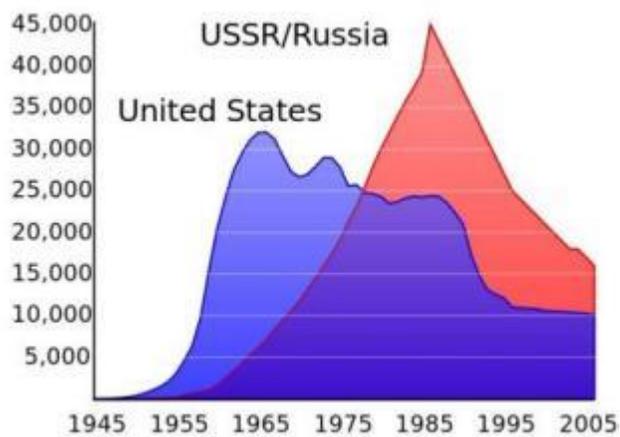


The Arms Race

During the Cold War the United States and the Soviet Union became engaged in a nuclear arms race. They both spent billions and billions of dollars trying to build up huge stockpiles of nuclear weapons. Near the end of the Cold War the Soviet Union was spending around 27% of its total gross national product on the military. This was crippling to their economy and helped to bring an end to the Cold War.



Soviet and United States build up of nuclear weapons

Start of the Arms Race

On August 29, 1949 the Soviet Union successfully tested its first atomic bomb. The world was shocked. They did not think the Soviet Union was this far along in their nuclear development. The Arms Race had begun.

In 1952 the United States detonated the first hydrogen bomb. This was an even more powerful version of the nuclear bomb. The Soviets followed up by exploding their first hydrogen bomb in 1953.

ICBMs

In the 1950s both countries worked on developing Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles or ICBMs. These missiles could be launched from long range, as far away as 3,500 miles.

Defense

As both sides continued to develop new and more powerful weapons, the fear of what would happen if war broke out spread throughout the world. Militaries began to work on defenses such as large radar arrays to tell if a missile had been launched. They also worked on defense missiles that could shoot down ICBMs.

At the same time people built bomb shelters and underground bunkers where they could hide in the case of nuclear attack. Deep underground facilities were built for high ranking government officials where they could reside safely.

Mutual Assured Destruction

One of the major factors in the Cold War was termed Mutual Assured Destruction or MAD. This meant that both countries could destroy the other country in the case of attack. It wouldn't matter how successful

the first strike was, the other side could still retaliate and destroy the country which first attacked. For this reason, neither side ever used nuclear weapons. The cost was too high.



Missile fired from a submarine

Détente and Arms Reduction Talks

As the Arms Race heated up, it became very expensive for both countries. In the early 1970s both sides realized that something had to give. The two sides began to talk and take a softer line towards each other. This easing of relations was called détente.

In order to try and slow down the Arms Race, the countries agreed to reduce arms through the SALT I and SALT II agreements. SALT stood for Strategic Arms Limitation Talks.

End of the Arms Race

For the most part, the Arms Race came to an end with the collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of the Cold War in 1991.

Interesting Facts About the Arms Race

- The Manhattan Project was top secret, even Vice President Truman didn't learn about it until he became president. However, Soviet Union leader Joseph Stalin's spies were so good, he knew all about it.
- The US B-52 bomber could fly 6,000 miles and deliver a nuclear bomb.
- It is estimated that by 1961 there were enough nuclear bombs built to destroy the world.
- Today India, Pakistan, North Korea, and Israel also have nuclear capability.