Cold War (1945-1991)

You mean the world was divided among three groups after World War II?

Explaining the Cold War

The Cold War was the name given to the international world order that lasted from 1945-1991. From the destruction of World War II, two “super powers” the U.S. and the Soviet Union led two blocs of contending nations: the non-communist states, led by the United States, and the communist bloc, led by the Soviet Union. The two blocs had fundamental differences for organizing government, society and the economy. The U.S. led Western nations supported democracy, individual rights, and a free market economy of supply and demand; the Soviet bloc favored a totalitarian system of limited personal freedoms and socialism in which the government made the major economic decisions on behalf of the people. Although the United States and the Soviet Union did not fight a direct war, there was a constant threat of nuclear war and smaller wars occurred around the world. A third group, the Non-aligned Movement, did not formally have a desire to be involved in the Cold War. The main countries involved included Indonesia, India, Yugoslavia, Egypt, and Ghana. However, membership expanded to nearly 100 nations during the Cold War. During the Cold War, these three groups were called the First, Second, and Third World.

U.S. President Harry Truman proposed a doctrine of containment to stop the spread of communism through the use of military force or financial assistance. The United States and its allies formed the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as a defense against Soviet aggression; the Soviet Union and its partners created the Warsaw Pact as a counter alliance. The communist takeover of China in 1949 added to U.S. concerns about the spread of communist ideas. Often nations that were part of the non-aligned movement, or the “Third World” were subject to military, political, and economic intervention by the U.S. (First World) and the Soviet Union (Second World).

The Threat of Nuclear War

During the 1950’s and 1960’s, the United States and Soviet Union built large stockpiles of nuclear weapons. President Dwight Eisenhower adopted a policy of massive retaliation to deter a Soviet attack. In early 1962, the U.S. had placed nuclear missiles in their allied nation Turkey, close to the Soviet Union’s border. Later in 1962, American spy planes discovered that the Soviet Union had placed missiles in Cuba only 90 miles from the United States. Cuba had become a communist nation after the 1959 revolution lead by Fidel Castro. The U.S. government had secretly sponsored an attack on Cuba in the hopes of getting rid of Castro, but the Bay of Pigs invasion (as it was called) was a huge failure. President John Kennedy ordered the Soviet Union to remove the missiles and for several days in October 1962, it appeared that the two nations would go to war. Eventually, the Soviets removed the missiles from Cuba and the U.S. removed theirs from Turkey. U.S. involvement in wars in Korea, Vietnam, and Angola are examples of other “containment” efforts.
Cold War at Home
The threat of a communist-led attack on the United States caused many Americans to fear for their safety. American schools routinely held drills to train children what to do in case of a nuclear attack and Americans were urged to build bomb shelters in their basements. The conviction of several American citizens (Alger Hiss, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg) for spying for the Soviet Union increased domestic fears of communism. Senator Joseph McCarthy took advantage of that fear to falsely accuse government officials and other Americans of being communists. The term McCarthyism is used to describe the paranoia that leads to the making of false accusations based on rumors.

The End of the Cold War
The end of the Cold War came about as internal problems in the Soviet Union and external influences forced changes. In the 1980’s, the increasing costs of the military as well as demands for economic and political reforms brought a new leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, to the Soviet Union. Gorbachev’s dual policies of glasnost (Russian word meaning openness) and perestroika (Russian term for economic reforms) led to countries in the Soviet bloc renouncing communism. In 1991, the Soviet Union broke apart. The central region of the former Soviet Union was renamed Russia and communism was abandoned. Despite the end of the Cold War, the expansion of nuclear weapons to other nations maintains the possibility of the use of nuclear weapons. See the chart at right for a list of countries with nuclear weapons.

Key Vocabulary
Super powers: a powerful and influential nation that dominates its allies politically, economically, and militarily
Blocs: a group of countries with similar ideas
Free Market: an economic system in which businesses operate without government controls

Totalitarian: a government with a single party and no opposition in making rules for politics, economics or social matters
Non-aligned: not taking a side in a war
Socialism: a system in which the government controls production and distribution of goods (the economy)

Doctrine: rule or principle of a belief or policy
Containment: action to prevent the spread of something undesirable
Stockpiles: large amounts of equipment or other items
Massive retaliation: a strategy in which an attack is responded to with a greater counter-attack

Propaganda poster teaching children to be prepared for a nuclear missile attack

Countries with Nuclear Weapons (as of 2013)
1. United States
2. Russia
3. United Kingdom
4. France
5. China
6. India
7. Pakistan
8. Israel
9. North Korea (possible)

http://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/Nuclearweaponswhohaswhat

Quick Review
1. The drawing (below) instructed Americans to be prepared for what possible event?
   A. water shortage
   B. electrical outage
   C. nuclear attack
   D. hurricane

2. The involvement of the United States in wars in Korea, Vietnam, and Angola are examples of –
   A. isolationism
   B. containment
   C. neutrality
   D. massive retaliation

   A. World War I
   B. World War II
   C. Cold War
   D. Persian Gulf War

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