

## **Explain how and why the USSR increased its control over Eastern Europe between 1945 and 1949. [22]**

There were many reasons why Stalin and the USSR wanted to control Eastern Europe. The first of these was to create a boundary or 'buffer zone'. The USSR wanted to protect itself from the spread of capitalist ideas or further attack from Western countries. This 'Iron Curtain' as it would be later called by Churchill was going to be made up of Communist countries. Stalin's idea was that Western countries would have to attack this buffer zone before being able to attack the USSR.

The USSR also wanted reparations for war damage and they would take these from countries they controlled. Eastern Europe was full of raw materials which could be used by Russia.

The USSR used different tactics when taking over Eastern European countries. Many times in elections the following cycle occurred- Pressure from Moscow would make sure Communists would obtain high positions in emergency Governments. Communists would then suggest radical changes which would ensure economic recovery and finally votes would be rigged making sure the Communists would win. An example of this is Hungary.

The USSR gained influence over Yugoslavia in a completely different way to this. Yugoslavia refused Russian takeover however they were still a Communist Government. This meant they were still viewed with the same suspicion from Western states. After WWII many Eastern States were still occupied by Soviet Soldiers. This means that the USSR has a major presence and easily influenced the decisions of emergency governments which were often weak.

The Marshall Plan was set up in 1947 which would ensure that European countries could develop economically and recover from the effects of WWII. This plan would inject \$13.3 Billion into the European economy. Stalin condemned this and as a result set up Comecon and Cominform. Although the Marshall Plan itself was dangerous to the Russian regime, the resulting set-up of the counter organisations strengthened Russian control over the East and made sure they could develop like the West.

In 1948 all road, rail and canal links to West Berlin were closed. This was caused by the Western Alliance and New Currency introduced in this newly merged area. Stalin was angry at this as he thought this merger would again develop a Germany which could threaten the USSR.

Discontent arose from Eastern Germans seeing their Western counterparts get richer while they got poorer. It was decided that supplies would be airlifted into Berlin as Stalin was unlikely to shoot planes down. The plan had not expected to work and for long periods West Berliners had to endure rationing.

Stalin admitted defeat the next year and the Blockade was lifted. During this period NATO was set up. The USSR responded to this by setting up the Warsaw Pact. As with the Marshall Aid the Western Actions had caused a positive impact for the USSR. The Warsaw Pact meant that Soviet controlled states had more protection than before, making them stronger.