**Pre-Reading Activity for “The Kite Runner.”** Read, annotate the document and then answer the Qs so that you have adequate background information to help you understand the film setting and content.

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| The Cold War  The USA and the Soviet Union (USSR) emerged as the two superpowers of the world after World War 2 ended in 1945. Each had its ideological mission, its networks of alliances, third-world clients, and deadly arsenal of nuclear weapons. Europe was divided, with massive military forces of the USA and its NATO allies on one side and massive forces of the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies on the other. Germany itself was split, with the western three-quarters of the country (and three-quarters of the city of Berlin) occupied by the USA, Great Britain, and France. The eastern part, surrounding West Berlin, was occupied by the Soviet Union. The Allied area was unified into the new nation of West Germany and the Soviet occupied area into the new nation of East Germany. In 1961 East Germany built the Berlin Wall separating East from West Berlin. It symbolized the division of Europe by what Winston Churchill had called the “iron curtain”.  Despite the hostility of East-West relations during the Cold War, a relatively stable but tense relationship emerged, and conflicts never escalated to all-out war. The central concern of the West during the Cold War was that the Soviet Union might gain control of Western Europe- either through invasion or through communists’ taking power in war-weary and impoverished countries of Western Europe. Through the policy of containment, the U.S. sought to halt the expansion of Soviet influence globally on multiple levels. The Cold War thawed temporarily when Stalin died in 1953, but hostilities increased under the next Soviet leader, Khrushchev, when the Soviet Union installed medium-range nuclear missiles in Cuba (Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962). US President Kennedy imposed a naval blockade to force their removal. The USSR backed down on the missiles, and the USA promised not to invade Cuba in the future. Leaders on both sides were shaken by the possibility of nuclear war.  Tensions increased again in 1979 when the USSR invaded and occupied Afghanistan, trying to expand its communist influence in Asia. The US boycotted the 1980 Moscow Olympics and then began to support Afghan rebel groups to stop communist expansion, which forced the USSR into a longer and more expensive war then they expected. By 1989 it seemed as though the USA and USSR were military equals, but it became more evident that the USSR lagged far behind the West in everything else- wealth, technology, infrastructure, and citizen/worker motivation.  Scholars do not agree on the question of why the Cold War ended. One argument holds that the build-up of US military strength under President Reagan forced the USSR into bankruptcy as it tried to keep up in the arms race. Another argument holds that the USSR suffered from internal stagnation over a number of decades and ultimately imploded because of weakness in its communist political and economic system. Indeed, some scholars think the USSR would have fallen apart much earlier if it had not been for the U.S. as a foreign enemy whose unintentional role was to bolster the Soviet government’s legitimacy with its own people. | Superpower = Nation that has nuclear weaponsThird World = Underdeveloped countries, mostly in Africa, Asia & Latin AmericaQ1: What became the symbol of the Cold War?Q2: How was the Cold War different from pervious ‘hot’ wars?Q3: What was the purpose of the US policy of containment?Q4: Which events increased the tensions between the USA and USSR?Q5: How did the US practice ‘containment’ in Afghanistan? |