

# History

## for the IB Diploma

### The Cold War: Superpower tensions and rivalries

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In memory of Cyn (1947–2010)

*Death ends a life, not a relationship*

(A. C. Grayling)

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# Introduction

# 1

This book will examine the various aspects of what was known as the Cold War – a historical and global phenomenon that began around the time of the end of the Second World War in 1945. It lasted until the collapse of the communist bloc in Eastern Europe, and then the Soviet Union itself, in the years 1989–91.

## Overview

Essentially, the **Cold War** can be seen as a fifty-year worldwide struggle between two rival states – the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics – and their allies: the West *v.* the East. The two main states were often referred to as ‘**superpowers**’, though several historians claim that only the USA was a truly global superpower for most, if not all, of the Cold War.

The Cold War was a struggle which, at one time or another, involved many different countries across the various regions of the world. While the two main protagonists never actually fought each other directly, it was nonetheless a total war in that the economies and foreign policies of both states were, to differing degrees, significantly geared to it. This commitment also affected the citizens of the states involved – again differentially – in terms of living standards, civil and political freedoms, and aspects of culture.

**Cold War:** The term used to describe the tension and rivalry between the USA and the USSR between 1945 and 1991. Originally used in the 14th century about the conflict between Christian and Islamic states, ‘cold war’ refers to relations that, although hostile, do not build up into a ‘hot war’ (involving actual military conflict). The term was popularised in the years 1946–47 by US journalist Walter Lippmann and US politician and businessman Bernard Baruch.

**superpower:** First used in 1944, this term refers to a country considered so powerful, because of its economic and military resources, that it can largely dictate and control international events to serve its own interests.



**Figure 1.1** Cold War spy novels and films became very popular, especially in the West; the fictional James Bond was probably the world’s best-known spy

## 1

## Introduction

However, the Cold War was not always ‘cold’. In some states and regions across the world, ‘hot wars’ were fought, or local civil wars became entangled in the greater geopolitical aims and moves of the two main Cold War players. As well as large-scale military conflicts in parts of Asia – such as Korea, Vietnam and Afghanistan – many other vicious small-scale wars broke out in Africa and the Americas. In Europe no wars were fought after 1945, but several significant crises occurred – for instance, over Berlin. Also, some attempts to liberalise regimes in Eastern Europe resulted in Soviet military or political interventions.

## Cold War or ‘Great Contest’?

Some historians, however, see the Cold War as a specific and more intense phase of a longer-term ideological and political conflict between two opposed social and economic systems: capitalism v. communism. This conflict had been in existence since November 1917, when a revolution in Russia resulted in the Bolsheviks (Russian communists) taking power. According to the historian Isaac Deutscher, what followed were attempts by capitalist states to ‘strangle’ this threat to their system by both military and economic means. At the same time, the Bolsheviks and other communist parties strove to support or spread revolution to other parts of the world.

## Themes

To help you prepare for your IB History exams, this book will cover the themes relating to the Cold War: Superpower tensions and rivalries (World History Topic 12 in Paper 2), as set out in the IB *History Guide*. The main aspects of the three major themes listed below will be examined in chapters 2–7 of this book:

- Rivalry, mistrust and tension
- Leaders and nations
- Cold War crises

Chapters 2–7 will explore these three themes, alongside examination of the nature and origins of the Cold War, the development and impact of various Cold War crises, and how the Cold War finally came to an end. Units within each chapter will deal with events and developments in different parts of the world – especially in Europe and in Asia, but also in the Americas, and in Africa and the Middle East.

In addition, two Case Studies explore two major Cold War crises – the Korean War and the Cuban Missile Crisis – in more detail, to enable you to compare and contrast these two crises in terms of causes, impact and significance. The Korean War case study will be found in Chapter 4, and the Cuban Missile Crisis in Chapter 5.

All the main events, turning points and key individuals of these two crises, and of other crises and developments, will be covered in sufficient detail for you to be able to access the higher mark bands – provided, of course, that your answers are both relevant and analytical!

In fact, one of the most significant events of the Cold War was the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, when the world came close to nuclear war. There were those who genuinely believed that the horror of atomic weapons experienced by the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 would be inflicted on European and American cities. The image of nuclear mushroom clouds haunted many people for the duration of the Cold War.



**Figure 1.2** A photograph of a US atomic bomb test from 1945, when the US dropped two atomic bombs on Japan. Until 1949, the US had a monopoly on nuclear weaponry

Other key events include US involvement in the Vietnam War and the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. Important aspects and concepts, such as the Truman Doctrine and containment, the arms race and Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD), the Domino Theory, détente and arms control, will also be examined.

