

J. The Cold War

1. When Germany and Japan were defeated, only two countries remained as cardinal cultures in the world: the United States and the Soviet Union (i.e. Communist Russia).
2. The Cold War between them was the only time two global superpowers competed to decide the fate of the world.
3. Luckily, there was never a world war. America created NATO and the Soviet Union created an alliance called the “Warsaw Pact.” They were both powerful enough that neither side wanted to fight the other.
4. Most of the conflicts in the Cold War were in Asia, where the United States, acting as world police power prevented the communist takeover of South Korea in the Korean War of 1950-3, and by entering into military alliances with Saudi Arabia and Iran.
5. The greatest crisis of the period came when Cuba became communist under its leader Fidel Castro. Castro obtained a nuclear missile defense from Russia, and upon learning of it, American president John F. Kennedy realized that such weapons could be used to destroy the United States before it could respond. He thus had to threaten a world war against Cuba and Russia to compel Russia to withdraw its weapons. The *Cuban Missile Crisis* of 1962 was the closest the two sides came to World War III.
6. The United States showed that it was willing to fight communism just about anywhere, which was one reason the Soviet Union eventually gave up.

K. The Triumph of America

1. Apart from the military contest between the superpowers, there was also a “space race.”
2. Russia won the first two legs of the space race, by putting the first man-made object into orbit around the earth in 1957. It was a small satellite called Sputnik. Then, Russia put the first man into space, Yuri Gagarin, in 1961.
3. America achieved the most spectacular comeback, however, and in 1969, put the first man on the moon, Neil Armstrong. This event allowed America to regain lost prestige as a cardinal culture, and Russia was never able to match that feat.
4. The other important “races” were in the field of nuclear power and computing.
5. In the 1980s, companies like IBM, Microsoft, and Apple grew in America. They made new products at an amazing rate. Russia’s leader knew that communism could not achieve the same progress as free people were accomplishing in America.
6. The death blow to communism probably came in 1986, when a nuclear reactor at Chernobyl, which is now in Ukraine, exploded in a catastrophic accident. An investigation into the crisis showed that a fatal flaw in Russian nuclear designs almost ruined all of human life. The Russian leader Mikhail Gorbachev who ended communism said that the Chernobyl disaster was the key moment where communism failed.
7. Russia then decided not to control Eastern Europe any longer. Germany was reunited, and soon the European Union was created. Russia became a *post-communist* country without a clear direction. The main challenge both Europe and Russia face as cardinal cultures is that they live in a world of American primacy.