

The Cold War

When we look back over the span of centuries that represents American history, it is easy to call out major military engagements which represent the major wars of this country. From World War II to the Civil War to Korea to World War I, America has been involved in many military engagements and emerged victorious in all but a few of them. But one of the strangest, longest lasting wars that America has entered into was the one that was called "The Cold War".

For many Americas living today, The Cold War was a fact of life for decades. The reason it was a cold war was that there was no battlefield, no armies on deployment, no body counts and no major engagements to report. Instead it was a long period of silent animosity between the United States and the Soviet Union that lasted from the end of World War II up to the early 1990s.

The strange thing was that the cold war grew out of our relationship with the Soviet Union during World War II which was a relationship of friendship. But the seeds of the "conflict" were in place at the end of that horrible war. With the presence of nuclear technology, the concept of a "superpower" was born. This was not itself a source of tension until the Soviet Union themselves developed the bomb as well and a long cold stand off ensued in which both nations trained thousands of these weapons on each other to warn the other that they must never consider firing those weapons.

It was a staring contest that lasted almost fifty years and created a tremendous drain on both economies. Both countries had to maintain "parity" of their nuclear weapons so neither country got more than the other thus throwing off the balance of power and giving one combatant an unfair advantage. This was a strange logic in that both countries possessed enough weaponry to destroy the earth dozens of times over but still they insisted on "having parity" throughout the cold war.

It was clear that no battle between the Soviet Union and America could ever be tolerated. The potential outcome of engaging those weapons had the power to destroy life on planet earth. But neither country was prepared to lay down their arms and begin the process of making peace with the other. So the weapons continued to point at each other, day after day, year after year, for fifty years.

So instead of conducting battles directly, the two countries fought each other through small wars around the world. The Soviet Unions, working with China happily contributed to the humiliating loss in Vietnam that the United States endured. But the United States then turned around and armed the Afghan Mujahideen which lead to the defeat of the Soviet Union in their occupation of

that country. From proxy wars, the space race, and occasional face offs such as the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Cold War continued for decades testing the will and resolve of both countries never to look away and give the other the advantage.

Finally the pressure on the economies of the two countries took its toll in the early 1990s, particularly in the Soviet Union as the stress of sustaining such an expensive and unproductive war forced the Soviet economy into collapse and the empire broke up. The United States had won the cold war by sheer will to endure and stubborn refusal to give in. This is a seldom spoken of element of the American spirit but it is one that the Soviets learned to their own disaster not to test. Hopefully no other "superpower" will ever think they are equipped to test it again.

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