Where appropriate, each chapter will contain visual and written sources, both to illustrate the events or issues under examination, and to provide material for exam-type questions. These will help you gain practice in dealing with the questions you will face in History Papers 1 and 2.

### The nature of the Cold War

Chapter 2 will explain what the Cold War entailed and present the views of different historians about its nature (including the arms race) and how it affected the citizens of the states involved. It will examine the impact of the Cold War on the **United Nations** and on less-developed countries, such as those in the Non-Aligned Movement. It will also study the ideological differences between the major players, as well as the differences – and similarities – between capitalism and communism.

### The origins of the Cold War

Chapter 3 will explore the various long- and short-term factors involved in the start of the Cold War, and will examine the different opinions of historians as to when and why it could be said to have started. In particular, this chapter will focus on how rivalry and mistrust – and the role of different leaders – contributed to increasing tensions and the start of the Cold War.

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**United Nations:** This was the international body which, on 20 April 1946, replaced the League of Nations. The United Nations (UN) was intended – like the previous League of Nations – to help avoid or end conflict between nations, as well as carry out various humanitarian roles. Unlike the League of Nations, however, UN member states agreed to provide troops to help keep the peace and enforce UN decisions. However, it was dominated by the US and the Soviet Union and, as the Cold War began and developed, its activities were often restricted by the mistrust and rivalry between the two superpowers.

## 1

**Introduction****The development and impact of the Cold War**

Chapters 4–6 will look at the global spread and impact of the Cold War, with the focus not just on Europe but also on countries in parts of Asia and Oceania, the Americas, and Africa and the Middle East. These chapters will continue to examine the significance of the decisions of different leaders, and how these contributed to continuing mistrust and tensions.

**The end of the Cold War**

Chapter 7 will explore the final years of the Cold War and the reasons it came to an end, including Soviet weaknesses, the role of individual leaders and developments in Eastern Europe.

**Key concepts**

To perform well in your IB History exams, you will often need to consider aspects of one or more of six important Key concepts as you write your answers. These six Key concepts are listed below:

- Change
- Continuity
- Causation
- Consequence
- Significance
- Perspectives

Sometimes, a question might ask you to address two Key concepts, for instance:

‘Evaluate the reasons for, and the immediate impact on the development of the Cold War of, the Soviet Union’s decision to place nuclear missiles in Cuba.’

It is important to note that although the word ‘causes’ doesn’t explicitly appear in the question, words such as ‘reasons’ or ‘why’ nonetheless are asking you to address Causation. To help you focus on these, and gain experience of writing answers which address various of these Key concepts, you will find a range of different questions and activities throughout these chapters.

**Theory of knowledge**

Alongside these broad key themes, most chapters contain Theory of knowledge links to get you thinking about aspects that relate to history, which is a Group 3 subject in the IB Diploma. The Cold War topic has clear links to ideas about knowledge and history. A relatively recent phenomenon, the Cold War was highly political, and ideology was important both for its key players and for the historians writing about it at the time and since its end in 1991. Thus questions relating to the availability and selection of sources, and to interpretations of these sources, have clear links to the IB Theory of knowledge course.

For example, when investigating aspects of the origins of the Cold War, or the motives of individuals (such as Stalin or Truman) or states (such as the USSR or the USA), historians must decide which primary and secondary evidence to select and use – and which to leave out – to make their case. But in selecting what they consider to be the most important or relevant sources, and in making judgements about the value and limitations of specific sources or sets of sources, how important are these historians’ personal political views?



Is there such a thing as objective ‘historical truth’? Or is there just a range of subjective opinions and interpretations about the past that vary according to the political interests and leanings of individual historians?

