

## Assignment Discovery Online Curriculum

**Lesson title:**

The Role of NATO

**Grade level:**

9-12, with adaptation for younger students

**Subject area:**

United States History, World History

**Duration:**

Two class periods

**Objectives:** Students will

1. understand the political atmosphere of post-World War II Europe and the U.S. foreign policy strategy of containment;
2. research critical events that occurred prior to the formation of NATO, such as the Marshall Plan, the Truman Doctrine, the Berlin airlift, and Churchill's coinage of the term *iron curtain*; and
3. distinguish on a map the countries that formed the Warsaw Pact and the NATO alliance in 1955.

**Materials:**

- Textbooks, encyclopedias, and other print and Internet resources
- A map of post-World War II Europe
- Copies of the Take-Home Activity Sheet NATO in 1955: A Map Activity
- NATO in 1955: A Map Activity Answer Sheet

**Procedures:**

1. In order for students to understand the function of NATO fully, they need to be familiar with key points in the history of the organization. You may choose to distribute these key points (reviewed in steps 3 and 4) to your students or display them on an overhead projector.
2. Begin by polling the class to see how many students know what the word *NATO* stands for. NATO is an acronym for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Discuss what students already know about the organization.
3. Explain to students that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization was formed in 1949 as a response to the threat of Soviet invasion of Western Europe after World War II. NATO was, and still is, a European defense coalition, an alliance of countries pledged to ensure the freedom and security of all member countries. Using a map, show and explain to the class how the Soviet Union occupied the nations of Eastern Europe as its army moved toward Berlin to bring an end to Nazi rule of Germany in 1945. After the war ended, Great Britain and the United States demanded that Soviet leader Joseph Stalin pull his troops out of

Eastern Europe. Fearing another attack by Germany, Stalin kept his troops in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, and Communist governments were imposed on these nations.

4. Explain to students that, at this time in history, many people believed that the Soviet Union was determined to impose its style of communism on the entire world. The Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe seemed to give support to this suspicion. American foreign policy under President Truman and later presidential administrations was shaped to act as a counterbalance to the possibility of a Soviet takeover in Europe and communist revolution in other places in the world. This effort to stop Soviet expansion and the spread of communism was known as the *policy of containment*.
5. Briefly introduce the following four terms to the class. Explain to students that these terms represent dramatic ideas and events that occurred after World War II and set the stage for the formation of the NATO alliance in 1949.
  - The Truman Doctrine
  - The Marshall Plan
  - Winston Churchill's "Iron Curtain" speech
  - The Berlin airlift
6. Now break the class up into small research groups. Explain to students that they will need to write a brief summary of each term listed above describing what the event or idea was as well as its historical significance. Students will also need to explain briefly how each of these four points related to the policy of containment. Students should use print and interactive research tools such as their textbooks, encyclopedias, and the Internet.
7. When students have finished their work, review their responses in a classroom discussion. Keep in mind that student answers may vary, but they should basically include the following information for each point:
  - The Truman Doctrine (1947) was proposed by President Harry Truman after World War II to prevent communism from spreading to Greece and Turkey. The doctrine gave financial support (\$400 million) to both countries in order to reduce the threat of communist insurrection.
  - The Marshall Plan (1947) was approved by the U.S. Congress and allotted \$7 billion to the nations of Western Europe in an effort to prevent the rise of communist parties there. The Marshall Plan helped establish close ties between Western Europe and the United States.
  - British prime minister Winston Churchill's "Iron Curtain" speech (1946) illustrated the division within Europe at that time. Following World War II, Europe had clearly been divided into two political and economic systems supported by two superpowers, the Soviet Union and the United States. The Soviet Union occupied countries in Eastern Europe (East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Bulgaria) after the war, imposing Communist rule over them. The western democracies of Britain, France, West Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Belgium, along with allies such as Canada and the

United States, were in opposition to the spread of Communism in Europe. In his speech, Churchill described the conflict this way: “From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent.” Churchill was outlining the ideological conflict between Soviet Communism and democratic capitalism.

