt could accept the system of spheres of interest that Stalin and Churchill agreed on in October 1944, but it would have been political suicide to have publicly advocated this course of policy.

Just before his death in April 1945, Roosevelt was in the process of changing his view of the possibilities of continued cooperation with the Soviet Union. The new President, Harry Truman, intensified this skepticism, although during the first few months of his administration he was understandably uncertain as to exactly what policy to pursue.

From the time of the meeting of foreign ministers in London in September–October 1945 there was an open split between the United States and Britain, on the one hand, and the Soviet Union on the other. Now public opinion and attitudes in Congress began to change in earnest. The hopes for cooperation had been high. The disappointment at not having succeeded was thus even greater. From having believed that the Soviet Union was perhaps not so unlike the United States, a large part of public opinion swung to believing that Stalin was a new Hitler. Not much time was required to move from one extreme to the other.

The United States could not achieve the comprehensive policy goals it had laid out. Although the Americans may have underestimated their own strength before the Second World War, there were indications that they overestimated it after the war. These indications would become stronger as the postwar period progressed. This was probably mainly due to the ambitious nature of their goals, for the means which were available were considerable. The United States had a monopoly on nuclear weapons. There was a definite expectation in Washington that the atomic bomb, by its mere existence, would have a moderating effect on the Soviet Union. For instance, it would have a deterrent effect with regard to possible Soviet plans for an attack on Western Europe. However, there were few people in Eastern Europe who could see any positive effect of the new weapon. (The atomic bomb will be discussed in more detail on pp. 138–41.)

The United States had a wide-reaching network of bases throughout the world. The Pacific was considered an enormous US-dominated lake by many. In Europe, the United States had forces in the occupied countries and set up important bases on Greenland and the Azores and in Iceland. These were established primarily on the basis of US commitments in the occupied areas and on considerations of their significance for the defense of the American continent, but their purpose changed with the international situation. When Secretary of State James Byrnes announced in September 1946 that US troops would participate in the occupation of Germany as long as the occupation persisted, this
Table 2.1  The Percentage Agreement between Churchill and Stalin

We alighted at Moscow on the afternoon of October 9, and were received very heartily and with full ceremonial by Molotov and many high Russian personages.

At ten o’clock that night we held our first important meeting in the Kremlin. There were only Stalin, Molotov, Eden, and I, with Major Birse and Pavlov as interpreters.

The moment was apt for business, so I said, ’Let us settle about our affairs in the Balkans. Your armies are in Roumania and Bulgaria. We have interests, missions, and agents there. Don’t let us get at cross-purposes in small ways. So far as Britain and Russia are concerned, how would it do for you to have ninety per cent predominance in Roumania, for us to have ninety per cent of the say in Greece, and go fifty-fifty about Yugoslavia?’ While this was being translated I wrote out on a half-sheet of paper:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The others</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Britain</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(in accord with USA)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yugoslavia</td>
<td>50–50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Hungary</td>
<td>50–50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Bulgaria</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The others</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I pushed this across to Stalin, who had by then heard the translation. There was a slight pause. Then he took his blue pencil and made a large tick on it, and passed it back to us. It was all settled in no more time than it takes to set down.

Of course we had long and anxiously considered our point, and were only dealing with immediate war-time arrangements. All larger questions were reserved on both sides for what we then hoped would be a peace table when the war was won.

After this there was a long silence. The pencilled paper lay in the centre of the table. At length I said, ’Might it not be thought rather cynical if it seemed we had disposed of these issues, so fateful to millions of people, in such an off-hand manner? Let us burn the paper.’

’No, you keep it,’ said Stalin.


*Revised by Foreign Ministers Eden and Molotov on 11 October:

Hungary: 80% (USSR)–20% (UK)
Bulgaria: 80% (USSR)–20% (UK)

was not directed primarily at Germany, but at the Soviet Union. His declaration put an end to the uncertainty as to how long the United States would have troops in Europe, an uncertainty due in part to Roosevelt’s statement at Yalta that the US troops would have to be recalled within two years. Roosevelt had assumed that American public opinion would not tolerate this type of commitment in Europe for a longer period of time.

Roosevelt himself had advocated that postwar economic support to the Soviet Union ought to be linked to the policies pursued. Washington attempted to influence Moscow’s policies through economic measures. First, Lend–Lease aid
was reduced abruptly in May 1945 and then again in August. This was partly to express dissatisfaction with Soviet policies, particularly in Eastern Europe. Then the preliminaries for loan negotiations were prolonged, and when the negotiations were finally initiated at the beginning of 1946, the conditions were stringent. Agreement could not be reached. Loan policy was also used actively in relation to the countries of Eastern Europe in the hope of attaining political influence, but to little avail once more.

The distribution of economic support gives a good picture of Washington’s involvement and priorities. During the period from July 1945 to July 1947, the countries which would later participate in the Marshall Plan received various American loans and credits amounting to 7.4 billion dollars. The corresponding figure for Eastern Europe was 546 million, including 106 million to Finland. Britain received 4.4 billion, the Soviet Union 242 million in so-called Lend-Lease pipeline deliveries. Stopping them would have damaged US interests almost as much as Soviet interests. France received 1.9 billion, Poland 90 million. Italy received 330 million, Czechoslovakia 73 million, the Benelux countries 430 million, Bulgaria and Romania nothing.

