

# World War II Aftermath

World War II ended on September 2, 1945, when Japan formally surrendered. Germany had surrendered in May 1945. Much of Europe and east Asia lay in ruin due to the intense and prolonged fighting that took place. However, the United States (US) and Soviet Union (USSR) emerged from WWII with independent economies, strong militaries, and the capability to produce nuclear weapons. These two countries became known as the **superpowers**, and they would be at the core of the **Cold War**, which would last for the next 45 years.



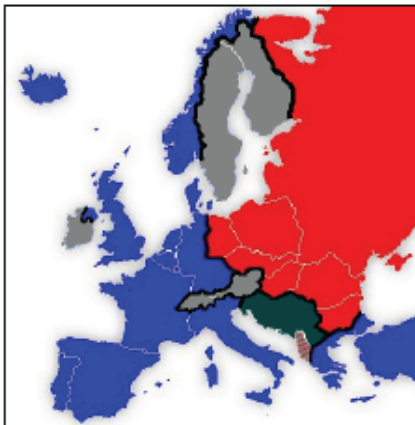
*Joseph Stalin*

Even though the US and USSR had been allies during WWII, there was extreme distrust between the two countries. The US was worried about Soviet **communism** and leader Joseph Stalin's tyrannical rule of his own country. The USSR resented the US delay in entering WWII which resulted in the deaths of tens of millions of Soviets. The events that followed the end of WWII only strengthened this mutual distrust.

Because many countries had been conquered by Germany or Japan, their borders had to be redrawn and governments reestablished. Many of the countries that Germany occupied during WWII returned to the borders and governments they had prior to the war. However, Germany could not return to its prewar state. Germany's government was in turmoil, and the main Allied Powers (US, United Kingdom, France, and USSR) wanted to maintain a presence in Germany while rebuilding occurred. Germany was split into four zones. The USSR controlled East Germany, and the remaining three Allies controlled West Germany. Berlin, the capital of Germany and located deep in East Germany, was also divided into four zones. Again, the Allies controlled West Berlin and the USSR controlled East Berlin.



*Germany post WWII*



With the USSR controlling East Germany, as well as other countries in eastern Europe that had been occupied by Germany during WWII, Europe became a divided continent. The **Eastern Bloc** was led and controlled by the communist USSR. These countries eventually formed their own alliance called the **Warsaw Pact** in 1955. The **Western Bloc** was led and controlled by their own individual democratic governments. They formed an alliance against communism called the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (**NATO**) in 1949, and the US was a part of this alliance. The Western Bloc wanted to contain communism. UK Prime Minister Winston Churchill called this imaginary line that divided the Eastern and Western Blocs the **"Iron Curtain"**.

*The Iron Curtain separated the democratic Western Bloc from the communist Eastern Bloc.*

Japan was also occupied by the Allies while it recovered from the war. However, the USSR did not maintain a presence there. Japan was able to become an independent country again in 1952. Korea, similar to Germany, was divided. The USSR would control North Korea and the Allies would control South Korea until a free election could be held for all of Korea. However, the USSR would refuse to hold a free election. Today Korea is two independent countries. North Korea is communist, and South Korea is democratic.

After the war, many leaders from Germany and Japan were brought to trial for **war crimes**. The Nuremberg Trials were held in Germany from 1945-1949 to prosecute and punish the major war criminals of the European Axis Powers, while the Tokyo War Crimes Trials were held in Japan from 1946-1948 to prosecute and punish the major war criminals of the Far East. Those accused had committed crimes against humanity such as the Holocaust (genocide), slave labor, and



*Defendants at the Nuremberg Trials*

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torturing prisoners of war. They had also violated the rules of war according to the **Geneva Conventions**. Some were sentenced to prison, and some were executed. These trials set the precedent for establishing international law.



*United Nations flag*

Countries around the world wanted to prevent WWII from happening. On October 24, 1945, 51 countries formed the **United Nations (UN)**. Included were five permanent Security Council members: France, the USSR, the UK, the US, and China. These five countries would be responsible for negotiating and maintaining peace worldwide. The UN still exists today, with almost 200 member countries.

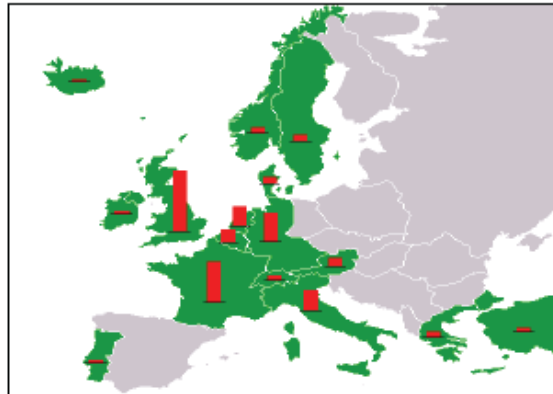


*Flags outside the UN headquarters*



*Destruction of Berlin*

In 1948 the US realized that Europe needed a lot of help to rebuild itself. Many European countries were in debt or out of money because of the expenses of the war. Their citizens also did not have enough food to eat or money to pay extra taxes to rebuild Europe. Because the US had not been a battleground during the war, the US economy was doing well. The US was the richest country in the world. The US realized that if western Europe was not able to rebuild itself quickly, it might fall to communism. The US wanted to help Europe. The **Marshall Plan** was set up by the US to help Europe's economy. Eighteen western European countries received \$13 billion worth of food, machines, and other goods from 1948 until 1951. The USSR rejected any assistance for itself and the eastern European countries it controlled. As a result, the economies of western European countries improved, while eastern European countries continued to struggle.



*European countries that received aid through the Marshall Plan.*