- The Berlin airlift (1948) was a response to a Soviet attempt to cut off all supplies to democratic West Berlin. The Allies responded with 321 days of air support to the people of West Berlin, flying in food and medicine in spite of the Soviet land blockade.
8. Now moderate a class discussion on how each of the four events set the stage for the formation of NATO. Students should understand that the United States and Western Europe felt insecure about the Communist presence in Eastern Europe and needed to form a foreign policy strategy that was stronger than containment—an alliance was needed to seal opposition to future Soviet expansion.
  9. Explain to students that 12 nations signed the original North Atlantic Treaty in 1949, which created the strategic alliance known as NATO. Those 12 nations were Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Britain, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, and the United States.
  10. Using a map, show students how in 1955, following the admittance of democratic West Germany into NATO, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (the U.S.S.R.) forced its Eastern European puppet states into a counteralliance. The Warsaw Pact, signed in Warsaw, Poland, was formed in response to NATO. Seven European Communist nations joined the U.S.S.R. in the Warsaw Pact: Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Romania. NATO stood guard over Western Europe for more than 40 years, until 1989, when the Berlin Wall came down and Germany was reunited.
  11. Pass out copies of the Take-Home Activity Sheet: NATO in 1955: A Map Activity. This activity sheet displays a map of Europe in 1955 after West Germany was admitted to the NATO alliance. As homework, have students label and color code the countries on the map and answer the critical thinking questions.
  12. Have students submit their activity sheets and review the answers with the class. Moderate a class discussion on the motivations for the NATO powers to join the alliance as well as the motivations of the Soviet Union to occupy and control the Warsaw Pact nations. Discuss what role NATO played in global politics during the Cold War. Did it carry out this role effectively? Did NATO's role in global politics change following the fall of the Soviet Union?

**Adaptation:**

Younger students will need more time to research and understand abstract terms such as *communism*, *containment*, *cold war*, and *iron curtain*. Have students imagine that they are members of the U.S. Congress in 1949. World War II ended four years ago, and the Soviets control Eastern Europe. The news has just reached America that the Soviets have created their

own atomic weapon. Ask students to write a speech to their constituents explaining why or why not the United States should join NATO and lead the alliance. The map activity can be used with younger students, but they should focus on the geography of the divided Europe rather than the political and ideological nature of the period.

**Questions:**

1. NATO's first supreme commander was Dwight D. Eisenhower, World War II general and president of the United States from 1953 to 1961. Eisenhower's position gave the United States a leading role in NATO. In your opinion, is it right for one nation to dominate the military command structure of the NATO alliance? How can military power be evenly distributed among the currently 19 member states that make up the alliance?
2. NATO intervened in the former Yugoslavia to stop the war crimes being committed there, but it did not go to Rwanda, where war crimes have also been committed. Should NATO be restricted to military actions within Europe, or does NATO have the right to become involved in military conflicts outside the North Atlantic community? Explain your reasoning.
3. The Berlin Wall came down in 1989, followed by the reunification of Germany one year later. The Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991 and has since developed a fledgling democracy under Presidents Yeltsin and Putin. Do you believe that there is still a need for an alliance such as NATO? Support your response with specific examples from current events.
4. The European Union is considering the development of a defense force that would be purely European and outside of NATO's control. Will the United States suffer a loss of prestige and a reduction in strategic strength if such a force is developed? Explain your answer.
5. Three of the former Soviet Union's satellite countries—Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary—joined NATO in 1999. How does the inclusion of former Warsaw Pact nations in NATO change the mission of NATO as a military alliance?
6. What shape should NATO's relationship with Russia and other non-NATO nations such as China take in the future? What role do you think NATO should play in the post-Cold War world?

**Evaluation:**

You can evaluate your students' work using the following rubric. Students will be graded on the work they complete in their map activity.

Three points: accurate coloring and labeling of the activity sheet map; answers to the focus questions that reflect reasonable analytical skills and accurate historical knowledge

Two points: completion of the activity sheet map; answers to the focus questions that may show little or no historical understanding of the subject

One point: failure to complete the map activity; failure to answer all or most of the focus questions correctly

**Extension Activity:**

**NATO's Changing Role**

The focus of NATO's existence in the 1990s shifted from preventing a Soviet attack on Western Europe to insuring stability in an increasingly unstable Europe. Divide students into five groups and assign each group one of the following countries to research: France, Russia, Germany, Yugoslavia, and the United States. Have each group prepare a presentation to the class that describes the state of their nation's relationship with NATO today. Is the nation a member of NATO, a partner (one who works in cooperation with the alliance but is not a member), or an enemy? Students should research what type of government their assigned nation has, the geographical position of the nation, its military, any military conflicts it has been in since 1949, and whether the nation is receiving any political, military, or economic benefits as a result of its association with NATO.