Loan policy was closely linked to Washington’s evaluation of what was a politically acceptable government. The most Moscow-oriented regimes received little or nothing. In the autumn of 1946 US aid to Czechoslovakia, the bridge-builder among the Eastern countries, was abruptly cut off. Prague’s foreign policy had become unacceptable to Washington. In the autumn of 1947 complaints about the bridge-builders among the Western countries, the Scandinavian countries, became ever stronger, although there was no question of cutting off economic aid to countries participating in the Marshall Plan.

The decisive factor was a country’s foreign policy stance. Governments which were far from perfect in terms of democracy could increasingly count on support if they opposed the Soviet Union and Communism. This was evident in US policy towards Greece and Turkey: in 1946 Washington was willing to increase economic assistance to these two countries, the Sixth Fleet was built up in the Mediterranean, the firm stand towards the Soviet Union in Iran was a signal for Greece and Turkey as well, and the United States was prepared to give the British the weapons they might need to fight the left-wing guerillas in Greece. In the autumn of 1946, the Truman administration decided to do whatever was necessary to prevent the guerillas from winning and to get the Turkish government to resist Soviet wishes with regard to boundary changes and a stronger position in the Bosporus–Dardanelles.

When the British economic situation in February 1947 was such that they had to withdraw from the area almost entirely, the Truman administration was ready to take over. The administration did not need to be convinced, as Congress and public opinion did, that major outlays were necessary. The striking new element was that assistance was linked to a general principle that US policy
would support ‘free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.’ This was the Truman Doctrine.

Nor did the Marshall Plan represent anything dramatically new in Washington’s relations with Western Europe. The economic assistance given during the years 1945–47 was, in fact, greater per year on average than it was during the Marshall Plan from 1948 to 1951. But the Marshall Plan was innovative in its organizational form, and it was given in a few large portions, not in many smaller installments (see pp. 169–71).

The establishment of NATO in April 1949 was a more wide-reaching change. As we have seen, the ties to Europe were considerable before 1949, so even the changes in US military involvement in Western Europe can easily be exaggerated. Nonetheless, for the first time in peacetime the United States entered into a military alliance with countries outside the Western hemisphere.

In March 1947, Britain and France had signed the Dunkirk treaty, which was formally directed against Germany – a situation that was realistic enough, particularly for France. The Soviet Union was not mentioned, but lurked in the background, particularly for Britain.

As early as the turn of the year 1947–48, Britain, with various forms of often uncoordinated support from France, Belgium, and the Netherlands, began to campaign for a more direct US contribution to the defense of Western Europe. As had been the case with the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan, the Europeans’ eagerness to link the United States more closely to Europe was an important precondition for the US stance.

According to the British, the defense of Europe could not be effective without US participation, preferably in the form of membership in a joint organization. At this time Washington was not prepared to make any commitment regarding participation. A vicious circle was in the making. The United States wanted to see what the Western Europeans established before deciding how strongly to support it. Western Europe would perhaps not be able to accomplish anything of substance if the US did not in advance guarantee comprehensive assistance.

A number of events in February–March 1948 contributed to a change of course by the United States, resulting in US participation in negotiations on the establishment of an Atlantic defense system: the coup in Czechoslovakia, the Finnish–Soviet cooperation pact, and the fear of a Communist victory in elections in Italy. From Germany came an alarming report by US commander General Lucius Clay that a conflict could erupt there. What seems to have had the most immediate effect, however, were rumors that the Soviet Union might suggest a type of Finnish pact with Norway. (Nothing came of this. For that reason, these rumors were long given little emphasis in analyses of the background for NATO.)

Even after US–British–Canadian negotiations had resulted in an agreement to establish some form of Atlantic security system, a year passed before NATO was established. The Americans disagreed among themselves as to what course to
pursue. Such leading members of the Truman administration as George F. Kennan and Charles Bohlen were skeptical about an Atlantic treaty and wanted a more loose-knit association between North America and Western Europe. The military were unenthusiastic because they feared that Western Europe would attain too much influence on US strategy and make excessive demands on what were after all the limited resources of the United States. The Congress had to be consulted. The Democrats were uncertain as to what the outcome of the presidential election in the autumn of 1948 would be. In addition, time would show that although all the countries of Western Europe wanted to tie the United States more closely to Europe, they disagreed on just how this should be done. (Relations between the United States and Western Europe are discussed in more depth on pp. 170–71.)

There were definite limitations to both Washington’s use of instruments to promote its aims and its foreign policy commitments. The atomic bomb was used primarily to end the war with Japan. There could never be any question of using it to threaten the Soviet Union directly. No one was prepared for such a rapid change from wartime cooperation to Cold War. Lend–Lease was not stopped primarily to frighten the Soviet Union. It was a program of assistance for all the allies, and the President had promised Congress that he would dismantle it as soon as the war was over. Loan negotiations were carried out with little confidence that anything of significance could be accomplished. The conditions attached were not unique to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe; the many countries of Western Europe that received assistance from the United States were also expected to render return services of various kinds.

The limitations of US foreign policy involvement were made evident by demobilization and through attitudes towards the defense budget. Rapid demobilization undermined the US position, but there was no way of stopping it. It had to be carried out. Anything else was considered political suicide. The army was reduced from 8 million men at the end of the war to 1.5 million in the summer of 1946. The corresponding figures for the navy were 3.5 and 0.7 million. A large part of the remaining troops were merely waiting to come home. The defense budget sank drastically. The political leaders, following Truman’s lead, felt that the upper limit to what the United States could bear in defense expenditure was 12–13 billion dollars. This was a high figure compared with the prewar period. But considering the extent of US occupation commitments, and not least compared with later defense expenditure, this was a small sum.

