Cold War

For M.A (Semester – 2)

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Introduction

- The Cold War is the name for the overarching rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union that came to define the period from the end of World War II in 1945 until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. At its center— part cause, part effect—was the postwar division of Europe and especially of Germany, whose unification in 1989-1990 was a decisive moment in the endgame of the Cold War. But the Cold War extended far beyond Europe to become a global competition between the superpowers, as well as communist China, involving a nuclear arms race that teetered, at times, on the brink of devastating war.

TERMINOLOGY

- The term *Cold War* was popularized by the American columnist Walter Lippmann in his book of that title published in 1947. But in October 1945 the British author George Orwell, pondering the implications of the new atomic bomb, had already predicted an era in which a great power could be at once "*unconquerable* and in a permanent state of 'cold war' with its neighbours". The term, in fact, has a long lineage, having been used to characterize Hitler's war of nerves against France in the 1930s and the international arms race before World War I.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

- For a generation the field of Cold War historiography was dominated by American authors. Early writings were predominantly sympathetic to the policy of the U.S. government, blaming the Cold War largely on Soviet territorial expansionism and portraying American policy as reactive. Although differing on the relative importance of ideology as against power politics in Soviet thinking, this so called orthodox school held sway in the 1950s and early 1960s. Its exemplars included the scholar and policymaker Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. During the 1960s, however, a ‘‘revisionist’’ critique gained momentum, fed by contemporary political debate about the Vietnam War and by the firstfruits of American archives. Historians such as William Appleman Williams argued that an American policy of economic expansion bore a large measure of responsibility for the Cold War. Anxious to promote an ‘‘open door’’ for its trade, finance, and ideas, the United States, they argued, had been trying to redesign the world in its own image, to create an informal American empire.

ORIGINS

- Revisionists were often inclined to date it back to 1917, the year of the Russian Revolution and the United States' entry into the European war. As such, the Cold War was a struggle of revolution versus counter revolution. On the other hand, the two powers had little to do with each other after the end of the Russian civil war and the United States' retreat from European commitments.
- What really brought them into contact was their alliance of wartime necessity against Hitler and especially the presence from 1945 of U.S. and Soviet troops in the heart of defeated Germany. With the two powers now face to face and forced to work together on postwar peacemaking, their fundamental ideological differences really began to matter. Each still wanted cooperation, but on its own terms, and events in 1945 showed just how far the other side would go.

ORIGINS…(continued)

- The biggest problem was what to do about Germany itself, occupied by America, Britain, France , and the Soviet Union as prelude, it was assumed, to creating an independent, de Nazified German state. However, the Allies could not agree on the terms for a peace treaty. Having lost perhaps twenty-eight million in the war, the Soviets were naturally determined to keep Germany down. The Americans, remote from Europe and suffering only three hundred thousand dead, were more interested in rebuilding the German economy as a motor for European recovery.
- The defeat of Hitler's Reich also left the Red Army in control of large areas of Eastern Europe. Joseph Stalin (1879-1953) understood the Yalta Conference of February 1945 to signify that he was being given a free hand in ‘‘his’’ part of Europe, just as he left the British and Americans predominant in the West. But they expected that he would conform to the ‘‘open door,’’ democratic values for which they proclaimed the war had been fought. The imposition of Communist-dominated governments in Poland, Bulgaria, and Romania in 1945 was therefore a deep shock. Stalin, in turn, regarded Western protests as a breach of promise and as sinister evidence that his erstwhile allies posed a threat to basic Soviet interests.

ORIGINS…(continued)

- The year 1945 was not just the end of the Second World War; it also marked the beginning of the nuclear age. In August 1945 the United States dropped two atomic bombs on Japan to end the Asian war. Stalin's response was to galvanize the Soviets' own atomic project, giving it top priority for manpower and resources. Revisionist historians sometimes argued that if Washington had been more willing to share atomic secrets with Moscow, this might have reduced Cold War friction. But even a leader less paranoid than Stalin would not have rested easy as long as atomic weapons remained an American monopoly. Nuclear rivalry exacerbated the underlying mistrust.
- During 1945, the new American president, Harry S. Truman, agreed to the governments of Poland, Bulgaria, and Romania on essentially Stalin's terms, with the addition of a few token non communists. But his suspicion of Soviet conduct deepened during 1946, not only in Europe but also in places such as Iran, Turkey, and Korea. Winston Churchill, the wartime British prime minister, helped conceptualize the new worldview with his speech at Fulton, Missouri, on 5 March 1946 warning of an ''Iron Curtain'' coming down across Europe. On both sides, memories of the previous war were pervasive. The Americans and British saw events as a possible replay of the 1930s, with aggression escalating into another world war if the response was appeasement; the Soviets feared another surprise attack from the West, akin to 1941, and Stalin played on this to justify renewed repression at home.

