



The Cold War

1945 - 1989 United States History for Kids: Cold War Era

The articles in this section on United States History for Kids relate to the dates, famous people and important events from 1945 - 1989: Cold War Era. The Cold War Era saw the fight against the spread of Communism, the McCarthy Witch hunts and entry into the Korean War, the Vietnam War and the Cuban Missile Crisis. The Space race began, NASA was established and America landed the first man on the moon. The issue of Civil Rights came to the fore, the fight for equal rights for women and the culture of the youth began to take prominence. The leaders of the US who were elected president during the Cold War Era, helped to make the great events in United States history. Learn about the important events in the United States History of Harry S Truman, Dwight D Eisenhower, the United States History of John F Kennedy, Lyndon B Johnson, Richard Nixon, the United States History of Gerald Ford, the history of Jimmy Carter and the history of Ronald Reagan.



Definition and Summary of the Cold War (1945 - 1991)

Summary and Definition: The Cold War was a period of "non-hostile belligerency" primarily between the USA and the USSR. It was a 'war of words' and competition involving the Cold War Space Race and Arms Race involving the nuclear build-up between the USA and its allies in the West and the Communist world dominated by the USSR and China in the East. Main events of the Cold War such as the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Bay of Pigs, the Soviet Invasion of Hungary, the Korean War, the Vietnam War and the U2 incident brought brought the world to the brink of a Nuclear War and annihilation.

The Cold War Presidents (1945 - 1991)

Nine US Presidents were in office during the precarious period in history known as the Cold War. The Cold War started in 1945 during the presidency of Harry Truman and the Cold War ended in 1991 with the fall of the Soviet Union during the presidency of George H Bush. The other US Presidents in power during the Cold War were Dwight D Eisenhower, John F Kennedy, Lyndon B Johnson, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan.



The Cold War Facts: Fast Fact Sheet (1945 - 1991)

Fast, [fun facts](#) and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's) about the Cold War.

What was the Cold War? The Cold War (1945 - 1991) was the name given to the tense relationship and "non-hostile belligerency" between the United States and its [NATO](#) allies, and the Soviet Union and its allies in the [Warsaw Pact](#)

Why was it called the Cold War? The Cold War was so called because of the icy relationship between the USSR and USA starting at the end of WW2. Because two great powers never [directly](#) fought each other it was called a "cold war", meaning there was no physical fighting and described as "non-hostile belligerency". It was a "War of Words".

When did the Cold War start? The Cold War started in 1945 at the end of WW2 as the United States developed the first Atomic Bomb and the power struggle between the USA and the USSR began.

When did the Cold War end? The Cold War ended after a period of 46 years when the Soviet Union fell in 1991 ending the Cold War.



The Cold War Map: Iron Curtain border

The Cold War Facts for kids: What Caused the Cold War?

The origins and causes of the Cold War began at the end of WW2 with the Yalta Conference and then the Potsdam conference which was marked by the ideological differences between Truman and Stalin. Increased Soviet power in Eastern Europe with the eastern Bloc led to the descent of the Iron Curtain, the border between the East and the West. America believed it should contain Communism which led to the [Truman Doctrine](#) and the [Marshall Plan](#).

The Cold War Facts for kids: How was the Cold War Fought?

The Cold War was 'fought' with words, by spying and entering a military arms competition. Vast amounts of money were spent on defense and nuclear arms. The USA and the USSR competed to produce new technological and industrial innovations which included space exploration, satellites and the race to the moon.

The Cold War Facts for kids: What Countries were involved in the Cold War? NATO Countries (The West)

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization ([NATO](#)) was the military alliance of the West during the Cold War that was established in 1949. The members of NATO were the United States, the United Kingdom, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, France, Canada, Portugal, Italy, Norway, Denmark and Iceland. Three years later, on 18 February 1952, Greece and Turkey also joined.

The Cold War Facts for kids: The Warsaw Pact Countries (The East), the Iron Curtain

The Warsaw Pact (14 May 1955 - 1 July 1991) was the USSR response to the NATO treaty at the start of the Cold War. The [Warsaw Pact](#) was a defense treaty among eight communist 'satellite states' of Eastern Europe dominated by the USSR during the Cold War. The members of the Warsaw Pact were Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania and the Soviet Union. The countries were referred to as the Eastern Bloc and their location was described as being behind the "[Iron Curtain](#)", the boundary that separated the free democratic countries of the West with the communist dominated countries of the East, as shown in the map.

The Cold War Facts for kids: Key People - The Cold War Presidents

The Key people during the Cold War were the leaders of the USA and the USSR. There were nine Cold War Presidents between 1945 - 1991. The names of the Cold War Presidents were Harry Truman, Dwight D Eisenhower, John F Kennedy, Lyndon B Johnson, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan and George H Bush.

