

## **COLD WAR CRISIS 1961-1981**

As the United States began a new decade, a series of crisis will become the leading stories in newspapers and televisions throughout the country. By the end of the 1970s, when combined with serious domestic issues, many American began to believe the Cold War was a losing fight and the Soviet Union may have a superior political and economic system.

### **SPACE EXPLORATION**

In February 1962, the United States, in making its first earth orbit, rocketed astronaut John Glenn three times around the world in a space capsule and recovered him without harm. The launching was postponed many times until optimum conditions prevailed. Glenn received wild acclaim with the same modesty that Lindbergh had shown in 1927, and it was expected that his flight was an introduction to further progress in space exploration by America in the race with Russia to demonstrate what each political system could accomplish. However, the Russians were earlier, for in 1961 they had orbited two separate, manned craft; the Russians also consistently rocketed heavier space vehicles than did the United States. Many short flights, both failures and successes, had been carried out during the intense preparation for Glenn's successful flight. In May 1962, Scott Carpenter completed three orbits. After him Walter Schirra, America's third astronaut, made a nearly faultless six-orbit flight in October 1963.

Many unmanned space shots were made for various exploratory purposes. As the first step in a global communications system, the Telstar satellite was put into orbit in July 1962. The most distant space exploration was by the Mariner 2, on December 14, 1962 it had reached its nearest point to Venus in a flight of 35,000,000 miles. In a race with the Russians, the US was the first to successfully complete a voyage to the moon that included a moonwalk in the summer of 1968.

### **NATIONAL DEFENSE**

The "Missile Gap," that the Democrats had talked of so much during the campaign of 1960, was admitted to be much less serious than the Democrats had represented during the campaign, but spending for defense was substantially increased. Late in 1963 one authority showed the US had several times as many ICBMs as Russia and many more surface naval vessels and long range bombers. Russia had the lead in men in the armed services, conventional submarines and in armored tanks. Kennedy secured liberal appropriations from Congress for a build-up of conventional weapons so as to avoid too much dependence upon nuclear weapons, which could not be used in local wars triggered by the enemy.

### **THE BERLIN CRISIS**

Kennedy inherited the problem of a disunited Germany; from this arose the crises centering on Berlin. Premier Khrushchev fully tested the will of the new administration to resist the pressures to squeeze the Western powers out of the former German capital. West Berlin constituted a painful thorn in the side of the Communists. The prosperity there contrasted with the drabness of Communist Germany and at the same time offered an easy escape route for Germans fleeing East Germany. The Soviets threatened to unilaterally turn the whole problem over to the Ulbricht's Communist government in East Germany, a government the US had never recognized and one that might not permit continued access to Berlin from West Germany. This Soviet course might lead to greater danger of war being precipitated by the East Germans. The Communists defiantly built a wall across Berlin beginning in August 1961 to seal off the border between West and East Berlin. On numerous occasions gunfire and tear gas bombs were exchanged across the wall. Khrushchev prevented the ultimate crisis by postponing the time for the signing and agreement with East Germany over the border patrol. President Kennedy visited West Berlin at the height of the crisis and, in a symbolic gesture, told a cheering crowd that he considered himself a citizen of the besieged city saying "Ich bin ein Berliner."

### **CUBA MISSILE CRISIS**

After the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba by the US and the belief by Khrushchev he had won a significant victory in Berlin prompted a showdown between the US and Soviet Union over the placement of offensive nuclear weapon in Cuba. From the beginning of the Castro government, Russia and Communist China both exploited Cuba as a base for promoting communism in Latin America. Using the

US placement of nuclear weapons in Turkey, Khrushchev planned to put the same type weapons 90 miles off the coast of Florida.

In the summer of 1962 American senators warned that Cuba was being turned into a missile base against the United States, and reports followed of Russian technicians and troops in Cuba. In October, when US surveillance proved that Russian offensive missiles were in Cuba, Kennedy took the initiative in the Cold War by ordering a blockade of Cuba to prevent further Soviet arms shipments. The most serious crisis since China entering the Korean War reached its climax when Russian ships steaming toward the American blockading ships were recalled or submitted to blockade regulations and missiles were removed from Cuba. In return for his cooperation, Khrushchev was secretly promised the US would retire its nuclear arsenal in Turkey.

The President's leadership in the confrontation with the Soviets had the effects of 1) greatly raising the sagging national morale since the successful Cuban revolution by Castro and 2) greatly increased the confidence of the political leaders of the US when dealing with communism (Vietnam War?).

## **THE VIETNAM WAR**

American involvement in Vietnam began in a small way during World War II when nationalists in Indo-China sought freedom from France. In 1964 American involvement escalated rapidly into a major war. In terms of such statistics as cost, duration, tonnage of bombs dropped, and American casualties, it became one of the major wars of the US, outranking the Korean War. The nation became deeply divided as the more radical advocates of peace agitated for immediate withdrawal of American forces from South Vietnam.

