

communism A social and economic system which, according to Marx and Engels, should be based on the ownership, control and self-management of all major parts of an economy (land, industries, banks) by the whole of society, not just the wealthy capitalist classes. This classless society would be preceded by a socialist stage of development in which, for the first time since early human history, the ruling class would be the majority (i.e. working) class.

capitalism A social and economic system based on the private ownership of all major parts of an economy by a dominant or ruling minority class of individuals, families, companies and/or wealthy shareholders, who make all the important decisions concerning investment, production and employment. The state and society as a whole has no or very little say over such issues. Often also called a market or a free enterprise economy.

Military-Industrial Complex This refers to the top US military leaders (the Pentagon) and large US armaments companies. Some people, including Eisenhower, expressed concern that the M-I-C worked together to persuade US presidents that increased defence expenditure was vital to respond to the Soviet 'threat' when, in fact, it was not.

Fact Halliday suggests that the Second Cold War stemmed from the economic dominance of capitalist firms in California and those associated with the defence industry. He also links it with the rise of Christian fundamentalism and the New Right in the USA.

What were the main features of the Cold War?

The main theories

Historians have developed at least three major interpretations concerning the reasons for the Cold War. Not surprisingly, there are also multiple – often conflicting – assessments of its nature. The eight main theories are explained below.

1 The Russian menace

Many have seen the Cold War as essentially a series of crises and conflicts resulting from Russian expansionism and Soviet **communism**, which the 'free' West struggled to contain. Hence the actions taken by the US and its allies were merely defensive measures against the threat of Soviet tyranny.

2 US imperialism

Others have taken the opposite viewpoint. Instead of Moscow being the heart of an 'evil empire', the threat came from Washington, which was attempting to spread the evil of expansionist and predatory monopoly **capitalism** – and essentially US capitalism – in order to achieve global hegemony. This was not just over the 'communist' enemy, but also over its Western allies. Most significantly, the US was more than prepared to use military force to achieve its objectives, whether through invasion, the backing or instigation of coups, or training and arming 'terrorists'. In fact, such actions have been seen as essential to the '**Military-Industrial Complex**', which is said to need enemies and war in order to maintain high profitability in late capitalism.

3 West–West conflict theory

Some historians consider the Cold War to be a much more complex conflict, suggesting that it was essentially a smokescreen for the US while the country attempted to secure domination of the Western world. By placing the Soviet Union in the role of 'evil empire', the US sought to control developments both in Western Europe and in Japan and other parts of Asia. Arguably, this can be seen most notably during the Second Cold War (1979–85), a period that coincided with economic problems in the West and the rise of independent nationalist movements in the Developing World.

According to this view, the events of the Cold War were an extension of the inevitable competition and conflicts between rich capitalist states that had certainly led to the First World War, and possibly to the Second World War as well.

4 Intra-state theory

This theory, closely related to the West–West conflict theory, suggests that the Cold War was essentially the playing out on an international stage of developments in the internal domestic economies and social formations of the most important individual states. As such, the foreign policies of the USA and the USSR during the Cold War should be seen as attempts by politicians and – in the case of capitalist states – of groups of companies, to use international events as opportunities to resolve internal tensions and overcome competitors.

5 Class-conflict theory

Although similar to the West–West and intra-state theories, the class-conflict theory is much more clearly based on Marxist analysis and the centrality awarded to national and international class struggle. Hence the Cold War and the tensions between the superpowers should be seen as a result of the historic conflict between capitalism and communism. Adherents of this theory see the Cold War as both the result of these tensions and a cover or excuse to intervene militarily in areas considered important. Such US interventions during the Cold War could be 'sold' to the general public in the West as merely defensive responses to deliberate attempts by Moscow to spread its 'evil empire' and pernicious ideology, even when evidence suggested the USSR had played no role in them.

6 Superpower theory

Another interpretation of the Cold War is linked to the emergence of superpowers after 1945, and sees the essential nature of the Cold War as the attempt by two superpowers not to vanquish each other, but to carve up the world between themselves. This view is associated in particular with Mao and Communist China, and supporters of their version of Marxism–Leninism. Developed in the 1960s, this theory had an important impact on the Cold War. The rise of Communist China, and especially its dispute with the USSR in the 1960s, created a multi-polar aspect to the Cold War, and eventually saw both the USA and the USSR trying to gain China's support in their struggles and rivalries.

