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The Cold War: Superpower tensions and rivalries

SECOND EDITION

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Contents

Dedication	3
Introduction	4
1 What you will study	4
2 How you will be assessed	5
3 About this book	7
CHAPTER 1 The origins of the Cold War, 1917–45	10
1 The ideology of the Cold War	10
2 The Soviet Union and the Western powers, 1917–41	14
3 The Grand Alliance, 1941–45	20
4 The liberation of Europe, 1943–45	25
5 The Yalta Conference, February 1945	33
Activities	38
CHAPTER 2 From wartime allies to post-war enemies, 1945–47	39
1 Transition from war to fragile peace, 1945–46	39
2 Germany, June 1945–April 1947	47
3 The Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan	51
4 The 'Iron Curtain'	56
5 Key debate: Did the US or the USSR start the Cold War, 1945–47?	64
Examination practice	67
Activities	67
CHAPTER 3 The impact of Cold War tensions on Germany and Europe, 1948–52	68
1 The division of Germany	68
2 Western European rearmament	76
3 The consolidation of the rival blocs	85
Examination practice	95
Activities	95
CHAPTER 4 The spread of communism in Asia, 1945–54	96
1 Japan and the Cold War, 1945–52	96
2 The Chinese Civil War	101
3 The Korean War, 1950–53	111
4 Indochina, 1945–54	122
Examination practice	129
Activities	129

CHAPTER 5	From <i>détente</i> to the Berlin Wall, 1953–61	130
1	The thaw, 1953–55	130
2	The emergence of the Third World and the Non-Aligned Movement	140
3	1956: The year of crises	144
4	The aftermath of the Hungarian and Suez Crises, 1957–58	152
5	The Berlin Crisis, 1958–61	156
	Examination practice	164
	Activities	164
CHAPTER 6	The global Cold War, 1960–78	165
1	The Sino-Soviet split	165
2	The impact of Cold War tensions on the Congo, 1960–65	171
3	The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962	176
4	Vietnam, 1954–75	187
5	What was the impact of Cold War tensions on the Middle East, 1957–79?	202
6	The Cold War in Africa, 1964–79	211
	Examination practice	221
	Activities	221
CHAPTER 7	The politics of <i>détente</i>, 1963–79	222
1	US–Soviet relations, 1963–72	222
2	<i>Détente</i> in Europe, 1963–69	231
3	<i>Ostpolitik</i>	238
4	Helsinki Accords and SALT II, 1975–79	242
	Examination practice	247
	Activities	247
CHAPTER 8	The end of the Cold War	248
1	'New Cold War', 1976–85	248
2	Mikhail Gorbachev and renewed <i>détente</i> , 1985–89	258
3	The collapse of communism in eastern Europe, 1989–90	267
4	Collapse of the USSR	280
	Examination practice	290
	Activities	290
CHAPTER 9	Examination guidance	291
1	Preparing for Paper 2 examination questions	291
2	Examination advice and practice	294
	Glossary	310
	Timeline	316
	Further reading	319
	Internal assessment	323
	Index	325

The origins of the Cold War, 1917–45

The Cold War was a period of political hostility between capitalist and communist countries, in particular between the US and the Soviet Union, which, from its onset in 1945, lasted for over 40 years. It brought the world perilously close to another global war several times. This chapter looks at the origins of the Cold War, which can be traced back to the Russian Revolution of 1917. You need to consider the following questions throughout this chapter:

- ★ How significant were the ideological differences between the opposing sides as a cause of the Cold War?
- ★ To what extent did the USSR's foreign policy in the interwar years reflect its priorities of defence and regaining territory lost at the end of the First World War?
- ★ In what ways were the war aims and ambitions of the USSR, US and Great Britain conflicting?
- ★ How far did the liberation of Europe, 1943–45, intensify the rivalry and distrust between the 'Big Three'?
- ★ What was achieved at the Yalta Conference?

KEY TERM

USSR Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the name given to communist Russia and states under its control from 1922, also known as the **Soviet Union**.

Communism A political and economic system in which all private ownership of property is abolished along with all economic and social class divisions.

Capitalism An economic system in which the production of goods and their distribution depend on the investment of private capital with minimal government regulation and involvement.

1 The ideology of the Cold War

▶ **Key question:** How significant were the ideological differences between the opposing sides as a cause of the Cold War?

The term 'cold war' was used before 1945 to describe periods of extreme tension between states stopping just short of war. In May 1945, when the US and the **USSR** faced each other in Germany, this term rapidly came back into use to describe the relations between them. The writer George Orwell, commenting on the significance of the dropping of the atomic bomb by the US on Japan in 1945 during the Second World War (see page 41), foresaw 'a peace that is no peace', in which the US and USSR would be both 'unconquerable and in a permanent state of cold war' with each other.

The Cold War was a fundamental clash of ideologies and interests. Essentially, the USSR followed Karl Marx's and Vladimir Lenin's teachings (see pages 11–13) that conflict between **communism** and **capitalism** was unavoidable, while the US and its allies for much of the time saw the USSR, in the words of US President Reagan in 1983, as an 'evil empire', intent on the destruction of democracy and civil rights.

Capitalism and communism

Communism

In the nineteenth century, two Germans, Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx proposed communism as an idea for radical social change. This system provided the foundations of **Marxism–Leninism** which, in the twentieth century, became the governing ideology of the **Soviet Union**, much of central and eastern Europe, the People’s Republic of China, Cuba, and several other states.

Marx argued that capitalism and the **bourgeoisie** in an industrial society would inevitably be overthrown by the workers or ‘**proletariat**’ in a socialist revolution. This initially would lead to a ‘**dictatorship of the proletariat**’ in which the working class would break up the old order. Eventually, a true egalitarian communist society would emerge in which money is no longer needed and ‘each gives according to their ability to those according to their need’. In this society all people would be completely equal and economic production would be subordinated to human needs rather than profit. Crime, envy and rivalry would become things of the past since they were based on greed and economic competition. So, in its essence, communism is profoundly hostile to capitalism.

Marxism–Leninism

In the early twentieth century, Vladimir Ilych Lenin developed Marx’s ideas and adapted them to the unique conditions in Russia. Russia’s economy was primarily agricultural and lacked a large industrial proletariat which would rise in revolution. Lenin therefore argued that communists needed to be strongly organized with a small compact core, consisting of reliable and experienced revolutionaries, who could achieve their aims of undermining and toppling the Tsarist regime. In 1903 Lenin and his followers founded the **Bolshevik Party**, which seized power in Russia in October 1917.

Just before the Bolsheviks seized power Lenin outlined his plans for the creation of a revolutionary state in an unfinished pamphlet, *State and Revolution*. It would be run by ‘the proletariat organized as a ruling class’ and would use terror and force against any organization or person who did not support it. In fact the state would be the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’, and would ‘wither away’ only once its enemies at home and abroad were utterly destroyed. Then, of course, the promise of communism would dawn where there would be no economic exploitation, crime, selfishness or violence.

Under the leadership of first Lenin, and then Josef Stalin, the USSR became an authoritarian, communist state where the state was in charge of all aspects of the economy; there were no democratic elections and freedom of speech was limited.

In what ways did the ideologies of the opposing sides differ?

KEY TERM

Marxism–Leninism

Doctrines of Marx which were built upon by Lenin.

Soviet Union See USSR.

Bourgeoisie The middle class, particularly those with business interests, whom Marx believed benefited most from the existing capitalist economic system.

Proletariat Marx’s term for industrial working-class labourers, primarily factory workers.

Dictatorship of the proletariat A term used by Marx to suggest that, following the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, government would be carried out by and on behalf of the working class.

Bolshevik Party The Russian Communist Party which seized power in a revolution in October 1917.

Capitalism

Capitalism is an economic system in which the production of goods and their distribution depend on the investment of private capital with a view to making a profit. Unlike a **command economy**, a capitalist economy is run by people who wish to make a profit, rather than by the state. By the 1940s western economies such as the US, Canada and Britain were mixed – with the state playing an increasingly major role in key sections of the economy, but with private enterprise playing a large part as well.

What were the clashes between the two ideologies?

Ideological clashes

Opposition to Marxism–Leninism in the USA and the western European states in 1945 was reinforced, or – as Marxist theoreticians would argue – even determined by the contradictions between capitalism and the command economies of the communist-dominated states.



KEY TERM

Command economy

An economy where supply and pricing are regulated by the government rather than market forces such as demand, and in which all the larger industries and businesses are controlled centrally by the state.

Parliamentary government A government responsible to and elected by parliament.

Representative government A government based on an elected majority.

Political systems

In the west there was a deep mistrust of communism as a political system, particularly its lack of democracy. The USSR dismissed democracy as a mere camouflage for capitalism and its politicians as its puppets. For Marxist–Leninists, democracy meant economic equality where there were no extremes between wealthy capitalists and poor workers and peasants. However, for the **parliamentary governments** of western Europe and the US, democracy meant the liberty of the individual, equality before the law and **representative government**, rather than economic equality under the dictatorship of the proletariat. Liberal or parliamentary democracy challenges the right of any one party and leader to have the permanent monopoly of power. It is, at least in theory, opposed to dictatorship in any form.

