

CHAPTER**17****Critical Thinking Activity****Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus****The Cold War**

The alliance between the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union quickly unraveled after World War II. While there was a common enemy, Western democracies and Soviet leaders had overlooked their political, economic, and social differences. After the war, suspicions returned. Soviet expansion into Eastern Europe heightened American fears of communism, a system in which society as a whole, represented by the Communist party, owns and controls property and the means of production.

Within months after the end of World War II, the United States and the Soviet Union entered into a period of intense confrontation and rivalry. Difficulties over the writing of the treaties and over the government of occupied Germany grew increasingly severe. The Allies' goal of establishing democratic governments throughout Europe after World War II proved to be elusive. To former British Prime Minister Churchill and U.S. President Truman, democracy meant political and economic systems like those in Great Britain and the United States. But Western democracy was unacceptable to Soviet dictator Stalin, who began to establish Soviet-style communism in Eastern Europe.

When the fighting ended, Soviet troops occupied much of Eastern Europe. The Soviet leaders, who had promised free elections in these nations, did not follow through. In Hungary, where free elections were held in 1945, Communist candidates received only 17 percent of the vote. Unwilling to lose control, Stalin later suppressed elections in Hungary and in the other nations of Eastern Europe. Then, under elections supervised by Soviet troops, voters gave 90 percent of the vote to Communist candidates in Poland. This pattern was repeated in all Soviet-occupied areas, helping to establish Communist governments throughout Eastern Europe. By 1947 these nations had become Communist dictatorships. Nations that were held under Soviet domination came to be called satellite nations because, like planets circling the Sun, they were dependent upon the Soviet Union. In matters of both domestic and foreign policy, the satellite countries were subordinate to the Soviet Union.

The satellite nations of Eastern Europe served the Soviet Union. They were an important market for Soviet products as well as a source of supply of munitions, oil, and other natural resources and products needed by the Soviet Union. To restore the devastated Soviet economy, the Soviets removed entire factories, transportation equipment, and machinery from the satellite nations back to the Soviet Union. Stalin also ordered purges, or forced removals, of leaders of satellite nations who were deemed disloyal.

The leaders of Western Europe and the United States watched with grave concern as the Soviet Union crushed all opposition in the nations of Eastern

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Europe after 1945. Former Prime Minister Winston Churchill identified the new threat in a speech in March 1946 at Fulton, Missouri. With President Truman on the platform, Churchill warned of an “iron curtain” descending across the European continent. Thus the phrase *iron curtain* would be used to describe Soviet policy from 1945 to 1989.

In contrast to the Soviet Union, when World War II ended the United States began to withdraw troops from Europe. This withdrawal left the Soviet army as the most powerful military force in Europe. As a result of the German invasion, the Soviet Union had lost 20 million people and suffered devastation of land, property, and industry. Feeling threatened by Western powers, the Soviet Union wanted to create a buffer, or safety zone, on its western border. Soviet troops stationed there ensured that the nations of Eastern Europe would remain its allies.

The Communists promised to abolish poverty, privilege, and private property. They guaranteed productive work, shelter, education, health care, and a classless society in the new “people’s democracies” of war-torn Eastern Europe. The Americans responded with a policy of containment—preventing the further spread of communism.

American newspaper columnist Walter Lippmann published his newspaper columns on containment in a book called *The Cold War*. The title, a term coined by Lippmann to refer to a state of war that did not involve actual bloodshed, came to be used by nearly everyone. The Cold War was unlike any other struggle. It required constant military preparedness for both sides; it called for military support for countries believed to be in danger of a Communist takeover. It had other economic costs, as both the United States and the Soviet Union tried to “buy” allies with gifts ranging from food to steel mills.

1. Why was Stalin so determined to develop satellite countries that would constitute a buffer zone for the Soviet Union?

2. Why did the Soviet Union’s alliance with the allies during World War II disappear so quickly after the war was over?

3. When and how did the Cold War end? What action is recognized as the culminating end of the Cold War? What became of the former Soviet Union?

