

T H E C O L D W A R

A period of geopolitical tension between the **USA** and the **USSR** (the two postwar **superpowers**), along with their respective allies

Lasted **from 1947 to 1991**

- ▶ It was called the '**Cold War**' because there was no large-scale fighting between the two superpowers.
- ▶ The **threat of mutual destruction by nuclear weapons** meant that they avoided direct confrontation.
- ▶ Instead they expressed their **struggle for dominance** by indirect means.



ORIGINS

▶ In **1945** the **Second World War** ended with the **USSR** in control of Eastern and Central Europe. The Western Allies (USA, Britain and France) controlled most of Western Europe.

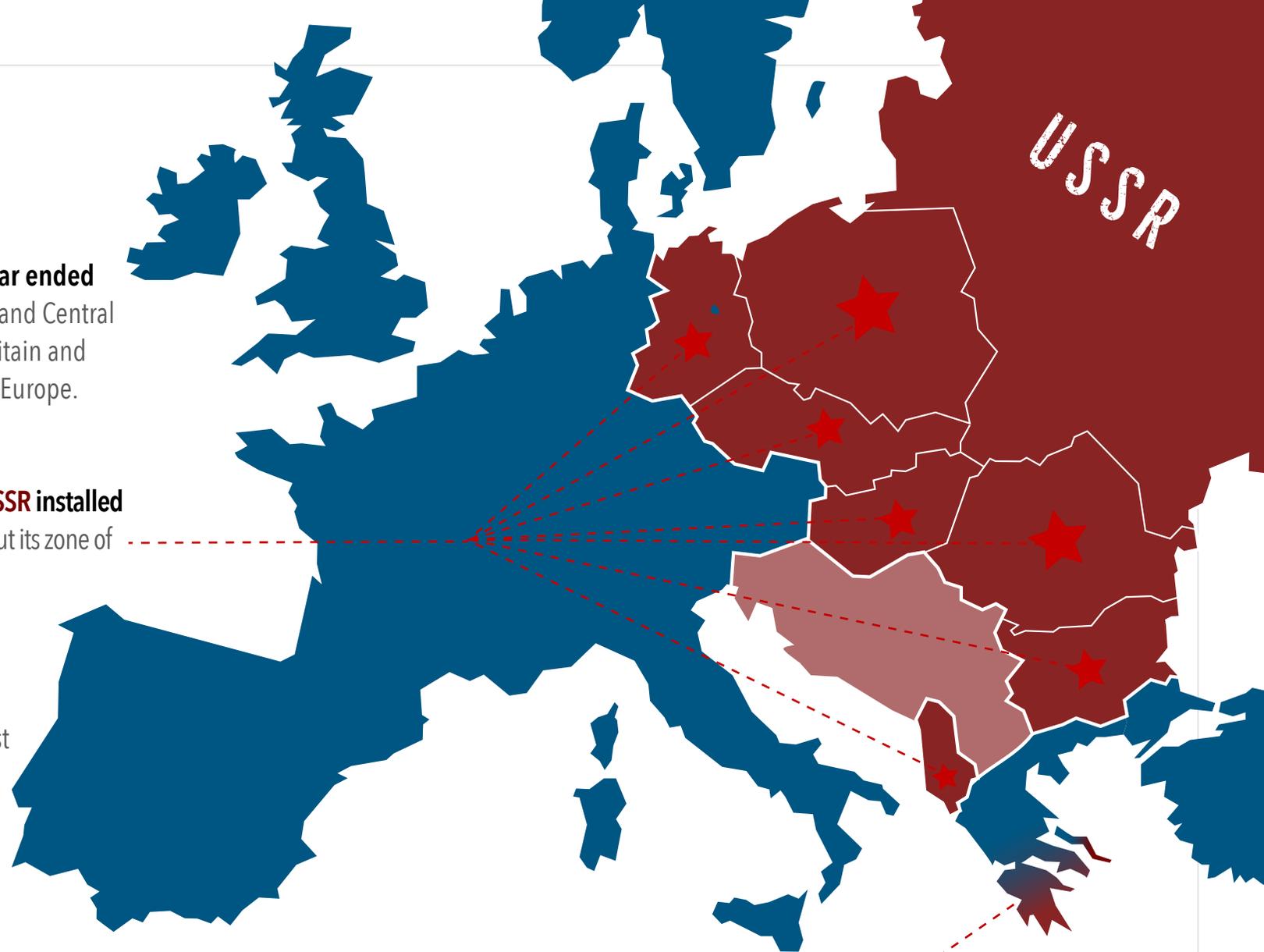
▶ Between **1945 and 1948** the **USSR** installed **Communist governments** throughout its zone of control, using force where necessary.

