

THE COLD WAR: 1945-62

Stalin was less interested in dominating Berlin than is frequently suggested. He saw it as a way of putting pressure on the allies in a bid to extract concessions from them. By 1948 his real interests lay in Asia.



Mounting tensions the end of the illusion of peaceful coexistence.

The Cold War was a fifty year period of high tension between the USA and the USSR. Both sides could not afford it to become a real conflict because of the existence of nuclear weapons, but neither could there be real peace because of the ideological differences between Communism and Capitalism and mutual suspicion. We can best understand the Cold War by breaking it up into phases. The first phase starts at the end of the Second World War and

ends with the Cuban Missile Crisis. It is a period that sees mounting tensions and several moments where nuclear war was imminent. This seventeen year period was potentially the most dangerous in world history.

In brief here are the main features of the first period:

1) Division of Europe 1945-48: *At the end of the Second World War Europe was divided between east and west. The Red Army occupied Eastern Europe at the end of the war, Winston Churchill said in*

1946 that an 'Iron Curtain' had descended across Europe.

2) China goes Communist, Russia get the bomb 1949: *In 1949, China, a close US ally, became a Communist State with Mao Zedong as its leader. In the same year the USSR tested its first atomic bomb, many years sooner than predicted by the USA. Blind panic and anti communist hysteria gripped America as a result.*

From Korea to Cuba

Cold War turns hot

3) **Korean War 1950-53:** *Following the fall of China to Communism the Korean War began. Korea had been divided in two at the end of the Second World War, with a Soviet backed Communist government in the North and a US backed regime in the South. When Kim Il Sung, the leader of North Korea, invaded the South the US and other nations responded and fought back. When China joined the fight the war ended in a stalemate but not before the US general in charge, Douglas MacArthur, contemplated using the atom bomb.*

4) **Hungary 1956:** *When Stalin died in 1953 his successor Nikita Khrushchev made a secret speech to the politburo condemning the dictator. This was followed by a relaxation of Stalin's terror, and many in Russia and beyond thought Communism was about to become more democratic and free. In Hungary a reformist government was established but the Soviets decided to crush it with force, causing many people around the world to turn their back on Communism.*

5) **Paris Summit, Gary Powers 1960:** *By the early 1960s tensions between the super powers were at their height, both had amassed huge stockpiles of nuclear weapons, no longer dropped by bombers but launched as long range missiles. Two weeks before a summit to defuse tensions could begin, an American U2 spy plane was shot*

Question: Between 1945-1962 who was actually winning the Cold War? What evidence is there for your conclusion?

down over Russia. The pilot, Gary Powers was taken prisoner. Khrushchev demanded an apology from US president Eisenhower, and when he didn't receive one the talks were cancelled. An agreement to limit arms might have been possible at Paris but the U2 incident made it impossible.

6) **Berlin and Cuba 1961-62:** *Berlin by 1961 had become the flashpoint of tension in the Cold War, as thousands of East Germans used it as a conduit to escape from the impoverished East into the wealthy West. This caused huge problems for the economy in the East and both Khrushchev and East German Leader Walter Ulbricht were determined to stop it. They built a wall through Berlin, sealing off the Eastern half of the city, shooting anyone trying to get through. The following year, the world came close to the brink of nuclear disaster over Cuba. America had placed nuclear missiles in the 1950s along Russia's borders, in Germany, Turkey and Japan. Russia responded by placing missiles in Cuba, which had had its Communist revolution in 1959. John F Kennedy blockaded the island creating a dangerous*

Fusce ac leo

Hungary in 1956 and Korea in 1953. The Hungarians attempted to liberate themselves from communism following the death of Stalin and his denunciation by Khrushchev in the 'Secret Speech', the west was unable and unwilling to come to their aid when the Soviets crushed their revolt. America, Britain and the UN did come to the aid of the South Koreans in 1950, why do you think they were able to help one country and not another?



Stalemate 1962-1979

standoff with Russian ships laden with nuclear warheads.

