

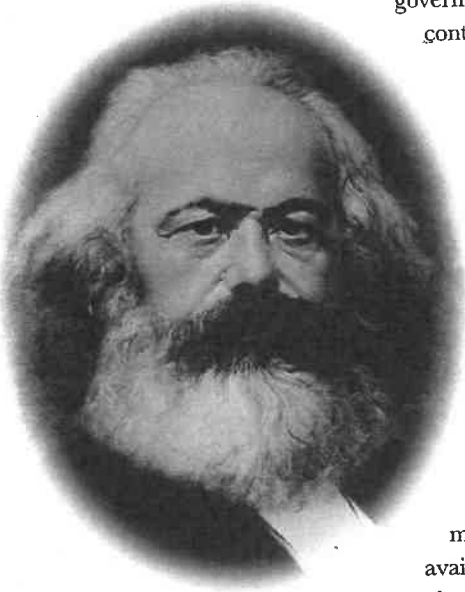
The Roots of the Cold War

A CONFLICT OF IDEOLOGY

Unlike conventional wars, the Cold War did not follow a declaration of war or a sudden act of aggression. The Cold War brought about its changes slowly, until, by 1950, it dominated international politics. Its roots lay deep in the past.

The Cold War was essentially a conflict between two ideologies and their respective systems of government. Liberal democracy, an ideology embraced by the United States, Britain, and other Western countries, advocates rule by elected representatives and holds that a government might broadly regulate a capitalist, or free market, economy but should not otherwise attempt to control it. Communism, as embraced by the Soviets and later by China, is an ideology that advocates authoritarian rule by a single party and holds that a government should own all businesses and control the economy.

▼ Karl Marx, the German philosopher who foretold the eventual collapse of capitalism while in exile in Britain, the cradle of the capitalist system.



KARL MARX

Modern communism is the brainchild of the German philosopher Karl Marx (1818–1883). Marx believed that history, like science, operates by knowable laws. According to these laws, a society moves through three stages of development: feudalism, capitalism, and finally communism. Economic change, Marx believed, was the engine that would move a society through these stages.

Marx argued that the capitalist, free-market way of life was doomed. A society's available wealth would find its way into the hands of fewer and fewer business owners, or

VLADIMIR LENIN (1870–1924)

Born Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, Lenin was first inspired by the works of Karl Marx at the age of nineteen. Lenin's most important contribution to Marxist thought was his belief that a society such as Russia's could pass from feudalism to communism without going through the capitalist stage of development. After seizing power in the Russian revolution of 1917, he attempted to put his ideas into practice. The result was the Soviet Union's communist system of government, which lasted for over seventy years.

“capitalists,” who would try to gain profits by paying less wages to the working class, or “proletariat.” Eventually, Marx argued, the proletariat would grow tired of being exploited. They would overthrow the capitalists and establish a classless society in which there was no private property and everyone was treated equally.

REVOLUTION

Marx believed that a temporary government, which he called the “dictatorship of the proletariat,” would be needed after the fall of capitalism. This government would be led by a band of communists dedicated to weeding out the last remnants of capitalism and class-based thinking.

Marx's theories were first put to the test not in a major industrial country, such as the United States or Britain, but in Russia, a largely agricultural and old-fashioned empire. The Bolsheviks, a group of communists led by Vladimir Lenin, seized power in Russia in 1917. After defeating all their opponents in a bloody civil war (1918–1921), they proceeded to establish the world's first communist state.

► The dawn of a brave new world? A Soviet propaganda painting showing Lenin (with tie) amid a crowd of enthusiastic workers in 1917.





▲ Guilty or not? A Soviet committee engaged in "purging" suspected dissidents from the Communist Party in 1933. By 1939, thousands of supposed enemies of Stalin's regime had been executed or imprisoned in inhumane labor camps.

Dictatorship

One of communism's chief weaknesses appeared the moment Lenin seized power: how were the new leaders to be kept in check? Lenin genuinely wished to help ordinary Russians by giving them decent wages, education, and health care, but many of his followers were more interested in advancing their own careers. In addition, Lenin's belief in the righteousness of his cause led him to establish a one-party state in which no opposition was tolerated.

Any hope that the new Soviet Union might develop into a communist utopia was ended in 1928, when Joseph Stalin came to power. A ruthless and paranoid dictator, Stalin ruled the Soviet Union through the Communist Party until his death in 1953. Until 1941, he enforced five-year modernization plans for Soviet industry. At the same time, he sanctioned the slaughter of millions of innocent peasants and purged the party, the government, and the armed forces of anyone he suspected of opposing him. The full extent of his crimes did not come to light until after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Russia and the West

In 1917, the Bolsheviks overthrew a provisional government that endorsed the principles of liberal democracy. This act turned Western governments against the Bolsheviks from the start. During the Russian Civil War that followed, Britain and several other Western governments sent troops to support the "White" opponents of the "Red" communists.

