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Overview and Events of The Cold War

Despite the given name, the Cold War, this event was one of the hottest events in history, with many almost leading to the annihilation of the human race and the world as we know it. This event lasted from 1945 with end of world war two, to 1991 when the fall of the Soviet Union occurred. With communism rising in the east and Capitalism and democracy reigning in the west, the world was at a standstill. Although the cold war brought about many “peacekeeping” superweapons, many people still live in fear today stating that the cold war is not yet over. But what happened during that time period to let it still linger around today?

Throughout the second world war, Germany and America were racing to build a new kind of super-weapon, the atomic bomb. Germany's experiments were cut short by D-day, Germany was now facing a war on two fronts, in the west, the Allies, with the other being the Soviet Union in the east. On May, 08, 1945, the Third German Reich, commanded by new Fuhrer, Admiral Karl Donitz, surrendered to Soviet forces, ending the European front but, there was still the Pacific front where America was island hopping its way to the Japanese home-islands.

On July 16, 1945, the first atomic bomb was tested in the United States, and it was a success. With this new super weapon the United States could end the war as soon as the next A-bombs were produced. On August 6th and 7th, atomic bombs, Little Boy and Fat Man were

dropped on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The official calculated death toll was about 185,000 people (BBC, Hiroshima and Nagasaki). Japanese Emperor Hirohito could not stand to watch his people perish and suffer anymore and officially announced the unconditional surrender of the Japanese Empire, ending the second world war. But, the Soviets were intrigued by this new weaponed, and wanted to beat their capitalist enemy in an all out arms-race.

In 1948, the new borders of the world were set. The Soviet Union had created many new Socialist Republics to add to its union as satellite states (Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Czech SR and Slovakia, and Democratic Republic of Germany [GDR]), or better known as East Germany, for the west was controlled by the former Allies. Then, on April 4th, 1949, former countries of the Allies founded or joined NATO. In retaliation, the Soviet Union created the Warsaw Pact in 1955, which consisted all of its puppet states. For the next 45 years, these two factions would wait out a brutal war for dominance of the world. But many small conflicts would heat up the cold war.

There were many small conflicts and breakouts of communism during the cold war. The first semi-large event was the Korean war. When the Soviets liberated the Korean peninsula from Japanese rule during the second world war, it created a East and West Germany situation. In the South was the new Democratic Korea (South Korea), and in the north was the Stalinist Korea (North Korea). In 1950, without warning, North Korea invaded the South plunging America into the Korean war which lasted from 1950 to 1953 and resulted in the loss and gain of nothing for both sides.

The Vietnam war was another, more remembered, case of communism spreading in Asia yet again. First in China with Mao Zedong, next in North Korea with Kim Il-Sung, and now

Vietnam with Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Cong. After the second world war the French were having problems with communist guerrillas in their colony of French Indochina (Modern day; Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam). In 1955, North Vietnam finally attacked South Vietnam, just as Korea did. Eventually when the French couldn't handle the Vietnamese, a few years after, in 1965, American troops landed in Vietnam. The war was painful and dragged on for ten more years before America finally troops and the war was over. North Vietnam was successful and the country was unified under the communist flag.

The war itself was looked down upon by many United States citizens. "You were considered a war criminal if you came back to America after the war, you would have to hide or throw away your uniform to get back in." Karen Olsen, 76, recalls what veterans were to some after the war. "Others would just move to Canada or Mexico to avoid harassment". But, by the late 70s and early 80s the Cold War was becoming, cold. The closest the cold war came to becoming hot was in 1962.

From the years 1953 to 1959, a revolution was raging in the Caribbean island nation of Cuba. Communist revolutionaries, led by Che Guevara and Fidel Castro, were fighting against the authoritarian government, and its president, Fulgencio Batista. The war was bloody and long but the revolutionaries came out on top in the end and installed a new socialist government. Fidel Castro would take over as the new dictator of Cuba. The Soviet Grand Premier, Nikita Khrushchev, realized a new opportunity in North America. Over the next three years, relations between Cuba and the Soviet Union would cause one of the most frightening events of the cold war; the Cuban Missile Crisis.

In early 1962, Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev made a deal with Cuban premier, Fidel Castro, to place Soviet nuclear missiles on the island to prevent another invasion of Cuba by the United States, like that of the Bay of Pigs invasion. Throughout the year, Soviet ships had been transferring materials to build nuclear rockets and launch sites, as well as Russian IL-28 bombers. When US president John F. Kennedy was notified about the Cuban missiles, he issued a warning to Khrushchev on live TV for the public to see.

“It shall be the policy of this nation to regard any nuclear missile launched from Cuba against any nation in the Western Hemisphere as an attack by the Soviet Union on the United States, requiring a full retaliatory response upon the Soviet Union.” (Office of the Historian, Cuban Missile Crisis).

The United States also decided to set up a naval blockade blocking Soviet ships from entering into Cuban ports. These events continued for multiple days with no sign of the Soviets letting up. Their missile launch pads were almost completed for service, Kennedy had to act again. He made a proposition to the Soviet Union stating that if the Soviets removed all missiles from Cuba the US would not attempt another invasion. Khrushchev respond with a letter to Kennedy

“If there is no intention,” he said, “to doom the world to the catastrophe of thermonuclear war, then let us not only relax the forces pulling on the ends of the rope, let us take measures to untie that knot. We are ready for this.” (Office of the Historian, Cuban Missile Crisis).

The final agreement only came after America had agreed to remove their Jupiter missiles (Nuclear warheads) from Turkey, and by November 10th, the final Soviet jets had left Cuba and

the naval blockade was removed. This event is considered the closest the cold war ever came to becoming full out nuclear warfare between the eastern and western powers.

Finally the end came, on December 25th, 1991, the Soviet sickle and hammer flag was lowered from the Kremlin and replaced with the traditional Russian tri-color (white, blue, and red). The country was suffering from bankruptcy and civil unrest, and many of the Soviet satellites demanded freedom from communism. After the the last Soviet Premier, Mikhail Gorbachev resigned as president, Boris Yeltsin was put into office as the new president of the Russian Federation. Relationships improved with the United States, and the cold war had ended, but still lingered on in memory.

All in all, the cold war was a large event for the entire world itself. It has left behind many problems with North Korea and their leader Kim Jong-Un. Relationships have improved with Russia (Former Soviet Union) and Vietnam since the cold war. Communism is now a lesser threat to democracies of the world. But anything could trigger another nuclear war between NATO and North Korea, China, and still Russia.

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