

Reading Essentials and Study Guide



The Cold War, 1945–1989

Lesson 3 Cold War Conflicts

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How does conflict influence political relationships?

Reading HELPDESK

Academic Vocabulary

temporary lasting for a limited time; not permanent

emerge to come into being through evolution

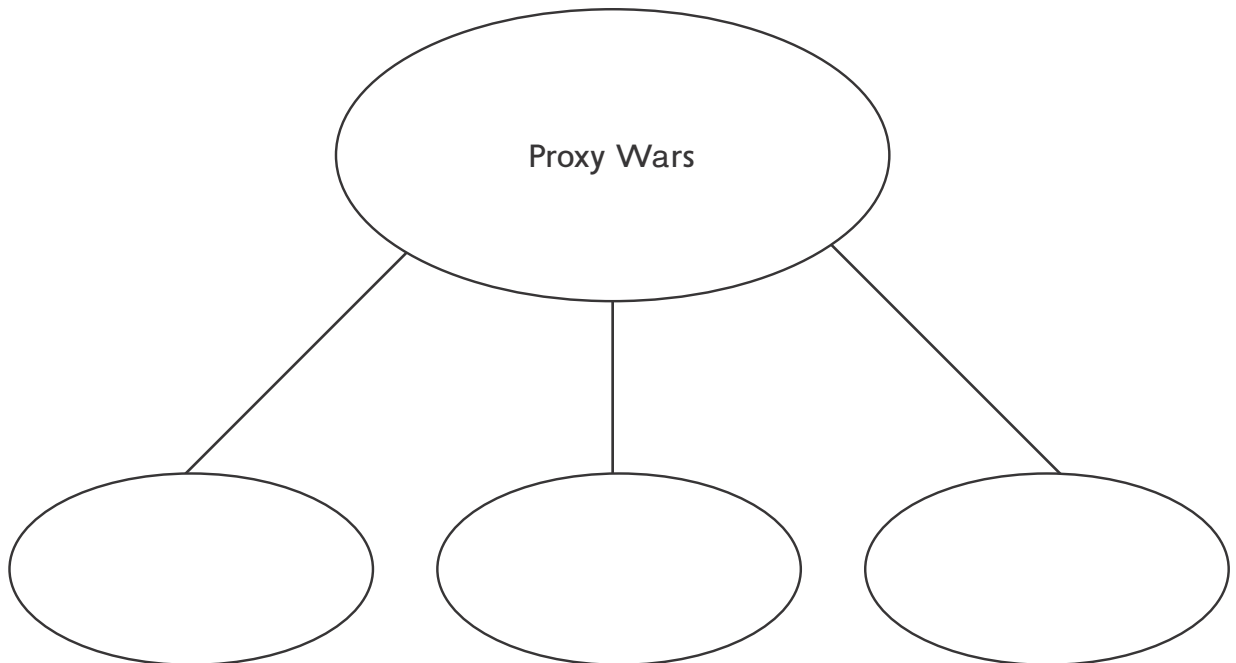
Content Vocabulary

proxy war a war in which the powers in conflict use third parties as substitutes instead of fighting each other directly

domino theory the idea that if one country falls to communism, neighboring countries will also fall

TAKING NOTES: *Categorizing*

ACTIVITY As you read, use a chart like the one below to list the different proxy wars fought by the United States and the Soviet Union.



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IT MATTERS BECAUSE

The Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union spread in the years after World War II. As a result, military alliances around the world were created. The competition between the superpowers also affected “hot” wars, or those that actually involved fighting. The wars in Korea and Vietnam were directly related to the Cold War.

The United States and the Soviet Union

Guiding Questions *What common factor triggered the “hot” wars in Asia during the Cold War? How did nuclear weapons influence political relationships during the Cold War?*

World War II had destroyed European supremacy among the nations of the world. Europe did not gain back its position. The United States and the Soviet Union were now the world’s two superpowers. As the Cold War conflict between them grew stronger, European nations were divided into two armed camps. They were forced to depend upon one or the other of these two major powers. This division also spread to the rest of the world. The rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union brought the world to the brink, or the very edge, of nuclear war. These two nations seemed to hold the survival of the world in their hands.

The two powers never directly fought each other. Instead, the United States and the Soviet Union fought a series of **proxy wars**. A proxy war occurs when two powers in conflict use substitutes instead of fighting each other directly. Proxy wars were common during the Cold War. Both the United States and the Soviet Union were armed with powerful nuclear arsenals. As a result, neither wanted to fight the other directly. However, both nations were willing to support opposing sides in local wars in other countries. The two nations considered this support as part of the ongoing struggle between their two worldviews.

