



LIFE·PAC®

History & Geography



Alpha Omega Publications®

HISTORY & GEOGRAPHY 1009 THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

CONTENTS

I. THE COLD WAR	2
Origins of the Cold War	2
Course of the Cold War	6
End of the Cold War	14
II. THE WORLD TODAY	19
North America	23
Central America	24
The Caribbean	25
South America	28
Europe	32
Africa	38
Asia	43
Australia	49

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THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

The contemporary world is the world in which we live. Presenting current events in historical terms is a challenge. It is a challenge because this history is still being made. This LIFE PAC® will present events from World War II until the present day. You will see how our world has been shaped by these events. You will be studying events through which your parents and grandparents lived.

In the first section, you will study the **Cold War** between the United States and the Soviet Union. You will see how the developing conflict shaped post-war

Europe. You will learn how the vast power and nuclear arsenals of the two super-powers kept them from fighting a direct war. You will study the crises and local wars that marked the conflict between them. You will learn how the conflict ended with the fall of the Soviet Union.

In the second section, you will study the geography and current political status of the nations of the world. In a continent-by-continent survey, you will see how the world has changed during the Cold War and how it has remained the same.

OBJECTIVES

Read these objectives. The objectives tell you what you will be able to do when you have successfully completed this LIFE PAC.

When you have finished this LIFE PAC, you should be able to:

1. Describe the nature of the Cold War.
2. Name the major events of the Cold War.
3. Understand the basic structure of the United Nations.
4. Describe the course of the Korean and Vietnam Wars.
5. Describe the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe and the collapse of the Soviet Union.
6. Describe the basic geography of the six inhabited continents.
7. Name the major mountains, rivers, lakes, and deserts of the six inhabited continents.
8. Recognize the names and locations of the countries of the world.
9. Have a basic understanding of the current status of the nations of the world.

Survey the LIFE PAC. Ask yourself some questions about this study. Write your questions here.

THE COLD WAR

Introduction. The Cold War is the name given to the period that began at the end of World War II and ended with the collapse of Soviet power. During this time, the two **superpowers**, the United States and the Soviet Union, did not fight an actual "hot" war with each other. Instead this war was fought in a series of confrontations and local wars throughout the world. The end of this period is so recent that it is not yet

clearly defined. This LIFEPAAC dates the end of the Cold War in 1991 when Communism ended in the Soviet Union, and the country was divided into new countries. Another possible date would be 1989, when Communism collapsed in Eastern Europe, and the **Berlin Wall** was dismantled. In either case, the Cold War ended with a victory for the United States.

SECTION OBJECTIVES

Review these objectives. When you have completed this section, you should be able to:

1. Describe the nature of the Cold War.
2. Name the major events of the Cold War.
3. Understand the basic structure of the United Nations.
4. Describe the course of the Korean and Vietnam Wars.
5. Describe the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

VOCABULARY

Study these words and phrases to enhance your learning success in this section.

Cold War	satellites	Iron Curtain
containment	NATO	Warsaw Pact
thermonuclear	intercontinental ballistic missiles	Demilitarized Zone
repatriation	superpowers	endemic
nominally	draft	Berlin Wall
purge	autonomy	

Note: All vocabulary words and phrases in this LIFEPAAC appear in **boldface** print the first time they are used. If you are unsure of the meaning when you are reading, look the it up in a dictionary or encyclopedia.

ORIGINS OF THE COLD WAR

Post-War Situation. The United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R.) were the most powerful nations in the world at the end of World War II. Europe was devastated. Germany and Japan were in ruins from Allied bombing. The Soviet Union had a huge, well-supplied army holding all of Eastern Europe and one-third of Germany. The United States expected a period of friendly relations with the Soviet Union at the end of the war. After all, the two peoples had fought and died opposing a common enemy for four years. The U.S. expected to be able to use its influence during this time to convince the Soviet Union to withdraw from Europe peacefully. In fact, Joseph Stalin, the Soviet dictator, had no intention of allowing Eastern Europe to be free and possibly allied with the West.

Stalin acted quickly to secure his position, ignoring the promises he had made during the war. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania (the Baltic Republics) were annexed again (they had been taken in 1940 under an agreement with Hitler). Some Polish land was also taken by the Soviet Union. Poland was then compensated with a part of Soviet-occupied Germany (this basically shifted the entire country west). The Allied leaders had actually agreed to this travesty at Yalta, an Allied conference during the war. Stalin had given "his word" that Poland and the other nations would be allowed to have free elections. Instead, pro-Soviet Communist governments were set up in Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and Czechoslovakia. Yugoslavia and Albania set up Communist governments of their own. These nations

became Soviet **satellites** and were completely cut off from their free neighbors. In 1946, England's famous wartime leader, Winston Churchill, spoke of an "**iron curtain**" which now separated Europe into two opposing camps.