During the Second World War, the term 'superpower' was first used to describe the three major members of the Grand Alliance. However, the USA was in a league of its own, and by 1945 it was clearly the most powerful state that the world had ever seen. Many commentators, and later historians, began to use the term 'global superpower' to describe the USA and USSR in the period after 1945. However, it is debatable whether both these states can really be seen as *global* superpowers. Although the USSR was clearly a *regional* superpower, given the relative decline and weakness of other European states, it was really only the USA that could be termed a truly global superpower.

The USA

During the Second World War, the US economy had grown tremendously. By 1945, its productive capacity was greater than that of all other states combined. The US economy was also strong enough to intervene in the war-shattered economies of Europe, both to alleviate the problems these states were facing, and to improve the trading position of US companies and the economic strength of the US as a whole.

By 1945, the USA had the world's most powerful air force and navy. It also had a growing network of military bases across the world. Though its army was much smaller than that of the Soviet Union, between 1945 and 1949 it was the only state to own nuclear weapons.

The USSR

Despite the economic growth of the USSR during the 1930s, the country had been set back dramatically during the Nazi invasion and occupation. In many areas, it was necessary to begin again. Economically, the USSR was no match for the USA in 1945 – in particular, the efficiency and productivity of its factories were much lower.

Fact

As an example of the multi-polar nature of the Cold War, in the 1970s the USA under Nixon was able to achieve rapprochement with Beijing, putting pressure on the USSR, which then had to secure its borders against an erstwhile ally. As a consequence, the USSR was more willing to consider deals with the USA to lessen tensions in Europe and around the world.

Fact

Given its stronger economy, its much greater wealth and productive capacity, the USA was determined to ensure that pre-war tariff systems and trade blocs were replaced by 'liberal' or 'open' free-trade conditions. Under such conditions, the mechanics of a world capitalist market economy would operate to the advantage of the most efficient companies – most of which were based in the USA.

Fact

The Soviet Red Army had liberated most of its Eastern European neighbours from Nazi occupation, and was now based in these countries. This gave the USSR clear military domination in a very unstable area.

In order to defeat the Nazi invaders, Stalin had built up the world's largest land army. However, this was less well trained than the armies of the West. Also, the USSR had suffered approximately 30 million deaths during the war, and was exhausted.

Finally, the USSR did not develop nuclear weapons until 1949 – four years after the USA had deployed its first nuclear device. For most of the Cold War, the USSR's nuclear technology trailed that of the USA.

7 Arms race

Other Cold War historians have seen it as essentially driven by a new factor that emerged only in 1945 – nuclear weapons. They take the view that the Cold War was dominated by attempts by both superpowers to stop and even reverse the arms race as an issue of paramount importance to the survival of the human race. At times, the 'logic' of nuclear 'defence' seemed beyond the control of political leaders, and both sides carried different degrees of responsibility for escalating the nuclear arms race at different times.

8 North-South divide

The last major theory put forward by some historians focuses on developments in, and the growing importance of, what was for many years called the Third World. This theory suggests that the history of the period after 1945 was mainly a series of conflicts between powerful states such as the USA and the USSR over the control of weaker countries, which were of economic or strategic importance to them – or as a way of weakening their superpower rival. The issue was complicated by indigenous or local political movements in the Third World, which were intent on taking control themselves. These groups were often prepared to oppose superpowers, or to use them for their own ends.

Clash of ideologies – myths and realities

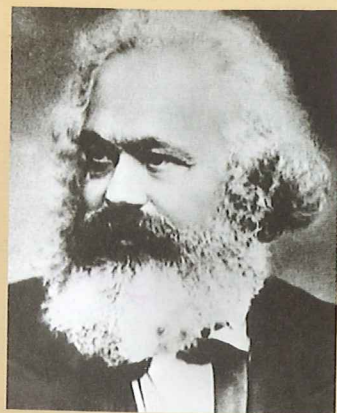
Having examined some of the main historical and political theories about the nature of the Cold War, we will now look at some of its practical manifestations in the period 1945 to 1991.

