

THE COLD WAR: An Overview

Source: <http://www.sparknotes.com/history/american/coldwar/index.html>

The Cold War is the name given to the relationship that developed primarily between the USA and the USSR after World War II. The Cold War dominated international affairs for decades, and included many major events and crises—the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Vietnam War, and the Berlin Wall to name a few. For many, the “proliferation” (rapid increase in number) of nuclear weapons in each country was the most worrisome issue.

The rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union for control over the postwar world emerged before World War II had even ended. U.S. presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman and Soviet premier Joseph Stalin never really trusted one another, even while working together to defeat the Nazis. This mutual mistrust actually began as far back as 1917, when the United States refused to recognize the new Bolshevik government after the Russian Revolution. Stalin also resented the fact that the United States and Great Britain had not shared nuclear weapons research with the Soviet Union during the war and was unhappy with the countries’ initial unwillingness to engage the Germans on a second front in order to take pressure off of the Soviets. Additionally, Stalin was irked by the fact that Truman had offered postwar relief loans to Great Britain but not to the USSR.

Important ideological differences separated the two countries as well, especially during the postwar years, when American foreign policy officials took it upon themselves to spread democracy across the globe. This goal conflicted drastically with the Russian revolutionaries’ original desire to overthrow capitalism. Having been invaded by Germany twice in the last fifty years, Soviet leaders also wanted to restructure Europe so that a buffer existed between the Germans and the Soviet border. Both the United States and the USSR believed that their respective survival was at stake, and each was therefore prepared to take any steps to win. As a result, both countries found themselves succumbing to the classic “prisoners’ dilemma”: working together would produce the best result, but with everything to lose, neither side could risk trusting the other. So why were these two super powers so distrustful of the other? Here are some major differences between the two world powers:

US	USSR
Free elections	No elections or rigged elections
Democratic	Autocratic / Dictatorship
Capitalist	Communist
Richest world power	Poor economic base
Personal freedom	All aspects of life and society controlled by the secret police
Freedom of the media	Total censorship

-Adapted from: The History Learning Site