Each superpower used military and economic aid to win the support of other nations. The United States began with NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) in Europe and continued to build alliances in other parts of the world. The Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) was formed to stop Communist aggression in the East. The United States, Great Britain, France, Pakistan, the Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand were members of SEATO.

The Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) included Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Great Britain, and the United States. It was meant to prevent Soviet expansion into the Middle East. The Soviet Union also created a number of alliances.

The Korean War and Vietnam War were two major conflicts of the Cold War. Each was a battle between communists and anti-communists. The Soviet Union and the United States sent military support to prevent the other side from expanding its influence. Also, the Cold War proxy conflict on the small island of Cuba almost turned into a major nuclear war.

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Reading Progress Check

Comparing What did NATO, SEATO, and CENTO have in common?

The Korean War

Guiding Question *What common factor triggered the “hot” wars in Asia during the Cold War?*

Japan controlled Korea until 1945. In August 1945, the Soviet Union and the United States agreed to divide Korea. It was split into two zones at the 38th parallel. The plan was to hold elections after World War II to reunify, or join together again, Korea. This plan never happened because American-Soviet relations grew worse. Instead, two separate governments emerged in Korea—a Communist one in the north and an anti-Communist one in the south.

Tension between the two Korean governments increased. With Joseph Stalin’s promise of Soviet support, Communist North Korean troops invaded South Korea on June 25, 1950. U.S. President Harry S. Truman saw this as yet another example of Communist aggression and expansion. He gained the approval of the United Nations (UN) and sent U.S. troops to repel, or force back, the North Korean invaders. Several other countries sent troops as well. In October, UN forces—mostly American—marched across the 38th parallel. They aimed to unify Korea under one government. The Communist government of China was greatly alarmed by the presence of the UN forces. As a result, the Chinese sent hundreds of thousands of troops into North Korea. They pushed UN forces back across the 38th parallel into South Korea.

North Korean and South Korean troops, along with those of supporting countries, fought for three more years. No final victory resulted. An armistice, or an agreement to stop fighting, was finally signed in 1953. The 38th parallel remained, and remains today, the boundary line between North Korea and South Korea. The division of Korea was reaffirmed. Many Americans viewed events in Korea as a success for the policy of containing, or limiting, communism in Asia.

The Korean War also confirmed American fears of communist expansion. The United States was now more determined than ever to contain Soviet power. As a result, in the mid-1950s the administration of President Dwight D. Eisenhower adopted a policy of massive retaliation, or fighting back. The policy stated that any Soviet advance would be met with the full use of American nuclear bombs. This applied even to a ground attack in Europe. It was after the Korean War that American military alliances extended around the world. President Eisenhower explained as the reason for this that the freedom at risk in Asia was as important as the freedom people had in the West.

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Reading Progress Check

Determining Cause and Effect What effects did the Korean War have on U.S. foreign policy in the mid-1950s?

The Cuban Missile Crisis

Guiding Question *How did nuclear weapons influence political relationships during the Cold War?*

The Cold War confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union reached frightening levels during John F. Kennedy's time as president. In 1959 a left-wing revolutionary named Fidel Castro overthrew the Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista. Castro then set up a Soviet-supported totalitarian regime in Cuba. It was a socialist regime with Communist contacts. United States viewed this Soviet-supported regime so close to the mainland as a security threat.

President Kennedy feared openly taking action against Castro. He believed the Soviets might retaliate by moving against Berlin. If this happened, the conditions might lead to a nuclear war between the two superpowers.

Kennedy considered alternatives for months. He finally approved a plan that the CIA had proposed. Exiled Cuban fighters would invade Cuba at the Bay of Pigs. The purpose of the invasion was to cause a revolt against Castro. The invasion began on Sunday, April 16, 1961. It was a disaster. The exiled fighters began surrendering by Wednesday. One hundred fourteen people died, and the rest were captured by Castro's troops.

After the Bay of Pigs, the Soviet Union sent advisers to Cuba. Then, in 1962, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev began to place nuclear missiles in Cuba. The missiles were a clear response to the placement of U.S. nuclear weapons in Turkey. (The missiles in Turkey were within easy range of the Soviet Union.) Khrushchev commented that the United States was worried about Soviet missiles that were 90 miles across the sea from the U.S. when U.S. missiles were basically on the Soviet border.