Religion

Marxism–Leninism was bitterly opposed to religion. One of its core arguments was that it was not an all-powerful God who influenced the fate of mankind, but rather economic and material conditions. Once these were reformed under communism, mankind would prosper and not need any religion. For Marxists religion was merely, as Marx himself had said, ‘the opium of the masses’. It duped the proletariat into accepting exploitation by their rulers and capitalist businessmen. During the revolution in Russia, churches, mosques and synagogues were closed down, and religion was banned.

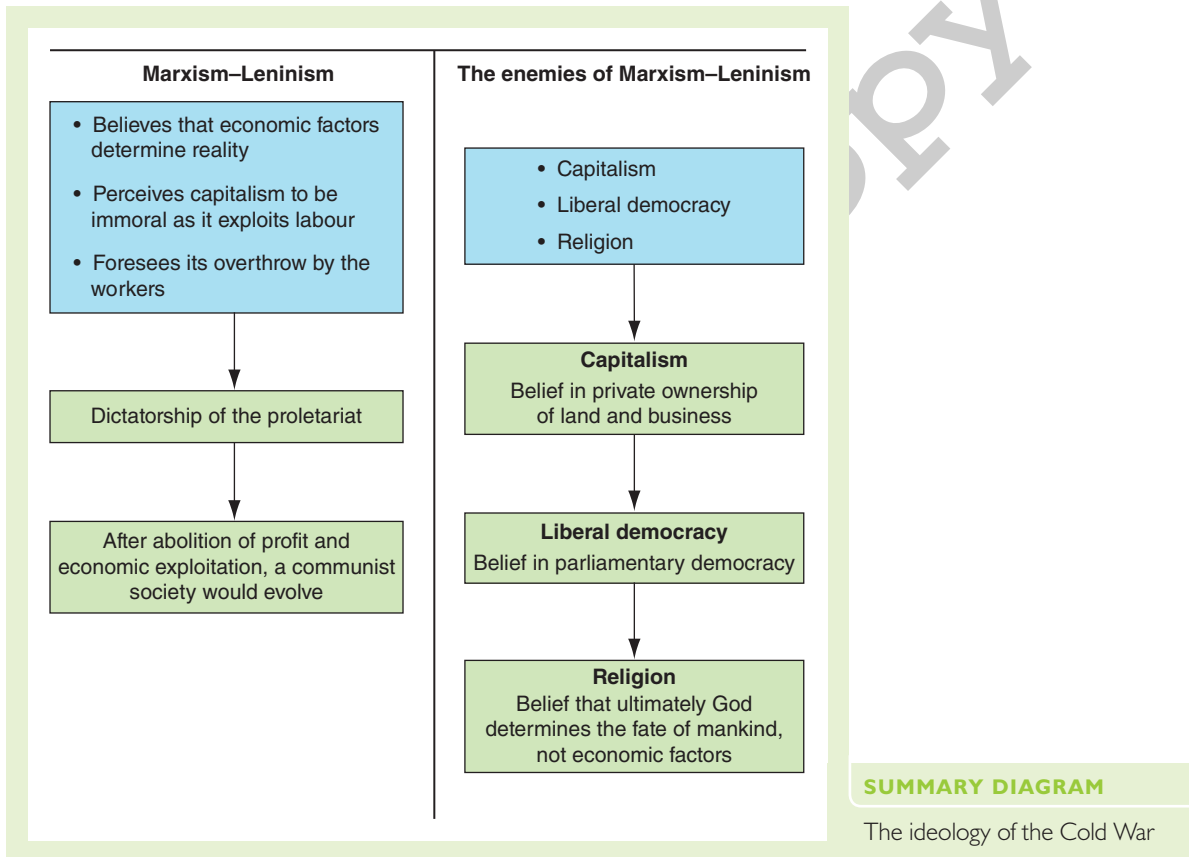
In Europe, Christian churches were amongst the leading critics and enemies of communism. After 1945, Catholic-dominated political parties in western Germany and Italy played a key role in opposing communism. In 1979, the election of Pope John Paul II of Poland as head of the Roman Catholic Church led many in Poland to oppose communist government (see page 268).

SOURCE A

An excerpt from *The Cold War, 1945–1991*, by John W. Mason, published by Routledge, London, UK, 1996, p. 71.

Fundamentally the cold war was a confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union, fuelled on both sides by the belief that the ideology of the other side had to be destroyed. In this sense ... co-existence was not possible ... The Soviet Union held to Lenin's belief that conflict between Communism and Capitalism was inevitable. The United States believed that peace and security in the world would only emerge when the evil of Communism had been exorcised [expelled].

What does Source A reveal about the nature of the Cold War?



2

The Soviet Union and the Western powers, 1917–41

▶ **Key question:** To what extent did the USSR's foreign policy in the interwar years reflect its priorities of defence and regaining territory lost at the end of the First World War?

The Bolshevik Revolution in Russia succeeded against the odds but Lenin was initially convinced that victory within Russia alone would not ensure the survival of the revolution. An isolated Bolshevik Russia was vulnerable to pressure from the capitalist world; its very existence was a challenge to it. If communism was to survive in Russia, it had also to triumph globally. This belief had a large influence on Soviet relations with the rest of the world.

SOURCE B

An excerpt from 'Farewell Address to the Swiss Workers' by Lenin, April 1917, quoted in *Lenin's Collected Works, Vol. 23, English edition (trans. M.S. Levin, et al.), Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1964, p. 371.*

To the Russian proletariat has fallen the great honour of beginning the series of revolutions which the imperialist war [the First World War] has made an objective inevitability. But the idea that the Russian proletariat is the chosen revolutionary proletariat is absolutely alien to us. We know perfectly well that the proletariat of Russia is less organised, less prepared and less class conscious than the proletariat of other countries. It is not its special qualities but rather the special conjuncture of historical circumstances that for a certain, perhaps very short, time has made the proletariat of Russia the vanguard of the revolutionary proletariat of the whole world.



What is the importance of Source B for understanding the aims of Russian foreign policy after the Bolshevik Revolution?

Why was there hostility between the US and Russia, 1917–20?



KEY TERM

Fourteen Points A list of points drawn up by US President Woodrow Wilson on which the peace settlement at the end of the First World War was based.

The US and Russia

One historian, Howard Roffmann, has argued that the Cold War 'proceeded from the very moment the Bolsheviks triumphed in Russia in 1917'. There was certainly immediate hostility between Bolshevik Russia and the US which, along with Britain, France and Japan, intervened in the Russian Civil War (1918–22) by helping the Bolsheviks' opponents, the Whites.

This hostility was intensified by the ideological clash between the ideas of US President Woodrow Wilson and Lenin. Wilson, in his **Fourteen Points** of January 1918, presented an ambitious global programme that called for the

self-determination of subject peoples, creation of democratic states, free trade and **collective security** through a **League of Nations**. Lenin preached world revolution and communism, repudiated Russia's foreign debts and nationalized all businesses in Russia, including those owned by foreigners.

However, the rivalry between these two embryonic superpowers which was to give rise to the Cold War after 1945, had not yet become acute. Despite playing a key role in negotiating the Treaty of Versailles, the US Congress refused to allow President Wilson to sign the peace treaty or for the US to join the League of Nations. Instead, the US retreated into **isolation** until 1941.

The Russian Revolution and Allied intervention

The Russian Civil War

Although the Bolsheviks had seized power in the major cities in 1917, they had to fight a bitter civil war to destroy their opponents, the Whites, who were assisted by Britain, France, the US and Japan. These countries hoped that by assisting the Whites, they would be able to strangle Bolshevism and prevent it spreading to Germany which, after defeat in the First World War in November 1918, was in turmoil and vulnerable to communist revolution by its own workers. If Germany were to become communist, the **Allies** feared that the whole of Europe would be engulfed in revolution. However, Allied intervention was ineffective and in 1919 French and US troops withdrew, and British troops were withdrawn in 1920. Only Japan's troops remained until the end of the Civil War in 1922. Intervention in the USSR did inevitably fuel Soviet suspicions of the Western powers.

The Polish–Russian War, 1920

At the **Paris Peace Conference** in 1919, British Foreign Minister Lord Curzon proposed that the frontier with Russia should be about 160 kilometres to the east of Warsaw, Poland's newly-created capital; this demarcation became known as the Curzon Line. Poland, however, rejected this and exploited the chaos in Russia to seize as much territory as it could. In early 1920, Poland launched an invasion of the Ukraine. This was initially successful, but, by August 1920, Bolshevik forces had pushed the Poles back to Warsaw. With the help of military supplies and advisors from France, Poland rallied and managed to inflict a decisive defeat on the **Red Army**, driving it out of much of the territory Poland claimed. In 1921, Poland signed the Treaty of Riga with Russia and was awarded considerable areas of the Ukraine and Byelorussia, in which Poles formed only a minority of the population.

KEY TERM

Self-determination Giving nations and nationalities the right to be independent and to form their own governments.

How did Allied intervention after the Russian Revolution have an impact on subsequent Soviet foreign policy?

KEY TERM

Collective security An agreement between nations that an aggressive act towards one nation will be treated as an aggressive act towards all nations under the agreement.

League of Nations

International organization established after the First World War to resolve conflicts between nations to prevent war.

Isolation A situation in which a state has no alliances or close diplomatic contacts with other states.

