



The Cold War: Causes and Inevitability

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Question 3: Why did the Cold War occur? Was it evitable?

One of the most significant events that evolved the fundamentals of international politics was the Cold War. 'The emergent global system, unlike earlier ones, featured a bipolar distribution of power' (Kegley & Wittkopf 2004: 113). With the weakening of other Allied powers and the demise of both Germany and Japan, the United States and the Soviet Union were given great power status. Undeniably, this led to a lot of rivalry and conflict between them. 'Great powers fear each other' (Mearsheimer 2001: 32). Each saw the other as a threat and turned to power to survive. They strove to attain relative advantage over the other, which greatly deteriorated their relations resulting in the Cold War. The Cold War was a vague image of war between these 'Great Powers' from 1945 to 1991 following the collapse of the Soviet Union (Lovell 2003:1). It influenced the decisions for policy makers and the role of international system, the nation-state and international organisation. The complexity of the Cold War in terms of what caused it to happen and its inevitability are still debated among scholars (White 2000:1). This essay will argue that the Cold War was inevitable. Regardless of the many reasons behind the occurrence of the Cold War, this essay will discuss confrontation of differences in ideologies and misinterpretation of foreign policy as the main causes of the cold war to further examine its inevitability.

The Cold War was seen as 'the battle ground' between communism and capitalism thus triggered other reasons for it to happen. This is when advocates of capitalism, led by the United States were in confrontation with the communist Soviet Union. Post World War II has seen an expansion of the Soviets' influence as an evidence of a sincere commitment to a more literal interpretation of communist ideology (White 2000:2). Corresponding to its actual foreign policy behaviour was Soviets' rhetorical goals to bend on world revolution. It is to eliminate capitalism and create a monolithic communist world. Soviets' political mission was 'compounded by communist ideology' (Gaddis 1972:3). Even though the Soviet Union gained control of the Baltic States and Eastern Poland, Stalin demanded that the other allies 'recognize the Soviet right to control large parts of Eastern Europe' (Herz 1966: 7-8). Roosevelt agreed but insisted that those states be allowed free elections, which he hoped would 'allay American fears of a Russian sphere of influence' (Gaddis 2000: 164). Stalin broke his promise to Roosevelt to create popularly elected government in Eastern Europe (McNeil 1957). This sparked a negative response from the United States.

It is important to note that Soviets' ideology could not have caused the Cold War if it did not come in conflict with American values and beliefs. At the same time as Soviet expansion, the United States has increased its influence on Western Europe (White 2000:1-2). The United States was gripped by a "Great Fear" of what Soviets' influence had over most of the Eastern Europe and what would have been over its own sphere of influence - Western Europe. The Americans learned to perceive Soviets and its communist ideology as an atheistic, and a system that threatened the fundamentals of American principles on democratic capitalism (Kegley and Wittkopf 2004:115). Rivalry was also stimulated by the 1917 Bolshevik revolution, which brought to power a government that embraced the Marxist critique of capitalistic imperialism thus formulated the fundamentals for the emergence of anticommunism as an opposing ideology to Marxism in the United States (Kegley and Wittkopf 2004:114) (Barson 1992).

Significant contradictions in ideologies and schemes by 'old allies' for the reconstruction of post-war Europe and the world; triggered constant rivalry and conflict between the US and the Soviet Union, which was evident in the attainment of separate spheres of influence, the policy of containment and the upward spiral of nuclear superiority. The possibility of the cold war being preventable can be seen from the similarities that existed between Soviets' communist ideology and United States' democratic capitalism; attempting to bring peace to the world after World War II (Graebner 1977:8). However, Soviets' communism focuses more on the union of different nationalities and indiscriminate, by abolishing the idea of the morally debatable private property, individualism and social classes (Laski 1936:11-12). In addition, Soviets' intention was to push communism to the rest of the world (Gaddis 1972:7). On the other hand, United States' democratic capitalism emphasises more on the power of market, freedom of speech and rights for nationalities by national self-determination (White 2000: 1-3). 'The error is to confuse purpose with result, motive with consequences' (Seldon: 284). 'The Americans had expended their influence in Europe just as Soviets had. The difference was that Soviet never questioned American influence in Western Europe while the Americans never learned to truly accept Soviet domination in Eastern Europe'(White 2000:3). The increasing influence of communism in post-war Europe and the public resistance towards United States' nuclear weapons in Greece was viewed as a threat to the United States. 'The very existence of the great states is threatened by several thousand armed men led by communist' (Dimpleby 1983). This fear and the non-existence of common enemies for both 'super powers' created an inevitability of confrontation and conflict between the United States and Soviet Union (White 2000:2). 'Within the United States, the trend [postulation of democracy] shows itself most clearly in efforts to rationalize United States foreign policy' (Aptheker 1962:38).