### **AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT**

The US became involved in Vietnam after the Japanese during WWII had driven out the French. When the French attempted to restore colonial rule over Indo-China (which was made up of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos), Ho Chi Minh's communist led Vietminh and other nationalist Vietnamese groups were determined to win independence. Ho announced the formation of the independent Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the French recognized it conditionally "as a free state within the French Union."

Misunderstandings between the French and the Vietnamese broke into open warfare in December 1946. In July 1949, the French gave support to the ex-Emperor Bao Dai in forming the State of Vietnam with its capital in Saigon. The US in 1950 recognized this new state and dispatched to it a military advisory mission. Later in the same year the US signed a Mutual Defense Agreement and nine months later agreed to provide economic aid. However, the communists were unhappy with the new government and began protesting the new government, sometimes violently. At Dienbienphu, communist armies clashed with the French. President Eisenhower considered resorting to massive air raids to aid the beleaguered French, but did not find sufficient agreement among other leaders in the US and England to do so. As a result the Vietnamese nationalists overwhelmed the French.

After the fall of Dienbienphu, the Western Allies met at Geneva (1954) to discuss Indo-China with Russia, the states of Indo-China and Communist China. The conference agreed to partition Vietnam temporarily into North Vietnam and South Vietnam along the 17th parallel until elections could be held to "bring about the unification of Vietnam." The French now finally recognized the complete independence of the states of Indo-China. The United States and South Vietnam did not sign the agreement. There was no agreement as to whether the conference intended to make South Vietnam a separate state nor was anyone bound to enforce the agreement.

The United States now offered economic and military aid to South Vietnam and organized the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) to guarantee the security of member nations and of South Vietnam. The corrupt leaders in South Vietnam failed to make needed reforms in the government. North Vietnam capitalized upon dissatisfaction among some of the people in South Vietnam and organized bands of Vietcong guerillas against the government of the premier of South Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem. The United States pledged continued aid to South Vietnam. In December 1960, the National Liberation Front (NLF)

was organized under the influence of North Vietnam. North Vietnam and the Vietcong received massive military aid from Russia and Communist China. In 1961 the Kennedy administration signed a treaty of friendship with South Vietnam and continued to give aid. December 1962, the US had only 4,000 men in Vietnam; a year later there 15,000; however, it was not until late 1964 that the US began major increases in troop assignments to South Vietnam.

### **ESCALATION OF WAR**

On August 2, 1964, a US destroyer that had been patrolling in conjunction with South Vietnamese vessels was attacked by three North Vietnamese PT-boats in the Gulf of Tonkin. American planes then bombed North Vietnamese PT-boat bases. Congress in a few days passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution giving the President power to "take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression." A Vietcong mortar attack on the American air base at Pleiku was followed by US bombing raids over North Vietnam. It was hoped the raids would force North Vietnam to the conference table.

In March 1965, the buildup of American air and ground forces accelerated. As the President reacted to developments in Asia the air strikes and ground action continued to increase. North Vietnamese regular army men entered the war in massive numbers. North Vietnam increased its aid to the Vietcong. Communist China and Russia maintained their supplies of munitions to North Vietnam. The US forces by mid-1968 had reached well over a half million. In June 1968, the war had lasted over six years and by then had exceeded the length of the longest previous war of the US, the War for Independence. From time to time the US halted air strikes and made other efforts to end the war, but the North Vietnamese usually replied to the effect the US must stop all bombing and withdraw unconditionally from the south. The North Vietnamese used holiday truces to accelerate the flow of men and materials to the South. In October 1969, the US casualties exceeded 40,000 killed and 255,000 wounded for the entire war.

The American justification for the war by the hawks was the containment of communism. The Johnson Administration justified the war according to the domino theory. This theory held that if South Vietnam should become communist, then one after another the countries of Southeast Asia would be taken over until the US would be forced to defend itself through a full-scale war. Also the US felt it had to demonstrate the credibility of its promises to aid friendly nations withstanding communist aggression.

### **OPPOSITION TO THE WAR**

As early as 1965 the escalating war increased the casualties as well as the protests. In August of that year there were already close to 1,000 war related deaths, over 3,000 wounded and close to 50 soldiers missing in action. The first organized nationwide anti-war demonstration was held in October. Draftees and "doves" burned their draft cards and rallies were held. Congress responded by passing a law making it a violation to destroy a draft card. At the end of the year close to 25,000 people marched on the nation's capital, the first of many Washington demonstrations.

