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Video Production

THE COLD WAR Part One

Teachers' Notes by Paul Latham

**Notes also available on DVD disc as
either a Word document or PDF file.
Also available on the website.**

The Cold War (Part 1)

Teachers Notes

ORIGINS OF THE COLD WAR

The Cold War was a term used to describe the emerging tension at the end of World War II, between the USA and its Western European allies on the one hand, and the Soviet Union and its Eastern European bloc on the other. It was a struggle of the ideologies of capitalism and democracy with the ideology of communism and brought the world to the brink of a nuclear war. The late 1980s saw a steady improvement in relations between the superpowers, with the Cold War coming to an end following the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Between November 1943 and July 1945, three major conferences were held that had an impact on the structure of the post war world. The first of these was a meeting with Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt held in Teheran in November 1943, where Stalin pressed for a future Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe.

The second conference was in Yalta in February 1945 where the foundations for post war Europe were laid.

The third wartime meeting of the leaders of Britain, the USSR and the USA was held at Potsdam in July 1945, where both Germany and Berlin were divided into zones of occupation. This marked the first hostile stage of the Cold War.

While Stalin finally joined the Allies against Japan, the power of US atomic bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki to end the Pacific War, were viewed as a threat to the security of the Soviet Union

On March 5 1946, Winston Churchill used the term 'iron curtain' in referring to Soviet expansionism and the division between east and west.

Understanding the issues

1. Explanation of terms and events: Capitalism; Communism; Democracy; Iron Curtain; Potsdam Conference; Superpowers; Yalta Conference.
2. Role of Churchill, Stalin, Roosevelt and Truman in settling post war problems.
3. Discussion: Why did tension arise between the Allies and the Soviet Union during World War II? Who was to blame?
4. Research: List the main concerns of the delegates at the Potsdam Conference. Analyse the concerns of Churchill in his Iron Curtain Speech.
5. Film Study: What were the implications of the dropping of atomic bombs on Japan?

THE TRUMAN DOCTRINE AND THE MARSHALL PLAN

On March 12 1947, President Truman gave a speech to the US Congress in which he laid out US foreign policy on the containment of communism. This policy became known as the Truman Doctrine. Congress supported Truman and agreed to \$400 million in aid to Greece and Turkey.

In June 1947, George C Marshall the US Secretary of State, unveiled the European Recovery Program which became known as the Marshall Plan.

This plan became the mechanism for Truman's containment of communism, and in April 1948 Congress agreed to \$17 billion of aid to Europe over five years

Once the Truman Doctrine was formulated and Marshall Aid offered, it was clear that Germany was going to be a major Cold War issue. Western leaders believed Stalin was attempting to drive the West out of Berlin, and possibly out of Germany. This was viewed as a further example of communist expansion that could not be tolerated.

As a result of the Western Powers proposing a new currency to operate within their zones of occupation, the Soviet Union stopped all rail and road links into West Berlin and cut off electricity and coal supplies. To the Western Powers this was virtually an act of war.

General Clay, the commander of the American occupation forces in Europe suggested a massive airlift be used to supply Berlin. All supplies were airlifted into Berlin for over 300 days until Stalin called off the blockade on March 12 1949.

As a result of the Berlin blockade and airlift, Berlin remained permanently divided, the three western zones became the Federal Republic of Germany and the Soviet zone became the German Democratic Republic.

The Berlin blockade led to tension between the two blocs and to a build up of armaments. In April 1949 the US established NATO, a defensive military alliance against the USSR. In May 1955, the USSR formed a defensive alliance against NATO known as the Warsaw Pact.

Understanding the issues

1. Explanation of terms and events: Truman Doctrine; Marshall Plan.
2. Map study: Berlin airlift 1948-1949; boundaries of the two new German states.
3. Discussion: Why did the Soviet Union try to force the West out of Berlin?
What does the Berlin airlift reveal about the Truman Doctrine?
4. Research: List the events leading to the Berlin airlift.
Analyse the short and long term effects of the Berlin blockade.
5. Film Study: What does the film reveal about Stalin's ambitions and strategies in Germany?

THE COLD WAR IN ASIA

Four years of civil war after World War II culminated in the establishment of the People's Republic of China at Beijing in October 1949, under the communist leader Mao Zedong. The Nationalist forces under Jiang Jieshi retreated to the island of Formosa

The USA had given over US\$2 billion dollars in aid to the nationalists in the years prior to the revolution. The loss of China to communism at the time the USA was focused on containing communism in Europe, was a blow to US plans. The USSR having largely ignored Mao's struggle in China, welcomed the success of the revolution as an example for other nations in Asia. In February 1950 the USSR and China formulated the Sino-Soviet Treaty.

The news that the USSR had exploded an atom bomb in September 1949, together with the Communist victory in China, started an arms build up by Truman. US concern appeared justified when the Korean War broke out on June 25 1950, with Soviet trained and armed North Korean troops invading South Korea and capturing the capital Seoul.