Western-style democracies remained suspicious of the one-party Bolshevik state throughout the 1920s and 1930s, and the Soviets increased this suspicion by supporting revolutionary communist parties in other countries. The United States did not formally recognize the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) until 1933, eleven years after its formation.

Unlikely Allies

Hostility between the Soviet Union and Western governments continued until World War II. At that time, the hostility did not so much end as cool off, because of the practical necessity of defeating a common enemy: Nazi Germany.

In August 1939, Germany and the Soviet Union shocked Western leaders by signing a non-aggression pact. Hitler had bitterly opposed communism, but by signing this pact he did not have to worry about the Soviets and could concentrate on attacking Western Europe. After Nazi victories in France and the Low Countries in June 1941, however, Hitler launched a massive assault on the Soviet Union. For the next four years, the Soviets and the Western liberal democracies had no choice but to fight together.

Joseph Stalin (1879–1953)

Stalin joined the Bolshevik party long before the 1917 revolution. After Lenin's death in 1924, he used his position as party secretary to isolate and eliminate his rivals. As head of the Soviet state, he modernized the country and led it to victory over the Nazis. He did so, however, at the cost of millions of lives. Modern Russia still bears the scars of his dictatorship, which was arguably the most brutal of modern times.

▼ The pact that shocked the world: Molotov, the Soviet commissar for foreign affairs, signs the Nazi-Soviet Pact in August 1939.

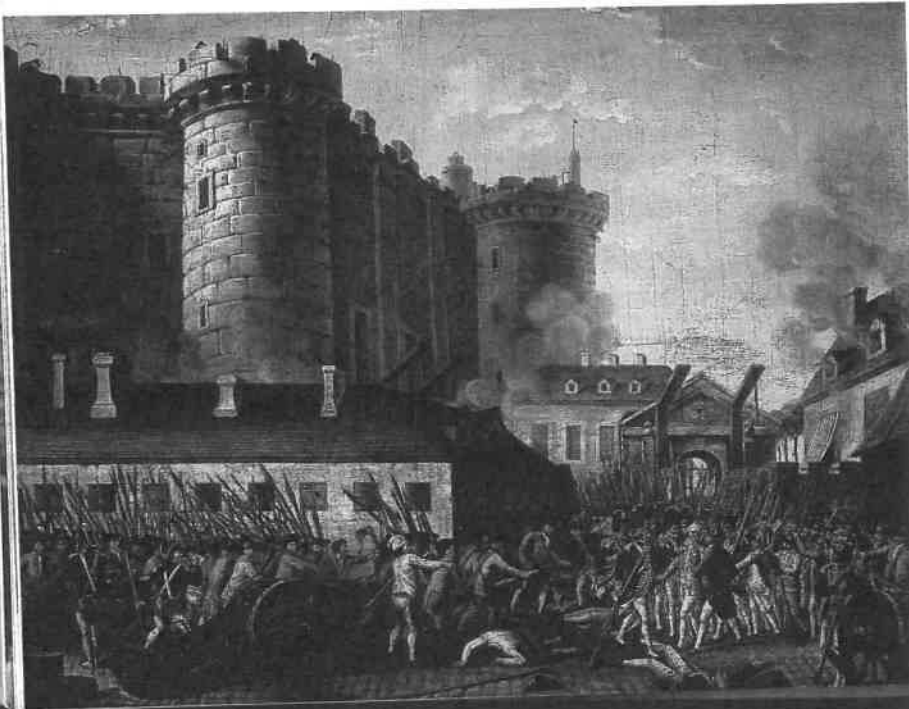


LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

The roots of liberal democracy stretch back to the English Revolution in the seventeenth century. After this revolution, England's representative parliament, rather than the country's monarch, became the key component of the English political system. In the next century, the English Revolution and new ideas about government inspired revolutions in the American colonies and in France. These two upheavals further developed the principles of liberal democracy.

In a modern liberal democracy, no individual, group, or institution has supreme power. If there is a monarch — as is still the case in Britain — he or she has no authority. Ultimate power lies in the hands of the people, who elect their leaders. The elected government makes laws that apply to all citizens alike, including members of the government. Different political parties each offer their own ideas on the best way to govern. All individuals are free to express their own opinions, even if they disagree with the government's actions.

▼ People power: Citizens of Paris storm a royal fortress and prison called the Bastille at the start of the French Revolution in July 1789.



BY THE PEOPLE OR FOR THE PEOPLE?

Soviet leaders claimed to believe in democracy, which was described by U.S. president Abraham Lincoln as “government of the people, by the people, for the people.” Western democracies, however, emphasized government by the people, whereas the Soviets sought government for the people.