By 1966 the escalation of the war resulted in the beginning of massive air strikes on North Vietnam, more US soldiers being sent to the front, the bombing of North Vietnam's capital, Hanoi, and its main harbor Haiphong, and the bombing of the demilitarized zone. Because of the draft deferment system, American soldiers comprised a disproportionate number of minorities, which further tarnished the image of the government. Schooled to fight nuclear wars with sophisticated weaponry, the US military never adapted to the guerilla tactics of the Vietcong.

In 1967 over 250,000 people demonstrated in New York City, marching from Central Park to the United Nations. Since it was an election year, candidates from both political parties campaigned to end what was becoming the longest war in American history. Even black leaders like Martin Luther King took up the cause. The year began with the largest North Vietnamese attack, the Tet offensive. Though the US withstood the massive assault, evening newscasts showing the attacks on Saigon and a key marine base in South Vietnam shocked the American people. Democratic Senator Eugene McCarthy, who declared his candidacy for the presidency and promised a quick end to the war, surprised President Johnson when he captured almost 40 percent of the vote in the New Hampshire primary. New York Senator Robert F. Kennedy quickly entered the race and it became apparent to Johnson that he would have a difficult time

retaining the Presidency. Thus, in a broadcast to the nation, he announced he would not seek his party's nomination and that he would order a partial halt to the bombing in Vietnam to speed up the peace talks. The Republicans nominated party faithful Richard Nixon, who promised he would turn the war over to the South Vietnamese and remove American troops if elected.

### **NIXON AND VIETNAM**

In July 1969, President Nixon began the withdrawal of troops and in November announced the intention of eventually withdrawing all US ground combat forces - this in response to the mounting mass demonstrations of peace advocates. The Nixon plan called for the ultimate "Vietnamization" of the war by replacing American troops with those of South Vietnam. By the end of 1969 over 100,000 men had been withdrawn from Vietnam and this policy of scheduled withdrawals was continued, but peace advocates called for immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal, trusting that adversaries would reciprocate by releasing American prisoners of war. In May 1970, Nixon secretly ordered a temporary invasion of Cambodia to destroy Vietcong sanctuaries. With the publication of the invasion and proof of the actual slowing of the US withdrawal when the Pentagon Papers were printed by the *New York Times*, new unprecedented protest demonstrations occurred all over the nation, especially on college campuses. Rioting students were killed in confrontations with police at Kent State University in Ohio and Jackson State College in Mississippi. Nixon promised that ground troops would be withdrawn in six weeks from Cambodia. American opposition to the war increased further when the media reported on the widespread use of drugs among the troops and the revelation by CBS News that American soldiers had murdered Vietnamese civilians in the hamlet of My Lai.

After a breakdown of secret peace talks in Paris between Henry Kissinger, Nixon's special representative, and the delegates from North Vietnam, the US resumed massive bombing of North Vietnam in late December 1972. Peace talks resumed near Paris on January 8, 1973. On January 27 a cease-fire agreement was signed in Paris to end the war. The truce was eventually extended to Laos and was to be extended to Cambodia. Numerous violations occurred, however, Congress cut off funds for US bombings in August 1973. The South Vietnamese fought until April 30, 1975 when they surrendered to the North. The Vietnam War was the longest in American history. From 1965-1972, the US dropped more than three times as many bombs on Vietnam as on Germany and Japan combined in World War II.

### **NIXON AND CHINA**

By 1969 conclusive evidence of the breakdown of monolithic world communism led by Russia or China made it possible for Nixon to move toward friendly relations with both China and the Soviet Union. In 1969 Nixon relaxed the embargo of American purchases of Chinese goods, as a first step. On November 15, 1971 Communist China made her entry into the United Nations. Later China invited a US table tennis team to visit Peking (Ping-Pong diplomacy) and admitted the US press to cover the event. In April Nixon eased relations with China by relaxing a 20-year trade embargo. In July Nixon announced to a surprised American public that he would visit China the next year to confer with its leaders about normalizing relations between the two countries. In February 1972, Nixon arrived in Peking for a visit that concluded with a joint communiqué pledging both powers to work for "a normalization of relations."

### **NIXON AND THE SOVIET UNION**

As the first US President to visit Moscow, Nixon arrived in May 1972 for a week of summit talks, which produced a landmark arms pact to head off a nuclear missile race between the two nuclear giants. A Strategic Arms Limitations Treaty (SALT), later ratified by the Senate, limited defensive antiballistic missile systems to 200 ABM interceptor missiles in each country. An executive agreement froze offensive missile arsenals to roughly existing levels. Spy satellites could verify adherence to the treaty. Other agreements on health, science and trade reflected the beginning of a *détente* from the Cold War and new era of cooperation between the two great powers. In May 1972, Nixon and Soviet Premier Kosygin signed the United States-Soviet Agreements in Space Exploration and Science and Technology. In July the Soviet Union agreed to purchase an estimated \$1 billion of wheat and other grains from the United States.