Allies In the First World War, an alliance between Britain, France, the US, Japan, China and others, including Russia until 1917.

Paris Peace Conference

The peace conference held in Paris in 1919–20 to deal with defeated Germany and her allies. It resulted in the Treaties of Versailles, St. Germain, Neuilly and Sèvres.

Red Army The army of the USSR.

The extension of Poland so far east helped to isolate Russia geographically from western and central Europe. The creation of Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania helped further this, leading to the creation of a *Cordon Sanitaire*, a zone of states to prevent the spread of communism to the rest of Europe. The recovery of these territories of the former Russian Empire became a major aim of the USSR's foreign policy before 1939.

SOURCE C

Central and eastern Europe in 1921.

? What information about the situation in Europe in 1921 is conveyed by Source C?



Soviet foreign policy, 1922–45

Once the immediate possibility of a world communist revolution vanished, the consolidation of communism within the USSR became the priority for Lenin and his successors. This did not stop the USSR from supporting subversive activities carried out by communist groups or sympathizers within the Western democracies and their colonies. These activities were co-ordinated by the **Comintern**, which was established in 1919 to spread communist ideology. Although foreign communist parties had representatives in the organization, the Communist Party of Russia controlled it.

In the 1930s, the USSR increasingly concentrated on building up its military and industrial strength.

Hitler and Stalin, 1933–41

The coming to power of Hitler and the Nazi Party in Germany in 1933 led to a radical change in Soviet foreign policy. Nazi Germany, with its hatred of communism and stated goal of annexing vast territories in the Soviet Union for colonization, presented a threat to the USSR's very existence. To combat this, Stalin, despite the ideological differences between the USSR and Britain and France, attempted to create a defensive alliance against Nazi Germany:

- In 1934, the USSR joined the League of Nations, which Stalin hoped to turn into a more effective instrument of collective security.
- In 1935, Stalin also signed a pact with France and Czechoslovakia in the hope that this would lead to close military co-operation against Germany. French suspicions of Soviet communism prevented this development.
- In September 1938, in response to Hitler's threat to invade Czechoslovakia, Stalin was apparently ready to intervene, provided France did likewise. However, Hitler's last-minute decision to agree to a compromise proposal at the Munich Conference of 29–30 September, which resulted in the **Munich Agreement**, ensured that Soviet assistance was not needed. The fact that the USSR was not invited to the Conference reinforced Stalin's fears that Britain, France and Germany would work together against the USSR.

Anglo-French negotiations with the USSR, April–August 1939

In March 1939, Germany invaded what was left of Czechoslovakia and, in April, the British and French belatedly began negotiations with Stalin for a defensive alliance against Germany. These negotiations were protracted and complicated by mutual mistrust. Stalin's demand that the Soviet Union should have the right to intervene in the affairs of the small states on her western borders if they were threatened with internal subversion by the Nazis, as Czechoslovakia had been in 1938, was rejected outright by the British. Britain feared that the USSR would exploit this as an excuse to seize the territories for itself.

Stalin was also suspicious that Britain and France were manoeuvring the Soviets into a position where they would have to do most of the fighting against Germany should war break out. The talks finally broke down on 17 August over the question of securing Poland's and Romania's consent to

← To what extent was Soviet foreign policy based on the aim to consolidate the Soviet state?

KEY TERM

Comintern A communist organization set up in Moscow in 1919 to co-ordinate the efforts of communists around the world to achieve a worldwide revolution.

Munich Agreement An agreement between Britain, France, Italy and Germany that the Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia would become part of Germany.

the passage of the Red Army through their territory in the event of war; something which was rejected by Poland.

KEY TERM

Lebensraum Literally living space. Territory for the resettlement of Germans in the USSR and eastern Europe.

Anglo-French Guarantee In 1939, Britain and France guaranteed Polish independence, in the hope of preventing a German invasion of Poland.

Spheres of interest Areas where one power is able to exercise a dominant influence.

The Nazi–Soviet Pact

Until early 1939, Hitler saw Poland as a possible ally in a future war against the USSR for the conquest of **lebensraum**. Poland's acceptance of the **Anglo-French Guarantee** forced him to reconsider his position and respond positively to those advisors advocating temporary co-operation with the Soviet Union.

Stalin, whose priorities were the defence of the USSR and the recovery of parts of the former Russian Empire, was ready to explore German proposals for a non-aggression pact; this was signed on 24 August. Not only did it commit both powers to benevolent neutrality towards each other, but in a secret protocol it outlined the German and Soviet **spheres of interest** in eastern Europe: the Baltic states and Bessarabia in Romania fell within the Soviet sphere, while Poland was to be divided between them.

On 1 September 1939, Germany invaded Poland, and Britain and France declared war on Germany on 3 September. The Soviet Union, as agreed secretly in the Nazi–Soviet Pact, began the invasion of eastern Poland on 17 September, although by this time German armies had all but defeated Polish forces. By the beginning of October, Poland was completely defeated and was divided between the Soviet Union and Germany, with the Soviets receiving the larger part.

SOURCE D

'Wonder How Long the Honeymoon Will Last?' A cartoon printed in US newspaper, the Washington Star, 9 October 1939.



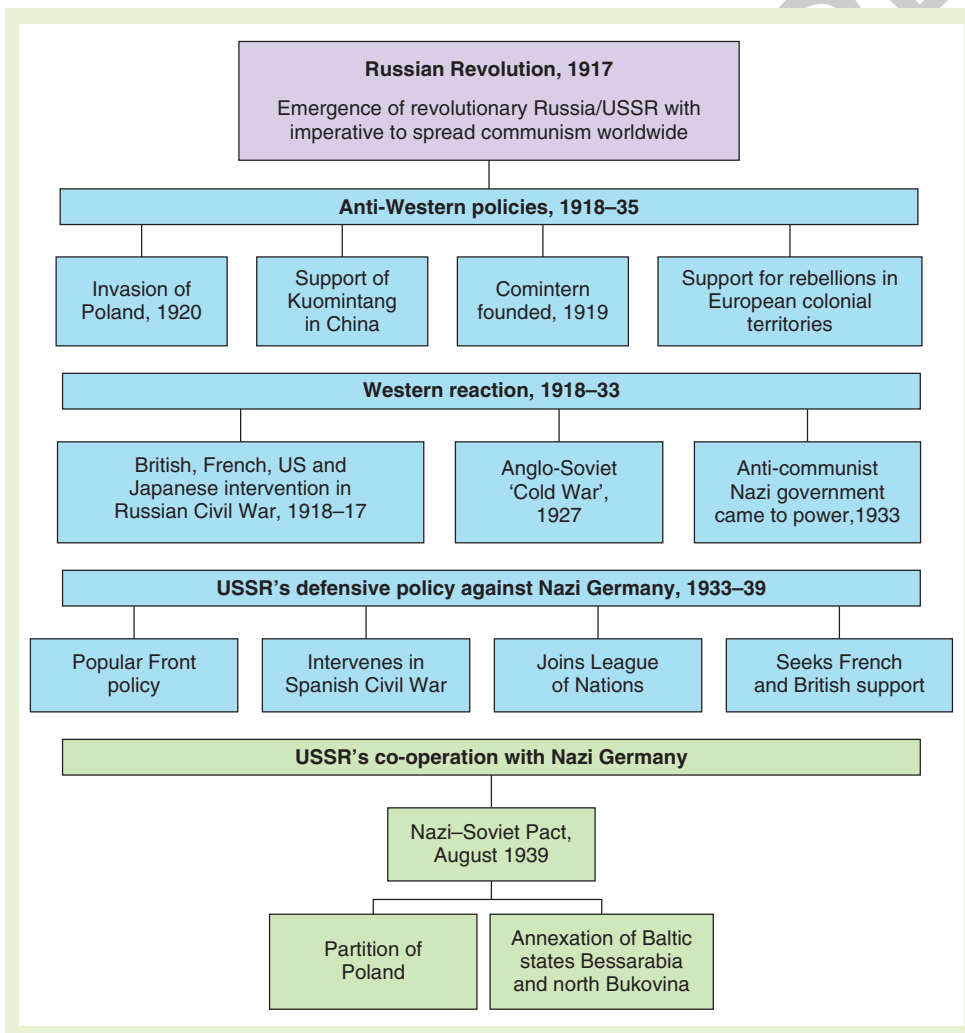
? What message is conveyed in Source D about the Nazi–Soviet Pact?

Territorial expansion, October 1939–June 1941

Until June 1941, Stalin pursued a policy of territorial expansion in eastern Europe aimed at defending the USSR against possible future aggression from Germany. To this end, and with the dual aim of recovering parts of the former Russian Empire, Stalin strengthened the USSR's western defences:

- He signed mutual assistance pacts with Estonia and Latvia in October 1939. The Lithuanians were pressured into agreeing to the establishment of Soviet bases in their territory.
- In March 1940, after a brief war with Finland, the USSR acquired the Hanko naval base and other territory along their mutual border.
- Stalin's reaction to the defeat of France in June 1940, which meant German domination of Europe, was to annex the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania and to annex Bessarabia and northern Bukovina from Romania.

In June 1941, Germany invaded the Soviet Union, and the USSR became allies with Britain against Nazi Germany, soon to be joined by the US.