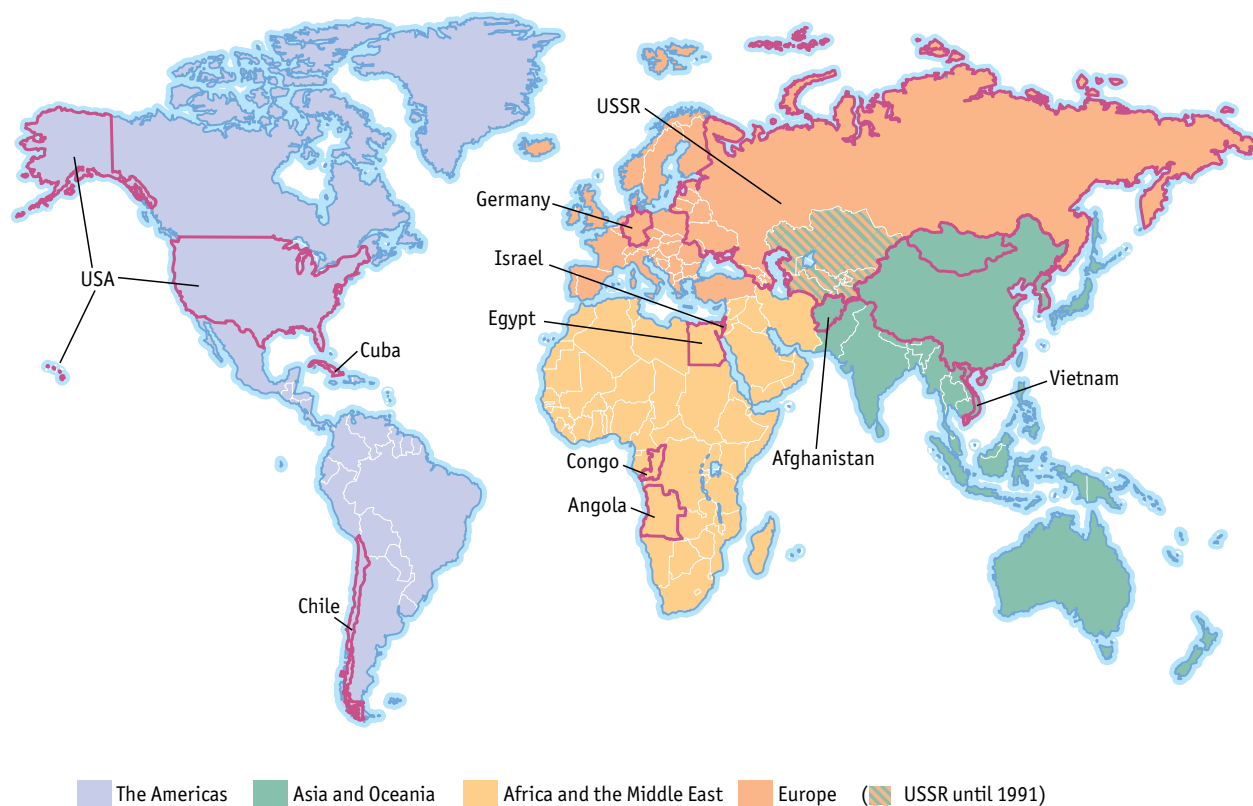
You are therefore encouraged to read a range of books offering different interpretations of the causes and course of the Cold War, in order to gain a clear understanding of its historiography. It is also important to be aware that since 1985 – and especially since 1991 – many archives have been opened up that contain sources and information unavailable to historians writing before those dates.

## IB History and regions of the world

For the purposes of study, IB History specifies four regions of the world:

- Europe
- Asia and Oceania
- the Americas
- Africa and the Middle East

Where relevant, you will need to be able to identify these regions and to discuss developments that took place within them. Remember: when answering a question that asks you to choose examples from *two* different regions, you *must* be careful – failure to comply will result in limited opportunities to score high marks.



**Figure 1.3** The four IB regions are shown on this map, along with some of the states covered by this book

## 1

## Introduction

## Exam skills needed for IB History

Throughout the main chapters of this book, there are various activities and questions to help you develop the understanding and the exam skills necessary for success. Before attempting the specific exam practice questions at the end of most chapters, you might find it useful to refer to Chapter 8 *first*. This suggestion is based on the idea that if you know where you are supposed to be going (in this instance, gaining a good grade) and how to get there, you stand a better chance of reaching your destination!

## Questions and mark schemes

To ensure that you develop the necessary understanding and skills, each chapter contains a number of comprehension questions in the margins. In addition, three of the main Paper 1-type questions (comprehension, reliability/utility, and cross-referencing) are dealt with at the end of Chapters 2–7. Help for the longer Paper 1 judgement/synthesis questions, and the Paper 2 essay questions, can be found in Chapter 8 – the final exam practice chapter.

For additional help, simplified mark schemes have been put together in ways that should make it easier to understand what examiners are looking for in your answers. The actual IB History mark schemes can be found on the IB website.

Finally, you will find examiners' tips and comments, along with activities, to help you focus on the important aspects of the questions and answers. These should help you avoid simple mistakes and oversights which, every year, result in even some otherwise good students failing to gain the highest marks.

