

# THE COLD WAR, 1945-1991

Cold War: The state of ongoing diplomatic tension and high level of military preparedness and mobilization that persisted for decades after 1945 despite the lack of actual military hostilities/combat for much of the time between the capitalist West, led by the USA, and the communist East, led by the USSR, made more dangerous by the existence of weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons

“Thus far the chief purpose of our military establishment has been to win wars. From now on its chief purpose must be to avert them. It can have almost no other useful purpose.”—Bernard Brodie, American naval theorist, 1946

## The Background

- Marxism/communism is opposed to private property and its accumulation (capitalism) and is committed to
  - The principle of violent revolution to overthrow capitalist governments and societies
  - the establishment of a dictatorship to re-educate society
  - and the ultimate abolition of the state and the achievement of a perfectly classless society (no Marxist system has ever achieved this ultimate goal)
- A Marxist/communist government comes to power in Russia in 1918 (the Bolshevik Revolution), establishing the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)
- 1918-1920, US sends army forces to Siberia to help repatriate Allied POWs to the West
  - USSR misconstrues this as an attempt by capitalist US to topple communist regime
  - This establishes “bad blood” between US and USSR and lays the foundation for the Cold War
- World War II
  - Sharks US and England enlist the aid of a Tiger (USSR) to crush another Tiger (Germany) despite the huge ideological differences between the two Sharks and their Tiger ally
  - During World War II, the USSR sustains by far the heaviest human and material losses of the “Big Three” Allied Powers, thus causing further Soviet resentment against the US
  - By 1945, during its counter-offensive against Germany, USSR captures and gains control of all of eastern Europe, including eastern Germany (which eventually becomes the separate state of East Germany), installing communist pro-Russian governments there and in Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and other countries

## **The Early Years, 1945-1949**

- George F. Kennan's "Long Telegram" to the State Department, 1946
  - Kennan, a US diplomat in Moscow, argues that the USSR will seek to expand and destroy the West
  - Kennan proposes that US policy should be to contain communism, preventing its spread to other countries—a policy known as Containment
- 1947, The Truman Doctrine: President Harry S Truman formally adopts Containment
  - "It must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation
    - "by armed minorities
    - "or by outside pressures."
- The Truman Doctrine's economic side
  - 1947-1952, the Marshall Plan (named for Secretary of State George C. Marshall)
  - Gives \$13 billion to war-damaged countries of Western Europe to stabilize them and thus reduce chances of communist takeovers
- The Truman Doctrine's military side
  - 1947, Congress passes the National Security Act
    - Creates Department of Defense, consisting of Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps
    - Creates Central Intelligence Agency
  - 1948, US begins its first peacetime draft
  - 1948, the Berlin crisis
    - USSR closes off all ground access to American/British controlled West Berlin, hoping to starve it into submission
    - Truman responds with the Berlin Airlift, a massive airborne transportation of food and supplies to West Berlin
    - 1949, USSR backs down and ends the Berlin blockade
  - 1949, US, England, and others sign the North Atlantic Treaty
    - the treaty creates the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)
    - A mutual defense organization: an attack on any NATO state is equivalent to an attack on all NATO members, and all will retaliate
    - Designed to deter a Soviet invasion of Western Europe
    - The first peacetime military alliance the US entered

## **The Cold War Turns Hot, 1949-1953**

- 1949
  - Communists come to power in China
  - The USSR develops atomic weapons
    - The combination of atomic weapons and air power makes the continental US vulnerable to overseas attack for the first time