SUMMARY DIAGRAM

Russia and the Western powers, 1917–41



KEY TERM

Axis The alliance in the Second World War that eventually consisted of Germany, Italy, Japan, Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Romania, as well as several states created in conquered areas.

Reparations Materials, equipment or money taken from a defeated power to make good the damage of war.

3

The Grand Alliance, 1941–45

▶ **Key question:** *In what ways did the war aims and ambitions of the USSR, US and Great Britain conflict?*

In the second half of 1941, the global political and military situation was completely transformed. Not only were Britain and the USSR now allies against Germany but, on 7 December 1941, Japan's attack on the naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, brought the US into the war, as the US immediately declared war on Japan, an **Axis** power. In response, Germany and Italy both declared war against the US on 11 December. Germany was now confronted with the Grand Alliance of Britain, the US and the USSR, the leaders of which became known as the Big Three. The USSR was to suffer the brunt of the German attack and effectively destroyed the German army by 1945, but in the process suffered immense physical damage and some 25 million casualties.

What were the aims of the Big Three?

→ The conflicting aims of the Big Three

As victory over the Axis powers became more certain, each of the three Allies began to develop their own often conflicting aims and agendas for post-war Europe.

The USSR's aims

By the winter of 1944–45, Stalin's immediate priorities were clear. He wanted security for the USSR and **reparations** from the Axis powers to help rebuild the Soviet economy. To protect the USSR against any future German attack, Stalin was determined to regain the land the USSR had annexed in 1939–40 and lost during the course of the war, including:

- land that the Soviet Union had annexed from Poland in 1939 (see page 16); in compensation, Poland would be given German territory that lay beyond the Oder River
- the Baltic provinces of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania
- territory lost to Finland in 1941
- Bessarabia and northern Bukovina from Romania.

Eastern Europe

In eastern Europe, Stalin's first priority was to ensure that regimes friendly to the USSR were established. By 1944, Stalin seems to have envisaged a post-war Europe, which for a period of time would consist of three different areas:

- An area under direct Soviet control in eastern Europe: Poland, Romania, Bulgaria and, for a time at least, the future Soviet zone in Germany.

It is held that Britain, the US, and the USSR were allied against the Axis Powers in the Second World War. What is an alliance? How and why can the meanings of terms change and be interpreted differently? (History, Language, Reason)

T
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- An ‘intermediate zone’, which was neither fully communist nor fully capitalist, comprising **Yugoslavia**, Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Finland. The communists would share power there with the liberal, moderate socialist and peasant parties. These areas would act as a ‘bridge’ between Soviet-controlled eastern Europe and western Europe and the US.
- A non-communist western Europe, which would also include Greece.

Continued co-operation

Stalin wanted to continue close co-operation with Britain and the US even after the end of the war. In 1943, he dissolved the Comintern (see page 17) as a gesture to convince his allies that the USSR was no longer supporting global revolution. The British government saw this as evidence that Stalin wished to co-operate in the reconstruction of Europe after the end of the war.

US aims

In the 1950s, Western historians, such as Herbert Feis, argued that the US was too preoccupied with winning the struggle against Germany and Japan to give much thought to the political future of post-war Europe, since it assumed that all problems would in due course be solved in co-operation with Britain and the USSR. Yet this argument was sharply criticized by **revisionist** historians in the 1960s and 1970s, who insisted that the US very much had its own security agenda for the post-war period.

More recently, historian Melvyn Leffler has shown that the surprise Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, and the dramatic developments in air technology during the war, made the US feel vulnerable to potential threats from foreign powers. Consequently, as early as 1943–44, US officials began to draw up plans for a chain of bases which would give the USA control of both the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. This would also give US industry access to the raw materials and markets of most of western Europe and Asia. Leffler argues that the steps the USA took to ensure its own security alarmed Stalin and so created a ‘spiral of distrust’, which led ultimately to the Cold War.

SOURCE E

An excerpt from an article by Melvyn Leffler, ‘National Security and US Foreign Policy’ in *Origins of the Cold War*, ed. M.P. Leffler and D.S. Painter, published by Routledge, London, 1994, pp. 37–38.

The dynamics of the Cold War ... are easier to comprehend when one grasps the breadth of the American conception of national security that had emerged between 1945 and 1948. This conception included a strategic [military and political] sphere of influence within the western hemisphere, domination of the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, an extensive system of outlying bases to enlarge the strategic frontier and project American power, an even more extensive system of transit rights to facilitate the conversion of commercial air bases to military use, access to the resources and markets of Eurasia, denial of these resources to a prospective enemy, and the maintenance of nuclear superiority.

KEY TERM

Yugoslavia In 1918, the kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was formed. In 1929, it officially became Yugoslavia. The Serbs were the dominating nationality within this state.

Revisionist In the sense of historians, someone who revises the traditional or orthodox interpretation of events and often contradicts it.

How important is Source E in explaining the cause of the Cold War?





KEY TERM

Tariffs Taxes placed on imported goods to protect the home economy.

Economic nationalism An economy in which every effort is made to keep out foreign goods.

Autarchic economy An economy that is self-sufficient and protected from outside competition.

Decolonization Granting of independence to colonies.

Atlantic Charter A statement of fundamental principles for the post-war world. The most important of these were: free trade, no more territorial annexation by Britain or the USA, and the right of people to choose their own governments.

Economic aims

Much of US President Roosevelt's policy was inspired by the ideas of his predecessor Woodrow Wilson, who in 1919 had hoped eventually to turn the world into one large free trade area. This would be composed of democratic states, where **tariffs** and **economic nationalism** would be abolished. The US government was determined that there should be no more attempts by Germany or Italy to create **autarchic economies**, and that the British and French, too, would be forced to allow other states to trade freely with their empires. Indeed, the US commitment to establishing democratic states meant that they supported the **decolonization** of the European colonial empires.

The United Nations

These ideas were all embodied in the **Atlantic Charter**, which British Prime Minister Churchill and US President Roosevelt drew up in August 1941, four months before the US entered the war. This new, democratic world order was to be underpinned by a future United Nations Organization (UN). By late 1943, Roosevelt envisaged this as being composed of an assembly where all the nations of the world would be represented, although real power and influence would be wielded by an executive committee, or Security Council. This would be dominated by the Soviet Union, Britain, China, France, and the US. For all his talk about the rights of democratic states, he realized that the future of the post-war world would be decided by these powerful states.

Britain's aims

The British government's main aims in 1944 were to ensure the survival of Great Britain as an independent Great Power still in possession of its empire, and to remain on friendly terms with both the US and the USSR. The British government was, however, alarmed by the prospect of Soviet influence spreading into central Europe and the eastern Mediterranean where Britain had vital strategic and economic interests. The Suez Canal in Egypt was its main route to India and British industry was increasingly dependent on oil from the Middle East. As Britain had gone to war over Poland, Prime Minister Churchill also wanted a democratic government in Warsaw, even though he conceded that its eastern frontiers would have to be altered in favour of the USSR.

→ **To what extent had the Great Powers agreed on dividing up Europe into spheres of influence by the end of 1944?**

→ Inter-Allied negotiations, 1943–44

Churchill and Roosevelt held several summit meetings to discuss military strategy and the shape of the post-war world, but it was only in 1943 that the leaders of the USSR, US and Britain met for the first time as a group.

The foreign ministers' meeting at Moscow, October 1943

In October 1943, the foreign ministers of the US, USSR, and Britain met in Moscow, the Soviet Union's capital, in an effort to reconcile the conflicting

ambitions of their states. They agreed to establish the European Advisory Commission to finalize plans for the post-war Allied occupation of Germany. They also issued the 'Declaration on General Security'. This proposed the creation of a world organization to maintain global peace and security, Roosevelt's United Nations, which would be joined by all peaceful states. US **Secretary of State** Cordell Hull insisted that the Chinese President Chiang-Kai-shek, as head of a large and potentially powerful allied country, should also sign this declaration. Stalin also informed Hull, in the strictest secrecy, that the USSR would enter the war against Japan after Germany's defeat in Europe.

 **KEY TERM**

Secretary of State
The US foreign minister.

Tehran Conference, 28 November–1 December 1943

At the Tehran Conference, Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin met for the first time to discuss post-war Europe, the future organization of the UN and the fate of Germany. Stalin again made it very clear that he would claim all the territories which the USSR had annexed in Poland and the Baltic in 1939–40, and that Poland would be compensated with German territory. To this there was no opposition from either Churchill or Roosevelt.

The key decision was made to land British, Commonwealth and US troops in France (Operation Overlord) rather than, as Churchill wished, in the Balkans in 1944. This effectively ensured that the USSR would liberate both eastern and south-eastern Europe by itself, and hence be in a position to turn the whole region into a Soviet sphere of interest. It was this factor that ultimately left the Western powers with little option but to recognize the USSR's claims to eastern Poland and the Baltic States.

SOURCE F

An excerpt from *Alliance* by Jonathan Fenby, published by Simon and Schuster, London, UK, 2008, pp. 246–247.

On 29 November Roosevelt told his son Elliot, who accompanied him to Tehran that:

'Our Chiefs of Staff are convinced of one thing, the way to kill the most Germans, with the least loss of American soldiers is to mount one great big invasion and then slam 'em with everything we have got. It makes sense to me. It makes sense to Uncle Joe. It's the quickest way to win the war. That's all.

