The Cold War

What do you think the term ‘The Cold War’ means?

Making a decision to go to war is not something that any country will do easily, but sometimes the differences between nations can seem impossible to solve by peaceful means. The United Kingdom, USA and USSR, along with many other countries found that they had to prevent Nazi Germany’s aggressive expansion in Europe.

The war against Germany ended in May 1945 and America brought the war against Japan, an ally of Germany’s, to an end three months later by dropping two atom bombs. The implications of this decision changed international politics for ever.

Why do you think that world politics were changed for ever by the first use of the atom bomb?

The ‘Big Three’ leaders, Stalin, Truman and Churchill got together in a series of meetings to discuss how they could work together to ensure peace and stability in Europe. They had been very united in their fight against Germany and Japan, but now their differences which had always been based on opposing political values started to show.

Fact Fact 1: Communism: a political idea which says that the interests of society as a whole are more important than individuals; everyone should be equal and remain equal; no-one should think himself better than others, or be richer.
Working with a friend, try to match each thought bubble to one of the ‘Big Three’ leaders: Stalin (USSR); Churchill (UK); Truman (USA)

I want to protect my country from attacks by the West: we have been invaded 3 times in the past 27 years. Our political values are at risk from capitalists.

The Empire seems to be crumbling: I think that my country needs some friends who are close to hand. I’m going to insist that France should have some special responsibility for helping to sort out defeated Germany.

I think we have a responsibility to maintain world order and not to just think about ourselves.

We can’t go back to an economic depression. We need to keep making and selling things at home and abroad, if not weapons, then useful goods, like cars. Our economy and way of life could spread throughout the world.

I would really like these two to get on because my nation doesn’t seem to be as influential as it once was and I need to keep friendly relationships around the world.

My country has borders in the east too. I want to make sure that Japan, who has always disliked us, won’t ever think about invading us. We lost 20 million from our proud nation in this war. I’m very alarmed by the atomic bomb.

First Fact 2 Capitalism: property, industry and land should be privately owned; anyone can invest his or her money and become richer than others; making money will encourage saving towards becoming rich; theoretically everyone has the opportunity to do this.
Although history is made through the facts and statements of the past, trying to understand ‘why’ is something that historians don’t always agree about. Sometimes what actually happened is less important than what people think happened and actions by one side which may have been defensive look aggressive to the other.

Look carefully at this map and you will see how USSR ‘took over’ Eastern European countries and set up communist friendly governments. If you were an American, or Western European what would you think?

Look carefully at this picture, below, of the first atomic bomb, dropped on Hiroshima by the USA. It brought about the end of the war against one of USSR’s oldest enemies, Japan, but killed 140,000. If you were a Russian, what would you think?
It became increasingly clear that the USSR and USA didn’t trust each other at all, despite the efforts of UK and an alliance called the United Nations.

With a group of friends, choose whether you are going to represent the USSR or the USA. Here is a list of options that you could choose from. List your preferred course of action from 1-10.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
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<tr>
<td>Invade Western Europe</td>
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<tr>
<td>Invade Eastern Europe</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stop talking to each other</td>
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<tr>
<td>Give economic assistance to countries in Western Europe</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support economic growth to countries in Eastern Europe</td>
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<tr>
<td>Develop nuclear weapons</td>
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<td>Develop space technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Make influential friends across the globe</td>
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<tr>
<td>Close and control borders</td>
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<tr>
<td>Form alliances with neighbouring countries</td>
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For a ‘cold war’ the period of international politics between the end of the Second World War in 1945 and the break up of the USSR in 1991 had some very ‘hot’ moments which could have brought the world as we know it, to an end.

Let’s look at one of these in more detail: The Berlin Blockade, June 1948-May 1949
Berlin was the capital city of Hitler’s Nazi Germany and it was important that after the victory in Europe in 1945, the allies; UK, USA, USSR and France should have an equal say in how it should be rebuilt. It was, therefore, divided into 4 zones. However, if you look carefully at the maps, you can see that there was a problem!

Stalin began to feel very uneasy because USA was pouring money into countries and governments which could prove themselves to be anti-Communist. The reality was that Berlin was an island of Capitalism in the heart of what Stalin had created as Communist East Germany.

What was the USSR’s response?

- To set up East Germany’s own currency
- To blockade all roads, rail lines, rivers and canals into the East.
- To cut electricity supplies to West Berlin
- To stop parcel mail from the West.

The Berlin Blockade lasted for 462 days!
Working with a friend, draw up a list of things that you think would be essential for you and your family to live for 462 days. Then join up with another pair of friends and compare your lists.

How would you get these supplies if the same restrictions Stalin imposed on Berlin were to be imposed on your town?

Operation Plainforce and Operation Vittals saw the British and Americans fly 278,228 missions into Berlin, over Soviet airspace. They delivered 2,326,406 tons of food and supplies, 1.5 million tons of coal. Although 78 air and ground crew lost their lives, the Berlin Blockade was the first victory for the West in the Cold War. Stalin and the USSR watched in stunned silence.

Other ‘hot spots’ in the Cold War for you to ‘defrost’ include:

- The formation of the Warsaw Pact
- The launch of the first Space Satellite-Sputnik
- The Bay of Pigs and the Cuba Missile Crisis
- The Berlin Wall