Although US involvement was global in principle and although it was far more comprehensive than Soviet involvement, the depth of US commitments varied considerably from place to place. As we shall soon see, Washington was willing to limit its role in Eastern Europe to the advantage of the Soviet Union. The surprising thing about US policy towards China was how little was done to prevent a Communist victory in the civil war (see pp. 39–43). To some extent, the United States tried to limit its involvement even in Western Europe. Washington encouraged European integration, in part to reduce Western European dependence on
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US assistance (see pp. 175–77). The United States also wanted to limit the number of members in NATO and consequently opposed membership by Greece and Turkey in 1948–49.

**Soviet Policy**

The Soviet Union, too, represented a global ideology. For Marxists it was almost a law of nature that the world would become Communist one day. But from a Soviet point of view in 1945 that goal would inevitably seem a long way off. The Soviet Union faced the task of widespread reconstruction, and the country far from equalled the United States in terms of strength.

This did not mean that the Soviet Union lacked ambitions. There was an expansive pressure inherent in its ideology. Yet some areas were more important than others, and the possibilities of increased influence were greater in some places than in others. America, Africa, and even most of Asia were of little significance for the Soviet leaders. Few attempts, if any, were made to establish Communist regimes there. Africa illustrated this situation most clearly. There was only one Communist party in all of Africa, and that was in South Africa. The shaping of colonial policy was for the most part left to the mother countries’ Communist parties. Stalin’s interest in Latin America was also minimal. In Japan, Moscow was willing to accept the US-supported occupation regime without much protest. Support for the Communists in China was lukewarm. Revolutionary attempts were made in Southeast Asia, but there is still no definitive assessment as to the Soviet stance regarding the revolts there in 1948.

The alternative to Communist control was to support nationalist leaders. But after a brief period of a few years, these leaders were denounced as lackeys of the colonial powers. This was the case with Gandhi and Nehru in India and to a lesser extent with Sukarno in Indonesia (see pp. 44–5).

At first the Soviet Union seemed inclined towards cooperation in Western Europe. The Kremlin only half-heartedy tried to change the occupation regime in Italy in order to increase its influence there. The large Italian and French Communist parties were advised to take part in broad coalition governments, partly in order to meet the enormous tasks of reconstruction. The Communists became constitutional and moderate.

In contrast, the Soviet position was strong in North Korea and in Outer Mongolia. Attempts were made to increase influence in other border areas. The Soviet Union was interested in acquiring the provinces of Kars and Ardahan in Turkey, as well as in attaining as much control as possible over the Dardanelles. Moscow tried to use Soviet troops in northern Iran to build up a loyal regime there. In China, Stalin wanted to regain the rights Russia had lost after being defeated by Japan in 1904–5.
Roosevelt thought the changes in China were a reasonable price to pay for Soviet participation in the war against Japan. Thus agreement on this point was reached during negotiations at Yalta. In return, Moscow recognized Chiang Kai-shek as the legitimate ruler of China. Churchill was kept out of these discussions, a fact which illustrated the weakened position of the United Kingdom. In March–April 1946, a firm Western reaction combined with tactical Iranian concessions resulted in a Soviet withdrawal from Iran. The demands with regard to Turkey were toned down. The same was true of more tentative wishes that had been expressed concerning joint bases with Norway on Spitsbergen and acquisition of the Italian colony Tripolitania (Libya).

However, all these ‘concessions’ had a price. Restraint in areas which were important to the West was to be reciprocated by similar restraint by the West in Eastern Europe. Stalin was relatively clear on this point. The most important objectives were established as early as December 1941, in talks with British Foreign Minister Anthony Eden. The Baltic countries were to be reincorporated in the USSR, the Polish border was to follow the Curzon line, and the Soviet Union wanted bases in Romania and Finland. In return, Stalin expressed his willingness to support British demands for bases in Western Europe, e.g. in France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, and Denmark.

This was not the last time Stalin himself clearly expounded on Soviet policy. The gist of the percentage agreement with Churchill in October 1944 was that the Soviet Union was willing to grant the British a free hand in Greece if the Kremlin was granted the same freedom in Romania, Bulgaria, and to a lesser extent Hungary. Stalin’s message to Churchill on 24 April 1945 illustrated the same line of thought, this time with regard to Poland:

Poland is to the security of the Soviet Union what Belgium and Greece are to the security of Great Britain … I do not know whether a genuinely representative Government has been established in Greece, or whether the Belgian Government is a genuinely democratic one. The Soviet Union was not consulted when these Governments were being formed, nor did it claim the right to interfere in those matters, because it realises how important Belgium and Greece are to the security of Great Britain, I cannot understand why in discussing Poland no attempt is made to consider the interests of the Soviet Union in terms of security as well.

Stalin did not waver when it came to the border changes mentioned in his conversation with Eden. Even when the existence of the Soviet regime was at stake, these were minimum demands.

