

The Early Soviet Response

Consolidation of Power in Eastern Europe After World War II, the Soviet Union quickly moved to establish control over Eastern Europe, creating a buffer zone of communist states.

By installing pro-Soviet governments in countries like Poland, East Germany, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia, the USSR secured its western front and countered Western influence.

The Iron Curtain The division between Eastern and Western Europe was solidified by the "Iron Curtain," a term popularized by Winston Churchill in 1946 to describe the ideological and physical boundary separating the Soviet-controlled East from the West.

The Iron Curtain symbolized the growing divide between the Soviet bloc and the Western democracies, with Eastern Europe effectively isolated from the West.

The Early Soviet Response (cont)

Formation of the Cominform (1947) In response to the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan, the Soviet Union established the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform) to coordinate and strengthen communist parties across Europe.

The Cominform aimed to maintain Soviet control over communist parties in Eastern Europe and to support communist movements in Western Europe.

The Berlin Blockade & Airlift (1948-1949)

Background Berlin, located deep within Soviet-occupied East Germany, was a focal point of Cold War tensions. The city was divided into sectors controlled by the U.S., Britain, France, and the Soviet Union.

In 1948, in response to the introduction of a new currency in West Berlin and the growing influence of the West in the city, the Soviet Union blocked all land and water routes into West Berlin.

The Berlin Blockade & Airlift (1948-1949) (cont)

Soviet Objectives The blockade was an attempt to force the Western Allies out of Berlin and to prevent the unification of the Western zones of Germany, which the Soviets feared would create a strong, capitalist state aligned with the U.S.

Western Response and Soviet Reaction The U.S. and its allies responded with the Berlin Airlift, a massive operation to supply West Berlin with food, fuel, and other necessities via air.

The success of the airlift forced the Soviets to lift the blockade in May 1949, marking a significant failure for the Soviet strategy and a victory for the U.S. policy of containment.

The Formation of the Warsaw Pact (1955)

Background In response to the formation of NATO and West Germany's integration into the Western alliance, the Soviet Union established the Warsaw Pact in 1955.

The Warsaw Pact was a collective defense treaty among the Soviet Union and its Eastern European satellite states, serving as a military counterbalance to NATO.



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The Formation of the Warsaw Pact (1955) (cont)

Purpose of the Warsaw Pact The Warsaw Pact formalized Soviet military control over Eastern Europe and ensured that member states would support the USSR in case of a conflict with NATO.

It also allowed the Soviet Union to station troops in member countries, further solidifying its control over the region.

Impact on Cold War Dynamics The formation of the Warsaw Pact deepened the division between East and West, contributing to the militarization of the Cold War and the perpetuation of the arms race.

It also provided a mechanism for the Soviet Union to intervene militarily in Eastern Europe, as seen in the crushing of uprisings in Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968).

The Spread of Communism

Support for Communist Movements The Soviet Union actively supported communist movements and regimes in Asia, Africa, and Latin America as a way to counter U.S. influence and expand its own.

The Spread of Communism (cont)

This included support for the Chinese Communist Party during the Chinese Civil War, assistance to North Korea during the Korean War, and backing for North Vietnam during the Vietnam War.

Cuban Missile Crisis (1962) The Soviet placement of nuclear missiles in Cuba, just 90 miles from the U.S. coast, was a direct response to U.S. containment policies, particularly the presence of U.S. missiles in Turkey and Italy.

The crisis brought the world to the brink of nuclear war but ended with the Soviet Union agreeing to remove the missiles in exchange for a U.S. pledge not to invade Cuba and the secret removal of U.S. missiles from Turkey.

The Soviet-Afghan War (1979-1989) The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 was an attempt to prop up a communist government and prevent the spread of Islamic insurgency, which was seen as a threat to Soviet control in Central Asia.

The Spread of Communism (cont)

The U.S. supported Afghan mujahideen fighters through covert operations, turning the conflict into a protracted and costly war for the Soviet Union, contributing to its eventual collapse.

Soviet Domestic Policies

Increased Repression and Control Internally, the Soviet leadership, particularly under Stalin, responded to the pressures of containment by tightening political control, increasing propaganda, and suppressing dissent.

The Gulag system was expanded, and political purges were conducted to eliminate perceived enemies of the state.

Economic and Military Strain The Soviet Union invested heavily in its military and space programs to keep pace with the U.S., leading to significant economic strain.

The arms race, particularly the development of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, diverted resources from the civilian economy and contributed to long-term economic stagnation.



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The Later Years

Glasnost and Perestroika By the 1980s, the Soviet economy was faltering under the weight of military spending and inefficiency. Mikhail Gorbachev, who became General Secretary in 1985, introduced reforms to address these issues.

Glasnost (openness) and Perestroika (restructuring) aimed to make the Soviet system more transparent and efficient, but they also unleashed forces that ultimately weakened the Soviet state.

Reduction of Cold War Tensions Gorbachev sought to ease Cold War tensions through arms control agreements, such as the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) with the U.S. in 1987.

He also signaled a reduction in Soviet interventionism by withdrawing troops from Afghanistan and allowing Eastern European countries to pursue their own paths, leading to the collapse of communist regimes in the region.

The Later Years (cont)

Collapse of the Soviet Union (1991) The combination of internal economic problems, nationalist movements within the Soviet republics, and external pressures from U.S. policies led to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.

The end of the Cold War marked the failure of the Soviet response to U.S. containment and the collapse of the communist bloc in Eastern Europe.



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