The Cold War and Cuba

Origins of the Cold War

At the end of World War II, the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union, which had fought together to stop Hitler's expansionistic ambitions, became more complicated. Once the war was over, competition between the two world powers increased, leading to the partition of Europe and to the so-called Cold War, the prolonged state of hostility with no open warfare, that emerged between the Soviet bloc and Western powers.



The Berlin Wall

The Berlin Wall came to symbolise what in 1947 the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill had called the "iron curtain", a marked division between the communist Soviet eastern bloc and the Western democratic capitalist bloc. East German soldiers started its construction in 1961 to stop the exodus of East Germans who, dissatisfied with life under the communist system, moved to West Germany hoping for a better future. With the building of the wall the city of Berlin best represented the division between two ideologies, communism and democracy.

The Cuban Crisis

Tensions between the two superpowers reached a climax in 1962, when the US found out that the Soviets had started the installation of nuclear-armed missiles in Cuba. US President John F. Kennedy decided to place an embargo in order to prevent the shipment of further missiles. Many thought that the world was close to a new global conflict but, after long and intense negotiations, the crisis was finally resolved with the removal of the Soviet missiles from Cuba and of US missiles from Turkey.



End of the Cold War

Tensions between the two blocs started to ease during the 1980s thanks to a series of agreements between NATO member countries and the Soviet government. It was especially thanks to Mikhail Gorbachev's administration and its reforms that a process of democratisation started in most of the communist countries under Soviet influence. The Berlin Wall was destroyed on 9th November 1989 and in 1991 the Soviet Union dissolved, giving rise to 15 independent countries.

Is it really over?

Some commentators have begun to speak of a "New Cold War", due to the growing tensions between NATO and Russia in the wake of the Ukrainian crisis. Ukraine has applied to become a member of NATO: if membership were approved, NATO would increase its presence near the borders of Russia, and Ukraine would build closer relationships with both the US and Europe, moving away from Russian influence. Hence, the firm opposition of Putin's administration, which led to the invasion of Ukraine on 24th February 2022.

to ease: *alleviarsi*
hence: *di qui*
in the wake: *sulla scia*
warfare: *conflitto*

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1 Fill in the table with the sentences below describing the causes and effects of the Cold War.

1. The Soviet Union was a communist dictatorship (Stalin was in power)
2. Both sides formed a variety of alliances (NATO and the Warsaw Pact)
3. The United States is a democratic republic
4. The arms race between the Soviet Union and the United States led to the threat of nuclear war
5. The USSR didn't accept that the USA supported countries trying to resist communism
6. Fear of communism (a.k.a. Red Scare) led to confrontations around the world including Cuba, Korea.
7. The Soviet Union broke up into 15 independent states
8. The United States resisted Soviet expansion in Eastern Europe
9. The US wanted free trade on a global scale
10. The fall of the Berlin Wall

Causes	Effects



2 You are going to read a newspaper article about people who were witnesses to the fall of the Berlin Wall. For questions 1-8 choose from the people A-D.

Who…

1. fears that the German government's reaction might be harsh? ☐
2. says that she/he was not in Berlin when the wall collapsed? ☐
3. says that she/he was queueing up to cross the border? ☐
4. thinks that the GDR might have ended differently? ☐
5. fears that a medicine might cause a problem? ☐
6. says that people protested even though they thought they could be attacked by the police? ☐
7. says that his friends had also escaped from the country? ☐
8. recalls that people felt as if they were in jail? ☐

A. **Heinrich** In the spring of 1989, the dissatisfaction of many was already evident. Despite Michael Gorbachev's reforms in the Soviet Union, nothing happened in the GDR. Then, the border between Hungary and Austria fell in the summer, and many people, including friends of mine, left the country. The situation became increasingly critical, and nobody knew at that time whether the government would resort to the "Chinese solution" as in Beijing and violently repress the protests.

B. **Gustav** I was studying in Leipzig at the time. One evening, one of the largest Monday demonstrations in the main square was planned, and nobody knew how it would end. Many were afraid, including me, as there had been rumours that the state would strike back this time. Hospitals were on alert. But the protest remained peaceful until the end, and that was perhaps the great miracle of the time. On that day, the highly armed state apparatus did not intervene – that was a turning point!

C. **Marlene** I distinctly recall deciding, amongst all of us, to go into East Berlin. We tried to get in to East Berlin, and we went up through checkpoint Charlie, the infamous checkpoint Charlie, and were waiting in line. And at that time, I was a little nervous because I had a prescription drug on me and I thought that maybe I might be – you know, you didn't know what the consequences of anything would be. And, you know, I went through anyway, and you could see the stark difference between both sides.

D. **Johanna** The Wall itself as a symbol – it was always there. It was an ugly, horrible thing running through the city, but, of course, people can get used to anything. I was there in June of '89 and people really wanted to be allowed to travel, and they understood that they were kind of walled-in, the regime was treating them like children. And this was a big mistake on the regime's part. It's not that Communism would have lasted, but the regime had the opportunity to have a more elegant exit from power than they took.

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