Poland was the most important Eastern European country both for the Soviet Union and for the Western powers. For the Soviet Union it was a buffer towards Germany and the West. An attack from the West would have to go through Poland. Britain had gone to war to defend Poland. That made it difficult to accept complete Soviet dominance. Both in London and in Washington, Poland was considered a test of whether and to what extent the Soviet Union would accept independent regimes in Eastern Europe.
From the summer of 1944 it seemed obvious that Moscow was determined that Soviet sympathizers, in other words the Lublin group, should be in control in Poland. Criticism of the exile government in London, recognized by the Western powers, became harsher. The London government’s forces in Poland were pushed aside and partly suppressed by the advancing Red Army. Local administration in the liberated areas was left in the hands of those who were loyal to the Soviet Union. In January 1945 Lublin was formally recognized by Moscow as the government of Poland. When it became evident that Stalin’s Poles would not stand much of a chance of winning free elections, the elections which were presupposed both at Yalta and at the Potsdam Conference were postponed indefinitely.

Developments in Poland were an indication of how things would develop in Romania. In March 1945 Moscow imposed a change of government to the advantage of the circles that were loyal to the USSR. The Soviet Union enjoyed more support in Bulgaria than in Poland and Romania, which were traditionally anti-Russian. For this reason the Kremlin’s methods were more indirect in Bulgaria, but the tendency was unmistakable: purging of the political opposition and increased control by Soviet sympathizers.

Even in the three countries mentioned, the Soviet Union was willing to make minor concessions to the Western powers. For instance, it appears that Stalin was prepared to accept the Eastern Neisse as the border between Poland and Germany. The Poles insisted on the Western Neisse. The United States and Britain accepted the western border without Stalin really being tested on this point. The Soviet Union was also willing to accept Western-oriented politicians in the governments of all three countries, although in a minority. When Washington and London protested against the biased elections that were planned for Bulgaria in August 1945, Moscow agreed to postpone them. Monarchy persisted in Bulgaria until the autumn of 1946 and in Romania yet another year.

Moscow’s flexibility was greater in Hungary and especially in Czechoslovakia, although limits were set for the freedom of action of these countries, too. In Hungary there were free elections. They were held in the autumn of 1945 and represented a victory for the Smallholders’ Party, whereas the Communists made a poor showing. During the first year after liberation, at least, the broad coalition government enjoyed considerable freedom of action, although it was gradually limited by the Soviet occupying power. From early in 1947 it was evident that Moscow would take complete control of Hungary. In Czechoslovakia there was widespread support for a course that meant close military and political cooperation with the Soviet Union. Economically and culturally, on the other hand, Czechoslovakia was oriented towards the West. Soviet forces were withdrawn in December 1945. Free elections were held in May 1946. In contrast to most of the countries of Eastern Europe, the Communist party enjoyed a strong position in Czechoslovakia, receiving 38 per cent of the votes. The extent of Soviet intervention was limited until the summer of 1947.
Figure 2.1 Territorial changes in Europe after the Second World War
There were Soviet troops in Austria as well, and in Finland the Soviets dominated the allied control commission. But in these countries developments took an entirely different course than in Eastern Europe. In its foreign policy, Finland emphasized close cooperation with the Soviet Union. The Communists were represented in the Finnish government until 1948, although they were in a minority. In terms of domestic policy Finland functioned like a Western democracy. After the peace treaty was signed in 1947, the Russians retained a base in Porkkala until 1955. Part of Austria was under Soviet occupation, but in contrast to Germany the country was administered as a single unit. In the elections of November 1945 the Communists received only 5 per cent of the votes. The country even participated in the Marshall Plan.

Soviet dominance in Eastern Europe was mainly based on the presence of the Red Army in the area. The widespread impression in the West was that Soviet demobilization was quite limited. For various reasons Stalin found it advantageous to exaggerate Soviet strength willfully. The number of Soviet troops had probably declined to 2.8 million by 1948. This figure was still higher than the corresponding figure for the United States, but much lower than was thought at the time. Even so, it was more than enough to retain control over Eastern Europe. Developments there cast long shadows into Western Europe.

As we have seen, the Soviet Union was willing to make certain concessions to the Western powers, who in turn were prepared to limit their influence in Eastern Europe, and agreements were entered into which reinforced Moscow’s position in the region. They ranged from ceasefire agreements and the percentage agreement in 1944 to the agreement on the governments of Bulgaria and Romania in December 1945 and the peace treaties in 1947. Both Washington and London were aware that Western control over Italy and Japan had to be paid for to a certain extent with return favors in Eastern Europe, although of course both sides tried to have their bread buttered on both sides.

The United States and Britain admitted that Eastern Europe was more important to the Soviet Union than to themselves. It was reasonable that the Soviets had considerable influence there. The border changes did not represent major problems. Nor was a certain orientation towards Moscow in foreign policy, such as in Czechoslovakia, particularly problematic during the very first phase of the Cold War.

Despite such concessions on both sides, the distance between them was considerable. Conflict over Eastern Europe would destroy the cooperation established during the war. Neither Washington nor London was willing to relinquish fully their influence in the area. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, had limited geographic objectives in Europe, but in at least the inner ring of countries the Kremlin was firmly set on establishing quite complete control.