Trouble is, the PM [Churchill] is thinking too much of the post-war, and where England will be. He's scared of letting the Russians get too strong in Europe. Whether that's bad depends on a lot of factors.'

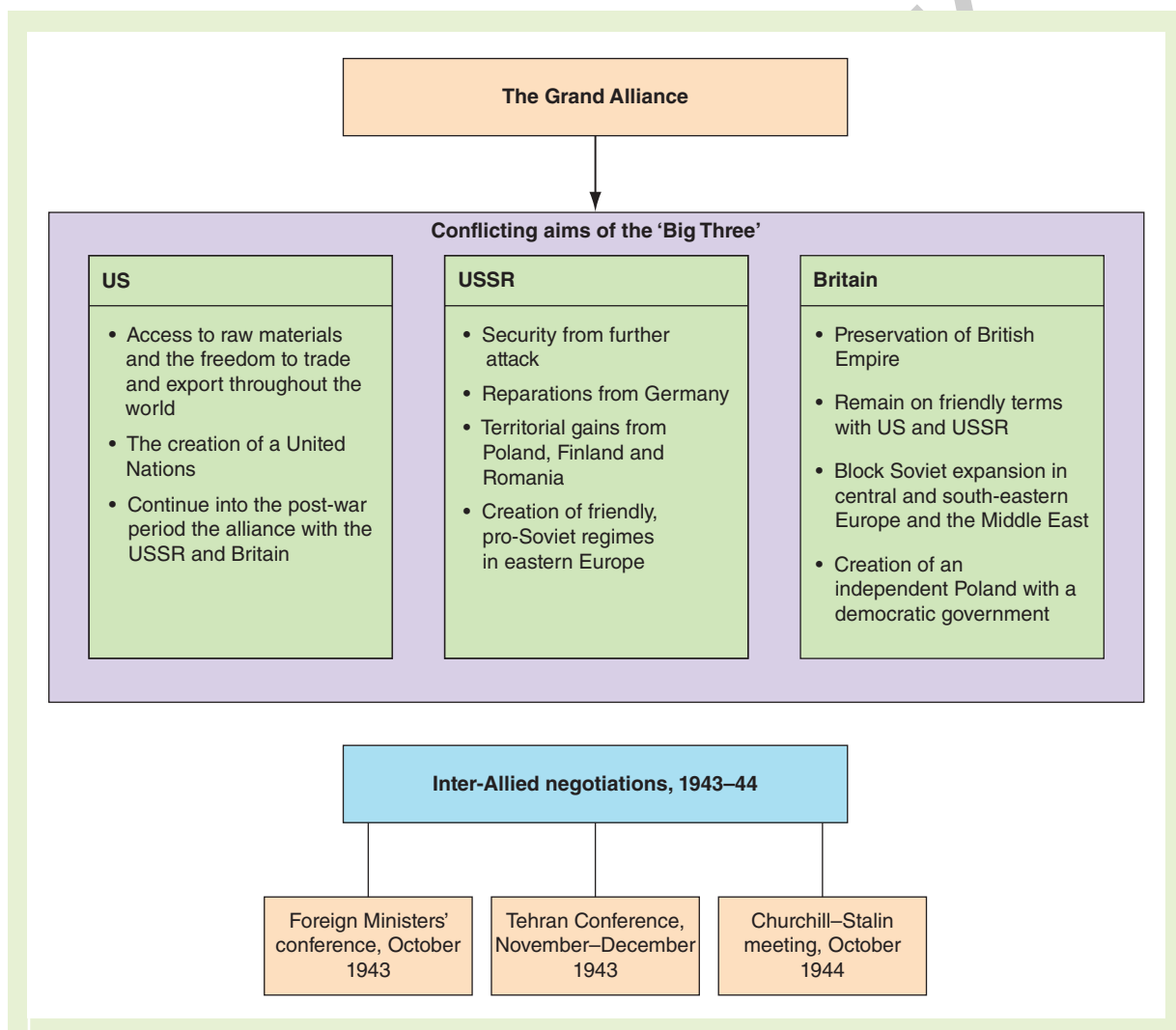
According to Source F, what were the political implications of Operation Overlord?



The Churchill–Stalin meeting, October 1944

A year later, in an effort to protect British interests in the eastern Mediterranean, Churchill flew to Moscow and proposed a division of south-eastern Europe into distinct spheres of interest. This formed the basis of an agreement that gave the USSR 90 and 75 per cent predominance in Romania and Bulgaria respectively, and Britain 90 per cent in Greece, while Yugoslavia and Hungary were to be divided equally into British and Soviet zones of interest.

After reflection, this agreement was quietly dropped by Churchill as he realized that it would be rejected outright by Roosevelt once it was brought to his attention. This, Churchill feared, would only lead to unwelcome tension in the Anglo-US alliance. Roosevelt had informed Stalin shortly before Churchill arrived in Moscow that there was 'in this global war ... no question, either military or political, in which the United States [was] not interested'. However, it did broadly correspond to initial Soviet intentions in eastern Europe, and Stalin did recognize Britain's interests in Greece, even denying the local communists any Soviet support (see page 30).



SUMMARY DIAGRAM

The Grand Alliance, 1941–44

4 The liberation of Europe, 1943–45

▶ **Key question:** How far did the liberation of Europe, 1943–45, intensify the rivalry and distrust between the 'Big Three'?

The liberation of eastern Europe by the Soviet army and western Europe by predominantly Anglo-American forces in 1944–45, created the context for the Cold War in Europe. It was indeed in Europe where the Cold War both started and ended.

Eastern Europe, 1944–45

To understand the complex political situation created by the end of the war, it is important to understand the significance of the Allied Control Commissions, the tension between the governments-in-exile and the local partisan groups, and the close links between the communist parties and the USSR.

What were the key sources of political power in liberated eastern Europe, 1944–45?

Allied Control Commissions

Bulgaria, Finland, Italy, Hungary and Romania were Axis states. Although they were allowed their own governments after their occupation by the **Allied powers**, real power rested with the **Allied Control Commissions** (ACC). The first ACC was established in southern Italy in 1943 by Britain and the US after the collapse of the fascist government there. As the USSR had no troops in Italy, it was not represented on the ACC. Similarly, as it was the USSR that liberated eastern Europe from Germany, Soviet officials dominated the ACCs in Romania, Bulgaria, Finland and Hungary. In this respect, Soviet policy was the mirror image of Anglo-American policy in Italy.

Governments-in-exile and partisan groups

In the states actually occupied by the Germans and Italians in eastern and south-eastern Europe (Poland, Czechoslovakia, Greece and Yugoslavia), governments-in-exile were established in London during the war. They were made up mainly of politicians who had managed to escape the German occupation; yet, being in London, they lost control of the **partisan groups** fighting in the occupied territories. Except for Poland, communist partisan groups emerged as the strongest local forces and their leaders were not ready to take orders from their governments-in-exile. Sometimes this suited Stalin, and sometimes, as in Greece (see page 30), it did not.

Communist parties

In the liberated territories, Stalin advised the local communist parties to form popular fronts or alliances with the liberal, socialist and peasant parties.

KEY TERM

Allied powers Commonly referred to as the Allies during the Second World War, this group first consisted of Poland, France, Britain and others, with the Soviet Union and the United States joining in 1941.

Allied Control Commissions These were set up in each occupied territory, including Germany. They initially administered a particular territory in the name of the Allies.

Partisan groups Resistance fighters or guerrillas in German- and Italian-occupied Europe.

Eventually these fronts became the means by which the communists seized power in eastern Europe (see map on page 139).

To what extent was Stalin's concern about post-war Poland prompted by the needs of Soviet security?

→ Poland

The Polish question was one of the most complex problems facing the Allies. Britain, together with France, had gone to war in September 1939 as a result of the German invasion of Poland. The British government therefore wanted to see the emergence of a democratic Poland once Germany was driven out by the Red Army. On the other hand, Stalin was determined not only to regain the territories that fell into the Soviet sphere of interest as a result of the Nazi–Soviet Pact (see page 18), but also to ensure that there was a friendly pro-Soviet government in Poland. In effect, this meant forcibly establishing a communist dictatorship, as the majority of Poles were strongly anti-Soviet and anti-communist.

In principle, Britain and the USA had agreed at Tehran to the Soviet annexation of eastern Poland up to the Curzon Line (see page 15), and that Poland would eventually be compensated for this by acquiring territory on her western frontiers from Germany. Both hoped optimistically that Stalin would tolerate a democratically elected government in Warsaw.

The Soviet advance into Poland

Once the Red Army crossed Poland's eastern frontier in early January 1944, the Soviet Union annexed the territory it had claimed in September 1939. By July, Soviet troops had crossed the Curzon Line and moved into western Poland. As they advanced, they systematically destroyed the **nationalist** Polish resistance group known as the **Polish Home Army**. Stalin fatally undermined the authority of the Polish government-in-exile in London by establishing the Committee of National Liberation, based in Lublin in Poland, which became known as the Lublin Committee. The task of the committee was to administer Soviet-occupied Poland, and eventually to form the core of a future pro-Soviet government in Poland.

