How had the USSR gained control of Eastern Europe by 1948?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this lesson you will:

- learn about the continuities in Soviet policy towards its satellite states.

GETTING STARTED

Cover up the cartoon in Source B and read the Churchill speech in Source A. What images does he conjure up? Could you draw a cartoon to sum up this short extract?

SOURCE A

*From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of central and eastern Europe – Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Bucharest and Sofia. All these famous cities and the populations around them lie in the Soviet sphere and all are subject to a very high and increasing measure of control from Moscow.*

An extract from Churchill’s speech at Fulton, Missouri, on 5 March 1946.

SOURCE C

*Mr Churchill now takes the stand of the warmongers and he is not alone. He has friends not only in Britain, but in the United States … As a result of the German invasion, the Soviet Union’s loss of life has been several times greater than that of Britain and the USA put together. And so what can be surprising about the fact that the Soviet Union, anxious for its future safety, is trying to see to it that governments loyal to the Soviet Union should exist in the countries through which the Germans made their invasion? How can anyone who has not taken leave of his senses describe these peaceful hopes of the Soviet Union as expansionist?*

Stalin’s response to Churchill’s speech, 1946.

The fall of the ‘iron curtain’ across Europe

After the UK General Election of 1945, Churchill was no longer the British prime minister. Free from the chains of office, he went on a tour of America where he was treated as a hero. In Fulton, Missouri, on 5 March 1946, he coined a phrase that would be used for the next 40 years when the East/West divide was mentioned (see Source A). The speech declared that Europe was being divided into two separate halves by Soviet policy. In the West were free, democratic states, but in the East, behind an ‘iron curtain’ were countries under the domination of communist parties subject to the Soviet Union. However, Stalin did not agree with Churchill’s reading of the way events had unfolded (Source C).
Why did the USSR seek to dominate Eastern Europe?
Between 1945 and 1948 the Soviet Union made sure that every country in Eastern Europe had a government that was both communist and sympathetic to the Soviet Union. As far as Stalin was concerned, this was a defensive measure aimed at creating a buffer zone between the Soviet Union and the West. The Soviet Union had been invaded from the west twice in the past 30 years; the establishment of communist governments in Eastern Europe would make such an invasion more difficult.

Of course, as far as the West was concerned, and the USA in particular, the Soviet Union was not acting defensively. It was taking the first steps towards world domination. Here was clear proof that the Western way of life was under threat. The spread of communism had to be stopped.
The Cold War, 1945–75

**Annex** – add to a country’s territory.

**Coalition** – a temporary alliance of political parties made in order to form a government.

**Sanctions** – impositions placed on a state in order to coerce it.

### Czechoslovakia

Following the war, a coalition government ruled Czechoslovakia. From 1946 the Communists were the largest party in the coalition. In 1948 the Communists used the army to seize control. Many non-communists were arrested and the non-communist foreign secretary, Jan Masaryk, was murdered. Rigged elections were held in which the Communists won a landslide victory. Other political parties were then banned.

### Poland

At the request of Britain and the USA at the end of June 1945, Stalin included a few London Poles in the new Polish government. In January 1947, however, fresh (rigged) elections saw the return of a totally communist government. The leader of the London Poles, Mikolaczyk, fled from Poland, fearing for his life.

### Yugoslavia

In Yugoslavia the communist resistance had fought bravely against the Germans, and in 1945 its leader, Marshal Tito, was elected president. At first, Tito and Stalin got on well, but relations deteriorated as it became clear that Tito did not intend to follow orders from Moscow. Yugoslavia was expelled from the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform), and economic sanctions were applied against it by other communist countries. Tito countered this by taking aid from the West – much to the annoyance of Stalin.

### Greece

Here the communists were not successful. They fought a civil war against the government supported by Britain and the USA. Stalin stuck by his promise to the Western allies not to provide support for the Greek communists, who were finally defeated in 1949.

### Romania

After the expulsion of the Nazis, a coalition government dominated by communists was set up in Romania. In February 1945 the Soviet Union forced the king to appoint a communist prime minister. By the middle of the year, communists were in control, and in 1947 the monarchy was abolished.

### East Germany

The Soviet Union controlled the eastern section of Germany after the war. In 1949 it became a separate communist state, the German Democratic Republic (East Germany).

### Bulgaria

In late 1944 a communist-dominated coalition government was set up. In November 1945 the communists won rigged elections, and in 1946 they abolished the monarchy.

### The Baltic States

At the end of the war, the Soviet Union extended its border some 500 kilometres west. It did this by formally annexing Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, which it had occupied during the war with Finland in 1939–40. It also kept control of the eastern half of Poland, which it had occupied under the terms of the Nazi–Soviet Pact in 1939 (although the Germans had occupied this area from 1941 to 1945).

