Important Cold War Events

**Berlin Airlift**

The Soviet Union cut off all links between West Germany and West Berlin. This was the start of the Berlin Blockade. Stalin was attempting to get democratic influence out of his West Berlin. He managed to cut off all of the land and water routes however the air was still available. This began the Berlin Air Lift. During the eleven months of the Berlin Airlift, U.S. and British planes supplied West Berlin with 1.5 million tons of supplies, a plane landing every three minutes, day and night. The U.S. and British gave the people of West Berlin food, medical supplies and all sorts of other goods. In the eyes of the rest of the world this made the U.S. look like heroes. It made Stalin look like a terrible leader. On May 12, 1949, Stalin, knowing he couldn’t risk shooting down the planes and realizing the PR disaster he’d caused, lifted the blockade. The whole experience was very embarrassing for the Soviet Union and was considered a win for the U.S. and its allies. This was very important to the Cold War because in a cold war where there is no direct fighting, it is things like this that decide who wins and who loses. This was a huge win for the U.S. and put many countries on our side.

**U-2 incident**

The U-2 Incident was one instance where the Soviets shot directly at a U.S. soldier. On May 1, 1960, the Soviet Union shot down a U.S. U-2 reconnaissance plane and called the flight an aggressive act. This event is extremely important to the Cold War because it was one of the few times the Soviets did direct physical damage to an American. They saw that he was flying low enough to hit with a missile so they did. Then they kept the pilot as a prisoner. This was huge in the U.S. because the Soviets were holding one of our men. It caused outrage. Because, of this event, tensions between the Soviet Union and the U.S. continued to climb.

**Cuban Missile Crisis**

On October 14, 1962, a U-2 spy plane flying over Cuba discovered nuclear missile sites under construction. These missiles would have been capable of quickly reaching the United States. Eight days later, Kennedy ordered a naval blockade of Cuba and all U.S. military forces to DEFCON 3. DEFCON 3 is an increased readiness in force greater than that required for normal readiness. Nuclear Weapons were prepared for launch, Polaris submarines were dispatched, and B-52 bombers were placed on alert. The world watched as tensions between the U.S. and the Soviet Union increased. Reconnaissance flights by U-2s continued over Cuba, while U.S. and Soviet officials exchanged words of warning. Finally on October 28, Khrushchev announced that they were withdrawing the missiles from Cuba. In the spring of 1963, the U.S. quietly removed the missiles from Turkey that equally threatened the Soviet Union. This crisis is regarded as the closest the world has come to a nuclear exchange. This event was one of the most important to the cold war because it was the closest the U.S. and Soviets ever came to hot war or direct combat.

**Vietnam War**

Communists in North Vietnam tried to take over South Vietnam, and so the U.S. tried to stop them to keep communism from spreading. However, because the U.S. was fighting against the communist North Vietnamese, the Soviets decided to back up the communists. This way the soviets weren’t directly fighting the U.S. The U.S. made very little progress in Vietnam because they couldn’t seem to adapt to the fighting style. Eventually, the cost and the death toll turned Americans totally against the war and on April 30, 1975 the last American troops left Vietnam by helicopter as the soldiers of the communist soldiers of the north marched into South Vietnam. This war was key to the idea of cold war because the U.S. and Soviets helped the opposing sides but didn’t have to wage hot war on each other. They were always looking for ways to indirectly fight each other and this was one of the best examples.

**Sputnik crisis**

The Sputnik crisis was the American reaction to the success of the Soviet Sputnik program. It was a key Cold War event that began on October 4, 1957 when the Soviet Union launched Sputnik 1, the first Earth satellite. The launch of Sputnik scared the American public. President Dwight D. Eisenhower referred to it as the “Sputnik Crisis”. Although Sputnik was itself harmless, its orbiting intensified the continual threat. The same rocket that launched Sputnik could send a nuclear warhead anywhere in the world in a matter of minutes, crossing the oceans that had successfully protected the continental United States from attack during both World Wars. Less than a year after the Sputnik launch, Congress passed the National Defense Education Act (NDEA). The act was a four-year program that poured billions of dollars into the U.S. education system. In 1953 the government spent $153 million, and colleges took $10 million of that funding; however, by 1960 the combined funding grew almost six times because of the NDEA. After the initial public shock, the Space Race began, leading to the first human launched into space, Project Apollo and the first humans to land on the Moon in 1969. This event was an important time period in the cold war because it sent Americans into a stage of panic. People started to think that the Soviets were more technologically advanced than us.

**Non-Proliferation Treaty**

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, commonly known as the Non-Proliferation Treaty or NPT, is an international treaty whose objective is to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology. Countries started signing it in 1968 and it came into effect in 1970. On 11 May 1995, the Treaty was extended forever. A total of 190 parties have joined the Treaty, with five countries being recognized as nuclear-weapon countries: the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, and China. More countries have ratified the NPT than any other arms limitation and disarmament agreement, which shows just how important and relevant it still is. The NPT was very important during the Cold War because both the U.S. and the Soviets agreed to not use nuclear weapons. This was huge for both countries because it somewhat eliminated the constant fear of being nuked at any time. This was not only very good back in Cold War times but even today it is a very important treaty. It has still held its value because nuclear weaponry is still an issue. It is one of those important events of the Cold War that leaves a lasting effect on our modern world.

**Berlin wall**

The Berlin wall was created to keep people in Communist East Berlin, from escaping into Free West Berlin. This was became a symbol of the control and fear that the Soviet Union placed on their people. The wall was not used to protect the Soviet Union from the U.S., but to keep its own people from escaping. Thousands of people tried to escape past the wall and many of them were killed by the Soviets. No one from Free Berlin was allowed to go into Communist Berlin, and no one from Free Berlin was allowed to go into Communist Berlin. The wall was torn down in 1989, and the world saw this as a great moment for freedom.

Assignment.

Part 1: For each paragraph summarize what happens.

Part 2: Explain what makes that event important to the cold war. WHY IS IT A SIGNIFICANT EVENT.