The USA secured a United Nations resolution to defend South Korea, with the USSR not present to use its veto. In the USA, opinion was divided as to whether to seek complete victory, or the original goal of repelling North Korean advances into the south.

President Truman at one stage even contemplated using atomic weapons. When the aggressive tactics of General MacArthur threatened China, he was dismissed from office, causing a split in public opinion in the USA.

By June 1951 a military stalemate was reached at the 38th parallel. For two more years only small gains in territory were made, while diplomatic negotiations continued. Finally in July 1953 an armistice was signed and Korea remained divided along the border established at the end of World War II. The USA had contained the spread of communism, but as in Europe a hostile stalemate was the result.

In 1954 Ho Chi Minh's Vietnamese nationalists defeated French forces at Dien Bien Phu. This marked the end of French colonialism in Indochina. President Eisenhower was concerned that if one nation of Asia went communist then the next would follow. This became known as The Domino Theory. It had importance for the US policy of containment, as communism spread from the USSR to China and Korea and on to Indochina. This set the scene for US intervention in Vietnam.

Understanding the issues

1. Explanation of terms and events: The Domino Theory; Dien Bien Phu.
2. Map study: Examine the different phases of the Korean war.
3. Discussion: What issue caused the USSR to boycott the Security Council in 1950 and what was the impact of this decision?
Why were the communist forces of Mao able to defeat the nationalist forces of Chiang in 1949? How significant were the roles played by the USA and the USSR in this outcome?
4. Research: Outline the roles played by Mao and General MacArthur in the Korean War.
5. Film Study: What does the film reveal about the tactics and strategies of both sides in the Korean War

THE POST STALIN ERA

Britain became a nuclear power in October 1952 and the USSR was no longer the only nuclear power in Europe.

Many in the USA were concerned that while their country was successful against the Germans and Japanese in World War II, they could not continue this success against the Chinese and North Koreans.

Many politicians in the USA began to exploit the fears of ordinary Americans and in the late 1940s a congressional body, the House for Un-American Activities Committee, was established to hunt for communist spies and sympathisers. It became notorious for its attempts to uncover communists in Hollywood. Two Americans, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were executed in New York for being part of a Soviet conspiracy to steal US nuclear secrets.

Senator Joe McCarthy was associated with the 'red scare' in the 1950s. 'McCarthyism' was responsible for many government officials and prominent Americans labelled as communists without any real justification. In 1954 McCarthy was finally censured by the Senate for his irresponsible behaviour.

After the death of Stalin in 1953, Communist Party Secretary Khrushchev and Premier Malenkov kept a tight rein on Eastern Europe. Soviet tanks crushed an uprising in Leipzig and East Berlin. However there was a thaw in this hard line towards Yugoslavia in 1955 and Poland in June 1956. However an attempt by Hungary to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact and declare its neutrality in October 1956, was answered by Soviet troops and tanks who brutally crushed the revolution. Khrushchev, although denouncing Stalinism, was still prepared to be ruthless to hold the Soviet bloc together.

In October 1957, the Cold War expanded into space with the USSR launching a satellite, 'Sputnik I'. The USSR widened their lead in the space race when Yuri Gagarin became the first man to orbit the Earth in April 1961. The USSR's space program, together with major developments in thermonuclear bombs, caused concern throughout the West. The USA increased its military budgets and further developed its missile research capacity. By the late 1950s the USSR was ringed by missiles armed by nuclear warheads.

The USA flew secret U-2 reconnaissance flights over Soviet territory to spy on military targets. Soviet concerns about US spying were confirmed when a U-2 aircraft piloted by Gary Powers was shot down in May 1960.

In June 1961 Berlin re-emerged as a major source of contention between the USA and the USSR. President Kennedy announced a major increase in arms spending and implied the US would be willing to use nuclear force to defend West Berlin. In August 1961 the USSR responded by constructing the Berlin Wall to separate East and West Berlin. The Berlin Wall became a symbol of the differences between life in a communist and capitalist state.

From 1961 onwards, the Cold War alternated between periods of thaw and periods of confrontation in different parts of the world.

Understanding the issues

1. Explanation of terms and events: NATO; Warsaw Pact; De-Stalinisation; CIA; Eisenhower Doctrine; Peaceful coexistence.
2. Briefly sketch the political careers of Khrushchev; Eisenhower.
3. Discussion: How were the arms race and the space race linked?
Why didn't the USA and their NATO Allies do more to help the opponents of the USSR in Eastern Europe?
4. Research: Reasons for, and significance of, the 1956 Hungarian Uprising.
Reasons for the failure of the Paris Summit in 1960.
5. Film Study: What role can documentary play in an understanding of historical events such as the Hungarian Uprising of 1956 and the impact of the Berlin Wall.