Free elections were the largest obstacle. The problem was that in the countries which were of most importance to the Soviet Union the Communists were weakest. There was little doubt that the peasant parties would win free elections in both Poland and Romania. Moscow would not accept this type of result,
EAST, WEST, NORTH, SOUTH

while the Western powers could not allow the opposition to be simply pushed aside. In Poland and Romania it was impossible to combine free elections with a government friendly to the Soviet Union, at least if the Western powers were to define what were free elections and the USSR what was a government friendly to the Soviet Union. There was no basis in domestic policy for a ‘Czech’ or ‘Finnish’ pattern in anti-Russian Poland and Romania. Soviet interests were also greater in these two countries than in Czechoslovakia and Finland.

US requirements as to what could be considered ‘friendly’ governments rose continually. The same thing happened on the Soviet side, although with the difference that the consequences of not fulfilling these requirements could be even more dramatic. During the initial period after the war, non-Communists were represented in all the governments of Eastern Europe and were even in the majority in several of them. They gradually lost influence. The pace varied from country to country, but by the autumn of 1947 most non-Communists were out of the picture. Of the prominent peasant leaders, Petkov in Bulgaria had been hanged, Maniu in Romania sentenced to prison for life, and Mikolajczyk in Poland and Nagy in Hungary had to flee from their native countries. From the summer of 1947 Moscow began to pursue a more active policy in Czechoslovakia as well. The coup in Prague in February 1948 arose partly from local conditions but undoubtedly enjoyed Soviet support. In 1948–49, comprehensive purges were initiated within the various Communist parties, purges which ended with death even for a number of leading party members (see pp. 203–6).

From the autumn of 1947, Moscow’s attitude towards Western Europe changed as well. The French and Italian Communist parties were severely criticized for the passive policies they had pursued, although they had done so with the Kremlin’s support. Now comprehensive strikes and demonstrations were launched, even though they were probably intended more to weaken the effect of the Marshall Plan than to take power in these two countries.

The Problem of Germany

The antagonism between East and West spread from Eastern Europe to Germany. The war against Hitler’s Germany had drawn the two sides together. After the country was defeated, they agreed on important principles as to the course of development for Germany. It was taken for granted that Germany would remain demilitarized. Even though the three major powers had discussed dismembering the country into several small states as late as at Yalta, in the following months all three would commit themselves to keeping Germany as one unit. Dismemberment would entail the danger of a new nationalistic movement being created by a rally call for unity. The three also agreed that clear limitations had to be placed on the German economy. The United States promoted the Morgenthau Plan for a short time, to the effect that all heavy industry was to be closed down.
Even after this plan was abandoned towards the end of 1944, their mutual point of departure was that Germany should not have a higher standard of living than the average in the European countries.

At Yalta the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union had grudgingly agreed to allow France to administer one of the zones of occupation, but it was to be carved out from the US and British zones. This rather humble start did not prevent France from pursuing a distinctive course. None of the other powers so strongly emphasized the importance of keeping Germany weak. Paris was opposed to a possible German central government attaining anything more than purely symbolic functions. The best solution would be to dismember the country, but France had entered into the discussion at such a late stage and had so little influence that this goal was unattainable. Instead the Saar province was to be annexed to France, whereas the Ruhr and the Rhineland regions were to be partitioned off from the rest of Germany and placed under international control in a manner that allowed France to play a central role.

Unlike France, the Soviet Union wanted a strong central government in Germany. As the US desire for a federal Germany reflected the American way of thinking, centralism reflected the Soviet model. A strong central government could be an instrument for procuring larger reparations from Germany. Moreover, the Soviet Union controlled a much smaller part of the country than the three Western powers combined. Through a strong central government Moscow could attain a certain influence even in the other zones.

The Soviet Union naturally had a particular interest in the payment of reparations. The Germans were to pay for the tremendous destruction they had caused. At Yalta Roosevelt and Stalin accepted the sum of 10 billion dollars as a basis for discussion concerning reparations to the Soviet Union. Moscow would return to this question again and again. The United States – and to an even greater extent Britain – was afraid that it would be impossible for the Germans to pay such large reparations as the Soviet Union wanted, and that in the end it would be American and British taxpayers who would be called on to keep the Germans alive while they in turn had to transfer large sums to the Soviet Union. London and Washington could recall unpleasant lessons from the First World War to this effect. At the Potsdam Conference in July and August this difficulty was partially, but only partially, resolved by agreeing that most of the reparations were to be taken from one’s own zone of occupation.

It is difficult to find clear patterns in the policies of the major powers with regard to Germany immediately after the war. Several courses competed with one another. This was perhaps most evident on the part of the Soviet Union. Moscow advocated German unity and even a strong central government. At the same time, the Soviets pursued policies which were bound to undermine both the desire for unity and the possibilities of attaining political influence. Rape and pillage were widespread. Their hard line in terms of reparations was poorly received by the Germans. The merging of the Communist party and the Socialist...
party in April 1946 was a sign that the Soviet Union was beginning to organize its zone according to the Eastern European pattern.

Churchill did not want to agree to the 10 billion in reparations to the Soviet Union, even as a basis of discussion. The British were skeptical, too, about the conditions of the Potsdam agreement regarding reparations. In the discussions as to how high industrial production should be in Germany, the British pressed for the highest figures. This was mostly because the Ruhr, the major industrial area, was in the British zone, and the British were afraid their weak economy would suffer because of outlays in Germany. The object of not weakening Germany too much in relation to the Soviet Union was another contributory factor.
On 3 May 1946, General Clay stopped payment of reparations from the US zone. The background for this action was the fact that it had proved impossible to administer Germany as a political and economic unit. France was the country which was most strongly opposed to any coordination, and Clay’s halt in the payment of reparations was aimed not only at the Soviet Union, but just as much at France. Gradually, however, the United States and Britain began to accept that the Saar region be linked to France. They still opposed partitioning the Ruhr and the Rhineland from the rest of Germany.

