

The USSR and the Eastern bloc

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In August 1949, the USSR exploded its first atomic bomb, then, in 1953, its first hydrogen bomb. Its claim to be a world power could no longer be disputed. In the Soviet Union, Stalin continued to govern alone. Liberalising tendencies which had appeared during the war disappeared once again, and Stalin's personality cult reached its height. A further wave of repression was interrupted, however, by the death of Stalin on 5 March 1953.