THE COLD WAR: PART 2

Stamp Commemorating Laika, the Soviet Space Dog

Unit Overview

As the 1950s progressed, the superpowers continued to battle for supremacy. Although the Cold War was usually fought on economic and political fronts with little direct confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union, it became a hot conflict in Korea in 1950. The death of Joseph Stalin brought Nikita Khrushchev to power. This Soviet leader faced off against John Kennedy in the Cuban Missile Crisis, an event that had the potential to plunge the world into nuclear war. The space race brought on an intense competition, which ended when the two nations collaborated on the Apollo-Soyuz Project in 1975. Let's see how it all happened.

Timeline of Events	
1950-1953	Korean War
1953	Death of Joseph Stalin
1956	Revolution in Hungary
1957	Launch of Sputnik
1958	The establishment of NASA
1961	Bay of Pigs Invasion
1962	Cuban Missile Crisis
1964	Khrushchev removed from power
1975	Apollo Soyuz Project

STOP: **Go to Section A Questions**

The Korean War

As tensions between the superpowers increased in Europe, the Cold War spread to Asia. **Korea**, which had been absorbed by Japan prior to World War II, became a hotspot. When Japan surrendered in 1945, Korea, like Germany, was divided at the **38th parallel** into Soviet and American zones of occupation. Residents of both zones claimed the right to unify the peninsula. By 1948, the Soviet zone had adopted a communist government while the American zone remained firmly anticommunist. Fears of a worldwide, communist conspiracy spread. Tension further escalated when **China** established a communist government in 1949. This also made Americans even more determined to pursue the policy of **containment** and set the stage for a military response after Soviet-backed, North Korean forces invaded South Korea in June of 1950.

Following the attack, the United Nation's Security Council met immediately without the Soviet Union, which was boycotting council meetings at the time. The United States called on the U.N. to demand the withdrawal of North Korean forces and to enforce this measure with military action, if necessary. Since the Soviets were not present to exercise their veto power, the resolution passed the Security Council. Nevertheless, North Koreans chose to ignore the ultimatum. The Security Council approved the use of military force in Korea and received commitments to send troops from sixteen countries. The United States, however, provided the majority of troops and equipment; U.S. **General Douglas MacArthur** was appointed commander of the United Nation's forces.

Korean Refugees Fleeing Chinese Forces   Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (MASH)
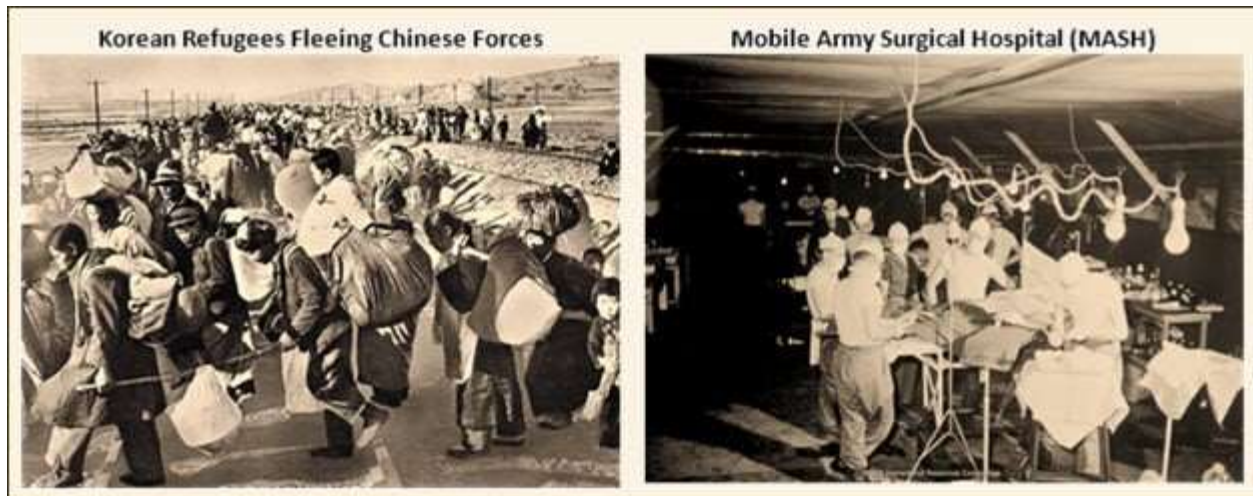
The war proved to be a bitter, bloody conflict. In the beginning, the North Koreans seized control of most of the Korean peninsula. The South Korean and U.N. troops responded by driving their enemies above the 38th parallel. This forced the North Koreans to retreat to the Chinese border. At this point, China intervened and pushed the opposition southward. The war seesawed back and forth until a fragile peace agreement was reached in 1953. The 38th parallel remained the dividing line between the two Korean states. North Korea continued as a communist nation, but the United States achieved its goal of containing communism above the 38th parallel. South Korea maintained its democratic government, and the superpowers avoided a direct confrontation with no risk of nuclear combat.

