

The Cold War, 1945-1989

THE STORY MATTERS...

In 1957 when the Soviets launched the first satellite into space, both the USSR and the United States possessed nuclear missiles. By the time Vice President Richard Nixon visited the Soviet Union in 1959, relations between the two countries were already extremely tense. During Nixon's trip, he and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev participated in a heated debate about capitalism and communism. Their argument illustrates the nature of the growing rivalry between the two nations.

Lesson 31-3

Cold War Conflicts

READING HELPDESK

Academic Vocabulary

temporary emerge

Content Vocabulary

proxy war domino theory

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How does conflict influence political relationships?

IT MATTERS BECAUSE

In the decades after World War II, the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union spread, creating military alliances and defining the postwar era. The competition between the superpowers also affected "hot" wars, especially in Korea and Vietnam.

The United States and the Soviet Union

GUIDING QUESTIONS *What common factor triggered the "hot" wars in Asia during the Cold War? How did nuclear weapons influence political relationships during the Cold War?*

World War II destroyed European supremacy in world affairs, and Europe did not recover from this. As the Cold War conflict between the world's two superpowers—the United States and the Soviet Union—grew stronger, the European nations were divided into two armed camps dependent upon one or the other of these two major powers. This division, however, also spread to the rest of the world. The United States and the Soviet Union, whose rivalry brought the world to the brink of nuclear war, seemed to hold the survival of the world in their hands.

Neither power, however, ever went to war directly with the other. Instead, the United States and the Soviet Union fought a series of proxy wars. A proxy war occurs when two powers in conflict use substitutes instead of fighting each other directly. Proxy wars were common during the Cold War. Armed with devastating nuclear arsenals, neither the United States nor the Soviet Union wanted to fight each other directly. However, both nations were willing to support opposing sides in local wars in the ongoing struggle between their two worldviews.

Each superpower used military and economic aid to win the support of other nations. In addition to NATO in Europe, the United States also built alliances in other parts of the world. To stem Communist aggression in the East, the United States, Great Britain, France, Pakistan, the Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand formed the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). The Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), which included Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Great Britain, and the United States, was meant to prevent Soviet expansion into the Middle East. The Soviet Union also created a series of alliances.

Two major conflicts of the Cold War were the wars that broke out in Korea and Vietnam. The Soviet Union and the United States each sent military support to prevent the other side from expanding its influence. In addition, a Cold War proxy conflict almost turned into a major nuclear war over the small island of Cuba.

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Comparing What did NATO, SEATO, and CENTO have in common?

The Korean War

GUIDING QUESTION *What common factor triggered the "hot" wars in Asia during the Cold War?*

Japan controlled Korea until 1945. In August 1945, the Soviet Union and the United States agreed to divide Korea into two zones at the 38th parallel. The plan was to hold elections after World War II to reunify

Korea. As American-Soviet relations grew worse, however, two separate governments emerged in Korea—Communist in the north and anti-Communist in the south.

Tension between the two governments increased. With the apparent approval of Joseph Stalin, Communist North Korean troops invaded South Korea on June 25, 1950. President Harry S. Truman of the United States, seeing this as yet another example of Communist aggression and expansion, gained the approval of the United Nations (UN) and sent U.S. troops to repel the invaders. Several other countries sent troops as well. In October, UN forces—mostly American—marched across the 38th parallel with the

aim of unifying Korea. Greatly alarmed, the Chinese sent hundreds of thousands of troops into North Korea and pushed UN forces back across the 38th parallel. Three more years of fighting led to no final victory. An armistice was finally signed in 1953. The 38th parallel remained, and remains today, the boundary line between North Korea and South Korea. The division of Korea was reaffirmed. To many Americans, the policy of containing communism had succeeded in Asia, just as it had earlier in Europe.

The Korean War also confirmed American fears of communist expansion. The United States was now more determined than ever to contain Soviet power. In the mid-1950s, the administration of President Dwight D. Eisenhower adopted a policy of massive retaliation. Any Soviet advance, even a ground attack in Europe, would be met with the full use of American nuclear bombs. Moreover, it was after the Korean War that American military alliances were extended around the world. As President Eisenhower explained, “The freedom we cherish and defend in Europe and in the Americas is no different from the freedom that is imperiled in Asia.”

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Determining Cause and Effect What effects did the Korean War have on U.S. foreign policy in the mid-1950s?

The Cuban Missile Crisis

GUIDING QUESTION *How did nuclear weapons influence political relationships during the Cold War?*

During the administration of John F. Kennedy, the Cold War confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union reached frightening levels. In 1959 a left-wing revolutionary named Fidel Castro overthrew the Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista and set up a Soviet-supported totalitarian regime in Cuba. Having a socialist regime with Communist contacts so close to the mainland was considered to be a threat to the security of the United States.

President Kennedy feared that if he moved openly against Castro, then the Soviets might retaliate by moving against Berlin. As a result, the stage might be set for the two superpowers to engage in a nuclear war.

For months, Kennedy considered alternatives. He finally approved a plan that the CIA had proposed. Exiled Cuban fighters would invade Cuba at the Bay of Pigs. The purpose of the invasion was to cause a revolt against Castro. The invasion, which began on Sunday, April 16, 1961, was a disaster. By Wednesday, the exiled fighters began surrendering. One hundred and fourteen died; the rest were captured by Castro’s troops.