▶ In **Yugoslavia** Tito's partisans separately established a Communist state in 1945. In **1948** **Yugoslavia** entered into conflict with the **USSR**, but remained Communist.

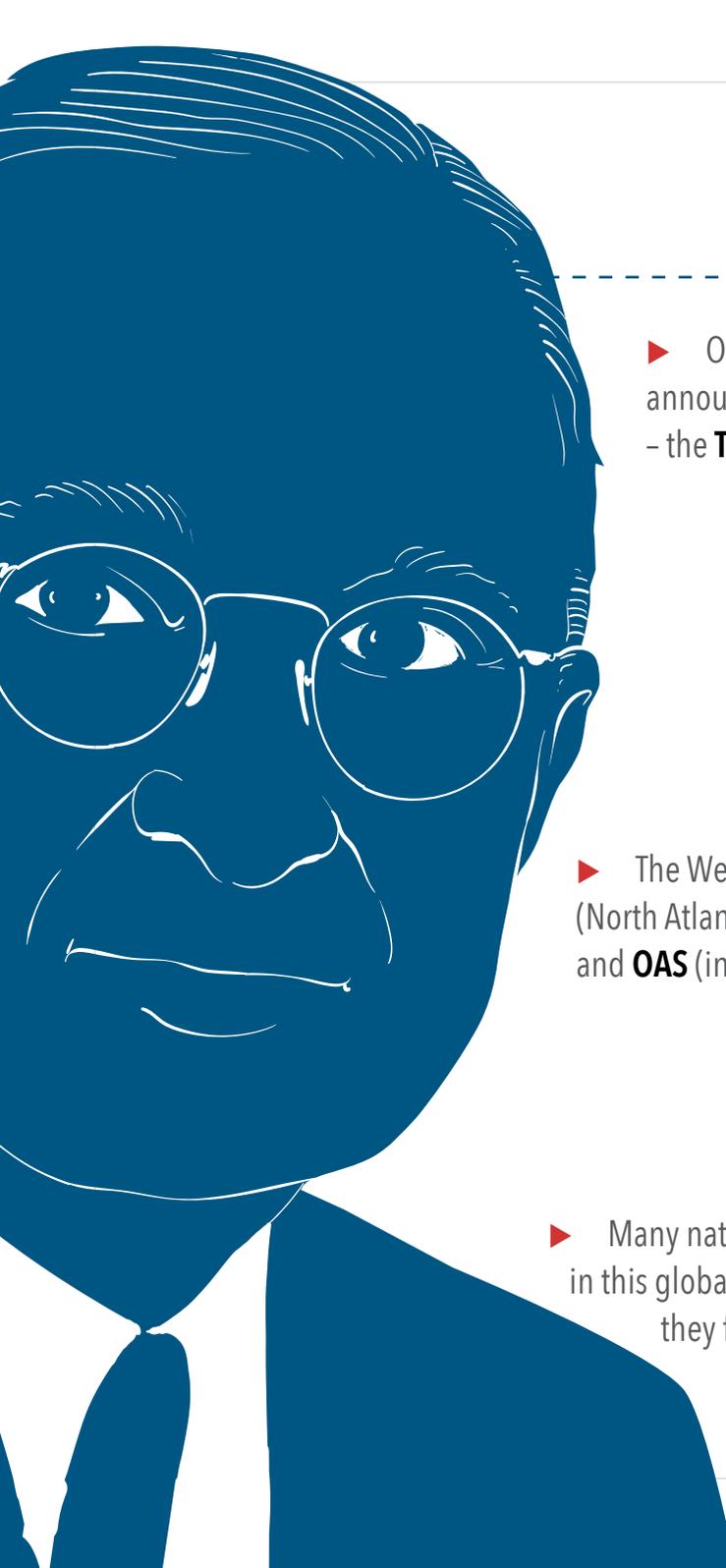
▶ On **5 March 1946** **Winston Churchill** warned the world that an '**Iron Curtain**' was drawing across Europe, dividing the continent in two hostile parts.

