

How “cold” was the Cold War?

World History and Geography 1500 to the Present



Duck and cover drill in a school in Brooklyn in 1962 taken from Wikipedia.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duck_and_cover#/media/File:P.S. 58 -
Carroll & Smith Sts. Bklyn. hold a take cover drill 01489v.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duck_and_cover#/media/File:P.S._58_-_Carroll_&_Smith_Sts._Bklyn._hold_a_take_cover_drill_01489v.jpg)

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Standard(s)

- WHII.10** The student will apply history and social science skills to understand the significance of the Cold War during the second half of the 20th century by
- explaining the causes, the domino theory, the role of containment, and the differences between the United States’ and Soviet Union’s economic and political systems;
 - describing the events, conflicts, and revolutionary movements including, but not limited to the Berlin Blockade, the Suez Canal Crisis, the Hungarian Revolution, the Bay of Pigs, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Prague Spring, as well as the impact of clandestine operations on the Cold War;
 - describing conflicts, events, and major leaders in Asia, including Mao Zedong, Chiang Kai-shek, Deng Xiaoping, Ho Chi Minh, and Tiananmen Square;

After World War II, the United States and the Soviet Union emerged as the world’s two superpowers. Although they had been allies, their relationship quickly broke down due to deep differences in political and economic systems. The United States supported democracy and capitalism, while the Soviet Union promoted communism and authoritarian rule. Each side feared the spread of the other’s influence. The conflict that followed became known as the Cold War due to the lack of armed conflict between the two nations. This inquiry has students explore if the use of the term “cold” is accurate for this period of time.

Featured Sources

Source A: [Truman Doctrine](#)

Source B: [Duck and Cover Video](#)

Source C: [Cold War Timeline](#)

Source D: [American War and Military Operations Casualties: List and Statistics](#)

Formative Performance Tasks

1. **COLLABORATE:** In small groups, students analyze sources A-D and sort evidence into categories that help answer the compelling question.
2. **DELIBERATE:** Students engage in a structured discussion using evidence from the documents to evaluate the accuracy of the term “Cold War.”
3. **PRODUCE:** Students independently write a short, evidence-based response to the compelling question.

Instructional Snapshot

Working with your group, students review each featured source and identify specific evidence from each one. Sort the evidence into two categories: evidence that supports the Cold War being “cold” and evidence that suggests the Cold War was “hot” or violent. Record the evidence and brief explanations on a shared chart or digital slide. This task encourages collaboration and shared interpretation, requires students to focus on evidence rather than opinion, and supports all learners before they move on to independent thinking. (COLLABORATE)

Students will deliberate by discussing the question “How ‘cold’ was the Cold War?” using evidence from the featured sources. Students should reference specific documents and explain how the evidence supports their thinking, while also considering viewpoints that differ from their own. This deliberation may be structured in several ways depending on class needs. In a Think–Pair–Share, students first reflect independently on the question, then discuss their ideas with a partner, and finally share their conclusions with the class using evidence from the sources. In a small-group discussion with sentence stems, students work in groups to discuss the question using provided prompts such as “One piece of evidence that suggests the Cold War was not cold is...” or “This source supports the idea that the Cold War was cold because...”. For a fishbowl or Socratic-style seminar, a small group of students discusses the question in the center of the room while others listen and prepare follow-up questions or responses, with roles rotating so all students participate. (DELIBERATE)

Students write an individual response to the compelling question “How ‘cold’ was the Cold War?” (PRODUCE)

How “cold” was the Cold War?

Featured Source: Truman Doctrine

Source A: National Archives and Records Administration. (n.d.). *Truman Doctrine (1947)*. National Archives and Records Administration. <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/truman-doctrine>

“The world is not static, and the status quo is not sacred. But we cannot allow changes in the status quo in violation of the Charter of the United Nations by such methods as coercion, or by such subterfuges as political infiltration. In helping free and independent nations to maintain their freedom, the United States will be giving effect to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

It is necessary only to glance at a map to realize that the survival and integrity of the Greek nation are of grave importance in a much wider situation. If Greece should fall under the control of an armed minority, the effect upon its neighbor, Turkey, would be immediate and serious. Confusion and disorder might well spread throughout the entire Middle East.

