The Cold War Essay, Research Paper

During the administration of United States President John F. Kennedy, the Cold War reached its most dangerous state, and the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) came to the edge of nuclear war in what was known as the Cuban Missile Crisis. What was the Cold War? What started the tensions between the United States and the USSR? What actions were taken and how were the problems resolved? All of these questions and more shall be answered in this paper.

The Cold War was a struggle between the United States and its allies and the Soviet Union. Although direct military conflict never took place, diplomatic and economic struggles occurred. The Cold War began when Joseph Stalin, leader of the Communist Party, used the Red Army to take control of most of the countries of Eastern Europe. The United States as well as Western European countries were greatly concerned. In response to Stalin’s military movements, President Harry Truman issued the Truman Doctrine in 1947. In his address to Congress, President Truman asked that the United States would aid any country that asked for help in resisting communism. The Truman Doctrine became known as the basis for containment, the policy to keep communism from spreading to other countries. After the Truman Doctrine, George Catlett Marshall, Secretary of State, proposed the Marshall Plan, the European Recovery Program through which the United States provided aid to Western Europe after World War 2, in June 1947. The Marshall Plan was offered to all European countries, but Stalin would not let the countries his military was occupying take part. In April 1949, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was formed. The countries involved in this pact were the United States, Britain, France, Canada, Belgium, Denmark, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, and Portugal. The NATO agreement said that “an armed attack against one or more of its members in Europe and America shall be considered an attack against them all.” To ward off aggressors, American forces and nuclear weapons were to be kept in Western Europe. In response to NATO, the Soviet Union formed a similar pact between seven Eastern European countries called the Warsaw Treaty Organization, or Warsaw Pact. The countries involved along with the Soviet Union were Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Romania.

While these pacts were forming, the United States and the Soviet Union were in an arms race. They were building lots of nuclear weapons, trying to outproduce each other so that neither dare attack. This policy is called deterrence. By 1952, the United States tested a hydrogen bomb, a bomb more powerful than an atomic bomb. A year later, the Soviet Union also tested a hydrogen bomb. Both countries developed rockets that had nuclear warheads. By 1957, the Soviet Union had developed intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM’s). ICBM’s could reach targets all over the world.

While arms were building up, the Soviet Union went through a major change in power. In 1953, Joseph Stalin, leader of the Communist Party, died. After Stalin’s death, Nikita Khrushchev took over the Communist Party. Khrushchev made things different. He said that the Soviet Union would follow a policy of “peaceful coexistence” with the West. This “peace” was to continue until the early sixties, when new conflicts surfaced.

In the early 1960’s, new tensions arose between the United States and the USSR when Fidel Castro openly embraced communism and allied with the Soviet Union. Anastas Mikoyan, the Soviet First Deputy Prime Minister, negotiated this alliance. Increasing friction between the United States and the Soviet Union caused President Dwight D. Eisenhower to sever diplomatic ties with Cuba. This was the unofficial beginning of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Before the ties were severed, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had been training Cuban exiles for a possible invasion of Cuba. Newly inaugurated President John F. Kennedy approved this invasion on April 12, 1961. On April 14, 1961, a group of B-26 bombers, which were piloted by Cuban exiles, attacked air bases in Cuba. This raid was designed to destroy most of Castro’s air power before the land invasion was to take place. On April 17, 1961, the land invasion of Cuba took place at the Bay of Pigs. The invasion forces consisted of about 1400 Cuban exiles. Not much was achieved, though. Cuban ground forces quickly stopped the invasion. Of the 1400 Cuban exiles, 114 were killed and 1,189 were captured.

After the invasion in Cuba took place, more tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union surfaced. In August 1961, the East German government, which was occupied by the Soviet Union, built the Berlin Wall. The Berlin Wall was a wall dividing West Berlin and East Berlin. It was 12 feet high and 28 miles long. Guards were on watch constantly and mines were placed around the wall to discourage escaping.

After the Berlin Wall, the United States’ worst fear came true. On October 14, 1962, U.S. spy planes spotted the first ballistic missile on Cuba. President Kennedy decided to take action. He had several options, invasion, air strikes, a blockade, or diplomacy. On October 22, 1962, President Kennedy ordered a naval blockade around Cuba to prevent the arrival of more missiles. President Kennedy announced that he would turn back ships with the intent of delivering missiles to Cuba. He also pledged full retaliation against the Soviet Union if even one missile is fired from Cuba toward any country in the Western Hemisphere. President Kennedy demanded that Khrushchev dismantles and removes the missiles that were placed in Cuba. Khrushchev agreed to remove the missiles and offered an on-site inspection. Kennedy agreed and removed the naval blockade from Cuba. Castro felt differently about the inspections. He wouldn’t allow them. The inspections weren’t needed. U.S. aerial reconnaissance planes revealed that the missile bases were being dismantled.

The Cuban Missile Crisis had ended. Nuclear war had been averted, but the end of the Cuban Missile Crisis didn’t end the Cold War. The Cold War didn’t “end” until the early nineties, when Mikhail Gorbechev and George Bush ended the superpower rivalry.