On the part of the United States there were obvious differences between the local authorities in Germany who, in order to facilitate their tasks then and there, advocated a more lenient policy, and the State Department in Washington, which was concerned about the reactions this course would evoke in other countries. For instance, these differences had manifested themselves in the negotiations regarding the level of industrial production: the US local authorities advocated a level slightly lower than the British proposal, whereas the State Department originally pressed for a level which was lower than that suggested by both the Soviet Union and France. (The stance taken by these two countries was partially determined by the fact that they themselves wanted to reap some of the benefits of increased production.)

Nevertheless, the tendencies in allied policies towards Germany were clear. The United States would follow an ever more lenient course. In July 1946 Washington proposed that those who wanted to could merge their zones with the US zone. Britain soon accepted, but both France and the Soviet Union declined. The establishment of the so-called Bi-zone illustrated two things: in the first place, that consensus as to Germany was in the process of disintegrating entirely and, in the second place, that the United States had assumed leadership in the West, here as elsewhere.

The major breakthrough for a new policy towards Germany was Secretary of State Byrnes’s speech in Stuttgart on 6 September 1946. Byrnes not only made it clear that US troops would participate in the occupation as long as it lasted; in addition, the German economy had to be made self-sufficient so that the country would not be dependent on supplies from abroad. The Germans would also have to be granted self-government to an increasing extent.

At the Potsdam Conference it had been decided that Poland was to administer the territory as far west as Oder-Neisse, but a final decision regarding the Polish-German border was to be made in connection with a German peace treaty. The Western powers had seemed to reconcile themselves to the fact that the temporary border would become the final border, but in Stuttgart Byrnes stated that it was not at all certain this would be the case. This initiative strengthened the US position in Germany, while the Soviet Union, which had tried to secure a foothold in relation to both Germany and Poland, now gave its full support to the Poles.

Germany was no longer an adversary. Increasingly, it became a prize the major powers competed for. The colder the Cold War became, the greater was
the interest in granting new concessions to the Germans. Moreover, it became increasingly evident that Europe could not be rebuilt economically without the reconstruction of Germany. The Western zones thus played an important role in the establishment of the Marshall Plan in 1947.

The Cold War made it more difficult for France to continue its independent course in Germany. In April–May 1948, Paris assented in principle to merging the French zone with the US–British zone. A constitutional assembly was to be convened and a federal German government to be established for the three Western zones. French policy regarding the Ruhr and Rhineland regions was abandoned. In return, agreement was reached that the Ruhr should have an international controlling authority, although a relatively weak one.

Seen from Moscow, these developments were ominous. The Soviet Union was excluded from the Ruhr and from most of Germany. The tremendous economic potential of the Western zones was about to be released. US assistance was being poured in. In June the Western powers implemented a monetary reform, which made it unmistakably evident that Germany was no longer an economic unit. The new West Germany would be integrated into Western European cooperation, but that did not improve the situation, as the country could easily become the dominant member.

The Berlin blockade was Moscow's response to these events. The first obstructions of traffic to West Berlin were introduced in April 1948. From 25 July the blockade was complete except for air connections. This was Moscow's most dramatic action after the war. For the first time force was used to promote changes in an area where Western troops were stationed. However, Moscow allowed itself a certain scope for maneuvering by arguing that the measures were due to repairs. Thus the blockade could be lifted when the repairs were completed. The Soviet objectives were not at all clear. A maximum objective may have been to prevent the creation of West Germany and to achieve control of all of Germany by the four powers. A minimum objective may have been to isolate West Berlin in order to bring the city under Soviet influence.

The Western powers improvised by establishing an airlift, a measure which was expected to be temporary but which proved to be protracted. The airlift exceeded everyone's expectations. The Soviet Union could not stop the traffic without resorting to more direct use of force. Nor could Moscow prevent the developments leading to the creation of a West German state. The blockade of West Berlin hastened the establishment of NATO and weakened the Soviet position in Western Europe. The Western blockade of East Germany in response to the Berlin blockade had a certain effect as well.

In May 1949 Moscow agreed to end the blockade without having achieved anything except minor concessions. The day after the blockade was ended, the three Western military governors approved the new West German constitution. Ten days later the new state was formally established. In October East Germany followed suit.
Motivating Forces behind US and Soviet Policies

It is almost always easier to describe a course of events than to explain why something happened. The difficulties are especially great in relation to the motivating forces behind Soviet policies because for decades little material was available from the Soviet Union. With regard to the United States, the problem has been the opposite: an overabundance of sources.

The United States

A number of different factors were of significance for the Americans. The question of national security was one of them. This could be observed even in US policy towards Eastern Europe. The region in itself was not of particular strategic importance to the United States. However, two circumstances diminished the distinction between important and less important regions. In the first place, many leading politicians in the Roosevelt and Truman administrations asked themselves whether ‘relinquishing’ Eastern Europe to the Soviet Union would not merely result in the pressure being transmitted to the next layer of countries. Then the strategically important Western Europe would be threatened. This layer-by-layer theory was accepted by more and more policy-makers in Washington during 1944–45. In the second place, and this may explain why the theory so easily gained ground, the lesson of the Second World War was that aggression developed gradually. Hitler had not been stopped in time; this mistake should not be made a second time.

