

To what extent was there a thaw in the cold war between 1953 and 1960



The cold war dominated international relations throughout the world for over 35 years. It showed political and military tension between the Western and Eastern powers. Some people suggest there was a thaw (improved relations) in the cold war between 1953 and 1960 while others suggest there wasn't.

On the one hand it could be said that there was a thaw in the cold war between 1953 and 1960. There were two main events that showed the thaw itself in 1953: the death of Stalin and the end of the Korean war.

The death of Stalin was a possible reason for a thaw. People suggested that the changes in leadership were an important reason for the thaw. Less suspicious Soviet personalities as for example Nikita Khrushchev and Prime Minister Malenkov ascended. Also, the same happened in the USA with the end of Truman's presidency and the election of Eisenhower. This was important because the cold war had been extremely tense when Stalin was the leader of the USSR and Truman the president of the USA. In 1954 the US senator McCarthy was discredited.

He was extremely anti-communist and during his speeches he accused people living in the USA of being communist spies even though he had no evidence for this. Because of this he created a hysterical anticommunist feeling in the USA and made it difficult for presidents to make a balance in the country. In 1954 he was discredited, he was shown being a liar. This helped a lot in balancing the atmosphere of the country, and soon afterwards president Eisenhower announced that the American people wanted to be more friendly with the Soviet people.

The thaw showed itself in many different ways. In 1955 the Russians made concessions. They agreed to give up their military bases in Finland. They also lifted their veto on the admission of 16 new member states to the United Nations. When Khrushchev paid a visit to Tito the quarrel with Yugoslavia was healed. Also the Cominform was abandoned, which suggested more freedom to the satellite states. Another thing that showed improved relationships was Khrushchev's famous speech in 1956. During the speech, Khrushchev talked about Stalin saying that he was a terrible person.

He also attacked the crimes committed by Stalin and his associates. This speech showed that the USSR was changing, that it was now more open to the world. With the visit of Khrushchev to the USA in 1959, a change between the relationship with the USA was shown as it compared when Stalin was in power he had never visited the country. As well, in 1959 there was a big development in the thaw. After the World War II, Austria had been divided into 4 zones of occupation. The Austrian government had limited powers and they were facing the same problems as in Germany.

The 3 western zones were recovering while the Russian zone insisted on squeezing reparations as in the form of food supplies. In 1955, the Russians were persuaded by the Austrian government to be more co-operative. This resulted in the withdrawal of all occupying troops and therefore the independence of Austria. The country remained neutral, with limited armed forces. On the other hand, it could be said that there wasn't a thaw in the cold war between 1953 and 1960, and that the thaw was only partial.

Even though Khrushchev made conciliatory moves, he was also very quick to respond to anything that seemed to be a threat to the East. This showed his policy was a curious mixture. For example, he had no intention of relaxing Russia's grip on the satellite states. In 1956 the Russians invaded Hungary. This showed the contrary to a thaw in the cold war. They invaded it to make sure the country didn't turn democrat. There was also a rising in Budapest against the communist government and Russian tanks ruthlessly crushed it.

In 1955, the Warsaw pact was signed between Russia and her satellite states shortly after West Germany was admitted to the NATO. This pact was a mutual defense agreement, which the west took as a gesture against West Germany's membership of NATO, which showed more tense relations. The arms race and the U-2 spy plane showed that there wasn't a thaw in the cold war between 1953 and 1960. The arms race continued throughout the 1950s. This showed that the USSR and the USA were both frightened of each other and that's why the arms race continued. The Russians continued to build up their nuclear armaments.

In 1960 the USA send the U-2 spy plane to spy on the USSR, which also showed fright and suspicion. In 1958 the Berlin Wall was constructed which caused a lot of tension in the cold war. Khrushchev announced that the USSR no longer recognized the rights of the western powers in West Berlin. The Americans said they would resist any attempt to push them out while the USSR did not press that point. In 1960 Khrushchev felt aggrieved when the U-2 spy plane was shot down inside Russia. Eisenhower refused to apologize and defended America's right to make reconnaissance flights.