▶ During the **Greek Civil War (1944-49)**, Communist partisans threatened to topple the Western-backed government.

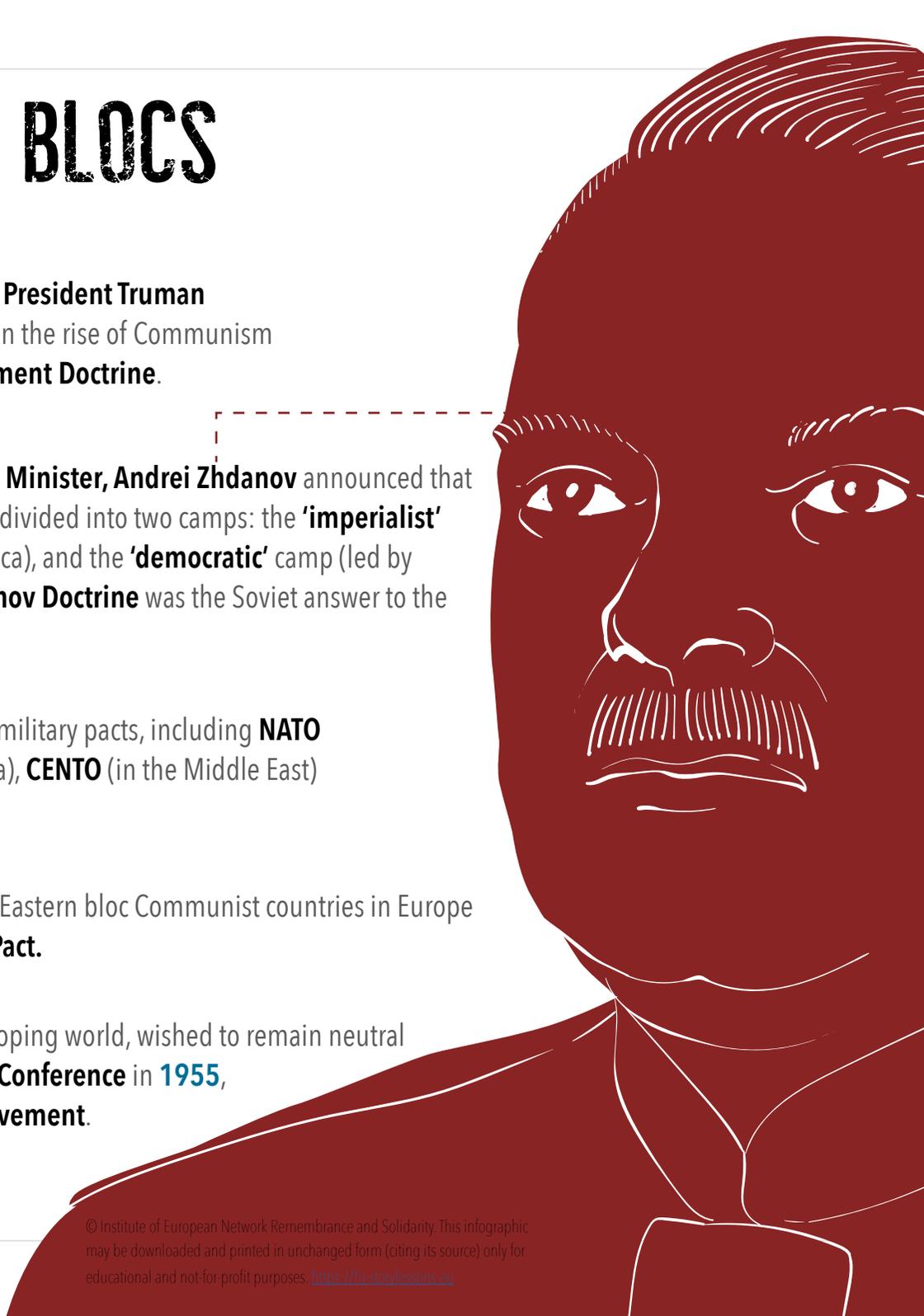
▶ The USA decided to prop up the Greek government with financial aid.