The United States was not willing to allow nuclear weapons within such a close distance. In October 1962, Kennedy found out that Soviet ships carrying missiles were heading to Cuba. He decided to blockade Cuba. The blockade would prevent the fleet from reaching the island. This decision gave each side time to find a peaceful solution. Khrushchev made a proposal. He agreed to turn back the fleet and remove Soviet missiles from Cuba if Kennedy pledged not to invade Cuba. Kennedy agreed.

The Cuban missile crisis brought the world frighteningly close to nuclear war. In fact, 30 years later in 1992 a high-ranking Soviet officer revealed just how close it had come to war. Short-range rockets armed with nuclear devices would have been used against U.S. troops if the United States had invaded Cuba. Fortunately, Kennedy had rejected the option of an invasion. At the time, people realized that the world could have been destroyed in a few days by a nuclear war. This realization had a great

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influence on both sides. A hotline communications system between Moscow and Washington, D.C., was installed in 1963. The two superpowers could now communicate quickly in times of crisis.



Reading Progress Check

Summarizing How was the Cuban missile crisis resolved?

The Vietnam War

Guiding Question *What common factor triggered the “hot” wars in Asia during the Cold War?*

By 1963, the United States had become involved in the Vietnam War. This struggle had an important impact on the Cold War. Most states in Southeast Asia had gained independence from colonial rule after World War II. The Philippines became independent of the United States in 1946. Great Britain also ended its colonial rule in Southeast Asia. However, France refused to free Indochina. This decision led to a long war in Vietnam.

The local Communist Party in Vietnam was headed by Ho Chi Minh. It led the struggle against French colonial rule. The Vietminh were an alliance of forces under Communist leadership. In August 1945, they seized power throughout most of Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh was elected president of a new republic in Hanoi. The French refused to accept the new government, and they seized the southern part of the country. For years, France fought Ho Chi Minh’s Vietminh for control of Vietnam. However, the French did not succeed. After a huge defeat at Dien Bien Phu, France agreed to sign the Geneva Peace Accords in 1954. Because of the Korean War, China and the Soviet Union wanted to avoid another conflict with the United States. As a result, they pressured Vietnam to agree to a **temporary** partition of the country. This was an effort to save French pride and satisfy the Americans. Vietnam was divided into two parts. The Communists were in the north, based in Hanoi. The non-Communists were in the south, based in Saigon.

Both sides agreed to hold elections in two years. They would then create a single government. Instead, the conflict continued. Vietnam soon became part of the Cold War conflict. The United States again joined the war to contain communism. It supported South Vietnam under nationalist leader Ngo Dinh Diem. South Vietnam had to deal both with North Vietnamese troops and with the Viet Cong. The Viet Cong were South Vietnamese Communist guerrillas, who were fighting against the government. They were supported by North Vietnam. By early 1965, the Viet Cong had almost seized control of South Vietnam. Their forces also received military aid from China.

In March 1965, President Johnson sent troops to South Vietnam. His goal was to keep the Communist regime of North Vietnam from gaining control of South Vietnam. U.S. policy makers saw the Vietnam conflict in terms of a theory called the **domino theory**. This theory about communism’s spread compared Asian countries to dominoes. If the Communists succeeded in South Vietnam, all the

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other countries in Asia that were freeing themselves from colonial domination would fall like dominoes to communism.

North Vietnam quickly responded to the presence of American troops. The north sent even more forces into the south. American forces had the advantage of massive superiority in equipment and firepower. Despite this, the United States failed to defeat the North Vietnamese. The number of American troops in Vietnam grew. Americans, especially college students of draft age, soon responded with an antiwar movement. The growing destruction caused by the conflict was repeatedly televised. It also turned American public opinion against the war.

President Johnson was condemned for how he handled the costly and indecisive war. As a result, he decided not to run for reelection. Former vice president Richard M. Nixon ran on the pledge, or promise, to stop the war and bring the American people together. He won the election and became president in 1969. Finally, in 1973, President Nixon reached an agreement with North Vietnam. The Paris Peace Accords allowed the United States to withdraw its forces. Within two years after American withdrawal, Communist armies from the North forcibly reunited Vietnam.

The North Vietnamese Communists gained control of Vietnam, but the domino theory proved wrong. Then Communist China and the Soviet Union had a split. This clear disagreement put an end to the Western idea of a single form of communism directed by Moscow. American relations with China resumed under President Nixon. New nations in Southeast Asia did not become communist. Above all, Vietnam helped show the limitations of American power. By the end of the Vietnam War, a new era in American-Soviet relations began to **emerge**.



Reading Progress Check

Applying Why is the Vietnam War sometimes understood as a proxy war?