SOURCE G

An excerpt from a report by Colonel T.R.B. Sanders who was in command of an Allied mission, which visited the V2 missile site at Blizna in central Poland in September 1944 after it had been captured by the Red Army. National Archives (NA HS4/I46), London, UK.

Everywhere we went (except in the forward areas) there were posters with portraits and short descriptions of the nine or ten chief members of the Lublin Committee. Other posters dealt with conscription, giving up of wireless sets, giving up of arms and payment of social insurance instalments. In addition all along the roads, there were numerous billboards with slogans in Russian and Polish such as 'Long live the Red Army!' 'Glory to our Great Leader Stalin!'

KEY TERM

Nationalist Someone devoted to the interests and culture of their nation, often leading to the belief that certain nationalities are superior to others.

Polish Home Army The Polish nationalist resistance group that fought German occupation during the Second World War.



What does Colonel Sanders' report in Source G reveal about the activities of the Lublin Committee in Soviet-liberated Poland?

The Warsaw Uprising

The Soviet Union's policy was revealed when the Polish Home Army rose in revolt against the Germans in Warsaw in August 1944 in a desperate attempt to seize control of parts of Poland before the Red Army could overrun the whole country. By capturing Warsaw, the Home Army calculated that it would be able to set up a non-communist government in the capital, which would be recognized by the Western Allies as the legal government of Poland. It was hoped that this would then stop Stalin from creating a communist Poland. Not surprisingly, Stalin viewed the uprising with intense suspicion. Although Soviet troops penetrated to within 20 kilometres of Warsaw, the Polish insurgents were left to fight the Germans alone and were defeated by 2 October.

The German defeat of the Warsaw Uprising effectively destroyed the leadership of the Home Army, and inevitably this made it easier for Stalin to enforce his policy in Poland. As Soviet troops moved further west towards the Oder River in the remaining months of 1944, the **NKVD**, assisted by Polish communists, shot or imprisoned thousands of participants in the Home Army in a determined attempt to eliminate the anti-Soviet Polish opposition.

Britain, the USA and Poland

Despite all that had happened, Roosevelt and Churchill still clung to the hope that it would be possible to reach a compromise with Stalin about the future of Poland. In the interests of post-war Allied unity, they were both determined to avoid a premature break with the USSR over Poland. In January 1945, the USSR formally recognized the communist-dominated Committee for National Liberation as the **provisional government** of Poland. Britain and the US, although they still supported Poland's government-in-exile in London, played down the significance of this in the interests of the unity of the Grand Alliance.

Romania and Bulgaria

On 20 August 1944, the Soviets launched a major offensive to drive the German army out of the Balkans. The immediate consequence of this brought about the collapse of the pro-German regimes in both Romania and Bulgaria. Like Poland, both states were vital to the military security of the USSR, since, if they were under friendly pro-Soviet governments, they would protect the USSR's south-western frontiers from any future attack. Soviet control of Romania would also allow access to Yugoslavia and central Europe, and enable it to strengthen its strategic position in the Black Sea. Control of Bulgaria would give the USSR a naval base from which to dominate the approaches to the Turkish Straits and the Greek frontier (see the map on page 139).

Romania

The Soviet Union was also determined to re-annex the Romanian territories of Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, which it had occupied in 1940, and

KEY TERM

NKVD Soviet security organization responsible for enforcing obedience to the government and eliminating opposition.

Provisional government

A temporary government in office until an election can take place.

← How did the USSR consolidate its position in Romania and Bulgaria?

launched an offensive against Romania on 20 August 1944. In a desperate attempt to take command of Romania in the face of the Soviet invasion, Romania's king deposed the pro-German government on 23 August. The king hoped, like Italy (see below), that Romania would be allowed to negotiate a ceasefire with the Western Allies and then form a new government in which communists would only be a minority. This idea was an illusion based on the false assumption that Britain and the US would begin a second front in the Balkans which would give these two allies more say in Romania's affairs. The king had no alternative but to negotiate an **armistice** on 12 September, with the Soviets who now occupied the country.



KEY TERM

Armistice The official agreement of the suspension of fighting between two or more powers.

Left-wing Liberal, socialist or communist.

The National Democratic Front

Britain and the US already tacitly accepted that Romania was in the Soviet sphere of influence, and gave no help to the Romanian government which was anxious to obtain a guarantee that Soviet troops would be withdrawn as soon as the war with Germany was over. An Allied Control Commission (ACC) was created and dominated by Soviet officials. A coalition government composed of communists, socialists, National Liberals and the left-wing National Peasants' Party, the so-called Ploughmen's Front, was formed. This was paralysed by disagreements between the National Liberals and the three other parties. Supported by Soviet officials on the ACC, communists and their allies formed the National Democratic Front and incited the peasants to seize farms from landowners and the workers to set up communist-dominated production committees in the factories.

In March 1945, Stalin followed the precedent of Britain, which had intervened in December 1944 in Greece (see page 30), to establish a new government friendly to the Soviet Union. With the help of the Red Army, Romanian communists orchestrated a coup which led to the creation of the pro-Soviet communist-dominated National Democratic Front government.

Bulgaria

Although Stalin did not want a break with Britain and the US, Western observers noted the anti-Western bias of Soviet policy in Romania and how Soviet officials actively supported the workers and peasant parties. The occupation of Romania allowed the Soviets to invade Bulgaria in early September 1944 and establish an ACC on 28 October.

Local communists, including several thousand partisan troops, had already established the Patriotic Front, an alliance of anti-German **left-wing** forces. The Front seized power from the pro-German government of Konstantin Muraviev and established a government in Sofia shortly before the Red Army arrived. Inevitably, this success strengthened local communists who attempted a communist revolution in the country. The country's former ruling class were eliminated with over 10,000 people executed. The trade unions and police were dominated by communists and large farms were taken over by peasants.

Soviet response

This enthusiasm for revolution did not, however, fit in with Stalin's overall strategy. Essentially, he was determined to safeguard Soviet control over Bulgaria, yet not antagonize his Western Allies any more than necessary while the war with Germany was still being fought, and at a time when Poland was becoming an increasingly divisive issue. Since the USSR's position was guaranteed through the key role of the Soviet chairman of the ACC, and the strong position of the local communist party, Stalin could afford to be conciliatory. Consequently, he attempted in the autumn of 1944 to persuade the Bulgarian communists to pursue a more moderate policy. He wanted them to tolerate a certain degree of political opposition and to work within the Patriotic Front coalition. This was difficult to achieve as local communists, sometimes backed by Soviet officials on the ACC, were determined to gain complete power regardless of Stalin's instructions or the diplomatic consequences.

Yugoslavia and Greece

Josip Broz (Tito) was one of the most successful partisan leaders in German-occupied Europe. As a communist, he looked to the USSR as a model for the state he wished to create in Yugoslavia, but his very independence and self-confidence caused Stalin considerable problems.

Why were Tito's ambitions viewed with suspicion by Stalin in 1944 and early 1945?

Yugoslavia

After the occupation of Bulgaria, Soviet troops joined with partisan forces in Yugoslavia, launching an attack on Belgrade on 14 October 1944. By this time, Tito had created an effective partisan army which not only fought the Germans but also waged civil war against non-communist Serbs and Croat nationalists. Tito's position had been strengthened when Britain decided in May 1944 to assist him rather than the nationalists, as his partisans were more effective opponents of the German army. With British weapons and equipment, they effectively dominated the struggle against the Germans and nationalists, laying the foundations for a communist take-over in 1945 in both Yugoslavia and in neighbouring Albania. Whenever Tito's partisans occupied an area, they formed communist-dominated committees which took their orders from him rather than the Yugoslav government-in-exile in London.

To the Soviets, the key to controlling south-eastern Europe was to create a military and political alliance between Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and the USSR. Tito was not, however, an easy ally and tried to carry out his own policies independently of the USSR. Despite Stalin's reluctance to provoke a crisis with Britain and America on the eve of the Yalta Conference (see pages 33–35), Tito established communist governments in both Yugoslavia and Albania, which his forces controlled by November 1944.

Stalin was able to exercise a firmer control over Tito's foreign policy. In January 1945, he vetoed Tito's scheme for a federation with Bulgaria which would have turned it into a mere province of Yugoslavia. He made it very

clear that Yugoslavia would have to subordinate its local territorial ambitions to the overall foreign policy considerations determined by the Soviet Union, although this displeased Tito.

Greece

Tito and Stalin also clashed over the attempts by the communist-controlled People's Liberation Army (ELAS) in Greece to set up a National Liberation Government on the Yugoslav model. During the war, ELAS emerged as the most effective resistance force in Greece and, like Tito's partisans, fought the Germans and non-communist **guerrilla groups**. By 1944, ELAS was able to launch a communist take-over of Greece. Yet, as Greece was an area regarded by the USSR as being well within the British sphere of influence, Stalin urged ELAS to join a moderate coalition government with non-communist parties. When a revolt encouraged by Tito broke out in Athens on 3 December 1944, Stalin, true to his agreement with Churchill (see page 23), stopped him from helping Greek communists and raised no objection to their defeat by British troops.

What was Stalin's policy in Hungary and Czechoslovakia?

→ Hungary and Czechoslovakia

In neither Czechoslovakia nor Hungary did Stalin have any immediate plans for a communist seizure of power. He wanted to keep alive the possibility of co-operation with non-communist parties in order to protect Soviet interests. Local communist parties were consequently ordered to enter into democratic coalition governments and to work within these to consolidate their position.