The Cold War Facts for kids: Key People - The Soviet Leaders

The main Soviet Leaders during the Cold War were Joseph Stalin who was Dictator of the Soviet Union from 3 April 1922 - 16 October 1952. Nikita Khrushchev who came to power in 1953 after the death of Stalin. Khrushchev was in power until 1964, when Leonid Brezhnev had him ousted. Leonid Brezhnev was the leader of the USSR for 18 years from 14 October 1964 - 10 November 1982. Two short-lived leaders emerged. Yuri Andropov ruled the USSR from 12 November 1982 - 9 February 1984 followed by Konstantin Chernenko who was in office from 13 February 1984 - 10 March 1985. Mikhail Gorbachev led from 15 March, 1990 - 25 December, 1991 and introduced the policies of Glasnost and Perestroika which contributed to the fall of the Iron Curtain and the Soviet Union.

The Cold War Facts for kids: Cold War Arms Race

Summary and Definition: The [Cold War Arms Race](#) between the US and the USSR began following the development of the Atomic Bomb and terrified the whole world with the threat of nuclear annihilation.

The Cold War Facts for kids: Cold War Space Race

Summary and Definition: The [Cold War Space Race](#) (1957 - 1975) was a competition in the exploration of space between the United States and the Soviet Union.

The Cold War Facts for kids: Capitalism vs Communism Economic Systems

Summary and Definition: Capitalism was the economic system of the West based on private ownership (rather than government ownership) and the free market system. Communism encompassed the economic system of the East based on government ownership and the control of resources.

The Cold War Facts for kids: The Red Scare

The [First Red Scare](#) was sparked by fear and suspicion of Russia and Communism following the Russian Revolution (1918-1919). The [Second Red Scare](#) erupted following WW2 with anti-communist hysteria in the United States sparked by fears of the Cold War Nuclear Arms Race and communist spies.

The Cold War Facts for kids: Cold War Brinkmanship

Summary and Definition: Brinkmanship is a term coined during the Cold War to describe the tactic of reaching the brink or verge of conflict without actually getting into a war. Cold War Brinkmanship was advocated by John Foster Dulles the U.S. Secretary of State from 1953-1959. The strategy of Cold War Brinkmanship involved aggressive and risky measures seemingly to approach the brink of war in order to persuade the opposition to retreat.

The Cold War Facts for kids: Cold War Propaganda

Summary and Definition: The Cold War era in America was a period of high tension, mistrust and paranoia. Anti-communism hysteria swept the nation as Americans feared the growth of communism and witnessed the USSR and communists suppressing freedom of speech, [religion](#) and civil rights and the oppression or resistance of its people. The Arms Race between the two nations saw the ever increasing competition to develop more and more nuclear weapons and the threat of a nuclear war. Terrified Americans felt helpless as the Space race supplied means of a constant spy system monitoring the USA ever 2 hours. Cold War Propaganda spread Anti-USSR and Anti-Communist information in the many different forms such as newspapers, posters, magazines, kid's comic books, literature, movies, television, radio, photographs and speeches. Cold War propaganda shaped public opinion to ensure the support of government policies and the massive spending required to compete with the Soviets.

The Cold War Facts for kids: Cold War Espionage

Summary and Definition: The Cold War involved the world of Espionage as the East and the West attempted to obtain the secrets of their Cold War opponents. Cold War espionage involved activities aimed at the gathering of Intelligence during the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. The CIA in the USA and the KGB in the USSR became synonymous with Cold War espionage. The KGB 'Committee for State Security' was formed in 1954 as the Soviet's intelligence-gathering and espionage agency and secret police. The Stasi, the East German secret police agency was one of the most repressive and brutal security forces of the Cold War. The CIA was formed in 1947 and involved in the surveillance of suspected foreign agents, covert operations and the deployment of agents abroad. The National Security Agency (NSA) obtained secret information by intercepting, monitoring, and decoding signals and radio traffic. The Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) was responsible for investigating domestic issues such as espionage and treasonable activities. Berlin was referred to as 'Spy Central'. The Berlin Tunnel was a highly elaborate secret passage that US and British agents used to gather information on KGB communication. Spies played an important role in espionage as did Cold War technology. Spy planes were introduced and the US Corona missions (camera-carrying satellites) and the Zenit Spy Satellite developed by the USSR.

The Cold War Facts for kids: Cold War Spies

Summary and Definition: The Cold War spies played an important role in espionage and covert operations. Spies gathered information in many ways, including intercepting communications, stealing documents, setting up 'bugs' (listening devices) or other means of surveillance, sabotage operations, paying informers and using double-agents. The most famous US nuclear spies were Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were charged with heading a Soviet spy ring and were condemned to death for espionage. [Alger Hiss](#), Elizabeth Bentley, and Whittaker Chambers were other famous spies of the Cold War era. American CIA analyst Aldrich Ames was one of the most successful Soviet double agents of the Cold War. The British 'Cambridge Five' including Guy Burgess, Donald Maclean and Kim Philby passed over thousands of confidential documents to the USSR.

