The Cold War (1945–1991)

The Cold War Unfolds

The Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union cast a shadow over the world for more than 40 years.

The Industrialized Democracies

As a result of government policies and international cooperation, the people of the industrialized democracies—the United States and Canada, Western Europe, and Japan—have enjoyed freedom and prosperity.

Communism Spreads in East Asia

In the late 1940s, communism made advances in East Asia.

War in Southeast Asia

Southeast Asian nations sought independence but also found divisive conflicts in the decades after World War II.

The End of the Cold War

After years of Communist rule, the Soviet Union collapsed and was replaced by Russia and other independent republics. After years of Soviet domination, the countries of Eastern Europe were free of Russian control, facing new and sometimes difficult challenges.

Summary

For almost a half century after World War II, the Cold War loomed over Europe—pitting the West, led by the United States, against the Soviet Union. Despite the constant threat, Western Europeans and their North American allies enjoyed their most rapid and sustained economic growth since the Industrial Revolution. The Soviet Union and its Eastern European satellites also made efforts to rebuild after the war but were held back by Stalin's repressive policies. In the 1980s, efforts at major reform unleashed forces that brought the collapse of communism and an end to the Soviet Union.