The United States immediately faced this new threat to the recently freed nations of Europe. When a Communist takeover was threatened in Greece in 1947, President Harry Truman chose to act. He realized that a return to the longstanding U.S. policy of isolation would leave the world unable to protect itself from Soviet aggression. Therefore, he

formulated and announced the policy of **containment**, also known as the Truman Doctrine. This policy committed the United States to restrict Communism to the places it already existed. Any attempt to spread it to new countries would be opposed by the United States throughout the world. In the case of Greece, \$400 million in aid was sent to both Greece and Turkey, which successfully defeated the Communist rebels in their lands. Containment was to continue as the basic policy of the United States through all of the Cold War.



Answer the following.

1.1 What are the two historical events, including dates, that could be used to mark the end of the Cold War?

- a. _____

- b. _____

1.2 Describe the policy of containment.

1.3 Who were the primary antagonists during the Cold War?

- a. _____
- b. _____

1.4 The Soviet Union set up Communist governments in:

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____

1.5 How did the United States expect to get the Soviets out of Eastern Europe after the war?

1.6 What two nations set up their own Communist governments after World War II?

- a. _____
- b. _____

United Nations. One ray of hope in the early years of the Cold War was the United Nations (UN). This international body had been formed in 1945 while the war was still being fought. Unlike its predecessor, the post-World War I League of Nations, the United Nations had the backing of the United States. The Soviet Union also joined. However, the United States and the Soviet Union both had a veto over any resolution passed by the organization. The Soviets used this freely to prevent any interference in their interests. Moreover, the UN had no enforcement power to back its decisions. It provided a forum for discussion and occasional action that was used by both sides in the Cold War.

The United Nations was created at a conference in San Francisco. Fifty nations signed the original charter that went into effect on October 24, 1945. The UN then accepted an invitation to set up its headquarters in the United States in New York City. The United Nations has six main organizational structures:

The General Assembly. All member states are represented in the General Assembly. The General Assembly makes all of its decisions by a majority vote, occasionally a two-thirds majority. Each country has one vote. The Assembly takes part in the election of the members for the other UN organizations. Its resolutions are not binding on any member nation except as they relate to the United Nations budget.

The Security Council. The Security Council is the UN organization responsible for keeping peace in the world. It consists of fifteen members, five of which (France, Great Britain, the United States, China, and Russia) are permanent members. The permanent members have a veto over any decision made by the

council; otherwise, decisions are made by majority vote. The Council can investigate and make recommendations on any matter it feels threatens world peace.

The Secretariat. The Secretariat consists of the secretary-general of the United Nations and his staff. The secretary-general is appointed by the General Assembly after being nominated by the Security Council. He serves a five-year term. The Secretariat runs the day-to-day operations of the UN. The secretary-general is also able to use the prestige of his position to encourage solutions of international problems.

International Court of Justice. The Court of Justice is the judicial branch of the United Nations. Its fifteen judges are appointed to nine-year terms. The court sits at The Hague, Netherlands. It gives advisory opinions to other UN branches and decides disputes between any governments that agree to submit a problem to the court. Decisions are by a majority vote of the judges.

The Economic and Social Council. The Economic Council is responsible for implementing United Nations' projects to improve life on this planet. It works to improve health, change working conditions, assist refugees, and improve agriculture among other things. The Council has 54 members elected by the General Assembly for three-year terms. It meets semi-annually, and decisions are by majority vote.

The Trusteeship Council. The Trusteeship council is responsible for the oversight of territories that are under UN protection and not yet independent nations. Most of these were former colonies such as Cameroon and New Guinea. There were eleven of these trusteeships at the end of World War II. Most are now independent nations.



Answer true or false.

- 1.7 _____ The UN has its own army to enforce its decisions.
- 1.8 _____ The Soviets could veto any UN resolution.
- 1.9 _____ The General Assembly has oversight of territories under UN protection.
- 1.10 _____ The Secretary-General is a figurehead.
- 1.11 _____ The Security Council is responsible for keeping peace in the world.



Answer the question.

- 1.12 What are the strengths and weaknesses of the United Nations?
