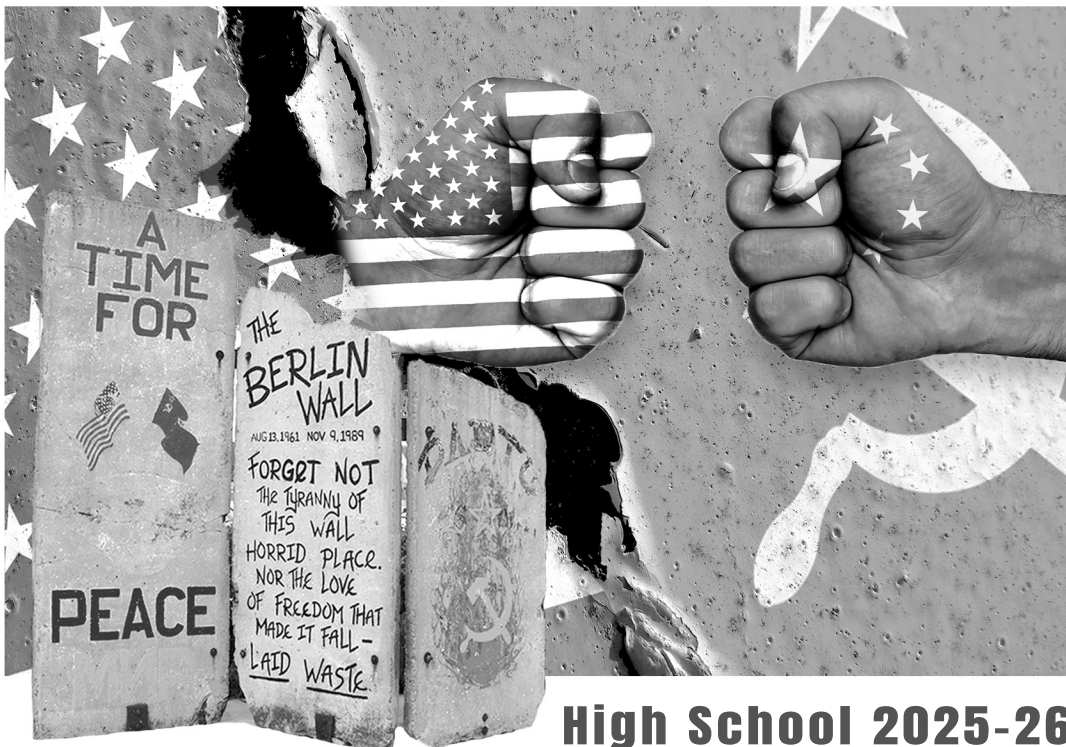




Social Studies **NOTES**



High School 2025-26

By Beth Bryant & Linda Tarrant

The Global Cold War and Its Fallout: From Yalta to Malta

UIL Social Studies Notes

2025-2026

TOPIC: The Global Cold War and Its Fallout: From Yalta to Malta

Written by
Hexco Academic

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Social Studies Notes 2025-2026

BACKGROUND

The Cold War was a global conflict that lasted from the end of World War II in 1945 until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. It was not fought on traditional battlefields but through threats, propaganda, proxy wars, espionage, and competition for global influence. At the heart of the Cold War was a deep ideological divide: the United States supported capitalism and democracy, while the Soviet Union promoted communism and a centrally planned economy.

The Cold War began in the aftermath of WWII. Although the U.S. and the Soviet Union had been allies against Nazi Germany, their alliance fell apart as both sides tried to shape the postwar world according to their own values. At the Yalta Conference, the three leaders of the Allied powers, Franklin D. Roosevelt (U.S.), Winston Churchill (United Kingdom), and Joseph Stalin (Soviet Union), gathered to discuss plans for the postwar world. Germany would be divided into four occupation zones (controlled by the U.S., UK, Soviet Union, and France) after its defeat. The Soviet Union agreed to join the war against Japan after Germany surrendered, and Stalin promised to allow free elections in Eastern Europe (a promise that was later broken). They also agreed to form the United Nations. The meeting was meant to ensure peace following WWII, but disagreements laid the groundwork for the Cold War.

By 1947, the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan made the U.S. position clear: it would support nations threatened by communism and help rebuild Europe to prevent the spread of Soviet influence. In response, the Soviet Union tightened its grip on Eastern Europe, and the Cold War entered full force.

