

Background Essay: The Marshall Plan and the Cold War



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The Cold War was fought with words and threats rather than violent action. The two nations at war were the United States and the Soviet Union.

Although the two superpowers had worked as allies to defeat Germany during World War II, tensions between them grew after the war. Feelings of mistrust and resentment began to form as early as the 1945 Potsdam Conference, where Harry S. Truman and Soviet leader Joseph Stalin met. Stalin was interested in expanding Russia's power into Eastern Europe, and the U.S. feared that Russia was planning to take over the world and spread the political idea of Communism.

Truman's response to the Soviet Union's sphere of influence and current conditions of war-torn Europe would become known as the Truman Doctrine. This doctrine proposed to give aid to countries that were suffering from the aftermath of World War II and threatened by Soviet oppression. The U.S. was especially concerned about Greece and Turkey.

Due to the slow progress of Europe's economic development following WWII, Truman devised another plan to offer aid called the Marshall Plan. The plan was named after Secretary of State George Marshall due to Truman's respect for his military achievements. Truman hoped that by enacting the Marshall Plan two main goals would be accomplished. These goals were:

- 1.) It would lead to the recovery of production abroad, which was essential both to a vigorous democracy and to a peace founded on democracy and freedom, and which, in the eyes of the United States, the Soviet Union had thus far prevented.
- 2.) It would support world trade, from which U.S. businessmen, farmers, and workers could benefit.

Truman also stressed the humanitarian intent behind aiding Europe's war-torn countries. The Marshall Plan was estimated to cost the United States approximately \$22 billion, but was later scaled down to cost \$13 billion after the plan was put into action. Secretary of State George Marshall presented the plan at Harvard University in June 1947, and it was met with acceptance by military leaders and political advisers.



Although the idea behind developing the Marshall Plan had good intentions of offering aid to people in postwar Europe, however, some people did not receive the Marshall Plan with the same perception as Harry S. Truman. As you read the following documents you will see multiple accounts of perspectives of the Marshall Plan. Take into account what you already know about the Cold War and the countries involved and apply that information to help you answer the following.

Document-Based Question: Did the Marshall Plan make the Cold War colder?

[Marshall Plan Map](#)

Cold War Timeline:

February 4th - 11th 1945	Yalta Conference	Meeting between Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin to decide what would happen at the end of the war. Topics discussed included -Partitioning of Germany, Fate of Poland, The United Nations, German reparations.
May 8th 1945	V E Day	Victory in Europe as Germany surrenders to the Russian army .
July 17th - August 2nd 1945	Potsdam Conference	The Potsdam Conference formally divided Germany and Austria into four zones. It was also agreed that the German capital Berlin would be divided into four zones. The Russian Polish border was determined and Korea was to be divided into Soviet and American zones.
August 6th 1945	Hiroshima	The United States dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima
August 8th 1945	Nagasaki	The United States dropped the second atomic bomb on Nagasaki.
August 14th 1945	V J Day	The Japanese surrendered bringing World War Two to an end.
September 2nd 1945	Vietnam Independence	Ho Chi Minh proclaimed Vietnam an independent republic.
March 5th 1946	Churchill's Iron Curtain Speech	Churchill delivers his 'Sinews of Peace' speech which contain the famous phrase "an iron curtain has descended on Europe."
March 12th 1947	Truman Doctrine	President Truman promised to help any country facing a Communist takeover
June 5th 1947	Marshall Plan	This was a program of economic aid offered by the United States to any European country. The plan was rejected outright by Stalin and any Eastern Bloc country considering accepting aid was reprimanded severely. Consequently the aid was only given to Western European Countries.
September 1947	Cominform	The USSR set up Cominform (Communist Information Bureau) which was the Information Bureau of the Communist and Workers' Parties responsible for the creation of the Eastern bloc.
June 1948	Formation of West Germany	The French, USA and UK partitions of Germany were merged to form West Germany.
June 24th 1948	Berlin Blockade	Russia's response to the merger of the French, USA and UK partitions of Berlin was to cut all road and rail links to that sector. This meant that those living in Western Berlin had no access to food supplies and faced starvation. Food was brought to Western Berliners by US and UK airplanes, an exercise known as the
May 1949	End of Berlin Blockade	Russia ended the blockade of Berlin.
April 4th 1949	NATO formed	The North Atlantic Treaty Organization formed with member states Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and the United States