

# THE COLD WAR



## WHAT WAS THE COLD WAR?

The Cold War was a long period of tension between the democracies of the Western World and the communist countries of Eastern Europe. The west was led by the United States and Eastern Europe was led by the Soviet Union (aka USSR). These two countries became known as superpowers. Although the two superpowers never officially had physical battles, they fought indirectly and competed in the arms race and the space race.

## WHEN WAS THE COLD WAR?

The Cold War began soon after World War II, in 1945. Although the Soviet Union was an important member of the Allied Powers (on the side of Britain during WWII), there was great distrust between the Soviet Union and the rest of the Allies. The Allies were concerned with the brutal leadership of Joseph Stalin as well as the spread of communism.

The conflict between the communists and capitalists spanned over forty years. The Cold War came to an end with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The Soviet Union was thus renamed Russia (or officially, The Russian Federation).



## THE ARMS RACE

During the Cold War, both the USA and the USSR spent enormous amounts of money to build the biggest and most powerful weapons. Of course, both countries wanted to have more – and stronger – weapons than the other.

Both countries made many nuclear weapons. These bombs can destroy an entire city and kill tens of thousands of people. The only time nuclear weapons have been used in war was at the end of World War II against Japan. Atomic bombs and hydrogen bombs were also made and tested, but never fired at an enemy.

## THE SPACE RACE

The Space Race was a competition of space exploration between the Soviet Union and the United States, which lasted from 1957 to 1969. Both countries wanted to be the first ones to: explore outer space with artificial satellites; send humans into space; and land humans on the Moon.



The Soviet Union launched the first satellite – named Sputnik - into Earth's orbit in October 1957. The Soviets were also the winners of the race to put a person into space. Major Yuri Gagarin orbited the earth on 12 April 1961. The Russian name for an astronaut is a cosmonaut.



President John F Kennedy of the United States of America set the impossible goal of landing a man on the Moon by the end of the sixties. This was also a challenge to the Russians to try to do it first. The Americans won this part of the race in 1969 when Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin landed on the Moon and returned safely to the Earth.

### COMMUNISM AND CAPITALISM

Communism is a type of government as well as an economic system (a way of creating and sharing wealth). In a Communist system, individual people do not own land, factories, or machinery. Instead, the government or the whole community owns these things. Everyone is supposed to share the wealth that they create.

Capitalism is an economic system. That is, it is a system for dealing with money and wealth. In a capitalist country, citizens, not governments, own and run companies. These companies compete with other companies for business. They decide which goods and services to provide. They also decide how much to charge for the goods and services and where to sell them. Companies do all these things to make money for their owners.

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### EXAMPLE QUESTIONS: USE HEADING 3 FOR THIS THERE NEEDS TO BE 5 QUESTIONS

1. Who was the leader of the Soviet Union during the Cold War?
2. In which year did the Cold War begin?
3. In which year did the Cold War end?
4. Which two superpowers had great tension between them?
5. What was the name of the first man in space?