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Video Production

THE COLD WAR Part Two

Teachers' Notes by Paul Latham

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The Cold War (Part 2)

Teachers Notes

CUBA AND THE MISSILE CRISIS

Under Kennedy and Khrushchev, the Cold War threatened to become a nuclear war over the issue of Cuba.

The Cuban dictator, General Batista was overthrown by a revolutionary movement led by Fidel Castro early in 1959. Castro's immediate efforts to annul US influence through the nationalisation of US companies, and his exportation of communist revolution to Latin America, soon gained him the enmity of the USA. The USA responded with economic pressure by refusing to buy Cuban sugar. The Soviet Union responded with economic and military aid to Cuba, strengthening Cuban-Soviet relations and posing a threat to the security of the USA. In April 1961, CIA- backed Cuban rebels, attempted to remove Castro from power in the Bay of Pigs invasion. The attempt proved to be a disaster, Kennedy's reputation suffered as a result and Cuba continued to move closer to the USSR.

A major confrontation between the two powers loomed in October when the US learnt that Soviet ballistic missiles, with atomic warheads capable of hitting the USA, were being installed in Cuba. Kennedy ordered a naval blockade against Soviet military shipments to Cuba, and demanded that the USSR remove its missiles and bases from Cuba. There appeared to be a real threat of nuclear war between the two superpowers. The crisis worsened as Soviet merchant ships approached the US blockade. On October 28, the Soviet ships were ordered to turn back by Khrushchev. The USSR agreed to dismantle the bases in return for the USA pledging not to attack Cuba.

A nuclear war had been averted. Each superpower now accepted the nuclear capacity of each other and established a 'hot-line' between the Kremlin and the White House, to help avoid future nuclear confrontations.

Relations between China and the USSR were further strained by the Cuban Crisis. Mao accused Khrushchev of backing down in the crises. Relation between China and the USSR were already strained by the de-Stalinisation policy of Khrushchev, and China also opposed Khrushchev's policy of peaceful coexistence. The Sino-Soviet split was not made public until late 1962 but the Western powers were clearly encouraged by this split in the communist bloc.

Understanding the issues

1. Explanation of terms and events: Bay of Pigs; naval blockade.
2. Brief outline of power and significance: Fidel Castro; Che Guevara.
3. Discussion: Explain why Kennedy did not give more support to the invasion.
What dilemma did Kennedy have over the missile bases in Cuba?
4. Research: List the stages of the Cuban Missile Crisis.
What was the impact of this crisis on Sino-Soviet relations? What other issues affected relations between the two from 1954 to 1963?
5. Film Study: How does the film enhance your understanding of the crisis in Cuba?

THE VIETNAM WAR

Following the defeat of the French in 1954, Vietnam was divided into communist ruled North Vietnam and non communist South Vietnam. A civil war developed as northern communist forces began to infiltrate the south. The US provided aid and military advisers to the government of South Vietnam. By 1964 it was obvious that South Vietnam would be defeated by the North unless the US intervened militarily. In 1965 President Johnson committed US combat troops to help the South. President Nixon continued with this commitment, but his prime concern was how to get the US out of the war without losing credibility. The war was becoming increasingly unpopular at home. Winning the war in Vietnam was becoming more improbable and the Paris Peace Talks continued to drag on.

Nixon adopted a policy of 'Vietnamisation', building up the forces of the South and making it possible to withdraw US forces. He also planned a massive bombing program of North Vietnam to force them to the negotiation table. A peace accord was finally signed in 1973, enabling the US to withdraw from the conflict. However by 1975 South Vietnam was taken over by the North, Laos was taken over by the Pathet Lao and Cambodia was controlled by the Khmer Rouge.

Understanding the issues

1. Explanation of terms and events: Geneva Conference; Vietnamisation; NLF; Khmer Rouge; Gulf of Tonkin Resolution; Operation 'Rolling Thunder'.
2. Brief outline of roles in the conflict: Ho Chi Minh; Henry Kissinger; Pol Pot.
3. Discussion: To what extent did the USA achieve peace with honour'?
4. Research: Assess the assistance given to the North by China and the USSR. The impact of anti-war protests in the USA.
5. Film Study: What does the film reveal about the impact of this war on both Vietnam and the USA?

DÉTENTE

Nixon had been known as a Cold War hardliner and a firm supporter of containment. Yet under Nixon US-Soviet relations improved considerably. This was the period of détente, an easing of superpower tensions and a further development of peaceful co-existence. The end of the Vietnam War ended US foreign policy consensus on the containment of communism.

Peaceful co-existence did not however allow greater freedom to the nations of Eastern Europe which were under Soviet domination. Khrushchev's successor, Leonid Brezhnev, ordered a Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Pronouncing what became known as the Brezhnev Doctrine, Brezhnev justified such aggression by declaring that no socialist country had the right to depart from this ideology.

