

COLD WAR SCOTLAND

Glossary

Atomic bomb

An atomic bomb is produced through nuclear fission. The energy of a conventional detonation is used to bombard an atomic nucleus – the nucleus splits and this creates a huge release of explosive energy. The bombs deployed in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 were atomic.

DEFCON

Defense readiness condition (DEFCON) is an alert state used by the United States Armed Forces. There are five levels, from DEFCON 5 (least severe) to DEFCON 1 (most severe), which correspond with ongoing military and political situations.

GIUK gap

NATO allies feared that the seaways between Greenland, Iceland and the UK were vulnerable to enemy espionage and attack, particularly as this corridor also provided America a point of access to Europe. Therefore, the so-called GIUK gap became a strategic Cold War defence location.

Iron Curtain

In 1946, Winston Churchill gave a speech in which he described the increasing tension between Eastern and Western blocs in Europe as the descent of an 'Iron Curtain'. The phrase entered popular lexicon to refer to the dividing line running between Communist and Western countries.

Mutually Assured Destruction

After the world reached the brink of nuclear catastrophe during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, both the United States and the Soviet Union adopted new thinking about nuclear war. With the development of more destructive nuclear weapons and the targeting of cities and their civilian populations, both sides recognised that any nuclear exchange would mean total annihilation. The guarantee of 'Mutually Assured Destruction' (MAD) prompted a thaw in the Cold War and bilateral negotiations over reducing strategic nuclear weapons.

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

In the tense atmosphere created by Western-Soviet hostility in post-war Europe and Asia, Western allies looked for collective security. In April 1949, twelve western nations, including the United States and the UK, created the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. NATO allies have assisted one another in preparation for defence and war to this day. During the Cold War, NATO underpinned Western European strategic nuclear defence and military operations.

Thermonuclear weapons

A thermonuclear bomb is produced through nuclear fission and fusion. The heat of an atomic detonation is used to create enough force for hydrogen nuclei to fuse. When nuclear fusion occurs massive explosive energy is released. In the 1950s, the Cold War nuclear arms race created the competitive conditions in which governments transitioned from atomic to thermonuclear bombs.

Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

In 1922, 15 existing countries united to form the first communist country, known as the Soviet Union. The largest and most populous country to join the USSR was the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (Russia). The USSR dissolved in 1991 at the end of the Cold War.

Warsaw Pact

In 1955, the Soviet Union and seven of its satellite states in Eastern and Central Europe formed a strategic defence alliance to counter NATO.