### Hungary

In November 1945 free elections were held, and the non-communist Smallholders’ Party won the most seats. In August 1947 fresh (rigged) elections were held and the Communists won total control. All other political parties were then banned.
The Truman Doctrine

As the USSR established dominance over Eastern Europe following the Second World War, President Truman felt there was little he could do because the Soviet Union had liberated the countries in question from Nazi occupation. Then, in February 1947, Truman was informed by the British that they could no longer afford to station troops in Greece and Turkey. Truman knew that the withdrawal of British troops would almost certainly lead to the Soviet Union taking control of these two countries. He therefore paid for British troops to stay in the area and gave financial support to the two governments. This was the beginning of the American policy of ‘containment’ – preventing the further spread of communism. The policy was officially announced in a speech made by Truman on 12 March 1947.

The views put forward in the speech have since become known as the ‘Truman Doctrine’.

In this speech, Truman let it be known that the USA was prepared to give help to any country under threat from communism. What form of help would there be for countries under threat from communism? Would Truman send troops into trouble-spots? This would be an act of hostility and would certainly lead to a war with the Soviet Union. Instead Truman would use America’s wealth to shore up the crumbling economies of Europe; he believed that communism flourished wherever there was misery and want – if you take away the misery and want, you take away the need for communism.

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Soviet reactions to the Marshall Plan

Truman wanted to end hunger and want in Europe so there would be no collapse into communism, and also so American companies would have greater trading opportunities. Stalin did not see things in quite the same way!

In September 1947 the Soviet Union formed the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform) to strengthen ties between communist countries. The Communist parties in Western Europe (those in Italy and France were particularly strong) were ordered to try to wreck their countries' use of American aid by strikes, but they were unsuccessful. In January 1949, Stalin announced the formation of the Council for Mutual Economic Aid (Comecon) to rival the Marshall Plan. The communist countries, however, did not have surplus funds to provide financial assistance to each other.
What were the consequences of the Berlin Blockade?

Background
- It had been agreed at Yalta that Germany would be split into four parts. This led to a split between East and West. This caused a special problem for the capital, Berlin, because it was in East Germany and the Allies did not want to give it up. Therefore, Berlin was also split in half.
- The post-war economy of the whole of Germany was in ruins.
- The Americans introduced the Marshall Plan and West Germany (and West Berlin) benefited; unsurprisingly East Germany (and East Berlin) did not.

Developing problem
- Britain and America combined their parts of West Germany into ‘Bizonia’.
- They introduced a new currency: the Deutschmark.
- Stalin was worried that a prosperous West Germany would pose a threat to Soviet security (Germany had invaded Russia twice in the past 30 years) and he did not want to see a wealthy West Germany next to a poor East Germany.

Soviet reaction
- Stalin decided to test the strength of the Allies and slow down the economic growth of the country by placing a blockade on West Berlin.
- Two million people lived in the Soviet zone but not under Soviet rule.
- All road and rail links were blockaded on 24 June 1948.

Crisis
- The Americans and British could not smash through the blockades, as this would be seen as an act of war.
- Stalin hoped the Allies would abandon their zone and leave the whole of Berlin in his hands.
- The Allies could not back down as this might encourage Stalin to make other demands elsewhere in Europe.

Decision
- The Americans and British took the decision to send supplies to West Berlin by air from their bases in West Germany.
- This was a massive task as West Berlin would need over 5000 tons of food and other necessities a day to survive.
- Non-stop flights were needed.
- B-29 bombers were stationed in Britain: this meant that the Soviet Union was in range of atomic weapons.
- Now the ball was back in Stalin's court. If he shot the planes down, he would be seen as the aggressor.

ACTIVITIES

Historians seldom agree on anything – they write different histories because of their background and opinions. Working in pairs, one of you should write a brief history of this period from an American point of view, the other from a Soviet one. Compare your paragraphs.

You need to have an opinion – it doesn’t matter whether you feel sympathy towards America or the Soviet Union, as long as you can back it up.

SOURCE E

A cartoon published in July 1948. The birds are carrying supplies into Berlin.

In Source E, Stalin is shown leaning out of a chimney, about to take pot-shots at storks.
- What is the impression of Stalin given by the cartoon?
- Does this seem a likely action for a world leader?
Detail
- For the best part of a year planes flew in and out of West Berlin: over two million tons of supplies were delivered and approximately 275,000 trips were made.
- Stalin called the blockade off on 12 May 1949; his gamble had failed.