Nevertheless, there was some cooperation and evidence that the two superpowers were intent on avoiding outright confrontation. Thus the US made no direct attempt to interfere when the USSR attacked Czechoslovakia.

For the USSR there were advantages with trade and technology in co-operating with the USA, as well as avoiding diplomatic isolation, particularly at a time of tension with China.

Significant headway was made during the détente period. In 1972 Nixon visited China. China joined the United Nations after the US agreed to China rather than Taiwan holding the seat.

Between 1972 and 1975 there were four summit meetings between the USA and the USSR: Nixon met Brezhnev in Moscow in 1972 and 1974; Brezhnev met Nixon in Washington in 1973; Ford met Brezhnev in Vladivostok in 1975. The main outcome of these meetings was agreement on arms control and the first Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT 1) was signed in 1972. Both powers co-operated on a number of issues working together in the Middle East to defuse the Yom Kippur war and their involvement in the joint Apollo-Soyuz space station in 1975. The Helsinki Conference in 1975, attended by thirty five nations, represented a major breakthrough in communications between East and West.

Understanding the issues

1. Explanation of terms and events: Détente; Brezhnev Doctrine; SALT 1.
2. Role of personalities in period: Nixon; Brezhnev
3. Discussion: To what extent did both the USA and the USSR believe that détente was in their best interest?
4. Research: List the reasons for détente.
5. Film Study: What does the film reveal about the achievements of détente?

END OF DÉTENTE TO THE END OF THE COLD WAR

Relations between the USA and the USSR deteriorated during the final year of the Carter administration in 1980. When Reagan became President, détente collapsed, and the first half of the 1980s saw a return to the icy relations of the 1950s.

The end of détente was a deliberate measure by the USA. It was Reagan's belief that the USA had been too soft on the USSR in the 1970s, particularly during the Carter administration. He believed that it had been a humiliating period for the US, particularly with the fall of Indochina to communism and the hostage crisis and failed rescue attempt in Iran. Reagan was determined that the US must restore lost pride and prestige. His foreign policy was hard line with containment and a selective rollback of communism.

The Soviet Union also contributed to the ending of détente with the 1979 invasion of Afghanistan by the USSR playing a significant role. The 1978-79 invasion of Cambodia by Vietnam, an ally of the Soviet Union also increased international tension. Events in Poland caused further deterioration in relations, although the Soviet Union did not take direct military action to put down the Solidarity Movement.

From the late 1970s to the end of the Cold War, the USA and the USSR were actively involved in conflicts in Afghanistan, Angola and Nicaragua, with both powers supplying military and economic aids to rival groups. Yet like Nixon before him, Reagan brought about some of the more significant improvements in US-Soviet relations. The early 1980s was a difficult and uncertain time for the USSR. Brezhnev died in 1982,

his successor Andropov died in 1984 and his successor Chernenko died in 1985. The Soviet economy had stagnated and its armed forces were bogged down in the Afghan war. In March 1985 Mikhail Gorbachev became leader of the USSR determined to improve relations with the US, reduce armaments and reform the Soviet economy. Gorbachev introduced the policies of *Glasnost* or openness, and *Perestroika* or restructuring.

Gorbachev and Reagan met for talks twice in Washington, once in Moscow and once in Reykjavik. They signed an Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) in 1987, the first treaty that actually reduced nuclear stockpiles. In 1991 Bush and Gorbachev signed the START 1 Treaty to further reduce warheads and missiles.

The Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989 and Gorbachev announced a series of unilateral troop reductions in Europe.

The collapse of communism in Eastern European countries Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, Czechoslovakia and East Germany, occurred in 1989. The Iron Curtain was now physically and ideologically destroyed. Europe was no longer divided and in Berlin the wall was pulled down. The Warsaw Pact no longer existed. Communism collapsed in the Soviet Union and by the end of 1991 the USSR was replaced by the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The end of the Cold War was complete.

Understanding the issues

1. Explanation of terms and events: Strategic Defence Initiative; Perestroika; Glasnost; Carter Doctrine; Mujahidin.
2. Map Study: List the communist bloc nations of Eastern Europe.
3. Personality study: The roles of Gorbachev, Reagan and Bush in ending the Cold War.
4. Discussion: To what extent was Reagan responsible for the outbreak of a new Cold War?
Why did the Cold War last so long?
5. Research: List the attempts to limit nuclear weapons in the period to 1990.
List the reasons for the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan
List the events of the East European Revolution of 1989.
6. Film study: How did the documentary film contribute to your understanding of why the Cold War ended?
What care should an historian take when using documentary film?