In 1945–46 the conflict concerned Eastern Europe and to some extent Germany. In 1947–48 Washington began to fear Soviet expansion into Western Europe. The main threat was not direct aggression. The chances of a direct attack were small, although they could not be disregarded entirely. Most politicians believed that an exhausted Soviet Union wanted to avoid a destructive conflict with the West. However, considering the long shadows Soviet control of Eastern Europe cast over Western Europe, the chances were greater of Moscow succeeding in less dramatic ways, as a result of political pressure, economic chaos, and active local Communist parties. Czechoslovakia was an example of this type of expansion.

A number of events during the winter and spring of 1948 contributed to the impression that Western Europe was threatened. The attitude of Western Europe itself was important; as we have seen (pp. 20–2), there was fairly constant pressure on the United States to play a more active role in European politics. This involved first economic assistance, then political and moral support, and finally direct military guarantees.

The influence of Britain was especially important. This country had the best relations with the United States and worked most actively to draw the United
States closer to Western Europe. Another important consideration was the fact that it was less necessary for the United States to play a new role in foreign policy as long as others could represent US interests. Washington and London did not see eye to eye on all matters. They disagreed as to colonial policy, international trade, the question of Palestine, and a number of other issues. Nevertheless, they had an important mutual interest in containing Soviet influence. As long as Britain was able to fulfill this function, there was less need for the United States to do so.

However, the position of the United Kingdom changed dramatically in the years immediately after the war. The British had to retreat on a number of fronts. In India, the colonial system began to collapse. The British withdrew from Palestine when the political problems piled up and their economy did not allow them to be actively present. Even more important in terms of the Cold War was the reduced presence of the British in Greece and Turkey and in Germany. The economic problems of the United Kingdom were the immediate cause of the proclamation of the Truman Doctrine in March 1947. When the British could no longer hold back the leftist guerillas in Greece nor support the Turkish government against Soviet pressure, the Truman administration saw that it had to take over.

In Germany, too, the weak British economy was an important reason for their close cooperation with the United States, as evidenced for instance by the merging of the two countries’ zones in 1946. In more comprehensive terms, it could be argued that both the Marshall Plan and NATO were measures that were established because the Western Europeans could not solve their economic, political, and military problems by themselves.

A number of different domestic conditions also influenced US policy. There was a strong ideological desire to spread the American gospel to other countries. America was God’s own country, with a duty to proclaim her values to others. Everyone wanted democracy and freer trade, or at least would have wanted them if they could have expressed their wishes. The more subdued version of this message was the emphasis on US responsibility to defend democracy against an expansive Communism.

There was widespread political agreement in the United States as to the main course the country pursued after the Second World War. However, some groups were more active than others, depending on which issue was most pressing. Ethnic considerations played a part. The many Polish-Americans were especially active with regard to Eastern Europe in 1944–45. The Italian-Americans played a corresponding role with regard to Western Europe. These groups in turn enjoyed support in wider circles, such as the Catholic Church.

After the 1946 election, Congress was controlled by the Republicans, and even though they were often even more anti-communist than the Truman administration, they were skeptical of most things that cost money. Anti-communism was to be inexpensive. Thus considerations of party politics influenced US policy. In order to compensate for the lack of enthusiasm with which the request
for 400 million dollars for Greece and Turkey was met by a Congress bent on saving, the Truman Doctrine was presented in extra dramatic terms. Other concessions had to be made to the Republicans in general and the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Arthur Vandenberg, in particular. The Marshall Plan was pruned here and there; Western Europe had to promise to do more on its own both economically and militarily; the United States avoided automatic military commitments towards Europe.

After such concessions the Truman administration managed to get its most important measures passed in Congress, usually by a large majority. The opposition which existed came from both the left and the right. On the left it was centered around former Vice President (1941–45) and Secretary of Commerce (1945–46) Henry Wallace and his supporters. Wallace was dismissed in the autumn of 1946 because of his more conciliatory attitude towards the Soviet Union. However, most of the opposition came from the right and was linked to Senator Robert Taft. The right wing was even more anti-communist than the majority, even more nationalistic, but also even more cost-conscious. The Marshall Plan cost the American taxpayer far too much. NATO limited US military freedom of action. Taft and his supporters represented the mild post-war variant of American isolationism.

Economic considerations, too, influenced US policy. A recurrent question was whether the US economy would slide into a new depression when the war was over. Many people believed that this type of setback was likely, even more believed that it was possible. It could be avoided or possibly softened by foreign policy measures. Exports could be increased, and possible surplus capital used for investments abroad. Important raw materials the United States lacked could be imported from abroad. The motives of pure self-interest behind these policies were reinforced by the ideology they were a part of. The dominant circles were convinced that tariffs and regional trade blocs were detrimental not only to the United States but to all countries, and that they were also an important explanation as to why war and conflict arise between nations.

Several factors moderated these economic considerations. In the first place, most people quite soon became more optimistic with regard to the possibilities of avoiding a new depression. In the second place, the United States was one of the countries in the world which was least dependent on its foreign trade. In absolute figures, the United States had by far the largest volume of foreign trade in the world, but in relation to total production, export and import each represented less than 5 per cent. This figure was much lower than for the countries of Western Europe. The United States was also more self-sufficient in terms of raw materials than almost any other country.