## **Suggested Reading:**

### ***Bill Clinton***

Michael Kelly. Chelsea House, 1999.

Now that Bill Clinton has left office, his tenure as president is open to continual assessment and reassessment. This biography provides a straightforward account of Clinton's life, from his difficult early years into his second term as president. The book does not cover his impeachment trial.

### ***Zlata's Diary: A Child's Life in Sarajevo***

Zlata Filipovic. Viking, 1994.

While many Americans feel removed from conflicts abroad and debate the necessity of American involvement, these conflicts become more immediate when seen through the eyes of those caught up in them. Writing over a two-year period, Zlata, a young girl living in Sarajevo, began her diary at age 11, when life was peaceful and dependable. As war broke out, her diary entries changed to reflect a life filled with violence, fear, and adult concerns.

## **Vocabulary**

### **alliance**

Definition: A military or political friendship between two or more nations, usually based on a common goal such as defense.

Context: The NATO **alliance** provides each of its members with a level of security, since an attack on one nation is regarded as an attack on all of the member nations.

### **arms race**

Definition: The competition between the Soviet Union and the United States in the area of military weapons systems, especially nuclear weapons.

Context: The **arms race** started with the development of the atomic bomb and continued through the Reagan era, when arms reduction treaties led to the destruction of nuclear weapons on both sides.

### **blockade**

Definition: The use of military troops or ships to prevent the flow of goods and people, usually to achieve a military aim.

Context: The Soviets constructed a **blockade** around Berlin to prevent goods and people from moving to the democratically controlled West.

### **cold war**

Definition: A time of political and military rivalry between nations that falls short of actual war. The United States and the Soviet Union were engaged in a cold war from 1945 to 1991.

Context: The **Cold War** existed because of the conflicting ideologies—Communism and democratic capitalism—of the United States, the Soviet Union, and their respective allies.

**containment**

Definition: The policy of the United States and its allies during the years of the Cold War to prevent the spread of Communism by the Soviet Union and its allies.

Context: The United States used its leadership in NATO as the primary weapon in the **containment** of Soviet expansion.

**occupation**

Definition: The act of taking possession of a place or area, often by military force.

Context: The Allied **occupation** of West Germany was the major factor in keeping the Soviets from imposing Communist rule over the whole of Germany and possibly over Europe.

**Academic standards:****Grade Level:**

9-12

**Subject Area:**

World History

**Standard:**

Understands how post-World War II reconstruction occurred, new international power relations took shape, and colonial empires broke up.

**Benchmark:**

Understands the impact of relations between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War (e.g., the effect of United States and Soviet competition for influence or dominance upon such countries as Egypt, Iran, the Congo, Vietnam, Chile, and Guatemala, and the impact of the Cold War on art, literature, and popular culture around the world).

**Grade Level:**

9-12

**Subject Area:**

Historical Understanding

**Standard:**

Understands the historical perspective.

**Benchmark:**

Uses historical maps to understand the relationship between historical events and geography.

**Credit:**

George Cassutto, social studies teacher, part-time Web master, and author of the *Internet Pocket Guide for Teachers*.

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## NATO in 1955: A Map Activity

Use your textbook or other resources to label the map below by placing the country names in or near the correct nations, color code the alliances using the key below, and then answer the critical thinking questions on the next page.