- since the Battle of New Orleans (1815), and vulnerable to widespread destruction/devastation for the first time in history, shocking and frightening Americans
- 1950, National Security Council Memorandum 68 (NSC-68) argues that the USSR is preparing for nuclear war against the West and recommends a more aggressive, military confrontational approach to the USSR than mere Containment; this shapes US policy in the following decades
  - The Korean Conflict, 1950-1953: the Cold War turns hot
    - Geopolitics: Korea provides good invasion routes to Japan, China, and USSR
    - 1945, US and USSR agree to divide Korea at the 38th parallel into two spheres of influence: South Korea (pro-Western) and North Korea (communist)
    - June 1950, North Korean forces invade and nearly overrun South Korea
    - In keeping with Truman Doctrine and NSC-68, Truman orders US forces into Korea to fight communist forces
      - N.B. this is a unilateral presidential decision based on the president's powers as commander-in-chief; Congress never officially declares war
    - United Nations also calls upon its members to send troops to help South Korea
    - After pushing communist forces back to the border, General Douglas MacArthur invades North Korea; China responds by sending hundreds of thousands of soldiers into Korea against US (thus pitting the US land forces directly against a Tiger's army—a *very* bad idea)
    - US forces eventually fight the Communists to a standstill along the 38th parallel but Truman refuses to authorize another invasion of North Korea, opting instead for limited war along the border
      - Limited war: a war in which political considerations limit and restrict available military strategies and objectives rather than permitting all means available to defeat an enemy
      - During the Korean conflict and the Cold War, the limiting factor is a fear of escalation into nuclear war and possible nuclear attack on the continental US
      - Limited war is hard on the troops: the government requires them to fight to achieve a stalemate on the 38th parallel, but the government forbids them from trying to "win"
    - When General MacArthur makes public and critical comments about Truman's limited war decisions ("In war there is no substitute for victory,"), Truman fires him
      - MacArthur fails to recognize the importance of civilian control of the military and the danger of a nuclear war
    - 1953, Korean conflict ended not with peace but a truce that continues until today, with a heavily armed border manned in part by US troops;

as of 2004, North Korea is developing nuclear weapons and has developed delivery systems

## **The Arms Race and the Crisis Years, 1953-1962**

- 1952, US explodes its first hydrogen bomb (a fusion weapon hundreds of times more powerful than previous fission weapons of the sort that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki)
- 1953, USSR explodes its first hydrogen bomb
- 1954-60, US and USSR deploy land-based missiles, submarine-launched missiles, and bomber-delivered nuclear weapons (the “nuclear triad”)
- 1957, USSR beats US into space, launching the first man-made satellite (named Sputnik), further increasing American fears of Soviet nuclear delivery capability
- 1961, USSR constructs the Berlin Wall, a wall that separates Soviet-controlled areas of Europe (and Berlin) from Western Europe (and West Berlin)
- Cuba:
  - 1959, a communist government under Fidel Castro comes to power in Cuba
  - 1961, US backs an abortive attempt by anti-Castro Cubans to invade Cuba and overthrow Castro: the invasion at the Bay of Pigs fails and becomes a source of international embarrassment for the US
  - 1962, Cuban Missile Crisis
    - USSR places offensive nuclear missiles in Cuba: US blockades Cuba and nuclear war nearly begins before US and USSR reach an agreement:
      - USSR agrees to remove missiles
      - US agrees not to invade Cuba and later withdraws obsolete missiles from Turkey

## **• 1963-1991: The Cold War thaws and ends**

- Nuclear limitations: Cuban Missile Crisis scares both US and USSR into negotiating limits to arms race and signing various treaties, among them:
  - 1963, the Test Ban Treaty, prohibiting above-ground testing of nuclear weapons
  - 1972, the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT), limiting the number of certain nuclear weapons
  - 1972, the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty: each side agrees not to develop or deploy anti-missile systems, in effect consenting to live in each other’s crosshairs
    - The ABM Treaty idea is that if either country launches a nuclear strike, the other will retaliate and neither will survive, thus making a nuclear war unwinnable and thus less likely to begin in the first place: this is called the concept of Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD)

- 1981-89, Reagan administration, exploiting the American Shark's wealth and productivity, conducts a massive buildup of US conventional and nuclear forces, hoping to bankrupt USSR as it tries to keep up
  - The buildup succeeds in bankrupting an already weakening Soviet economy and political system
    - 1989, Berlin Wall falls; East and West Germany soon re-unite
    - 1991, the USSR falls apart
  - But the US too, as a result of the buildup, develops a staggering national debt of trillions of dollars that continues to grow as of 2004, a source of major financial and economic weakness that threatens to destroy US economic, military, and diplomatic power in the 21st century

- **China**

- In population terms, by far the largest country on earth
- 1949-1972, no diplomatic relations between US and China; China a closed and isolated society
- 1972, President Richard M. Nixon makes a public state visit to China; relations begin to thaw
- 1979, US and China open full diplomatic relations
- 1989, Chinese military cracks down on Tiananmen Square protestors in Beijing who seek a more open and affluent society, drawing world condemnation
- 1949-2004, China is hostile to non-communist Chinese regime on Taiwan, leading to constant international tension during which US frequently sides with Taiwan
- 21st Century:
  - China developing a highly productive, capitalist-style economy while retaining authoritarian communist government, moving towards economic superpower status capable of challenging US economy while remaining generally hostile to US political ideology
  - China, the 21st century Tiger, is working hard on developing a navy that may someday challenge that of the US Shark