



Topic Overview

Faculty/Subject: History

Key Stage 4

Topic: Cold War & Superpower Relations



What **BIG IDEAS** will you cover in this topic?

This unit explores the origins, development and end of the Cold War, a period of intense rivalry and tension between the United States and the Soviet Union. Students will examine how ideology, military power, and nuclear weapons shaped global politics. The course covers key flashpoints, such as the Berlin Blockade, Cuban Missile Crisis and the Vietnam War, as well as efforts at détente and the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union. The unit highlights how individuals, technology, and international events influenced superpower relations over 50 years.

What other **key concepts, knowledge and skills** will you learn in this topic?

Key Concepts: Capitalism vs Communism; Tension, conflict and cooperation; Nuclear threat and arms race; Détente and diplomacy; Containment and expansion; Role of leadership and ideology
Key Skills: Explaining cause and consequence: Analysing historical significance: Chronological understanding: Evaluating the importance of events; Making supported judgments: Writing structured and focused explanations

What important **prior knowledge** will you use from your prior learning?

Basic understanding of communism, capitalism, democracy and dictatorship; Experience of dictatorships in the 20th century (e.g., Nazi Germany); Tensions between allies during WWII; The role of nuclear weapons and international conflict

Where does this topic fit into the **curriculum plan** for this subject?

This is Paper 2 in the Edexcel GCSE History course. It is worth 20% of the overall grade. It links to broader modern world studies by focusing on political ideologies, diplomacy, and international relations. It builds critical understanding of how global superpowers influenced world affairs and helps students make sense of the post-war world and contemporary international tensions.

Assessment:

How and when will you be assessed on this topic?

What will the success criteria be?

At the start of each lesson, there will be a **quick quiz** or to test knowledge recall from previous lessons. Frequent practice of **8-, 12- and 16-mark exam questions**, with support in structuring responses There will be a **formal assessment** at the end of the unit based on past Paper 3 GCSE questions

What will the success criteria be? To attain a Grade 4 in GCSE History you need to achieve between 45% and 50% when the marks for each unit have been combined. is awarded when you consistently achieve **50% or above** *Terminal assessment with GCSE style paper at the end of Year 11.*

What is the key **vocabulary** that you will need to know in this topic?

- Capitalism
- Communism
- Cold War
- Superpowers
- Containment
- Truman Doctrine
- Marshall Plan
- Iron Curtain
- NATO
- Warsaw Pact
- Berlin Blockade/ Airlift
- Arms Race
- MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction)
- Détente
- Doctrine
- Buffer zone
- Cuban Missile Crisis
- SALT
- Strategic Defence Initiative
- Sphere of Influence
- Perestroika
- Glasnost
- Eastern Bloc
- Soviet Collapse
- Dissident

What is the structure of learning/lessons in this topic?

Section 1: The Origins of the Cold War (1941–58)

L1 – What was the Grand Alliance and why did tensions grow?

L2 – What happened at the Yalta and Potsdam Conferences?

L3 – Why did the Iron Curtain fall across Europe?

L4 – What were the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan?

L5 – What happened during the Berlin Crisis and Airlift?

Section 2: Cold War Crises (1958–70)

L6 – What caused the Berlin Wall to be built in 1961?

L7 – How serious was the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962?

L8 – How did the Cold War affect relations in Czechoslovakia in 1968?

Section 3: The End of the Cold War (1970–91)

L9 – What was détente and why did it fail?

L10 – How did Reagan and Gorbachev change the Cold War?

L11 – What were Gorbachev's reforms and how did they weaken the USSR?

L12 – Why did communism collapse in Eastern Europe?

L13 – How and why did the Cold War end by 1991?