After the Bay of Pigs, the Soviet Union sent advisers to Cuba. In 1962 Khrushchev began to place nuclear missiles in Cuba, which were meant to counteract U.S. nuclear weapons placed in Turkey. Khrushchev said: “Your rockets are stationed in Turkey. You are worried over Cuba ... because it lies at a distance of 90 miles across the sea from the shores of the United States. However, Turkey lies next to us.”

Analyzing PRIMARY SOURCES

Cuban Missile Crisis

The Cuban missile crisis brought the United States and the Soviet Union to the brink of nuclear war. It was, perhaps, the most frightening moment of the Cold War. These sources focus on Khrushchev’s agreement to remove Soviet missiles from Cuba.

“I appreciate your assurance that the United States will not invade Cuba. Hence, we have ordered our officers to stop building bases, dismantle the equipment, and send it back home.

We must not allow the situation to deteriorate, (but) eliminate hotbeds of tension, and we must see to it that no other conflicts occur which might lead to a world nuclear war.”

– Letter from Nikita Khrushchev to President John F. Kennedy, October 28, 1962

Analyzing Primary Sources

What does the letter to President Kennedy suggest about Khrushchev’s reaction to the crisis?

Drawing Conclusions

Look at the caption of the cartoon on the left. What point is the cartoonist making about the Cuban missile crisis?

The United States was not willing to allow nuclear weapons within such close striking distance of its mainland. In October 1962, Kennedy found out that Soviet ships carrying missiles were heading to Cuba. He decided to blockade Cuba to prevent the fleet from reaching its destination. This approach gave each side time to find a peaceful solution. Khrushchev agreed to turn back the fleet and remove Soviet missiles from Cuba if Kennedy pledged not to invade Cuba.

The Cuban missile crisis seemed to bring the world frighteningly close to nuclear war. Indeed, in 1992 a high-ranking Soviet officer revealed that short-range rockets armed with nuclear devices would have been used against

U.S. troops if the United States had invaded Cuba, an option that Kennedy fortunately had rejected. The realization that the world might have been destroyed in a few days had a profound influence on both sides. A hotline communications system between Moscow and Washington, D.C., was installed in 1963. The two superpowers could now communicate quickly in times of crisis.

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Summarizing How was the Cuban missile crisis resolved?

The Vietnam War

GUIDING QUESTION *What common factor triggered the “hot” wars in Asia during the Cold War?*

By 1963, the United States had been drawn into a new struggle that had an important impact on the Cold War—the Vietnam War. After World War II, most states in Southeast

Asia gained independence from their colonial rulers. The Philippines became independent of the United States in 1946. Great Britain also ended its colonial rule in Southeast Asia. France refused, however, to let go of Indochina. This led to a long war in Vietnam.

Leading the struggle against French colonial rule was the local Communist Party, headed by Ho Chi Minh. In August 1945, the Vietminh, an alliance of forces under Communist leadership, seized power throughout most of Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh was elected president of a new republic in Hanoi. Refusing to accept the new government, France seized the southern part of the country. For years, France fought Ho Chi Minh's Vietminh for control of Vietnam without success. In 1954, after a huge defeat at Dien Bien Phu, France agreed to sign the Geneva Peace Accords. Because of the Korean War, China and the Soviet Union wanted to avoid another conflict with the United States. They pressured Vietnam to agree to a temporary partition of Vietnam. This was meant to save French pride and satisfy the Americans. Vietnam was divided into two parts. In the north were the Communists, based in Hanoi; in the south, the non-Communists, based in Saigon.

Both sides agreed to hold elections in two years to create a single government. Instead, the conflict continued, and Vietnam soon became part of the Cold War. The United States, opposed to the spread of communism, aided South Vietnam under nationalist leader Ngo Dinh Diem. In spite of this aid, the Viet Cong, South Vietnamese Communist guerrillas supported by North Vietnam, were on the verge of seizing control of the entire country by early 1965. Their forces also received military aid from China.

In March 1965, President Johnson sent troops to South Vietnam to keep the Communist regime of North Vietnam from gaining control of South Vietnam. U.S. policy makers saw the conflict in terms of a domino theory concerning the spread of communism. If the Communists succeeded in South Vietnam, the argument went, all the

other countries in Asia that were freeing themselves from colonial domination would likewise fall (like dominoes) to communism.

North Vietnam responded to the American troops by sending more forces into the south. Despite the massive superiority in equipment and firepower of the American forces, the United States failed to defeat the North Vietnamese. The growing number of American troops in Vietnam soon produced an antiwar movement in the United States, especially among college students of draft age. The mounting destruction of the conflict, seen on television, also turned public opinion against the war.

President Johnson, condemned for his handling of the costly and indecisive war, decided not to run for reelection. Former vice president Richard M. Nixon won the election with his pledge to stop the war and bring the American people together. Finally, in 1973, President Nixon reached an agreement with North Vietnam in the Paris Peace Accords that allowed the United States to withdraw its forces. Within two years after the American withdrawal, Communist armies from the North had forcibly reunited Vietnam.

Despite the success of the North Vietnamese Communists, the domino theory proved to be unfounded. A noisy split between Communist China and the Soviet Union put an end to the Western idea that there was a single form of communism directed by Moscow. Under President Nixon, American relations with China were resumed. New nations in Southeast Asia also managed to avoid Communist governments. Above all, Vietnam helped show the limitations of American power. By the end of the Vietnam War, a new era in American-Soviet relations had begun to emerge.

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Applying Why is the Vietnam War sometimes understood as a proxy war?

LESSON 31-3 VOCABULARY

proxy war a war in which the powers in conflict use third parties as substitutes instead of fighting each other directly

domino theory idea that if one country falls to communism, neighboring countries will also fall