### Color Code Key:



NATO countries



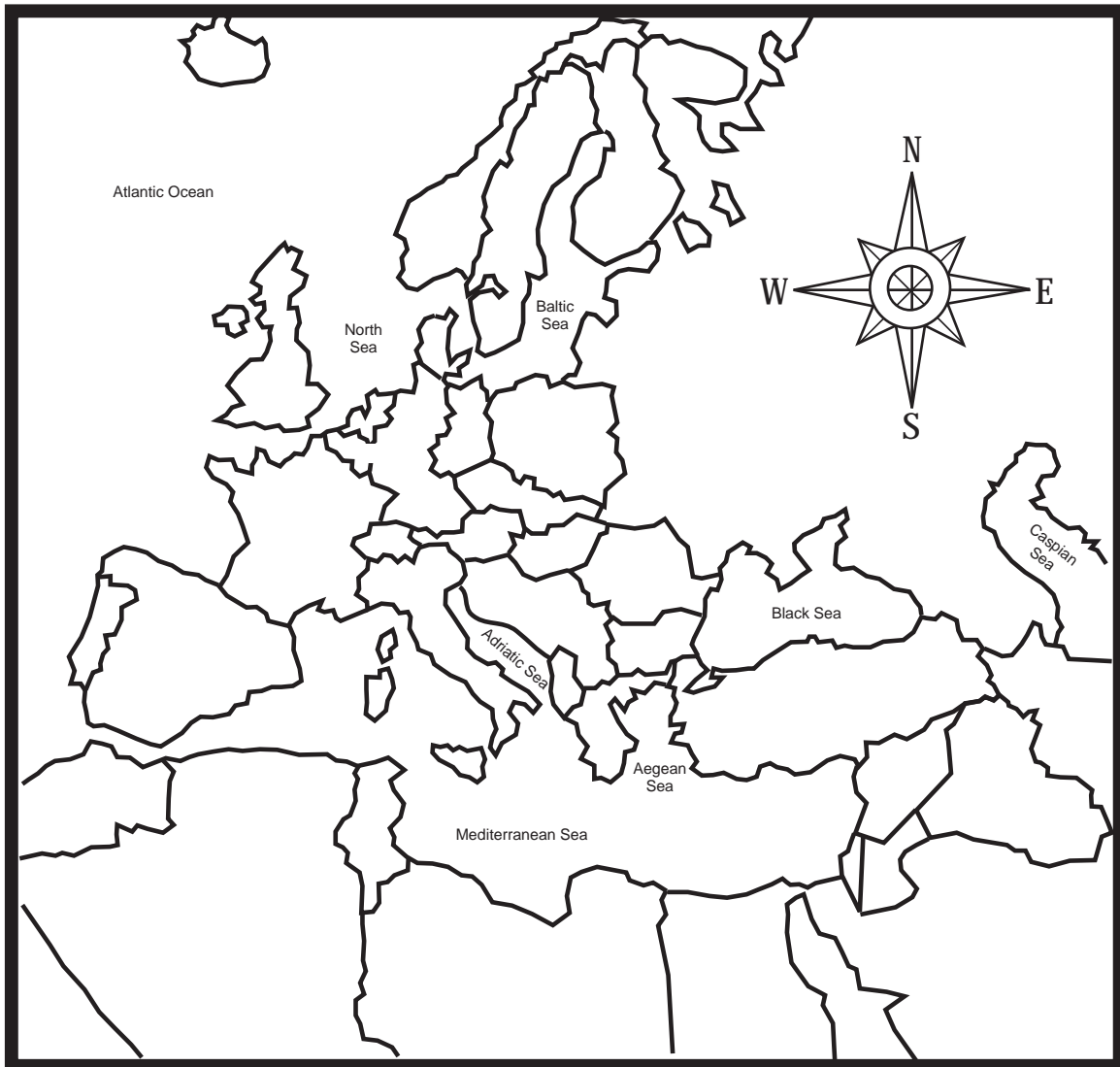
Neutral nations



Warsaw Pact nations



Other communist nations (Yugoslavia)





## NATO in 1955: A Map Activity

### Critical Thinking Questions

1. How did the alliances that formed in Europe after World War II form an “iron curtain,” as described by Winston Churchill in a 1946 speech?

2. Where are there “cracks” in the iron curtain as seen on the map?

3. Based on the map, what do you think led the nations of Western Europe to form NATO?

4. Using the map as the basis for your response, why, do you think, did the Soviet Union feel it had to take control of the Eastern European nations of East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Hungary, and Bulgaria?

Find a current map of Europe in your textbook. Compare it with the map above and list the nations that have gained independence or have emerged since the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991.

## NATO in 1955: A Map Activity

### Answer Sheet

1. The two alliances based on political and economic ideologies divided Europe down the middle. The democratic nations formed the western alliance called NATO, and the Communist nations formed the Warsaw Pact alliance.
2. Yugoslavia is under communist rule but is not part of the Warsaw Pact, which is controlled by Moscow. Also, Sweden, Finland, Austria, Switzerland, and Spain are neutral.
3. NATO was formed because the U.S.S.R. had taken over most of Eastern Europe after World War II.
4. The Soviets wanted control over Eastern Europe to prevent an Allied attack on the Soviet Union. Russia had been attacked by Germany twice before in the 20th century.
5. The Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have become independent from the former Soviet Union. The Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova have also become independent. Yugoslavia has divided into Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Serbia, and Montenegro. Czechoslovakia has split into the Czech and Slovak Republics.