POWER BLOCS



▶ On **12 March 1947** American President Truman announced a new doctrine to contain the rise of Communism – the **Truman Doctrine** or **Containment Doctrine**.



▶ Stalin's Culture Minister, **Andrei Zhdanov** announced that the whole world was divided into two camps: the '**imperialist**' powers (led by America), and the '**democratic**' camp (led by the USSR). The **Zhdanov Doctrine** was the Soviet answer to the **Truman Doctrine**.

▶ The Western powers formed several military pacts, including **NATO** (North Atlantic), **SEATO** (in South East Asia), **CENTO** (in the Middle East) and **OAS** (in the Americas).

▶ In response, the Eastern bloc Communist countries in Europe signed the **Warsaw Pact**.

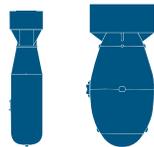
▶ Many nations, particularly in the developing world, wished to remain neutral in this global conflict. After the **Bandung Conference** in **1955**, they formed the **Non-Aligned Movement**.

THE NUCLEAR THREAT

▶ On **16 July 1945** the world's **first nuclear bomb** is tested in the USA. Detonated the day before the Potsdam Conference begins, it brings a new factor to international diplomacy.

▶ **The atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (6 and 8 August 1945)**

heralds the end of the war with Japan. The scale of the destruction shocks the world.



▶ American domination of nuclear technology does not last long. **The USSR tests its own bomb on 29 August 1949.**

▶ **A nuclear arms race** begins. The first thermonuclear bombs (**1952**) are followed by intercontinental ballistic missiles (**1957**).

▶ The threat of **Mutually Assured Destruction** – and indeed total, global annihilation – prevents either side from using their nuclear weapons.

16 July 1945

6 and 8 August 1945

29 August 1949

1952

1957

DIRECT CONFRONTATION

► **The Berlin Airlift, June 1948 - May 1949:**

Deep in the Soviet Zone of Germany, Berlin nevertheless has sectors administered by the Western powers. When Soviet troops blockade Berlin, the British and Americans supply the city by air for almost a year.

► **Berlin Crisis, 1961:**

Alarmed at the flood of East Germans escaping to the West through Berlin, USSR First Secretary Khrushchev demands the West withdraws troops from Berlin. US President Kennedy responds with a promise to defend West Berlin at all costs. In the end, the Communist authorities build a wall to isolate West Berlin from the rest of East Germany.

► **Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962:**

The USSR secretly begins transporting nuclear missiles to Cuba. Kennedy threatens all-out war unless the missiles are removed. Khrushchev backs down. In return, Kennedy also removes US missiles from Turkey.

► **Able Archer, 1983:**

US military exercises in Europe temporarily convince Soviet leaders that an attack might be imminent.

1948 - 1949

1961

1962

1983

PROXY WARS

▶ To avoid the possibility of nuclear escalation, the superpowers preferred to confront one another **through indirect means.**

▶ **Proxy wars** were civil or regional wars where the superpowers supplied and financed opposite sides.