STOP: **Go to Section B Questions.**

De-Stalinization

Although the **Soviet Union** emerged from World War II as a superpower, the Russian people continued to experience a low standard of living. Shortages of food, fuel and necessary consumer goods were common. Many were victimized by Joseph Stalin's ruthless policies that were enforced by secret police, purges and sentences served in labor camps. Following the death of Stalin in 1953, **Nikita Khrushchev** emerged as the new Soviet leader. Although he did not advocate a change in his country's goals, Khrushchev did pursue what he called **de-Stalinization** and criticized the former leader's abuse of power. In spite of

objections from Stalin's supporters, he pushed to ease the tension brought about by the Cold War and suggested peaceful co-existence with the West.

This did not, however, include a more permissive attitude toward Eastern Europe. Khrushchev sent tanks and other heavy military equipment to put down a revolt in **Hungary** in 1956 and dealt harshly with his critics within the Soviet Union. The Hungarians hoped that the United States would come to their aid. Since this did not happen, they had little choice but to continue their subservience to the Soviets. The deaths of the revolt's leaders and the imprisonment of over 22,000 participants underscored this point. By 1960, Khrushchev's favorable comments regarding peace were often mixed with hostile statements toward the United States and Western Europe.

Fidel Castro (left) and Nikita Khrushchev (right): 1961

STOP: **Go to Section C Questions.**

The Cuban Missile Crisis

Direct confrontations between the superpowers seldom occurred during the Cold War, but the **Cuban Missile Crisis** was a notable exception. In the 1950s, Cuban

society mostly consisted of a relatively few, very rich individuals and a large number of very poor individuals. For some young Cubans, socialism seemed a better alternative than the corruption and oppression offered by the country's dictator, **Fulgencio Battista**. Their first attempt to overthrow Cuba's government failed, but several of the rebels managed to flee to Sierra Maestra, a remote, mountainous region of Cuba. Here, they educated themselves and studied the tactics used by other revolutionaries. They gained the support of many poverty-stricken Cuban peasants. Under the leadership of Fidel Castro, the rebels overthrew the government and took charge. To strengthen his position, Castro tried those who were accused of abusing the poor and executed them. He also nationalized all American companies doing business on the island and used the money for reforms, such as the creation of a national healthcare system.

In the meantime, some Cubans fled to the America and claimed that, in reality, Castro was no better than Battista. The United States responded by declaring a trade **embargo** against Cuba and refused to buy Cuba's most lucrative export, sugar. Fidel Castro's philosophy shifted from socialism to communism when Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev offered to buy Cuban sugar. This resulted in a Soviet ally and pro-communist nation only ninety miles from the state of Florida. President **John Kennedy**, consistent with the U.S. policy of containment, agreed to support a group of anticommunist Cuban exiles, who landed on the island near the **Bay of Pigs** in 1961. Castro's military annihilated the rebels and quickly ended their attempt to remove the communist dictator from power. The incident not only provoked the further deterioration of U.S.-Soviet relations, but it also encouraged the suspicion of sabotage between the superpowers.