An important aspect of the underlying nature of the Cold War was that it was a war of ideology and propaganda, with each side or camp making its proclamations in an uncompromising and absolutist way. On the basis of analyses made by **Karl Marx** and **Vladimir Ilyich Lenin**, the Soviet Union believed that the development of capitalist competition invariably led to periodic economic crises and, as a consequence, to regional and global wars. It thus saw victorious worldwide communist or socialist revolutions as the only hope for world peace and adequate living standards for all.

The USA, on the other hand, believed that capitalism, a market economy and individual political rights would secure good living standards for all, and that the only way to achieve world peace was to contain and eventually 'roll back' communism wherever it existed. In this area alone, then, their respective and conflicting ideologies seemed to lead the two powers down a road to inevitable collision.

There were thus several similarities as well as significant differences between these two social systems. In reality, during the 1920s and 1930s – and after 1945 – there were many variations of these 'ideals'. This was true of both camps.

Karl Marx (1818–83) Marx was a German philosopher and historian who developed the materialist concept of history, arguing that class struggle and conflict were the most important factors behind social and economic – as well as intellectual and political – change. Along with his close collaborator Friedrich Engels (1820–95), he wrote *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848, which urged the industrial working classes in developed capitalist states to bring about revolution in order to achieve a socialist and then a classless communist society, based on greater freedom and abundance. His ideas inspired many revolutionaries, including Lenin and Trotsky.



The ideals of capitalism and communism

Ideals of capitalism

One important belief of capitalism is that the main businesses should be privately owned and run by individuals, families or companies, and not be restricted by the state – the free competition of a market economy is the most efficient way to run an economy. The wealth created by companies and wealthy individuals will lead to new jobs and will 'trickle down' to benefit the poorer sections of society.

Supporters of capitalism believe in a liberal parliamentary system, based on indirect democracy or representation, and that individuals should also have political rights, such as free speech, freedom of the press, information, assembly and religion, and the right to protest peacefully.

Ideals of communism

An important communist ideal is the creation of a classless society, based on abundance, which would mean that all have equal chances and opportunities. To achieve this, the most important parts of the economy should be socially owned and controlled (by either the state, local councils or co-operatives), with self-management by employees.

Politics should be wider and more democratic than the capitalist parliamentary system, and be based on a multi-party system with regular elections and **direct democracy**. Organised religions should be tolerated, but their involvement in education and people's lives should be controlled, and the state should actively encourage atheism.

Realities of capitalism

After 1945, many of the ideals of capitalism were met to a greater or lesser extent in most states in the Developed World. However, this was not usually the case in those Developing World countries that had capitalist or market economies. In the latter, there was extensive poverty, disease and even periodic starvation. At times, even much-needed education and health programmes were reduced at the insistence of capitalist banks based in developed capitalist states.

Many Developing World capitalist states were also either dictatorships, with no individual rights (torture of opponents was not unknown), or were corrupt political systems with power in the hands of powerful élites or families. In such states, elections were of little significance.

Furthermore, even in developed capitalist countries during the 1920s and 1930s, governments actively intervened on the side of the employers during industrial disputes, often using the police or the army to defeat strikes. In several capitalist countries – notably Italy and Germany – major capitalist banks, companies and even political parties actively supported the rise and rule of fascist dictatorships, as a way of protecting their financial interests during economic crises (such as the Great Depression) and against increasingly radical workers' trade union and political movements.

Realities of communism

In the Soviet Union, a one-party system had been established as early as 1921, even though this was acknowledged to be a temporary departure from Marxist principles. While there is still fierce historical debate about whether Lenin eventually intended to restore the Soviet multi-party democracy that had existed for several years after the Revolution – between 1917 and 1921 – once Stalin was in control, all other political parties were banned. Only the Communist Party was allowed to exist, and the USSR became a one-party dictatorship in both theory and practice, with Stalin's form of Marxism-Leninism justifying such a system.

direct democracy The right of voters to recall, between elections, any elected official who is felt have broken their promises.

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1870–1924) Lenin's real name was Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov. He joined the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, a Marxist party, in 1898. He provoked a split in the RSDLP in 1903, and formed the Bolshevik faction. Exiled from Russia until April 1917, he returned and, in November that year, pushed for the Bolsheviks to overthrow the provisional government.