▶ **Superpower involvement** prolonged these small conflicts, and made them much larger and more destructive.

▶ The most prominent examples are:

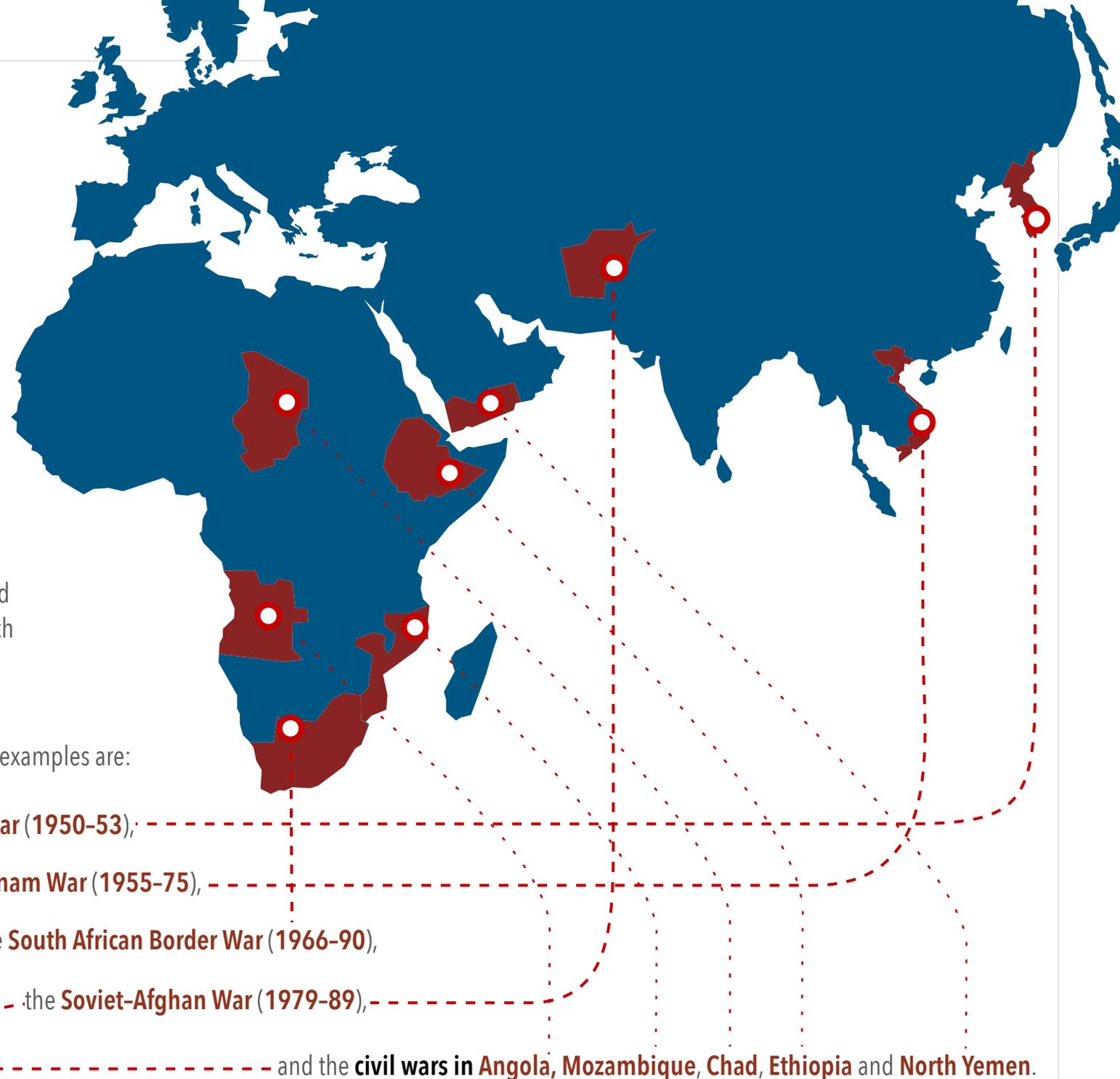
the **Korean War (1950-53),**

the **Vietnam War (1955-75),**

the **South African Border War (1966-90),**

the **Soviet-Afghan War (1979-89),**

and the **civil wars in Angola, Mozambique, Chad, Ethiopia and North Yemen.**



INTERNAL TENSIONS

WEST

- ▶ **Minor rifts** between allies. E.g. In **1966** France partially withdraws from NATO .
- ▶ **Popular uprisings** against US hegemony in the Philippines (**1945-54**), Cuba (**1958**) and several countries in Latin America (**1950s-1990s**). Domestic terrorist campaigns in Western Europe.
- ▶ Internal security in the USA leads to a series of **witch hunts** during the **Red Scare** of the **1950s**, though freedom of speech eventually wins out.
- ▶ **Student protests** in the West, particularly in the late **1960s**.

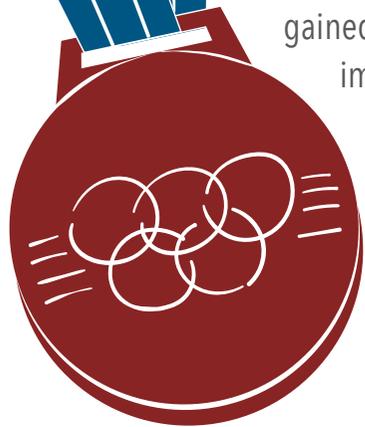
EAST