### **FOREIGN RELATIONS UNDER CARTER**

After the Nixon resignation, Gerald Ford continued the policies of Nixon. Carter emerged early as a crusader for human rights. He called for reform in the dictatorial governments of Cuba, Uganda, Ethiopia

and Argentina. He appointed Andrew Young, a black Southern Congressman, as Chief United States Delegate to the United Nations. Unfortunately, Young embarrassed the administration with bold pronouncements regarding human rights. He was later replaced because of his illegal contacts with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Carter called for free emigration of Jews from the Soviet Union, as well as other human rights declarations that came from Helsinki Accord of 1975 and the International Declaration of Human Rights. The Soviets rejected Carter's crusade claiming that the US needed to worry about its own mistreatment of minorities before worrying about the alleged mistreatment in other countries.

### **THE HOSTAGE CRISIS IN IRAN**

An almost unprecedented violation of the diplomatic immunity of embassy personnel occurred in November 1979, when the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's followers seized the American embassy building in Teheran and its personnel and held them as prisoners. Iranian revolutionary discontents, long and harshly suppressed, had succeeded (in January 1979) finally in overthrowing the Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlevi. The Shah had been financially supported by the US and was now living in the US as a political refugee. The American embassy personnel, about 50 in number, were held hostage while the Iranians demanded the return of the sick Shah to Iran for trial. President Carter took economic, diplomatic, and, at first, other measures short of military intervention to help bring their release. But in April 1980, Carter launched a number of planes to the vicinity of Teheran to stage a raid to rescue the hostages. The mission was withdrawn after a sandstorm and mechanical failures in several helicopters - failures that cost the lives of eight Americans in a collision of a helicopter with a transport plane. The excruciating hostage situation extended through the election campaign of 1980, and after the death of the Shah, the UN condemned Iran for taking the hostages.

In 1980 Iraq attacked Iran. At the beginning of a long war between the two countries, oil-consuming nations lost their fuel supplies coming out of the Persian Gulf. Finally in January 1981 newly elected President Ronald Reagan secured the release of the hostages in exchange for weapons to be used against Iraq. The 52 hostages were released one hour after Reagan was inaugurated on January 20, 1981.

### **"SALT" TALKS**

The Strategic Arms Limitations Talks agreement came up for negotiation in 1977, but the Soviets did not wish to reduce greatly their long range bombers and missiles. They did, however, agree to continue the 1972 agreement, which resulted in a ceiling on some nuclear weapons.

Carter was a strong believer in achieving a second SALT agreement. In 1979 he signed a new treaty with Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev. The terms of the treaty called for major Soviet reduction of existing missiles, a limitation of nuclear warheads, and the future reduction of new missile systems by the Soviets. Carter made an emotional plea to Congress for ratification of the treaty. Presidential politics and anger over the failure of the Carter administration to achieve a release of the hostages doomed the treaty.

### **AFGHANISTAN**

In December 1979, Moscow sent 5,000 troops to Afghanistan as further aid to the pro-Soviet government in that country that was attempting to suppress Muslim insurgents. Carter condemned the invasion and announced a US boycott of the 1980 Olympics to be held in Moscow. In addition he announced the cancellation of grain shipments to Russia.

### **THE PANAMA CANAL ZONE**

Panama had long been demanding the return of the Panama Canal Zone, and the United States Senate was debating treaties drafted. Conservatives opposed the ratification of these treaties. However, a treaty to maintain the neutrality of the canal won approval in 1978 by only two votes, only after an amendment was passed to the treaty conceding the right of American armed intervention if it became necessary to ensure the continuing operation of the canal. In October 1979, Panama took control of the Canal Zone and was promised total control at the turn of the century.

### **THE CAMP DAVID AGREEMENTS**

Perhaps Carter's greatest foreign policy achievement came in 1978 when he hosted a series of meetings at Camp David between Israeli Prime Minister Menachim Begin and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat. Under

a cloud of potential warfare in the Middle East, Carter was able to convince both sides to sign the first peace treaty between Israel and another Middle Eastern country. Carter's popularity was bolstered but plummeted later because of his inability to attain success with the hostage situation in Iran.

### **RELATIONS WITH CHINA**

Even as President Nixon urged full diplomatic relations with China, he was not able to achieve it during his administration, and neither was President Ford. Carter, too, believed it would be in the best interests of the US to recognize the Asian communist giant. On January 1, 1979, Carter announced full diplomatic recognition of China. As a result, all standing treaties with Taiwan (Democratic China) were cancelled and China was admitted to the UN shortly thereafter.