Consequences
- The blockade strengthened Allied resolve to stand up to Stalin whatever the cost.
- West Germany was formally united and free elections were held in August 1949. Konrad Adenauer's Christian Democrats won; he was a committed opponent of communism.
- The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) was formed in April 1949. This was a military alliance that promised to help if any of the members were attacked. This was significant because it was the first time America had signed up to a peacetime military alliance; it showed the determination of its members to stand up to communism.
- Stalin's response was to form the Warsaw Pact, a similar military alliance comprising of Eastern European countries under Soviet influence.

Fact file
The two alliances
NATO: USA, Britain, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway and Portugal. Greece and Turkey joined in 1952 and West Germany in 1955.
The Warsaw Pact: Soviet Union, Albania (expelled 1968), Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland and Romania.

Fact file
In 1949 the Soviet Union's scientists successfully developed an atomic bomb.

ACTIVITIES
Use the sub-title headings on pages 66–67 and make a flow diagram that shows how each of them is related to the other. Think carefully how you will place each one.

Look at Source E. What is the message of this cartoon? Use details of the cartoon and your knowledge to explain your answer.

Mark scheme
Level 1: 1–2 marks Using surface features only.
- 'Stalin is shooting storks carrying food and supplies out of the sky.'
- 'It shows Stalin in the ruins of Berlin.'

Level 2: 2–3 marks Interpretation only.
- 'Stalin is responsible for ruining Berlin.'
- 'People in Berlin need food and supplies.'

Level 3: 4 marks Main message.
- 'Stalin is not happy that supplies are getting into Berlin so he is shooting them down.'

Level 4: 5–6 marks 'Main message supported by details of the cartoon OR by contextual knowledge.
- 'The cartoonist sees Stalin as the opposite of a Santa popping out of the chimney shooting the storks, who are usually carrying babies, to the people of Berlin. Stalin is effectively killing the babies, the food and supplies, of Berlin that is keeping the city alive.'
OR
- 'Stalin's blockade of Berlin was followed by an attempt by the USA and Britain, represented by the storks, to deliver supplies. The world waited to see if Stalin would shoot down the planes: he didn't but the cartoonist must have thought he might.'

Level 5: 7 marks Main message supported by details of the cartoon AND by contextual knowledge. Both sides of level 4.
Who was more to blame for the start of the Cold War, the USA or the USSR?

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

In this lesson you will:

- evaluate historical factors in order to make a judgement on significant events.

**USA-controlled factors:**

1. President Truman was much more suspicious and less trusting of the USSR than Roosevelt.
2. The USA dropped atomic bombs on Japan to end the Second World War in that region.
3. The Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan promised aid to countries willing to stand up to the communist threat.
4. The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) was set up as a military alliance between European and North American countries.
5. America, Britain and France formally united their zones of occupied Germany to create the new Federal Republic of Germany.
6. The Federal Republic of Germany joined NATO.

**USSR-controlled factors:**

1. The Baltic States were under Soviet occupation at the end of the war.
2. Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary were under Soviet occupation.
3. Poland gained a communist-dominated government supported by the USSR.
4. The Communist Information Bureau (Cominform) was formed.
5. The Berlin Blockade.
6. Council for Mutual Economic Aid (Comecon) was formed.
7. The Soviet part of Germany became the German Democratic Republic.
8. Soviet scientists developed the atomic bomb.
9. The Warsaw Pact was formed as a military alliance of communist states.

**Other factors:**

1. The conferences between the Allied leaders at the end of the Second World War.
2. The death of Roosevelt in the USA and the election of Attlee in the UK.
All these factors need to be given more detail if they are to be of help to you in answering this question. The formulaic response would be to expand on all the American factors then offer the Soviet factors as a contrast before adding the ‘other’ factors and a conclusion. However, your work will be more interesting to read if you have an opinion at the beginning, then go about proving it.

**Step 1:**
Go through your notes and add detail to the above points. Complete extra research if necessary.

**Step 2:**
Each factor has a different level of importance; decide on the appropriate level of importance for each factor. At this stage you may begin to leave the less important factors out.

**Step 3:**
Decide your answer to the question: who was to blame for the Cold War?

**Step 4:**
Divide your reasons into two: one side is your argument for who was most to blame for the Cold War, the other is recognising that there is an alternative opinion but arguing that it is not as accurate as yours.

**Step 5:**
Look again at your points to support your argument and see if you can put any together to make better statements.

**Step 6:**
Do the same to the other side of the argument, although here you should aim to group together factors that are similar.

**Step 7:**
Write up your answer. Start with who you think was to blame and support your argument with the evidence you have collected. Then acknowledge the other opinion, also with supporting evidence. Make sure your conclusion matches your introduction.