The Cold War Facts for kids: Strategies and Doctrines

The Cold War lasted for 46 years from 1945 - 1991. Many of the Key events of the Cold War occurred over several years such as the Cold War Arms Race and the Cold War Space Race. Various strategies and doctrines were also a feature of the Cold War although not related to specific events. These include the Detente, Raprochement, Glasnost, Perestroika, Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD), and the Domino Theory.

The Cold War Facts for kids: Detente

Summary and Definition: [Detente](#) is a political term, taken from the French word meaning release from tension and the relaxation in a political situation. During the Cold War the term Detente signified the state of improved relations and an easing of tensions between the East and the West and a temporary 'thaw' in US-Soviet relations. The first signs of detente followed the [Cuban Missile Crisis](#) when in August 1963 the USSR, the United States and Great Britain signed the first Nuclear Test Ban treaty. Detente declined during the late 1970's due to the active support of the USSR of Communist revolutionary movements in the Third World contributing to a revival of the Cold War.

The Cold War Facts for kids: Rapprochement

The term rapprochement derives from the French word describing the reconciliation or re-establishment of cordial relations between previously nations that were previously hostile. In the context of the Cold War, the term 'rapprochement' refers to the improved relations that occurred during detente during the early 1970s and the Gorbachev era during the late 1980s.

The Cold War Facts for kids: Glasnost and Perestroika

Summary and Definition: [Glasnost and Perestroika](#) are Russian words closely associated with the late stages that led to the end of the Cold War. Perestroika and Glasnost were terms that encompassed many reform measures in the Soviet Union and the democratization of the Communist Party. Perestroika and Glasnost were promoted through the policies of Mikhail Gorbachev. The term 'Glasnost' is the Russian word meaning 'openness' especially in relation to public scrutiny. 'Glasnost' encompassed Soviet reforms implemented by Mikhail Gorbachev during the late 1980s, that encouraged open debate and freedom of speech. Mikhail Gorbachev gave great emphasis to 'Glasnost' in his speech of March 11, 1985. The term 'Perestroika' is the Russian word meaning "reform, rebuilding, reconstruction" used in relation to changes in Soviet society and the economic policy allowing competition in business.

The Cold War Facts for kids: The Domino Theory

Summary and Definition: The [US Policy of Containment](#) led to the [Domino Theory](#) which related to the spread of communist rule during the Cold War. The theory speculated that if one region came under the influence of communism, then the surrounding countries would follow in a falling domino effect. U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower put the theory into words, although he never directly used the term "domino theory", when referring to communism in Indochina during a news conference on April 7, 1954.

The Cold War Facts for kids: The Main Events

During this period in history there were nine Cold War Presidents. The main events of the Cold War that were related to specific dates included the [Bay of Pigs Invasion](#), the Cuban Missile Crisis, the [Berlin Blockade](#) and the [Berlin Airlift](#), the Soviet Invasion of Hungary and the Hungarian Revolution, the [Korean War](#), the [Vietnam War](#), the [U2 incident](#) and the [Fall of the Berlin Wall](#).

[Cold War Arms Race](#)

[Cold War Space Race](#)

The Cold War Facts for kids: Summaries and Definitions of the Main Events

Summaries and definitions of the Main Events and defining moments during the Cold War are summarized below providing a fast overview of this dangerous time in history that brought the world to the brink of a Nuclear War.

[Cold War Events \(1945 - 1947\)](#)

Yalta Conference
The Long Telegram

Potsdam Conference
Operation Crossroads
The Marshall Plan

The United Nations
Containment
National Security Act of 1947

The Iron Curtain
The Truman Doctrine

[Cold War Events \(1948 - 1955\)](#)

Founding of West Germany
Berlin Airlift
McCarthyism and HUAC
Mao Zedong

NATO
Berlin Blockade
CONELRAD
The Korean War
The Vietnam War

[Cold War Events \(1956 - 1961\)](#)

Bay of Pigs Invasion
U-2 Incident
Secret Speech

Cuban Missile Crisis
Berlin Wall built
Hungarian Revolution

Checkpoint Charlie Incident

[Cold War Events \(1968 - 1991\)](#)

Prague Spring
Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan
Fall of the Berlin Wall

SALT Agreements
Star Wars
Collapse of the Soviet Union

End of the Cold War

The Cold War Facts for kids: Cold War Movies

Summary and Definition: The most famous Cold War Movies include Red Dawn (1984 movie), Fail-Safe (1964) The Spy Who Came in from the Cold (1965), The Ipcress File (1965), The Hunt for Red October (1990 movie), The Manchurian Candidate (1962), A Gathering of Eagles (1963), The Third Man (1949 movie), The Bedford Incident (1965), The Spy Who Came in from the Cold (1965), Thirteen Days (2000), Rocky IV (1985) and Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy (2011 movie). Watching these Cold War movies provides a good insight into the tensions and events during this important time in history.

Source: <http://www.american-historama.org/1945-1989-cold-war-era/the-cold-war.htm>

United States History for Kids: Important Historical Events: This United States History for Kids website is presented in a unique way by linking some of the most famous events in United States History for Kids with the presidencies during which they occurred.