BACKGROUND OF THE COLD WAR

When World War II ended, Hitler was defeated and everyone looked toward peace. Peace agreements were signed and Europe thought things would get better. With the defeat of Hitler, however, the Soviet Union and the United States could no longer ignore the basic differences in their philosophies and ideas. The post World War II period became known as the Cold War—a battle between communist Soviet Union and capitalist United States. A full-scale battle between the two countries never took place but some smaller related wars did.

1. What was the Cold War? _____________________________________________________________

THE IRON CURTAIN

In February 1945, most people knew that World War II would soon end in the Allies favor. The Allied leaders met in the Soviet resort town of Yalta to plan the postwar world. Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin wanted a buffer zone to protect his country from invasions from the west. Twice in the previous 30 years his country had been invaded. Stalin demanded a pro-Soviet regime in Poland, which bordered the Soviet Union on the west, and the U.S. and Britain agreed. And they promised that all European countries would free and fair elections.

Stalin, however, quickly broke that promise. With its military might, the Soviet Union won control over several Eastern European nations, including not only Poland, but also Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, Albania, and Czechoslovakia. Stalin installed repressive, Communist government in each country and controlled them from Moscow.

2. How did Stalin break his promises at the Yalta Conference? ____________________________

This division of Europe into East and west was described by former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill in 1946.

“From Stetting in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across Eastern Europe...All these famous cities and the populations around them lie in the Soviet sphere and all are subject in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and increasing measure of control from Moscow.”
Churchill’s phrase “iron curtain” came to represent the imaginary European division between a mostly
democratic Western Europe and a Communist Eastern Europe. From behind the iron curtain, Stalin termed
Churchill’s words “a call to war.”

3. What is the Iron Curtain? ____________________________________________________________

THE DIVISION OF GERMANY

At Yalta, the three leaders also decided to divide Germany into four “temporary” zones of occupation:
American, British, French, and Soviet. Because of his need for a buffer between his country and the capitalist west, Stalin never allowed the country to be reunited and the Soviet sector of Germany became another satellite nation, East Germany.

4. Why was Germany split into two countries at the Yalta Conference? _______________________

The German capital, Berlin located within East Germany, was also divided. In 1948, East German officials tried to cut West European support to the western half of Berlin with a blockade. Led by the United States, western forces began an airlift of supplies to support the city. The Berlin airlift lasted for almost 18 months before the East Germans lifted the blockade.

5. Why did American forces fly supplies into West Berlin in 1948? __________________________

The Berlin Wall

In 1961, to keep its citizens from fleeing, East Germany built a fortified wall along the dividing line. The Berlin Wall became a concrete symbol of the division of the Cold War. People trying to climb it to reach freedom in the West were shot on sight.

6. What was the Berlin Wall? ____________________________

THE MARSHALL PLAN

Much of Western Europe lay in ruins after the war. Europe’s problems include record-breaking cold and snow, postwar unemployment, lack of food, and economic instability. In June 1947, US Secretary of State George Marshall proposed that America give aid to any European country that needed it. His assistance program, called the Marshall Plan would provide food, machines and other materials. As Congress debated the $12.5 billion program, in February 1948, the Communists seized power in Czechoslovakia increasing US fears that communism would spread to the rest of Europe. Congress immediately approved the Marshall Plan. The plan achieved spectacular success in western European nations such as Great Britain and France.
7. What was the purpose of the Marshall Plan? 

US POLICY OF CONTAINMENT

Soviet-American relations continued to worsen in 1946 and 1947. An increasingly worried United States sought to offset the growing Soviet threat in Eastern Europe. President Truman declared that it was time to stop “babying the Soviets.” He adopted a foreign policy called containment. The idea of containment was to keep communism from spreading into other countries BUT the United States decided to not attack nations where communism already existed. The US used containment policies to create new alliances and help weak countries resist Soviet advances.

8. What is the United States policy of containment?

GREECE/TURKEY AND THE TRUMAN DOCTRINE

With the policy of containment, the United States wanted to help weaker nations make sure they could fight communist advances.

In a speech asking Congress for foreign aid for Turkey and Greece, President Truman talked about the differences between communism and capitalism.

One way of life is based upon the will of the majority and is distinguished by free institution...free elections...and freedom from political oppression. The second way of life is based upon the will of a minority forcibly imposed upon the majority. It relies upon terror and oppression...

I believe it must be the policy of the United States to support free people who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.

Truman’s support for countries that rejected communism was called the Truman Doctrine. It caused great controversy. Some opponents objected to Americans interference in other nations’ affairs. Others argued that the United States lacked the money and army to carry on a global crusade against communism. Still others pointed out that some US support would go to dictators, Congress, however immediately authorized over $400 million in aid to Turkey and Greece.
9. What is the purpose of the Truman Doctrine?

NATO AND THE WARSAW PACT

The Berlin blockade heightened Western Europe’s fears of Soviet aggression. In 1949, ten Western European nations joined with the United States and Canada to form a defensive military alliance. This alliance was called the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). These nations promised to meet an attack on any NATO member with armed force. For the United States, NATO membership marked the country’s first peacetime military commitment.

The Soviet Union viewed NATO as a threat. In response, the Soviets developed an alliance system in 1955 as part of their own containment policy. It was known as the Warsaw pact. This alliance included the Soviet Union, Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Albania.

Both NATO and the Warsaw Pact were designed to be defense agreements. Their goals were very different than the United Nations. The UN was established as a peace keeping force, not a defense force.

10. What were the goals of NATO and the Warsaw Pact?

11. How were they different from the goals of the United Nations?