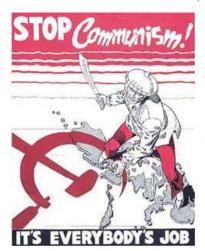# The Cold ~~War~~ Competition

The Cold War is poorly named, since the primary countries involved in it (USA and USSR) never actually directly fought against one another.  In a lot of ways, it's a lot more helpful to think of the Cold War as a track meet, where the countries were competing in a variety of ways to try to win the overall competition.  These different "events" would take the shape of economic policies, wars in other countries where revolutions were taking place, arms races, technology and space races, and spying/information.  It is only once you fully understand the events themselves, that you can fully understand the Cold War.



## Containment

Containment was a policy adopted by the United States and its allies to stop the spread of communism.  Together, they formed NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) to try to take their individual resources and use them to combat the Soviet Union.  Main nations in the NATO alliance included the United States, United Kingdom, and France.  Many smaller nations in Europe also joined NATO, mainly to try to stop Soviet aggression and keep the Soviet Union from taking over their countries.  These countries, like Turkey, did not have the nuclear weapons needed to protect themselves, but the United States was more than happy to offer to put missile stations in the country, as long as the US army ran the stations.  This put their missiles on the doorstep of the Soviet Union, and would become one of the main issues of the Cuban Missile Crisis.  As Vietnam, Korea, Cuba, and Afghanistan all had revolutions, the Soviets would support the communist side, while the US and other NATO countries supported the more democratic side.  Sometimes, if there was no democratic side, as was the case in Afghanistan, the US still supported the rebels, for the sole purpose of preventing the Soviet Union from taking control.

## Arms Race

World War 2 had proven that technology could make a major impact on the battlefield.  With the Americans using the nuclear bombs on Japan in 1945, both countries began to build hundreds of nuclear weapons.  By the end of the 1950's, both country had a stockpile of nuclear weapons large enough to utterly obliterate the other.  This idea came to be known of as Mutually Assured Destruction.  The idea was that if any country were to actually use a nuclear missile against the other in a war situation, then both countries would literally shoot thousands of nuclear missiles at each other, totally annihilating both nations, and possibly life on earth.  In the modern world, the idea of M.A.D. has led the United Nations to push for all countries to drastically reduce the number of nuclear weapons they have (known as de-armament) and for all countries to refuse to make more (non-proliferation.)  While most countries have agreed to this, some, like Iran, North Korea, India, Pakistan, and Israel have not agreed, and continue to build their nuclear arsenals.

The Arms race was about more than just nuclear weapons.  Both countries developed vastly superior submarines, air-craft carriers, tanks, and jet-powered aircraft to what was used in World War 2.

## Space Race

Another competition that the two countries engaged in was over the power to control outer space.  During World War 2, the Germans had developed the V2 rocket, which was capable, with some modifications, of carrying a satellite into outer space.  The Soviets were the first to send animals into outer-space in 1951, the first to have a satellite orbit the earth in 1957 (Sputnik) and the first to have a man go to outer space.  All of this made the Soviets look very powerful to the world, and was a featured point in their propaganda.  The goal then began to get a manned space-craft to land on the moon.  This was achieved by the Americans on July 20th, 1969.  Despite the Soviets winning all of the other "firsts," the fact that the

Americans were able to put a man on the moon gave them the ultimate bragging rights, and historians count the Americans as the winners of the space race.

While it was about developing the technology to reach the moon, the space race was about so much more than reaching the moon. By the 1970's, both countries had satellites in orbit with cameras that could spy on the other country from miles above the country. They could take pictures of important military sites, keep an eye on ships and supply movements, and watch the production output of key industrial sites. Both countries also developed the capabilities to launch nuclear weapons from satellites in space.

## Cuban Missile Crisis

Cuba was a failure of the containment policy of the United States. By the 1960's, communists had a firm control of Cuba, under the leadership of Fidel Castro. The United States was involved in a blockade and embargo of the country, refusing to allow trade to the country in the hopes of starving the communists out of power. Obviously, the Soviet Union wanted to aid the new communist government in any way possible, and Castro was willing to accept any help they were willing to offer. Since Cuba is within 90 miles of Florida, it gave the Soviets an opportunity to set up nuclear missiles capable of hitting the US with little to no warning, an advantage the US already had with missiles based in their NATO ally, Turkey.



*Photographs taken by US spy planes showing the location of Soviet Nuclear Missile Sites in Cuba.*

In October of 1962, US spy-planes took pictures of nuclear missiles being set up in Cuba. The Cuban Missile Crisis had begun. During the 13 days of the Cuban Missile Crisis, both countries exhausted all possibilities. The Soviet Union didn't want to get involved in an actual war, but they also didn't want to move the missiles without getting anything in return. The United States didn't want to get involved in a war either, but didn't want to reward the Soviets by giving them something just for setting up their missiles in Cuba and threatening the US, since this would encourage them to do the same thing later. Ultimately, the solution used by President John F. Kennedy would be to use secret phone calls to the Soviet leader, vaguely promising that if the Soviets removed the missiles from Cuba, a few weeks later, the US would also move their nuclear missiles out of Turkey. It could not be seen as an actual promise, since the US could not make a policy of giving in to the Soviets, but both leaders realized that if they didn't do something, a war was inevitable, and that would result in the use of both countries' nuclear weapons; something that would cause both countries to lose.

## Economic Policy

In the end, the United States simply had more resources than the Soviet Union did. While there were failures, the containment policy pursued by the United States basically worked, and they were simply able to spend more money than the Soviets were. Soviet technology had needed to cut a lot of corners to appear as powerful as American technology as well, resulting in disasters like Chernobyl. Chernobyl is the worst nuclear reactor disaster in world history. The explosion of the reactor's containment facility resulted in the abandonment of an entire town and a radioactive cloud that spread out over Eastern Europe. By the end of the 1980's, the Soviet Union was bankrupt. In 1989 the Berlin Wall was taken down, giving people living in communist-controlled East Berlin the option of leaving. Two years later, the Soviet Union would be dissolved, sending the Russian economy into a 15 year depression and granting self-rule to dozens of Soviet-controlled nations in the Eastern Bloc and Central Asia. The Iron Curtain had been destroyed, and the United States had been victorious in the Cold War.



*The Destruction of the Berlin Wall was symbolic of the end of the Cold War.*

Reading Comprehension Questions

1. Why did small European countries join NATO?
2. Why did the USA and USSR want to avoid open war during the Cold War?
3. Why was the fall of the Berlin Wall so important?

Write about it.

Create a newspaper article about the fall of the Berlin Wall or the end of the Cuban Missile Crisis.