## Terminology and definitions

In order to understand Cold War propaganda produced by the USA and the USSR, and the various historical arguments and interpretations of the conflict, you will need to understand the meaning of such terms as 'democracy' and 'totalitarian', 'left' and 'right', 'communist' and 'capitalist', as well as the ideas of the corresponding left-wing and right-wing ideologies. You will then be able to understand and focus on the arguments, tensions and propaganda that existed throughout the Cold War from 1946 to 1991.

At first glance, this appears to be straightforward – certainly, many people feel sure they know what these terms mean. However, it is important to understand both the historical applications of these terms and their meaning in the context of the Cold War. Some terms – such as 'Left and Right', 'communism', and 'totalitarian' are explained below; while others – such as 'capitalism' and 'democracy' – are explained more fully in Chapter 2.

## Left and right

As regards 'left' and 'right', and the terms 'left-wing' and 'right-wing', the origins of this political terminology can be traced back to the early stages of the French Revolution in 1789. At this time, the most **radical** political groups sat on the left side of the National Convention, while the most **conservative** ones sat on the right; the **moderate** political groups sat in the middle.

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**radical, moderate, conservative:** Radicals (from the Latin word *radix*, meaning 'root') are those people who want significant and fundamental changes to a system, and for these changes to take place quickly. Moderates lean towards smaller-scale changes over a longer period and at a more gradual pace. Conservatives tend to want things to remain much the same, and oppose fundamental changes.

## Communism

Communism is seen – both by its adherents and by those opposed to this ideology – as being on the far (or extreme) left. Communists view capitalism as being either moderate or far right, depending on the political circumstances and the prevailing forms of rule. For example, communists see both the modern USA and Nazi Germany simply as different political forms of capitalism. However, supporters of capitalism usually see it as moderate and firmly linked to democracy.

This is further complicated by the fact that there is more than one strand of communism; consequently, both historical players and historians have often meant different things despite using the same term. During the Cold War, for example, when Western politicians spoke about communism, they meant the form of rule in contemporary Russia – i.e. a one-party state. However, some communists have long claimed that the way Stalin ruled the Soviet Union was far removed from the ideas of Karl Marx, and even from the form of rule under Lenin and Trotsky's leadership in the first few years after the Bolshevik Revolution.

## Totalitarian

The history of the term 'totalitarian' is also complex. During the Cold War, some political commentators and historians used the term to emphasise their claim that Stalinist Russia was as bad as – or even worse than – Hitler's regime in Nazi Germany (see **Source B**). These writers and politicians argued that the West needed to be every bit as vigilant and aggressive against the Soviet Union during the Cold War as the Allies had been against Nazi Germany. However, other historians have argued that the label 'totalitarian' did not fit the USSR at this time. They say that policies based on such false arguments and assumptions played a large part in exacerbating East–West relations, given the Soviet Union's fears following the Second World War.

### SOURCE A

Stalin's police state is not an approximation to, or something like, or in some respects comparable with Hitler's. It is the same thing, only *more* ruthless, *more* cold-blooded ... and *more* dangerous to democracy and civilised morals.

Eastman, M. 1955. *Reflections on the Failure of Socialism*. New York, USA. Devin-Adair. p. 87.

However, some historians have pointed out the importance of noting that such totalitarian theories were first developed by US theorists during the late 1940s and early 1950s, at a time when the US was arguably already involved in its own 'drive towards global **hegemony**'.

Several historians and political commentators from the 1960s onwards pointed out that equating the Soviet Union with Nazi Germany was essentially a crude attempt to sway public opinion in the US and the West to accept permanent war preparations and military threats against the Soviet Union (see **Source B**).

Such 'totalitarian theories', which gave strong support to US foreign policy, are particularly associated with the political theorists Hannah Arendt, Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski. Friedrich and Brzezinski published *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* in 1954. Brzezinski went on to publish several other titles before becoming a foreign-policy adviser to US presidents.

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**hegemony:** From an ancient Greek word meaning 'leadership' or 'dominance', hegemony is especially used of one state or country having dominance over a region, or the world as a whole.

## 1

**Janus:** Janus was the Roman god of beginnings and ends, and of doorways and all openings. He was depicted with two faces, seeing both the end of something old and the start of something new – hence January was dedicated to him.

## Introduction

## SOURCE B

The logic is clear. What is needed is a heavily-armed state on a permanent war-alert and ready to strike at the first sign of aggression. Now all these statements would make sense on one condition: that Nazi Germany and the USSR are in fact two faces of the same beast, a totalitarian **Janus**. The entire thrust of the totalitarian theorist has been to prove the existence of such a monster.