Hungary

The decision taken at the Tehran Conference not to start a second front in the Balkans (see page 23) ensured that the Red Army would decide Hungary's fate. When Soviet troops crossed the Hungarian frontier in September 1944, Head of State Admiral Miklós Horthy appealed to the Soviets for a ceasefire, but Germany took Horthy's son prisoner and encouraged Hungarian ultra-nationalists, the **Arrow Cross Party**, to seize power in western Hungary. It was not until early December 1944 that Red Army units reached the outskirts of Budapest, Hungary's capital.

In the Soviet-occupied section of the country, the Hungarian Communist Party was initially too weak to play a dominant role in politics, and it therefore had little option but to co-operate with the Socialist Party, the Smallholders Party (a peasants' party), and several other middle-class parties. In December 1945, when elections took place for the National Assembly, the Communist Party, despite the presence of the Red Army, gained only 17 per cent of votes cast, but they were given three key posts in the provisional national government. Throughout 1945, Stalin's immediate aim was to remove anything from Hungary that could be used as war reparations by the USSR since Hungary had been a German ally. In the longer term he was not sure if Hungary should be integrated into the emerging **Soviet bloc** where it would be dominated militarily, politically, and economically by the USSR.



KEY TERM

Guerrilla groups Fighters who oppose an occupying force using tactics such as sabotage and assassination.

Arrow Cross Party A Hungarian ultra-nationalist political party that supported Germany in the Second World War.

Soviet bloc A group of states in eastern Europe controlled by the USSR.

Czechoslovakia

Of all the eastern European states, Czechoslovakia had the closest relations with the USSR. The Czechoslovaks felt betrayed by Britain and France over the Munich Agreement of 1938 (see page 17) and looked to the USSR as the power that would restore their country's pre-1938 borders. In 1943, the Czechoslovak government-in-exile in London under Edvard Beneš, the former president, negotiated an alliance with the USSR, although this still did not stop Stalin from annexing Ruthenia in eastern Czechoslovakia in the autumn of 1944 (see the map on page 44).

As the Soviet army occupied more and more of Czechoslovakia in the winter of 1944–45, the balance of power tilted steadily away from the democratic parties represented by the government-in-exile in London to the Czechoslovak Communist Party led by Klement Gottwald, who was a refugee in Moscow. Stalin nevertheless forced Gottwald to accept Beneš as President and work within a coalition government. In turn, Beneš followed a conciliatory policy and was ready to co-operate with the Communist Party, enabling Stalin to achieve a harmony that had been impossible to reach in Poland. When the Provisional Government was formed in 1945, the Communist Party was able to demand eight seats in the cabinet including the influential Ministries of the Interior and Information, although Gottwald skilfully camouflaged the Communist Party's powerful position by not demanding the position of Prime Minister.

Finland

In the summer of 1944 when Soviet troops invaded, Finland was granted an armistice on unexpectedly generous terms. The Finns had to:

- declare war on the Germans
- cede part of the strategically important Petsamo region on the Arctic coast, and
- pay reparations.

However, politically they were allowed a considerable degree of freedom. Marshal C.E.G. Mannerheim, who had co-operated closely with Germany during the war, remained president until 1946 and there was only one communist in the first post-war cabinet. Finland was in a position to give the USSR vitally needed reparations, such as barges, railroad equipment and manufactured goods. A repressive occupation policy would have disrupted these deliveries. In addition, the Finnish Communist Party was weak and unpopular, and the USSR had little option but to rely on the non-communist parties.

The liberation of Italy and France

Italy and France were liberated by the Western Allies. Italy was a leading Axis state, while France, until its defeat in 1940, had played the main part in the war against Germany. In both states, resistance to German occupation and

← Why did Stalin pursue such a moderate policy in Finland?

← How influential were the Communist Parties in Italy and France?



KEY TERM

Puppet government

Government that operates at the will of and for the benefit of another government.

Free French The French who supported de Gaulle after the fall of France in June 1940, when he established his headquarters in London.

puppet governments helped legitimize the Communist Party and enhance its popularity.

Italy

After the Allied landings in Sicily in July 1943, Mussolini, the Italian Fascist dictator, was overthrown and imprisoned, and in September an armistice was signed. This did not prevent German troops from seizing Italy's capital, Rome, and occupying most of the Italian peninsula. The Allies were then forced to fight their way up the peninsula, and it was only in April 1945 that northern Italy was finally conquered. Italy was the first Axis state to sign an armistice, and the way it was administered by the Allies set important precedents for the future. All Soviet requests to be involved were firmly rejected by Britain and the US which later gave Stalin an excuse to exclude them from eastern Europe. An Italian government was established and it was gradually given responsibility for governing the liberated areas. This government was closely supervised by the Anglo-American Allied Control Commission (ACC).

Palmiro Togliatti

Stalin had little option but to accept these arrangements, although he was determined that Italian communists should not be excluded from participating in the new government. Palmiro Togliatti, the leader of the Italian Communist Party, was ordered to form a coalition with the Socialist Party. He was to avoid any aggressive actions, such as an uprising or a civil war, which would cause tension between the USSR and the West and so make it more difficult for Stalin to consolidate the Soviet position in eastern Europe. Togliatti was also to draft a popular programme for reforming the Italian economy which, by promising measures that would help the workers and peasants, would prepare the way for later Communist Party electoral successes.

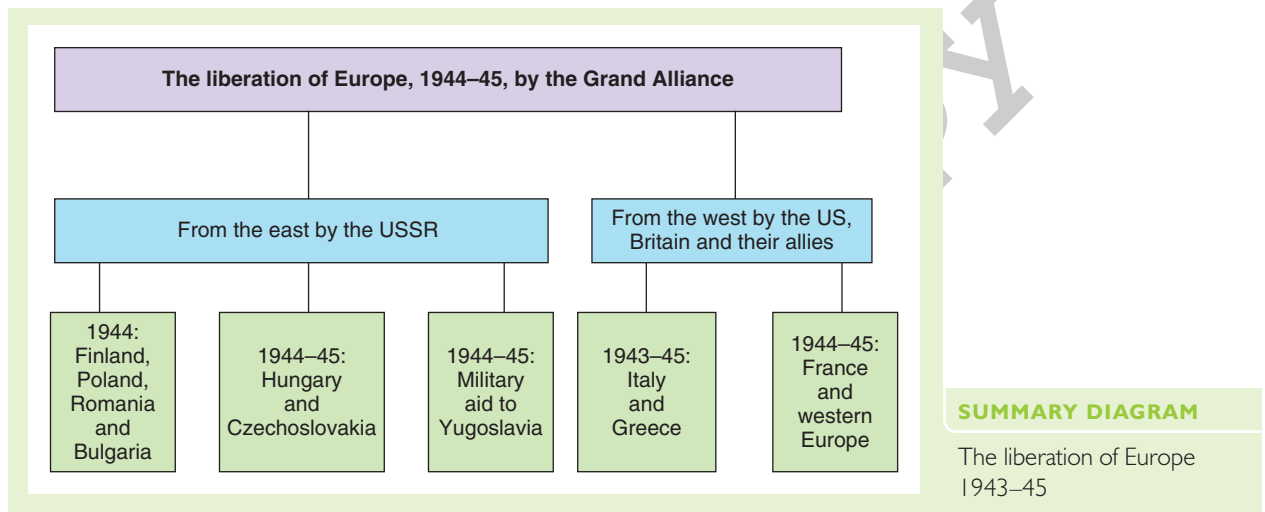
Togliatti carried out these instructions as well as he could, joining the new government that was formed when Rome was occupied by the Allies in June 1944. In the north in the winter of 1944–45, communists played a key role in the resistance against the Germans. Togliatti, only too aware of how the British had crushed the Greek revolt, managed to keep his more radical partisans in check. By the time the war had ended, this resistance won the communists considerable support throughout Italy and made them an essential partner in coalition government. This was seen when Togliatti himself became Minister of Justice in the Italian government, which was formed in April 1945. At this stage, then, Stalin's policy in Italy was to push the Italian Communist Party into joining a governing multi-party coalition.

France

When Paris was liberated in August 1944, General Charles de Gaulle, the leader of the **Free French**, immediately established an independent government.

His aim was to rebuild French power and to create a powerful French-led western European bloc. To counter the predominance of the Anglo-Americans, he looked to the Soviet Union, and in December 1944 signed the Franco-Soviet Treaty of Alliance and Mutual Assistance, which committed both states to co-operate in any future defensive war against Germany.

As in Italy, the French Communist Party, having played a prominent part in the resistance, became a major force in French politics. Its leader, Maurice Thorez, was instructed by Stalin to support the Soviet–French alliance and work towards creating a left-wing coalition with socialists, which, it was hoped, would eventually be able to form a government.



5 The Yalta Conference, February 1945

Key question: *What was achieved at the Yalta Conference?*

The Yalta Conference, attended by Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill, was, to quote the journalist and historian Martin Walker, ‘the last of the wartime conferences ... [and] the first of the post-war summits’. Besides creating plans for finishing the war in Europe and eastern Asia, it also attempted to lay the foundations of the coming peace. Plans were finalized for the occupation of Germany by the victorious powers, amongst whom, on Churchill’s insistence, France was to be included because he feared that the US might withdraw its troops from Europe soon after the end of hostilities. Each power was allotted its own zone, including a section of Berlin, which was placed under **Four-Power Control** (for details of the zone divisions, see map on page 44). The decision was also taken to establish the United Nations.