- ▶ **Major rifts** in the Communist bloc: splits develop with **Yugoslavia (1948)**, **China (1960)** and **Albania (1961)**.
- ▶ **Popular uprisings** in Central and Eastern Europe, including **East Germany (1953)**, **Hungary (1956)**, **Czechoslovakia (1968)** and the Solidarity movement in **Poland (1980s)** and previous protests in **Poland (1956, 1968, 1970 and 1976)** .
- ▶ Internal security (party apparatus) produces **secret police forces**, such as the Soviet **NKVD/KGB**, to keep tabs on the entire population. Interrogation of political prisoners becomes commonplace, as does torture, execution and imprisonment in the forced-labour camps' system in USSR and in some other countries of the Soviet bloc.
- ▶ **Dissident movements** and sporadic student protests spread throughout the East.

CULTURE WARS

▶ In place of armed conflict, the superpowers found **other ways to prove that their system was superior.**

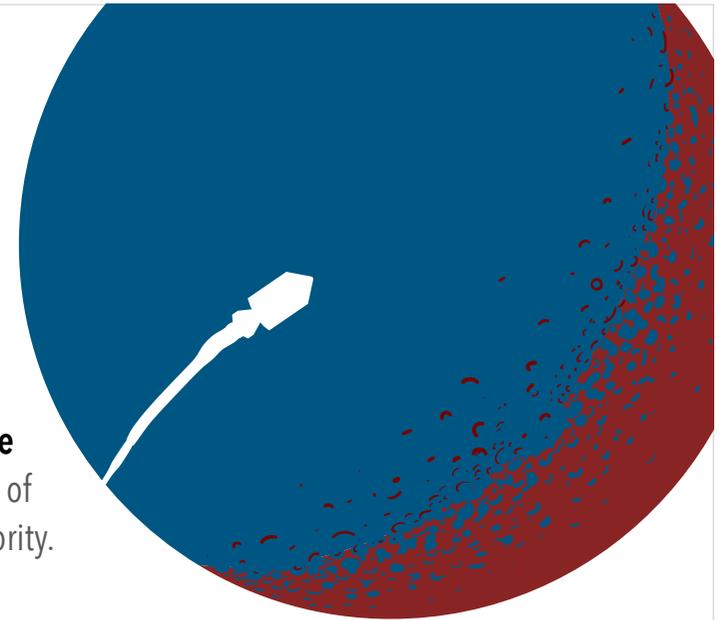
▶ **Sporting events**, particularly the Olympics, gained a disproportionate importance.