US dependence on other countries did not increase significantly until the 1970s. Nor was the business world more skeptical of the Soviet Union than other people were. Many branches, such as the aviation industry, obviously profited from international tension and large defense budgets, but most of the
business world was more interested in keeping taxes down than in increasing the defense budget.

The vast majority of exporters were interested in increasing trade with the Soviet Union: here was a market that could really amount to something. Thus these circles advocated both increased trade with and large credits to the Soviet Union. The many restrictions imposed on trade with the Soviet Union from the end of 1947 did not represent the attitude of big business in the United States.

The most important basis for US policy seems to have a tendency to be forgotten, namely the tremendous power of the United States at the end of the war. History affords few examples of overwhelming power that does not express itself in active policies. Considering US strength in 1945, it was almost inevitable that the country should try to shape the international environment in its own image to a considerable degree.

**The Soviet Union**

Stalin and the other Soviet leaders often stressed the fact that Soviet policy in Eastern Europe was motivated by considerations of national security. There is little reason to doubt that this was the case. During the preceding 30 years alone, Russia/the Soviet Union had been attacked by Germany twice. Besides this, there had been Western intervention in the civil war and war with Poland. The First World War had caused the fall of the Czar's regime. The Second World War had nearly resulted in a collapse of Stalin’s rule.

National security considerations would necessarily carry a lot of weight with any leader in the Kremlin. But Stalin made higher demands than most leaders. This had become evident in his domestic policy through the many extensive purges. Now the position of the Soviet Union in terms of foreign policy was to be secured. The only problem was that what was security for one country tended to be insecurity for another. This was true both in relation to the neighbors who were no longer to be given the opportunity to represent a threat and in relation to the Western powers.

On rare occasions Stalin could give credit to the Western powers. After the Second Front was finally established at Normandy in June 1944, he proclaimed that ‘one cannot but recognize that the history of warfare knows of no other similar undertaking in the breadth of its conception, in its giant dimensions, and in the mastery of its performance.’ *Pravda* went to the unheard of step of publishing the figures for the help the Soviet Union had received from the West during the war.

But these were rare exceptions. Stalin’s skepticism of the Western powers was considerable. It did not diminish as the war drew to a close. In March–April 1945, Stalin accused the Western powers of having made a separate peace in Italy, which would give the Germans the opportunity to transfer troops from
Italy to the Eastern front. At the end of April, the Red Army in Austria built up large defense installations. At that time the Germans were nearly defeated. It actually appears as though the Soviet leaders were now afraid that the Western powers would make a separate peace with Germany which applied throughout Europe, rather than just for Italy.

In August 1945 the leaders in the Kremlin began openly to emphasize their conviction that even though the danger of fascism was over, the Soviet Union could not reduce its vigilance on that account. The attacks on capitalism were increased. References to the mutual interests of the three major powers ceased. Stalin’s so-called election speech in February 1946 was an expression of this new orientation. (The Western leaders were cautious in their public descriptions of the Soviet Union, with few exceptions. Their private opinions were another matter. Thus the Truman administration tried to create the impression of a greater distance to opposition leader Churchill’s attack on the Soviet Union in March 1946 than the actual attitude of the administration would indicate.)

Soviet control in Eastern Europe was not only a military cordon sanitaire in relation to the West, but also an ideological barrier. The Soviet Union would no doubt be capable of closing its borders to undesired influences, but adding an extra margin here could not hurt. Consideration of the many Soviet soldiers in Eastern Europe played a part as well.

In addition, the risk that Moscow’s policy in Eastern Europe involved was very small. It is quite possible the Soviet leaders had the impression that the Western powers were prepared to ‘relinquish’ the region to them if a number of more or less cosmetic concessions were made. Little in the actions of the Western powers indicated otherwise, at least before the Yalta Conference. After Yalta it must have been evident to the Kremlin that both the United States and Britain intended to pursue an active policy, particularly with regard to Poland, but also in other countries. Former Foreign Minister Litvinov probably expressed genuine confusion when he said to an American journalist in June 1945: ‘Why did you Americans wait until now to begin opposing us in the Balkans and Eastern Europe? … You should have done this three years ago. Now it’s too late and your complaints only arouse suspicion here.’

Economic considerations played a role in Soviet as well as in US policy. The Soviet Union acquired substantial benefits in Eastern Europe and in other border areas, such as in China. Often the local economies were brutally exploited. Through trade agreements, joint companies, reparation payments, and war spoils, considerable resources were transferred to the Soviet Union.

Soviet expansion was certainly also in accordance with communist ideology. Stalin’s ‘socialism in one country’ had been an admission that, in direct opposition to Lenin’s expectations, the Communist revolution had been limited to the Soviet Union. Now, at last, history had begun to take its proper course. But expansion in Eastern Europe was much less a historical necessity than it was an expression of the possibilities created by the advance of the Red Army. Power was an important
condition for the policy pursued, even though the Soviet Union’s power was considerably less and geographically more limited than that of the United States.

The Cold War, 1945–1949: The Literature


Among more recent books on key aspects of the Cold War, two are particularly noteworthy: Melvyn Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford, Calif., 1992), and David Reynolds (ed.), *The Origins of the Cold War in Europe: International Perspectives* (New Haven, 1994).