KEY TERM

Four-Power Control

Under the joint control of the four occupying powers: Britain, France, the US and USSR.



What message is conveyed by Source H about inter-Allied relations?

SOURCE H

The 'Big Three': Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin (front row, left to right) at the Yalta Conference.



How was an agreement on Poland reached?

→ Poland

Poland again proved to be the most difficult subject on the agenda, and the Allies were only able to reach agreement through a series of ambiguous compromises, which could be interpreted differently by the USSR and the Western powers:

- They confirmed that Poland's eastern border would run along the Curzon Line.
- They agreed in principle, as they had at Tehran, that in compensation for the land lost to the USSR, Poland would receive a substantial increase in territory in the north and west from land to be removed from Germany. The exact details of this were not stated.
- The decision was also taken to reorganize the provisional government by including democratic politicians from both Poland and the London government-in-exile.
- Elections would be held as soon as possible.

Superficially this seemed to be a success for Britain and the US, but in fact, the terms were so vague that Stalin could easily manipulate them. First, the exact amount of land that Poland would receive at the cost of Germany was not fixed and secondly, democracy meant very different things to the

participants. For Stalin it essentially meant the domination of Poland by the Communist Party, while for Britain and the US it meant effectively the domination of the non-communist parties.

SOURCE I

An excerpt from *God's Playground: History of Poland, Vol. 2*, by Norman Davies, published by OUP, Oxford, UK, p. 205.

Given the relentless character of Soviet diplomacy over the Polish problem, it must be recognized, however, that Stalin's views had changed fundamentally. In 1939–41, the Soviet dictator had showed a willingness to trample on every vestige of Polish nationality or independence. From 1941 onwards he constantly reiterated his desire to restore 'a strong and independent Poland'. His understanding of 'strength' and 'independence' differed considerably from that which was held in Britain and America, or indeed in Poland, but was no less substantive for that. Anyone who has any doubts concerning the genuineness of Stalin's commitment should compare the post-war history of Poland with that of the Baltic states or the Ukraine. Stalin was the author not only of post-war Polish independence, but also of the peculiarly stunted interpretation of that concept which prevailed in the post-war era.

What information is conveyed by Source I on Stalin's Polish policy?



Declaration on Liberated Europe

To underpin the right of the liberated states to determine their own governments, Roosevelt persuaded Stalin and Churchill at Yalta to agree to the Declaration on Liberated Europe which committed the three governments to carry out emergency measures to assist the liberated states and to encourage democratic governments.

With the start of the Cold War, this became, as historian Martin Walker observed, a key text 'upon which all future accusations of Soviet betrayal and bad faith were made'. Yet such accusations completely ignored the reality of the situation in eastern Europe. Stalin saw Poland, and indeed the other eastern European countries, as corridors for an attack from Germany or western Europe on the USSR. He was therefore going to ensure that friendly governments, which in most cases were to mean communist ones, were in place.

How significant was the Declaration on Liberated Europe?

SOURCE J

An excerpt from 'Declaration on Liberated Europe', quoted in *The Cold War and the Making of the Modern World*, by Martin Walker, published by Vintage, London, UK, 1994, p. 14.

... The three governments will jointly assist the people in any liberated state or former Axis satellite state in Europe where in their judgement conditions require: (a) to establish conditions of internal peace; (b) to carry out emergency measures for the relief of distressed peoples; (c) to form interim governmental authorities broadly representative of all democratic elements in the population and pledged to the earliest possible establishment through free elections of governments responsive to the will of the people; and (d) to facilitate where necessary the holding of such elections.

How reliable is Source J as a guide to the immediate post-war policies of the 'Big Three'?



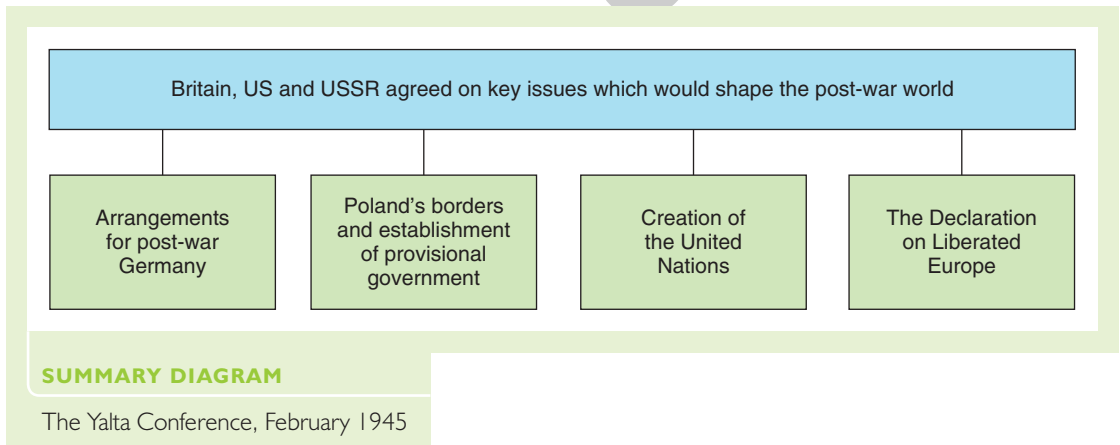
When did the war in Europe end?

→ The end of the war in Europe

Three months after the Yalta Conference, the war in Europe ended. In the final weeks of the war British and US forces raced to Trieste, Italy, in an attempt to stop Yugoslav forces seizing the port, while the British army in northern Germany crossed the River Elbe to prevent the Soviets from occupying Denmark (see map on page 44).

Churchill urged the US to make special efforts to take Berlin and Prague to pre-empt a Soviet occupation. But the US generals were not ready to see their soldiers killed for what they regarded as political reasons, and so both capitals fell to Soviet troops.

When the war ended with the surrender of Germany on 8 May 1945, Anglo-American forces occupied nearly half the area that was to become the Soviet zone in Germany (see the map on page 44). It was not until early July that these troops were withdrawn into the US and British zones, which had been agreed upon at Yalta.



Chapter summary

The origins of the Cold War, 1917–45

The origins of the Cold War are complex. On the one side it is impossible to ignore the teachings of Marxism–Leninism and the sense of righteousness which they instilled in the Soviet regime that established itself in Russia in 1917. On the other side this was countered by the US's intention to open up the world to free trade, democracy and self-determination in the firm belief that this would lead to global peace. To the USSR this was merely a camouflaged attempt by the US to pursue its own economic, capitalist interests, which were fundamentally hostile to Marxism–Leninism.

During the interwar years the Soviet government focused on internal issues rather than foreign policy. Nevertheless, through the activities of the Comintern, Soviet agents attempted to stir up trouble in the capitalist states of western Europe and their empires.

Through the Nazi–Soviet Pact of August 1939 the USSR regained the land she had lost to Poland.

The German attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941 led to a massive shift in diplomatic relations. The USSR was now allied to the very states it so distrusted. While the Second World War lasted the USSR and its Western Allies had no option but to co-operate to defeat Germany.

The military campaigns that defeated Germany in 1944–45 dictated the immediate post-war situation in Europe. Eastern Europe was under the ultimate control of the Red Army, while western Europe was firmly within the sphere of the British and US.

At the Yalta Conference of February 1945 the 'Big Three' agreed:

- Germany was to be placed under Four-Power Control
- in Poland the USSR would retain her gains of September 1939, while there would be democratic elections as soon as possible
- that democratically elected governments should be set up in liberated Europe.



Activities

- 1** In groups, compare and contrast capitalism and communism in the form of a chart for classroom display. Be sure to include overviews of governmental structures, economic policies, and more. Consider extending this activity by conducting research in a library to learn more about how each of these systems viewed gender issues, poverty, and colonialism.
- 2** Create a timeline of the ten most significant events for the Soviet Union between 1917 and 1945. This will require you to make judgements about which events were the most important. Be sure to indicate the event on the timeline and add a short explanation as to why that event was important.
- 3** Divide the class into two groups. Debate the validity of the following statement: 'The Soviet Union was to blame for poor international relations between it and the international community between 1917 and 1941.' One group should argue that the statement is accurate, while the other argues that it is not. Both groups should use evidence to support their argument.
- 4** Symbolism is a critically important part of propaganda. Research symbolism employed by the Soviet Union. Discuss symbols used by your country of origin, including their origin, purpose and history.
- 5** Access Kent University's British Cartoon Archive at www.cartoons.ac.uk. Find cartoons associated with various events discussed in Chapter 1 by using the search system provided. Compare and contrast these British cartoons from before the Second World War with those made during the Second World War. As a class, discuss how the symbolism, captions and purpose of cartoons changed between these two periods.
- 6** Extend Activity 5 above by comparing and contrasting cartoons created during the Second World War with those made afterwards in the first years of the Cold War. Create a presentation about the importance of cartoons as a medium of education and communication, reflecting on the importance of visual imagery in the past and in today's media.