Throughout the Cold War, the two superpowers rarely fought each other directly. Instead, they supported opposing sides in regional conflicts known as proxy wars. These included the Korean War (1950-1953), the Vietnam War (1955-1975), and the Soviet-Afghan War (1979-1989). In each case, the U.S. and Soviet Union provided weapons, funding, or troops to support allies who represented their respective ideologies. CIA-backed coups helped overthrow elected leaders and install pro-Western governments in places like Iran (1953) and Guatemala (1954). Similar efforts occurred in Chile (1973), where the U.S. supported the military ousting of socialist President Salvador Allende. These covert actions were part of the broader containment strategy, aimed at stopping communism from spreading around the world, often at the cost of democratic institutions.

The arms race was another major feature of the Cold War. Both nations stockpiled nuclear weapons in a competition for superiority, leading to the policy of Mutually Assured Destruction (M.A.D.). The Cuban missile crisis in 1962 brought the world to the brink of nuclear war and became a turning point that led to some efforts at arms control, such as the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT).

In the 1970s, a period known as détente temporarily eased tensions. However, conflicts in the 1980s, especially in Afghanistan and Eastern Europe, revived Cold War hostilities. The rise of reform-minded Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in the mid-1980s signaled the beginning of the end. His policies of glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring) aimed to modernize the Soviet system but also exposed its deep flaws. For nearly 30 years, the Berlin Wall stood as a physical reminder of the "Iron Curtain" that separated the Eastern bloc from the Western world. The wall finally fell in 1989, weakening Soviet control and becoming a key moment in the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe. Just weeks after the fall of the Berlin Wall, President George H.W. Bush and Gorbachev met off the coast of Malta. No formal treaty was signed, but both sides acknowledged the Cold War was ending. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 led to 15 independent nations. Many Eastern European nations moved toward democracy and capitalism, NATO expanded eastward, and the U.S. emerged as the lone superpower.

June 5, 1947	Marshall Plan offers U.S. aid to European countries.
Sept. 1947	Soviet Union establishes Cominform (Information Bureau of the Communist and Workers' Parties).
June 1948	A communist government is organized in Czechoslovakia.
June 24, 1948	Berlin blockade begins - Soviet Union blocks access to West Berlin.
April 4, 1949	NATO is formed with 12 members.
May 12, 1949	Berlin blockade ends.
May 23, 1949	France, the UK, and U.S. form the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany).
Aug. 29, 1949	Soviet Union drops its first atomic bomb.
Oct. 1, 1949	Mao Zedong declares creation of the People's Republic of China (PRC).
Oct. 7, 1949	Soviet Union forms the German Democratic Republic (East Germany).
1950s	
June 25, 1950	Korean War begins.
Jan. 20, 1953	Dwight D. Eisenhower is inaugurated as U.S. president.
March 5, 1953	Stalin dies, and Nikita Khrushchev assumes power.
July 27, 1953	Korean War ends with ceasefire declared near the 38 th parallel.
July 1954	Geneva Accords end the First Indochina War.
May 14, 1955	Warsaw Pact is formed.
Oct.-Nov. 1956	The Hungarian Uprising is suppressed by the Soviet Union.
Oct. 30, 1956	Suez Crisis occurs.
Oct. 4, 1957	Soviet Union launches Sputnik 1, starting the Space Race.
Nov. 3, 1957	Soviet Union launches Sputnik 2 carrying Laika, a dog.
March 27, 1958	Khrushchev becomes Soviet Union prime minister and Communist Party chief.
1960s	
May 1, 1960	U.S. U-2 spy plane is shot down by Soviet Union in Soviet airspace.
Jan. 20, 1961	John F. Kennedy is inaugurated as U.S. president.
April 12, 1961	Yuri Gagarin, a Russian astronaut, becomes first man to travel to space.
April 17, 1961	Bay of Pigs invasion begins.
Aug. 13, 1961	Berlin Wall construction begins between East and West Germany.

MARXISM, SOCIALISM, & COMMUNISM

Background

The idea of a society founded on a social commonwealth can be traced back to ancient Greece and later to the Christian Church, which furthered support of the concept of shared property. Contemporary communism, as we have come to know it, was born in the 19th century when Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels of Germany further defined the meaning of the word and wrote about the ideal principles of communism in a pamphlet called *The Communist Manifesto*.

According to Marxian theory, class struggle was evident throughout history and illustrated the perils of capitalism. Marx died before any communist countries were established. Vladimir Lenin, key founder of the Soviet Union, drew on Marxian theory to create Soviet Marxism in the early 20th century.

