

THE COLD WAR

The **Cold War** was the period of conflict, tension and competition between the [United States](#) and the [Soviet Union](#) and their respective allies from the mid-1940s until the early 1990s. Throughout the period, the rivalry between the two [superpowers](#) was played out in multiple arenas: military coalitions; [ideology](#), psychology, and [espionage](#); military, industrial, and technological developments, including the [space race](#); costly defence spending; a massive conventional and [nuclear arms race](#); and many [proxy wars](#).

There was never a direct military engagement between the US and the Soviet Union, but there was half a century of military buildup as well as political battles for support around the world, including significant involvement of allied and [satellite](#) nations in proxy wars. Although the US and the Soviet Union had been allied against [Nazi Germany](#), the two sides differed on how to reconstruct the postwar world even before the end of [World War II](#). Over the following decades, the Cold War spread outside Europe to every region of the world, as the US sought the "[containment](#)" of [communism](#) and forged numerous alliances to this end, particularly in Western Europe, the [Middle East](#), and [Southeast Asia](#). There were repeated crises that threatened to escalate into [world wars](#) but never did, notably the [Berlin Blockade](#) (1948-1949), the [Korean War](#) (1950-1953), the [Vietnam War](#) (1959-1975), the [Cuban Missile Crisis](#) (1962), and the [Soviet-Afghan War](#) (1979-1989). There were also periods when tension was reduced as both sides sought [détente](#). Direct military attacks on adversaries were [deterred](#) by the potential for [mutual assured destruction](#) using deliverable [nuclear weapons](#).

The Cold War drew to a close in the late 1980s following Soviet leader [Mikhail Gorbachev's](#) summit conferences with United States President [Ronald Reagan](#), as well as Gorbachev's launching of reform programs: [perestroika](#) and [glasnost](#).