Moreover, the disappearance of Greece as an independent state would have a profound effect upon those countries in Europe whose peoples are struggling against great difficulties to maintain their freedoms and their independence while they repair the damages of war.

It would be an unspeakable tragedy if these countries, which have struggled so long against overwhelming odds, should lose that victory for which they sacrificed so much. Collapse of free institutions and loss of independence would be disastrous not only for them but for the world. Discouragement and possibly failure would quickly be the lot of neighboring peoples striving to maintain their freedom and independence.

Should we fail to aid Greece and Turkey in this fateful hour, the effect will be far reaching to the West as well as to the East.

We must take immediate and resolute action.”

Questions for students to consider:

1. Who is the speaker, and what situation is he responding to in Greece and Turkey?
2. What does the speaker fear will happen if Greece falls under the control of an armed minority?
3. How does the speaker justify U.S. involvement without declaring war?
4. What words or phrases in the excerpt suggest urgency or danger?

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Featured Source: Duck and Cover Video

Source B: Middleton, R., Calonius, L., & Lambert, D. (Narrators/Contributors), United States Office of Civil Defense, National Education Association of the United States, & Castle Films, Inc. (Producers). (1952). *Duck and Cover* [Film]. Archer Productions; Castle Films, Inc. Retrieved from the Library of Congress: <https://www.loc.gov/item/2022604365/>

Use these questions to guide classroom discussion:

1. What emotions or fears does the *Duck and Cover* video try to create, and why would the government want the public, especially children, to feel this way?
2. Why did governments prepare civilians for nuclear attacks? What does this suggest about everyday life during the Cold War?

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Featured Source: Cold War Timeline

Source C: Harry S. Truman Presidential Library & Museum. (n.d.). *Timeline of the Cold War* [PDF]. https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/TrumanCIA_Timeline.pdf

Timeline of the Cold War

1946

- February 9: Stalin hostile speech - communism & capitalism were incompatible
- March 5 : “Sinews of Peace” Iron Curtain Speech by Winston Churchill - “an “iron curtain” has descended on Europe”
- March 10: Truman demands Russia leave Iran
- July 1: Operation Crossroads with Test Able was the first public demonstration of America’s atomic arsenal
- July 25: America’s Test Baker - underwater explosion

1947 Containment

- March 12 : Truman Doctrine - Truman declares active role in Greek Civil War
- June : Marshall Plan is announced setting a precedent for helping countries combat poverty, disease and malnutrition
- September 2: Rio Pact - U.S. meet 19 Latin American countries and created a security zone around the hemisphere

1948 Containment

- February 25 : Communist takeover in Czechoslovakia
- March 2: Truman’s Loyalty Program created to catch Cold War spies
- March 17: Brussels Pact organized to protect Europe from communism
- June 24 : Berlin Blockade begins lasting 11 months

1949 Containment

- April 4 : NATO ratified
- May 12 : Berlin Blockade ends
- 29 August : Russia tested its first atomic bomb
- October 1 : Communist Mao Zedong takes control of China and establishes the People’s Republic of China

- December 1 - Chiang Kai-shek moved to Formosa and created Nationalist government

1950

- January 30 - Truman approved H-bomb development
- February : Joe McCarthy begins Communist witch hunt and loyalty tests
- June 24: Korean War begins. Stalin supports North Korea who invade South Korea equipped with Soviet weapons

1951

- January 12: Federal Civil Defense Administration established
- April 11 : Truman fires MacArthur

1952

- A-bombs developed by Britain

1953

- March 17-June 4 Nuclear Arms Race atomic test series of 11 explosions at Nevada Test Site
- April 15: RAND report on the "Vulnerability of U. S. Strategic Air Power"
- July : Korean War ends
- December 8: Ike's Atoms for Peace speech