Ali, T. 1988. *Revolution From Above: Where Is the Soviet Union Going?* London, UK. Hutchinson. p. 160.

## History and changing perspectives

Since the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR in 1991, historians have been able to access a wealth of Soviet archive material that had previously been wholly unavailable or only available in part (although some files had been opened to both Soviet and Western historians from 1985, under Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost*, see 7.1, Gorbachev's 'New Thinking'). As the years have passed, US government documents have also been made public, and many key players have published memoirs and diaries. All this has allowed historians to cross-check and either corroborate or dismiss earlier interpretations of significant moments and factors in the Cold War.

For instance, on 19 April 2002, an article by Andrew Alexander appeared in the *Guardian* newspaper in Britain, entitled 'The Soviet threat was a myth' (see **Source C**). In fact, Alexander is a journalist for the British newspaper the *Daily Mail*, which took a consistently right-wing, anti-Soviet position during the Cold War. In the article, he came to the conclusion that 'Stalin had no intention of attacking the west. We [the West] were to blame for the cold war.'

One interesting aspect of this article is the journalist's use of the term 'orthodox' in relation to different historical interpretations and perspectives concerning the Cold War. In order to score highly in Paper 2, you will need to show some awareness and understanding of the historiography surrounding the Cold War.

This topic involves fundamental political aspects and attitudes – such as the struggle of the 'Free West' against the 'Evil Empire' (as one US president described the Soviet Union), or the battle between communism and capitalism. It should not be surprising, therefore, that there are several almost diametrically opposed explanations of the origins and subsequent development of the Cold War. Historians, like most other people, are rarely completely neutral when dealing with important or controversial issues. For this reason you should be aware, where relevant, of the political sympathies – and even ideological agendas – of historians and politicians writing about the Cold War. As you begin to read around the subject, you will come across 'orthodox', 'revisionist', 'post-revisionist' and even 'post post-revisionist' perspectives.

**SOURCE C**

On a long and reluctant '**journey to Damascus**', as I researched the diaries and memoirs of the key figures involved, it dawned on me that my orthodox view of the cold war as a struggle to the death between Good (Britain and America) and Evil (the Soviet Union) was seriously mistaken. In fact, as history will almost certainly judge, it was one of the most unnecessary conflicts of all time, and certainly the most perilous. ...

Truman had adopted an aggressive attitude to Russia the previous October. ... The programme would be based on 'righteousness'. There could be 'no compromise with evil'. ... He added that no one would be allowed to interfere with US policy in Latin America.

So Russian interference in countries essential to its safety was evil. But exclusive US domination of its own sphere of influence was righteous. ...

The fact that the cold war continued after Stalin's death does not, as some claim, prove the Soviets' unchanging global ambitions. The [Soviet/Warsaw Pact] invasions of Hungary in 1956 and of Czechoslovakia in 1968 were brutal acts, but were aimed at protecting Moscow's buffer zone. The same may be said of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1980 [sic] (as a result of which, with the help of the CIA, the **Taliban** came into existence). In none of these cases was there a territorial threat to the west.

Alexander, A. 'The Soviet threat was a myth'. Published in the *Guardian*, 19 April 2002. A longer version appeared in the *Spectator*.

**journey to Damascus:**

According to the Bible's New Testament, Saul was an official persecutor of the early Christians. He was on his way to Damascus to arrest some of Jesus Christ's followers when he had a vision, after which he became a Christian himself and took the name Paul.

**Taliban:** The Taliban was one of several extreme fundamentalist Islamist terrorist groups, funded by the US, which fought Soviet troops in Afghanistan. For a time they ruled Afghanistan, until driven from government by the US invasion in 2001 that followed the events of 9/11. See Chapters 6 and 7 for further information on the Taliban.

## Summary

By the time you have worked through this book, you should be able to:

- show a broad understanding of factors, such as rivalry and mistrust, that led to increasing tensions which eventually led to the start of the Cold War
- understand how the roles of different leaders contributed to these tensions, and how these tensions often led to serious Cold War crises and conflicts, and be able to evaluate the different historical interpretations surrounding them
- understand the nature of the Cold War, both within the major states involved and on a global scale
- show an awareness of the impact of the events of Cold War crises in various regions of the world, and in turn how developments in different parts of the world impacted on the Cold War elsewhere
- understand the complexities of international relations resulting from both a bi-polar (USA and USSR) and a multi-polar (USA, USSR, China, Cuba) framework
- understand the key events, crises and turning points in the Cold War, from its origins through to its final stages
- understand and explain the various factors involved in the ending of the Cold War.