

The Cold War is a term commonly used to refer to a period of geopolitical tension between the United States and the Soviet Union and their respective allies, the Western Bloc and the Eastern Bloc. The term cold war is used because there was no large-scale fighting directly between the two superpowers, but they each supported opposing sides in major regional conflicts known as proxy wars. The conflict was based on the ideological and geopolitical struggle for global influence by these two superpowers, following their temporary alliance and victory against Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan in 1945. Aside from the nuclear arsenal development and conventional military deployment, the struggle for dominance was expressed via indirect means such as psychological warfare, propaganda campaigns, espionage, far-reaching embargoes, rivalry at sports events, and technological competitions such as the Space Race.

The Western Bloc was led by the United States as well as a number of other First World nations that were generally liberal democratic but tied to a network of authoritarian states, most of which were their former colonies. The Eastern Bloc was led by the Soviet Union and its Communist Party, which had an influence across the Second World and was also tied to a network of authoritarian states. The US government supported anti-communist and right-wing governments and uprisings across the world, while the Soviet government funded left-wing parties and revolutions around the world. As nearly all the colonial states achieved independence in the period from 1945 to 1960, many became Third World battlefields in the Cold War.

The first phase of the Cold War began shortly after the end of World War II in 1945. The United States and its allies created the NATO military alliance in 1949 in the apprehension of a Soviet attack and termed their global policy against Soviet influence containment. The Soviet Union formed the Warsaw Pact in 1955 in response to NATO. Major crises of this phase included the 1948–1949 Berlin Blockade, the 1945–1949 Chinese Communist Revolution, the 1950–1953 Korean War, the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, the 1956 Suez Crisis, the 1961 Berlin Crisis, the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, and the 1964–1975 Vietnam War. The US and the USSR competed for influence in Latin America, the Middle East, and the decolonizing states of Africa, Asia, and Oceania.