

Cold War from 1947 to 1968

Phases

There are many theories about how the Cold War began. For some it began in 1919 as the Versailles Treaty was being negotiated and intervention armies were sent by Britain, France, USA, Japan and others to 'strangle Bolshevism in its cradle' as Churchill later described it. More conventionally it is dated from around 1946 and 1947 as the more assertive Truman took over from wartime president Roosevelt.

Consolidation

The Cold War emerged in the years from 1945 to 1947. The USA adopted a policy of 'containment' to prevent the spread of communism while the Soviet Union came to believe the American goal was world domination. In these circumstances the 'Grand Alliance' of the USA, Great Britain, France and the Soviet Union became a distant memory and conflict between them dominated global politics for the next 40 years.

In the early stages, each side consolidated its hold over areas under its control. The USA used the Marshall Plan and NATO to build its influence in Western Europe and, in a separate but similar scheme, in Japan. The Soviet Union tightened its grip on Eastern Europe, imposing Soviet-style command economies and communist-dominated dictatorships.

Military intervention

Both sides used military power to maintain control. The USSR sanctioned armed repression in East Germany, Poland and Hungary in the mid-50s and in Czechoslovakia in 1968. The USA used force to establish pro-American governments in Iran and Guatemala and assisted military and political dictatorships in Latin America often through covert operations.

The main flashpoint came as the USA attempted to fight against the spread of communism in Vietnam. It used low-level intervention at first, from 1956 until the early 1960s, and then adopted a policy of escalating military forces from the mid-1960s.

The Cold War is one of the most widely debated phenomena in history. This timeline charts its origins and phases

Rollback

In 1950 National Security Council resolution 68 stepped up the US effort with the aim of not simply 'containing' communism but achieving 'rollback' — that is, reversing its gains by means of vast militarisation, a development deplored by Kennan. President Eisenhower also warned of the growing influence of what he called 'the military-industrial complex' in his farewell speech as president in January 1961.

By then, US power, justified by the 'anti-communist' mission, encircled the globe while the USSR by and large concentrated on its own sphere and only gave limited and cautious assistance to allies beyond that sphere, such as the Allende government in Chile in 1970–3.

The main flashpoint came in the form of the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 where, after a tense stand-off, agreement was reached whereby the USSR withdrew its nuclear missiles and the USA pledged not to invade Cuba.

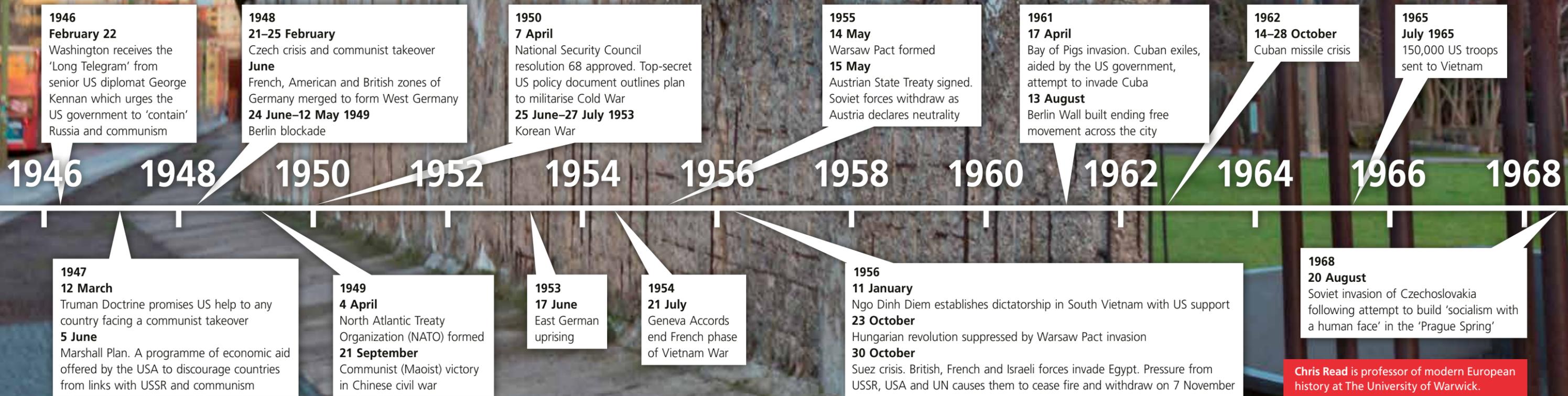
Détente

However, hubris was at hand for US global reach. In the mid-1960s the war in Vietnam was stepped up, but by 1973 the US had failed to break the North Vietnamese resistance. Rollback had failed and the next phase of the Cold War, détente, a return to dialogue and making agreements on the arms race and other issues, replaced it.

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Chris Read is professor of modern European history at The University of Warwick.