These two interpretations each had important ramifications for the way people lived. In most Western democracies there was an emphasis on individual freedom and choice, but there was also a wide gap between the rich and the poor. In the Soviet Union, on the other hand, income levels were roughly the same for everyone, if mostly lower than in the West, and there was no unemployment. Soviet leaders, however, banned all criticism of the government, because such criticism was considered backward-looking and antisocial.

CAPITALISM VS. COMMUNISM

In the Soviet Union, the state owned all wealth, and a central bureaucracy set wages, rents, and prices. This system eliminated most poverty, but it also stifled initiative. Most Russians saw no point in hard work if the state was the beneficiary, particularly if, as so many believed, the Soviet government was corrupt.

The United States and other Western democracies followed a capitalist, or “free enterprise,” system, in which competition in an open market decides prices and wages, and government only regulates the market to a slight degree. In this system, an individual's wealth depends on environment and circumstance as well as personal effort.

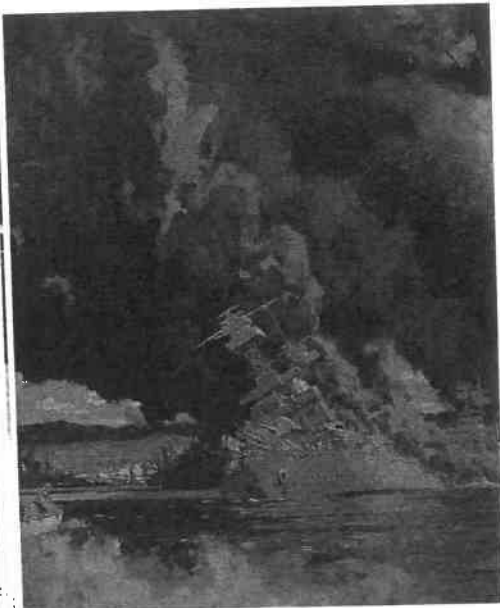
▼ In 1787, delegates to the Constitutional Convention, held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, sign the newly drafted Constitution. This document provided a template for liberal democracy around the world.



FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Freedom of speech is a key part of most Western democracies. This freedom was guaranteed to the American people in the first amendment to the Constitution, ratified in 1791:

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or of the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.”



▲ Japanese aircraft devastate U.S. warships in Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. The attack caused the United States to enter World War II on the side of Britain and its allies.

THE ARSENAL OF DEMOCRACY
In 1941, when the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union, Britain was the only major Western democracy waging war against fascism. The fascist nations Germany and Italy had overwhelmed most of Europe, except for neutral Sweden, Switzerland, and Spain. The United States was also technically a neutral country, but since 1940 it had supported Britain with a “bridge of ships” across the Atlantic.

U.S. president Franklin D. Roosevelt wanted the United States to be the “arsenal of democracy.” With the Lend-Lease Act of 1941, Congress empowered him to provide equipment and supplies to any nation whose defense was thought necessary for American security. After Japan’s attack on the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, and Germany’s subsequent declaration of war on the United States, the Soviet Union became a U.S. ally. By 1945 the United States had provided roughly \$11 billion in lend-lease aid to the Soviet Union. Military necessity had forced the United States to become the arsenal of communism as well as of liberal democracy.

AMERICA’S PROBLEM

By early 1942, the United States was in a difficult position. It was at war with the Axis powers of Germany, Italy, and Japan, which, by the Anti-Comintern Pacts of 1936 and 1937, had declared their deep hostility to communism. As the world’s most powerful liberal democracy, the United States was also bitterly opposed to communism. Yet it was now allied with the world’s leading communist state, the Soviet Union.

This situation was further complicated by events in China. From the mid-1920s to the mid-1930s, China had been ravaged by a civil war between the Chinese Communist Party

(CCP) and the U.S.-backed Guomindang, or Kuomintang (KMT). When war broke out between China and Japan in 1937, the CCP and the KMT formed the Chinese United Front to fight together against Japanese invaders. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor brought the United States into alliance with the partly communist Chinese United Front.

By the fall of 1943, the Soviet Red Army was driving the Nazis out of Russia, the Allies had cleared Axis forces from North Africa and had invaded Italy, and the Japanese were retreating in the Pacific. With eventual victory now likely, the Soviet Union and the Western democracies turned their attention to the shape of the postwar world. Not surprisingly, their respective visions were very different.

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT (1882–1945)

Born into a wealthy New York family, Roosevelt trained as a lawyer before entering politics. He made a name for himself as a reforming Democrat and was elected president of the United States in 1932, on the promise that he would combat the Depression. Many of his measures were successful, and his radio “fireside chats” to the nation brought him immense popularity. He was reelected in 1936, again in 1940, and yet again in 1944 — testimony to his skills as a leader in both peace and war.

▼ British gunners during the battle of El Alamein in Egypt in the fall of 1942. Allied victory in this battle marked the turning of the tide against Axis forces in World War II.