Influenced by ideology to a certain extent, both states' foreign policy is also seen as one of the main causes of the Cold War. Post-revolutionists interpreted that lack of transparency in those policies, prompted misperception, suspicion and rivalry between United States and Soviet

Union (White 2000:4). Washington's plan for peace consisted of several key points – to defeat completely, disarm, and occupy those nations which had started the war and to promote self-determination, thus preventing future depressions (Gaddis 1972:2). United States' President Harry S. Truman, failed to observe [at the moment of triumph over Hitler's Nazism] in his speech on the occasion of VE day, was that without the support from the world's greatest dictatorship [the Soviet Union] World War II might not have been won by the 'Great Three' (Graebner 1977:8). After the great battle, which ended in February 1943, Stalin could now try to obtain German confirmation of his territorial aims, which his Western allies had been conspicuously unwilling to give (Mastny 1979:73). Backed by 'learned experiences from three devastating invasions in 130 years' and the super power status 'given' from the victory of World War II, Soviet Union insisted on its post-war plan of the importance to seek security through territorial acquisitions and sphere of influence (Gaddis 1972:3). In response, the United States felt threatened by Soviet aggression and the Soviet perceived a change in American policy when the more abrasive rhetoric of Truman succeeded the more conciliatory approach of Roosevelt (White 2000: 4). 'Passion displaces reason' (Waltz 1959:162). American ability to have nuclear capability (Aptheker 1962:33-34) and the launching of Sputnik by the Soviet in the process of negotiation for cooperation were added to the illusive nature of both states' foreign policy towards each other (Miscamble 1976: preface).

The illusive characteristics of the purposes and approaches of both United States and Soviet Unions' foreign policy caused the Cold War to be inevitable. According to Hans J. Morgenthau in 'The Future of Diplomacy' (Morgenthau 1996), there are four fundamental rules for diplomacy. Firstly, both Soviet Union and United States broke the first rule by being determined to promote their ideologies and trying to prevent the others from doing the same (White 2000:2-4). Roosevelt sent an unclear message to the American public, the American Congress and the Soviet Union by trying to compromise with Stalin for cooperation, while at the same time increasing United States' military capability (Miscamble 1976:38-40). Secondly, the presence of power for both the Soviet Union and United States after the World War II (Mastny 1979:Chp. 3) (Crockkatt 2001:106) to assist them in fulfilling their objective of world capitalism and communism, made conflict inevitable thus broke the second rule (Waltz 1959:159). Thirdly, there was no compromise due to differences in objective of foreign policies between 'super powers' – the third rule (White 2000:2). Finally, all the elements of both foreign policies violated the fourth rule. It is because although the policies can be determined, it can't be characterised (Miscamble 1976:252). These violations of diplomatic rules in foreign policy have made cooperation between the Soviet Union and the United States after World War II, 'an unachievable dream' thus stirred conflicts and rivalry.

In conclusion, rivalry and conflict between the two great powers was inevitable. Each state placed too much emphasis on itself and tried its best to ensure that its great power states were never challenged. The conflicting fundamentals of political mission and national interests between the two great powers made the bipolar system of the Cold War as a mutually assured destruction. So much so, that every move made by the other state was considered a threat, regardless of the situation.

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