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The Cold War



The seeds of hostility between the United States and the USSR began near the end of World War I. The Bolsheviks (later Communists) overthrew the existing Russian government.

In December 1922 began the formation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) under Communist control. The United States refused to recognize the Soviet state until 1933.

The profound ideological differences between the USSR and the United States were problematic and made worse by Joseph Stalin, who ruled the USSR from 1929 to 1953 as a ruthless dictator.

In July 16, 1945, the creation of the first atomic bomb came to fruition in the United States and was tested at Alamogordo, New Mexico at a site called "Trinity". The atomic bomb had two objectives: a quick end of World War II and possession by the US (and not USSR), would allow control of foreign policy.

In 1947 president Harry S. Truman authorized U.S. aid (The Truman Doctrine) to anti-Communist forces in Greece and Turkey. The policy was expanded to justify support for any nation that the U.S. government considered to be threatened by Soviet expansionism. This policy, known as the containment doctrine, was aimed at holding back and restricting the spread of Communism world wide.



Containment quickly became the official U.S. policy towards the USSR. In the meantime, the Russians obtained top secret blue prints of the original Trinity design.

On August 29th, 1949, the Soviet Union detonated its first atomic bomb, at the Semipalatinsk Test Site in Kazakhstan. This event ends America's monopoly of atomic weaponry and launches the Cold War. In the 1950's, The Arms Race became the focus of the Cold War. America tested the first Hydrogen (or thermo-nuclear) bomb in 1952, beating the Russians in the creation of the "Super Bomb".

The political climate of the Cold war became more defined in January, 1954, when U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles announced the policy that came to be known as "massive retaliation" -- any major Soviet attack would be met with a massive nuclear response. As a result to the challenge of "massive retaliation" came the most significant by-product of the Cold War, the Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM).

The ICBM's were supported with the thermo-nuclear bomb (with a much greater destructive power than the original atomic bomb), inertial guidance systems (defines the difference between weight, the influence of gravity and the impact of inertia), and powerful booster engines for multistage rockets. As a result, ballistic missiles became sufficiently accurate and powerful to destroy targets 8000 km (5000 mi) away. For more than thirty years, the ICBM has been the symbol of the United States' strategic nuclear arsenal.

In October 1961, The Soviet Union detonates a nuclear device, estimated at 58 megatons, the equivalent of more than 50 million tons of TNT, or more than all the explosives used during World War II. It is the largest nuclear weapon the world had ever seen at that time. The Tsar Bomba (King of the Bombs) is detonated after US and USSR agree to limit nuclear testing. It is the largest nuclear device ever exploded. Having no strategic military value, Tsar is viewed as an act of intimidation by the Soviets.

The most serious Cold War confrontation between the United States and the USSR that took place in October, 1962. The U.S. discovered that the Soviets were in the process of positioning nuclear missiles in Communist Cuba. The United States sends naval blockade to stop Soviet ships carrying missiles to Cuba. October, 22, U.S. military alert is set at DEFCON 3 and Castro mobilizes all of Cuba's military forces. October, 24, Soviet ships reach the quarantine line, but receive radio orders from Moscow to hold their positions while being backed up by a Soviet submarine. JFK concludes that if we invade in the next ten days, the missile base crews in Cuba will likely fire at least some of the missiles at US targets.

October, 25, American military forces are instructed to set DEFCON 2 - the highest ever in U.S. history. October, 26, Khrushchev receives a cable from Castro urging a nuclear first strike against the US in the event of an invasion of Cuba.

October, 27, while one U-2 spy plane accidentally flies into Russia, another is shot down over Cuba. October, 28, the crises ends. In a speech aired on Radio Moscow, Khrushchev announces the dismantling of Soviet missiles in Cuba and does not insist on his demands concerning the removal of U.S. missiles from Turkey.

From the Cuban missile crisis both sides learned that risking nuclear war in pursuit of political objectives was simply too dangerous. It was the last time during the Cold War that either side would take this risk. After the Cuban Missile Crisis, the US and USSR still superimposed their competition on local conflicts in other parts of the globe.

In Africa, newly independent nations such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Nigeria, received military backing and other assistance from the United States and the USSR. American-Soviet competition in the Third World intensified once again, this time during the civil war in Angola and the Somali-Ethiopian war over the Ogaden region. During this phase of the Cold War, Communist Cuba played a significant role alongside the USSR, while the Chinese, now deeply wary of the USSR, participated on the side of the United States.

The early 1980s was a final period of friction between the United States and the USSR, resulting mainly from the Soviets' invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 to establish a Communist regime. In 1983, president Ronald Reagan announces the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI). Commonly known as Star Wars, SDI is envisioned as a satellite-based nuclear defense system, which would destroy incoming missiles and warheads in space.

August 1985, the Soviet Union announces a nuclear testing moratorium. December 1987, Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and U.S. President Reagan sign the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces -- the first arms accord signed by both Moscow and Washington that calls for the elimination of an entire class of weapons -- intermediate-range missiles. July 1991, the United States and the Soviet Union sign the Strategic Arms Reduction Act.

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