U.S. Intercepting a Russian Carrier during the Cuban Missile Crisis

In 1962, photographs taken during the flight of a U-2 spy plane over Cuba revealed the construction of a base for intermediate-range missiles with nuclear capability. American intelligence revealed that Soviet ships were heading toward Cuba with more shipments of missiles. In total, the Soviets sent forty-two medium-range missiles and twenty-four intermediate ones along with 22,000 military personnel. For Khrushchev, this seemed a logical response to U.S. missiles close to the Soviet border in **Turkey** and an attempt to overthrow a communist government. The United States sent two letters of protest to the Soviet Union and placed a type of naval blockade known as a **quarantine** in the path of the Soviet military cargo ships. News organizations broadcast reports of the crisis around the world, and the fear of a nuclear war reached global proportions. Rather than risk a direct military engagement, the Soviet ships altered course and returned to the Soviet Union.

Map Showing the Placement of Soviet Missiles in Cuba: 1962

The Soviets agreed to remove all of their missiles from Cuba, an action that was completed within two months. The United States ended its naval quarantine and promised never to invade Cuba again. The U.S. missiles sites located in Turkey were also dismantled. Another outcome of the Cuban situation was the installation of a direct telephone line between Moscow and Washington D.C. to ease communication between the superpowers in times of crisis. The final result was viewed as a success for the Kennedy administration, but it contributed to the political downfall of Nikita Khrushchev in 1964.

STOP: **Go to Section D Questions.**

The Space Race

In October of 1957, Soviet technicians launched **Sputnik**, the first satellite, into the earth's orbit. About the size of a beach ball, this shiny, metal orb, trailed by four antennas, quickly followed the successful Soviet test of a hydrogen bomb and made headlines around the world. Americans concluded that, if the Soviets had rockets powerful enough to put a satellite into orbit, they also had rocketry capable of striking the continental U.S. with nuclear warheads. This was enough to convince the American public to support the allocation of millions of tax dollars to overtake the Russians in the space race. The Soviet Union was equally dedicated to maintaining its lead and also spent vast amounts of money on its space program.

Cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin

For the next two decades, the superpowers engaged in a number of technological and engineering firsts. In the fall of 1957, the Soviet Union launched Sputnik II and sent **Laika**, a Russian dog, on a quick space flight. The United States followed with its first successful satellite venture, **Explorer I**, in early 1958. President Eisenhower authorized the creation of the **National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA),** and the agency soon sent up the world's first communications satellite. In 1961, Soviet cosmonaut **Yuri Gagarin** became the first man in space when **Vostok I** carried him on an orbit around the earth. Later that same year, the United States responded by sending **Alan Shepard** on the first American manned space flight and with the **Friendship VII** mission, which completed three orbits with astronaut **John Glen** aboard in February of 1962. President John Kennedy, determined to put the United States in the forefront of the space race, announced the intent of putting a man on the moon by the end of the decade, and this became a reality in 1969. The space race drew to a close in 1975 with the **Apollo-Soyuz Project**, a collaborative effort shared by the superpowers and the first of many combined aeronautic ventures. Although it sometimes increased Cold War anxiety, space exploration and its accompanying technology has produced global benefits in the areas of telecommunications and computer science.

What Does It All Mean?

The Cold War rivalry and the fight for international superiority was fueled by the events of the 1950s and 1960s. Military operations in Korea, an intense confrontation over Cuba and an expensive but productive space race all served to intensify the distrust between the United States and the Soviet Union. Both sides, however, remained wary of being the first to deploy nuclear weapons. The United States continued to operate based on the policy of containment, and the Soviet Union maintained its determination to achieve security. By the 1970s, however, the Cold War would draw the United States into Vietnam and the Soviets into Afghanistan. These long, costly conflicts would prove difficult to win by traditional military tactics.

Additional Resources and Activities

Main Points Worksheet

The Start of the Space Race (article with quiz)

The Korean War