The story, which would shape modern history, began in 1917 when Lenin and the Bolshevik Party rose to power after seizing the window of opportunity created by the October Revolution. From that moment, Russia ceased to be a monarchy and became a country that reflected the ideology of Marx, Engels, and Lenin. Although communism was not limited to Europe, the struggle for dominance was more intense on this continent, as the Soviet bloc struggled to gain the advantage in the fight against the West and democracy.

By the end of the 20th century, Gorbachev, a reformist, led the Soviet Union away from Leninist-based development toward social democracy. Under these reforms, along with rising levels of ethnic nationalism, the Soviet Union dissolved, and most of the nations that were affected abandoned their Marxist-Leninist systems for more capitalist economies.

The Soviet Union split up in 1991, and the country organized itself as a semi-presidential republic where the president was considered the head of state. Currently, the Russian Federation is a democratic state represented by multiple parties.

What is Marxism?

Karl Marx (1818-1883) was a German philosopher and economist. He is best known as the "Father of Communism" and author of *The Communist Manifesto*, a pamphlet written with Friedrich Engels that served as a key element of the socialist movement, and *Das Kapital*, a book about socialism.

Marxism is the method of socialism in which the foremost feature is public ownership of the means of production, its distribution, and its system of exchange. Under capitalism, the working class, or "the people," own only their capacity to work; they have the ability only to sell their own labor. According to Marx, a class designation is defined by the relations of its participants to the means of production. He proclaimed that history shows a timeline of class struggles, wars, and revolutions. Under capitalism, the workers, in order to support their families, is paid a paltry minimum wage or salary. The worker is disaffected because he has no control over the labor or product that he produces. The capitalists sell the products produced by the workers at a proportional value, as related to the labor involved. Surplus value is the difference between what the worker is paid and the price for which the product is sold.

An increasing impoverishment of the workers occurs as the result of economic recessions. These recessions result because the working class is unable to buy the product of their labors and because the ruling capitalists do not consume all of the surplus value. A proletarian or socialist revolution must occur, according to Marx, where the *state* (the means by which the ruling class forcibly upholds rule over the other classes) is a dictatorship over the workers. Communism evolves from socialism out of this progression: the socialist slogan is "From each according to his ability, to each according to his work." The communist slogan varies thusly: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs."

He defends the use of surveillance flights by emphasizing that the U.S. sought to avoid surprise attacks and keep global peace. He points out that the U.S. had repeatedly called for open skies and arms control, but the Soviet Union had rejected these efforts. He also makes clear that such flights were not intended for aggressive action but for preserving peace and preventing war through informed decision-making.

Key Quote:

- "The necessity for such activities as measures for legitimate national defense is enhanced by the excessive secrecy practiced by the Soviet Union in contrast to the free world." - U.S. State Department

Farewell Address by Dwight Eisenhower (1961)

Summary/Context: President Dwight D. Eisenhower addresses Americans as he prepares to leave office. He thanks them for their trust and wishes for peace and prosperity for the future. He emphasizes that U.S. leadership depends not only on military and economic strength but on using that power to promote global peace and human progress. He reminds citizens that their core mission is to preserve peace, advance human achievement, and uphold liberty, dignity, and integrity. He also warns that arrogance or complacency could undermine these ideals.

Eisenhower points out a struggle against a hostile, atheistic ideology and calls for sacrifices rather than dramatic, one-time fixes. He encourages balanced decisions across national priorities: economy, defense, public welfare, and future needs. He highlights the unprecedented size of the U.S. military-industrial complex and warns that its influence has entered into all levels of society and government. He stresses that citizens must remain vigilant to prevent this complex from threatening democratic liberties. He also acknowledges the growing dominance of government-funded scientific research, noting how universities and labs increasingly depend on federal contracts. He warns that this could lead to policy becoming captive to technological elites.

He urges Americans not to sacrifice future generations by exploiting resources. He appeals for a global community built on mutual trust and equity. He admits his own disappointment that lasting peace is not yet visible, even as the U.S. avoids war. Eisenhower vows to continue to support the nation's progress as a private citizen. He ends with a hopeful prayer that all nations achieve peace with justice, guided by faith, humility, and devotion to principle.

Key Quotes:

- "The prospect of domination of the nation's scholars by Federal employment, project allocations, and the power of money is ever present and is gravely to be regarded."
- "You and I—my fellow citizens—need to be strong in our faith that all nations, under God, will reach the goal of peace with justice. May we be ever unswerving in devotion to principle, confident but humble with power, diligent in pursuit of the Nation's great goals."

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