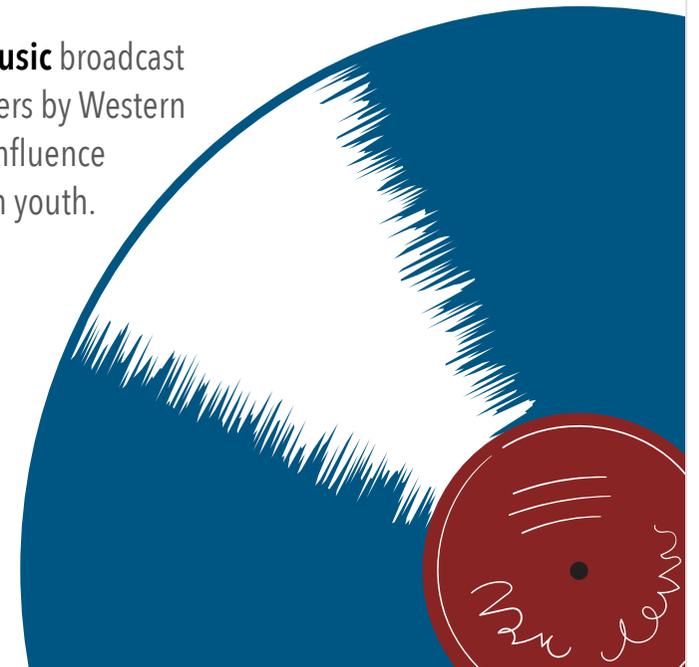
▶ **Consumer culture** and variety became a strong weapon for the West.



▶ The **space race** became a measure of technical superiority.



▶ **Pop music** broadcast across borders by Western radio won influence over Eastern youth.



THE END OF THE COLD WAR

- ▶ By the **1980s** the USSR was no longer able to compete economically with the USA. The establishment of the Independent and Self-Governing Trade Union 'Solidarity' in Poland became the most visible manifestation of the Eastern bloc's growing dissatisfaction with Communist rule.
- ▶ In **1986** General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union **Mikhail Gorbachev** announced policies of *perestroika* (economic reconstruction), and *glasnost* (openness and greater freedom of speech).
- ▶ In **April 1989** Hungary opened its border with Austria. This **first break in the Iron Curtain** started a chain reaction.
- ▶ Under the pressure of opposition in Poland partially free democratic elections took place in **June 1989**. This resulted in the establishment of the **first non-Communist government in the Soviet bloc**.
- ▶ These first changes led to the **fall of the Berlin Wall** that **November**.
- ▶ In **1990** Lithuania became the **first of 14 Soviet Republics to break away** from the Union.
- ▶ On **26 December 1991** the Soviet Union dissolved itself. **The Cold War finally came to an end.**

QUESTIONS

Both power blocs experienced internal tensions during the Cold War. Although they followed similar patterns, they played themselves out in two very different societies.

- ▶ What were the political differences between the Eastern bloc and the Western one?
- ▶ What are the differences between the countries within their blocs?
- ▶ Why were tensions so much worse in the East than in the West?
- ▶ And what qualities did the Western bloc have that allowed it to survive, when the Eastern one ultimately failed?



THE COLD WAR



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<https://enrs.eu/>

Infographics prepared for the project
**Hi-story lessons. Teaching & learning
about 20th-century European history**

The mission of the **Hi-story lessons'** project is to show European history of the 20th-century from different perspectives. Underlining the need to teach history with an awareness that neighbouring countries may possibly have a different viewpoint on the same historical fact is the project's main aim.

With **Hi-story lessons** we strive to challenge how teachers and their students see the history of Europe – its diversity and complexity at times even with contrary opinions.

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