1954

- March 1: H-bomb Castle-Bravo test
- March : KGB established CIA helps overthrow unfriendly regimes in Iran and Guatemala
- July : Vietnam split at 17th parallel

1955

- May : Warsaw Pact formed

1956

- June 29: USSR sent tanks into Poznan, Poland, to suppress demonstrations by workers
- September 4: USSR sent military aid to Afghanistan
- October - November : Rebellion put down in Communist Hungary.
- October 29: Suez Crisis began with Israeli attack led by Moshe Dayan against Egyptian forces in the Sinai Egypt took control of Suez Canal

1957

- August 26: Vostok rocket launched 1st ICBM
- October 4 : Sputnik launched into orbit
- November 3: Sputnik II launched - Laika died in space

1958

- January 31: Explorer I launched
- July : NASA began Mercury project using Atlas rocket
- November : Khrushchev demands withdrawal of troops from Berlin

1959

- January : Cuba taken over by Fidel Castro
- September : Khrushchev visits United States; The Kitchen Debate

1960

- A-bombs developed by France
- May : Soviet Union reveals that U.S. spy plane was shot down over Soviet territory
- November : John F. Kennedy elected President of USA
- December 19: Cuba openly aligns itself with the Soviet Union and their policies.

1961

- April : Bay of Pigs invasion see Cuban Missile Crisis Timeline
- August 13 : Berlin border is closed
- August 17 : Construction of Berlin Wall begins

1962

- U.S. involvement in Vietnam increases
- October: Cuban Missile Crisis

1963

- July : Nuclear Test Ban Treaty ratified
- November 22: President Kennedy assassinated in Dallas, Texas

1964

- August : Gulf of Tonkin incident
- October: A-bombs developed by China

1965

- April : U.S. Marines sent to Dominican Republic to fight Communism
- July : Announcement of dispatching of 200,000 U.S. troops to Vietnam

1966

- B-52s Bomb North Vietnam

1967

- The US Secretary of Defence Robert McNamara admits that the US bombing raids had failed to meet their objectives

1968

- January : North Korea captured U.S.S. Pueblo
- President Johnson does not run for the presidency and Richard Nixon Elected President of the USA
- August : Soviet Red Army crush Czechoslovakian revolt

1969

- July 20 : Apollo 11 lands on the moon

1970

- April : President Nixon extends the Vietnam War to Cambodia

1971

- Publication of the Pentagon Papers

1972

- February: President Richard Nixon visits China
- July : SALT I signed

1973

- January : Cease fire in Vietnam between North Vietnam and United States
- September : U.S. supported coup overthrows Chilean government
- October : Egypt and Syria attack Israel; Egypt requests Soviet aid

1974

- August : President Nixon resigns

1975

- April 17: North Vietnam defeats South Vietnam which falls to Communist forces

1976

- February: Soviet and Cuban forces help to install Communist government in Angola.



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**Featured Source:
American War
and Military
Operations
Casualties**

Source D: DeBruyne, N. F. (2018). *American war and military operations casualties: Lists and statistics* (CRS Report No. RL32492). Congressional Research Service.
<https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/RL32492>

War or Conflict	Branch of Service	Number Serving	Total Deaths	Battle Deaths	Other Deaths	Wounds Not Mortal
Korean War (1950-1953)	Total	5,720,000	36,574	33,739	2,835	103,284
	Army	2,834,000	29,856	27,731	2,125	77,596
	Navy	1,177,000	657	503	154	1,576
	Marines	424,000	4,509	4,267	242	23,744
	Air Force	1,285,000	1,552	1,238	314	368
Vietnam Conflict (1964-1973)	Total	8,744,000	58,220	47,434	10,786	303,644
	Army	4,386,000	38,225	20,963	7,261	201,525
	Navy	1,842,000	2,566	1,631	935	10,076
	Marines	794,000	14,844	13,095	1,749	88,594
	Air Force	1,740,000	2,586	1,745	841	3,449

Sources List:

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