1) America slowly drawn into Vietnam 1962-68: *Vietnam was a French colony until World War Two when it was invaded by Japan. At the end of the war, France returned but the Vietnamese were not willing to be ruled by Europeans any more. France fought to control Vietnam until her defeat in 1954. America believed that once France left, Communism would fill the void and so became increasingly involved. In 1964 America fabricated an attack on her ships in the Gulf Of Tonkin and used it as an excuse to invade, committing half a million men by 1968. In that year the North Vietnamese launched the Tet Offensive invading the South, and whilst it was ultimately defeated, the offensive rocked the American public's faith in their ability to win the war and America began searching for an exit from Vietnam.*

2) Russia and China rift grows: *By the mid 1960s, relations between Russia and China were very difficult and the Cold War began to become a three way struggle between America, Russia and China. Mao Zedong was a thorn in the side of Soviet leaders as he wanted to establish himself as the leader of world Communism. He believed that other countries should follow his brand of revolution which was based far more on the peasants than on the workers. Mao was frequently rude and insulting to the Soviets, who saw themselves as his mentors and he used his troops along the Sino-Soviet border to provoke the Russians.*

3) Prague Spring 1968: *A tide of revolution and protest swept the world in 1968, and in Czechoslovakia a new*



reformist element in the Communist Party came to power, promising 'Socialism With A Human Face'. Their leader, Alexander Dubcek did not seek to end Communist rule, only to liberalise it so that it might be more popular. Moscow feared it would lose Czechoslovakia from its alliance, the Warsaw Pact, and so invaded. There was far less bloodshed than in 1956, but one student protester Jan Palach, set fire to himself in order to bring attention to the crisis.

4) Nixon visits China 1972: *President Richard Nixon had been elected in 1968 on a promise of getting America out of Vietnam. His special advisor Henry Kissinger worked out how this could be done. He arranged for Nixon to visit China an event that worried the Russians, who did not want to see two enemies ally themselves against the USSR. This put pressure on the Russians to stop arming the North Vietnamese and to force them to negotiate. The Russians also invited Nixon to Moscow, and the entire strategy was hailed as a great success for America, who left Vietnam the following year.*

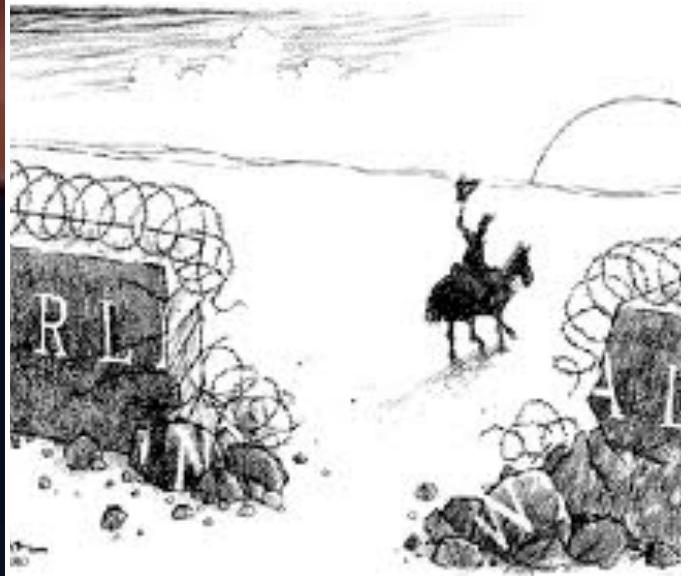
**When Nixon met Mao:
Was this the most
important meeting of the
Cold War? Make sure you
give an evaluation in your
answer.**

5) Helsinki Accords: *The Helsinki Accords, signed in 1975 were a sign that tensions were easing between East and West. Communist and Capitalist countries in Europe and North America signed an accord that committed all of them to respect human rights. The Helsinki Accords started to bring about change in the USSR, because now Russia had made some commitment to respecting the freedoms of her own people. Some historians race the start of the end of the Cold War to the Helsinki Accords.*

6) Afghanistan: *In 1978 in Afghanistan, a revolution occurred, bringing a pro Soviet government to power. America began to send aid to anti government forces and soon the USSR was drawn into a long, bloody war to support her ally. America was determined to give Russia her very own version of Vietnam and after ten years the war had begun to bankrupt Russia. America armed the Islamic Mujahideen fighters who had come from across the Middle East to fight Russia.*



Ronald Reagan was determined to bring the Cold War to an end, can he be credited with that achievement, or did it happen for other reasons?



Endgame 1979-89

Winning the Cold War

1) Reagan and the Second Cold War: *Ronald Reagan came to power pledging to win the Cold War. He began to ratchet up tensions again by referring to the USSR as an 'evil empire'. He also knew that the Soviet economy was very weak and defence spending was very costly, so he began to spend huge sums on arms, forcing the USSR to keep up. In the mid 1980s Reagan promoted the Star Wars project, a system designed to protect America and her allies from Soviet nuclear missiles. This initiative brought tensions to dangerous levels.*

2) Solidarity: *The Helsinki Accords created an opportunity for opposition in Eastern Europe, and it first manifested itself in Poland. Ship workers at the Gdansk shipyard, led by an electrician called Lech Walesa, formed the first trade union in Poland since the Communist takeover and called it Solidarity. Poland's new leader in 1981 General Jaruzelski*

knew what the Soviets would do if democracy broke out in Poland, and he declared martial law, outlawing Solidarity, which continued to operate underground, now as a political opposition, not just a trade union.

3) Soviet Economy struggles: *Since the October Revolution in 1917 most of the Soviet economy had been centrally run, with the government giving strict quotas on what products should be made through its economic planning organisation GOSPLAN. This was very inefficient and led to immense waste. By the 1980s there was a huge demand in Russia for consumer goods, but the economy was still designed to produce commodities for heavy industry and to build the defence industry. Soviet leaders had long since abandoned the idea that the mass repression of Stalin could be repeated, so they had to find other ways to deal with an unhappy population.*

How did the USSR lose?

The first nuclear armed power to blink

4) Able Archer: *In 1983 the Soviet Union shot down a Korean airliner that had accidentally strayed into Soviet airspace, and this was followed by a huge US and NATO military war-game called operation Able Archer. The Soviet leadership two years earlier had become convinced by Ronald Reagan's speeches that America would launch a nuclear strike first. At the same time the Soviets were actively looking for signs of a nuclear attack, the USA began to simulate one, making it the most dangerous moment of the Cold War.*

5) Gorbachev, Glasnost and Perestroika: *When Mikhail Gorbachev became leader of the Soviet Union, he did not intend to dismantle Communism, instead he wanted to find ways that it could be made to work. Gorbachev knew the economy was backward and inefficient and it couldn't create enough wealth to pay for a strong defence industry or a consumer society, so he introduced 'Perestroika' or restructuring. This meant that the Soviet economy would be less tightly managed from the centre, allowing workers to take initiative and be creative. Glasnost, or 'openness' was a policy of allowing Soviet Citizens to speak freely and discuss what they really thought, and it forced the secretive Soviet Government to be more transparent and open.*

The USSR ceased to exist in 1991 with barely a shot fired. How had the west prevailed where Hitler and his armies had failed?

These changes did not save Communism but instead accelerated its decline.

6) The Berlin Wall: *Gorbachev's changes in Russia were felt in Eastern Europe and in 1989 the pressure for change was unstoppable. The Berlin Wall, once a symbol of Soviet oppression in Eastern Europe was dismantled in December 1989 and free travel between the East and West became possible. Shortly after the East German Government toppled, along with most other Communist governments in Eastern Europe. Germany was reunified in 1991 and in December 1991 the Soviet Union was dissolved, bringing the Cold War to an end.*

Key Question: Why did the Soviet Union, a nuclear armed super power lose the Cold War and then cease to exist?

Was this the end of history? Or just the end of an era?