THE PARTITION OF EUROPE (1947- 49)

- The crucial year was 1947. The British, in eco-nomic crisis, informed Washington that they could no longer provide financial aid to Turkey and Greece, where the communists were gaining ground in a brutal civil war. Calling on Congress to pick up the tab, Truman spoke of a world divided between ‘‘democracy’’ and ‘‘totalitarianism,’’ and committed the United States to supporting ‘‘free peoples’’ everywhere. The Truman Doctrine of 12 March 1947 ideologized the Cold War.
- The second big American initiative that year was the Marshall Plan. With Western European recovery faltering because of a grave shortage of dollars, the U.S. secretary of state George C. Marshall spoke out at Harvard University on 5 June. Marshall promised that if the Europeans drew up a joint recovery program, the United States would provide financial assistance. Marshall’s offer did not in principle exclude the Soviets, who turned up at the ensuing conference at Paris in July with a hundred strong delegation. But when Stalin discovered that the aid would not be unconditional, as in the war, and that the Americans saw it as a lever for opening up nationalist economies, he recalled his delegation and warned satellite countries such as Poland and Czechoslovakia that participation would be regarded as a hostile act against the Soviet Union. The Marshall Plan went ahead for Western Europe alone, while much of Eastern Europe became an exploited Soviet colony. In many ways July 1947 was the moment when the Iron Curtain really came down.

THE PARTITION OF EUROPE (continued)

- The divide became political as well. May 1947 saw new coalition governments formed in France, Italy, and Belgium, without the communists. Over the next year, union movements across Western Europe split into communist and noncommunist groupings. Meanwhile, Eastern European states were Stalinized, with only Moscow loyalists left in power, and command economies were rapidly imposed.
- With the great powers deadlocked over its future, Germany remained essentially a barter economy in which the main medium of exchange was cigarettes. The country was potentially the engine of European economic recovery, and the British and Americans decided they must start to revive their zones of Germany without Soviet agreement. After the communist takeover of Czechoslovakia in February 1948, the French—hitherto more fearful of the Germans than of the Russians—also fell into line. Faced with a new currency in western Germany, Stalin tried to intimidate the West by imposing a blockade of Berlin in June 1948. To his surprise, the Americans and British responded with an airlift that kept the city supplied through the winter until he conceded defeat in May 1949.
- By this time the Western allies had agreed on the basis of a new western German state. The Federal Republic of Germany came into existence in May 1949, even though the Allied occupation continued. The Berlin crisis also accelerated talks about transatlantic cooperation. The North Atlantic Treaty, signed in April 1949, was an unprecedented American peacetime commitment to the security of Europe and a sign of how far the world had moved since 1945.

MILITARIZING THE COLD WAR (1949-1955)

- Later in 1949, however, the initiative again shifted away from the West. In August the Soviet Union tested its first atomic bomb, based on information transmitted by Soviet agents about the device tested by the Americans in 1945. And in October the Chinese communists, victors of the long and savage civil war, proclaimed the new People's Republic of China.
- In Stalin's eyes these two events signaled a shift in the ‘‘correlation of forces.’’ They emboldened him to approve the bid by his North Korean allies to bring the whole of their country under communist control. The Korean War, which broke out in June 1950, had a dramatic effect on Europe. The Atlantic allies, fearful that it presaged a similar offensive in Western Europe, galvanized their own rearmament and turned the treaty into a proper military alliance (the North Atlantic Treaty Organization—NATO), with its own command structure under American leadership. Despite strong opposition in Congress, the United States committed four new combat divisions to European defense, in return demanding that the Europeans accept the rearmament of West Germany.

MILITARIZING THE COLD WAR (continued)

- The French were deeply alarmed at the revival of German military power. For nearly four years the allies explored the idea of a European Defense Community in which German forces would simply be part of a multinational army. After this proposal was rejected in the French Assembly in August 1954, the allies eventually agreed to admit a rearmed West Germany into NATO. Its forces would not have an independent existence, and the government also renounced atomic, biological, and chemical weapons.
- The Soviets also viewed the revival of West German power with grave suspicion. In the spring of 1952 Stalin proposed new talks leading to a Germany that would be united, rearmed but neutral. When the West rejected this as a spoiling tactic, the Soviets sealed off their part of Germany from the west. Having argued in 1952-1953 about whether East Germany was an asset or a liability now that they had looted most of its assets, the Soviet leaders were panicked by the riots across the country in June 1953. In a marked change of policy, they started to build up the East German regime. When West Germany joined NATO in May 1955, the Soviets countered by drawing their satellites, including East Germany, into their own military system, known in the West as the Warsaw Pact.
- Only a few European countries stayed aloof from the two rival alliances. Switzerland and Sweden maintained their traditional neutrality. In Austria, the four occupying powers withdrew in May 1955, under a treaty that left the country united, independent, and nonaligned. And Yugoslavia's leader Josip Broz Tito had successfully broken away from Moscow's orbit to develop a looser communist economy with aid from the West. But these were rare exceptions. Ten years after the end of Hitler's Reich, most of Europe had been divided into two armed camps.

FIRST THAW AND NEW DIVISIONS (1955-1961)

- Stalin's death in March 1953 heralded a thaw. The new collective leadership was anxious to reduce tension with the West, and it negotiated an armis-tice in the deadlocked Korean War. The two sides also looked for advantageous ground on which to stage a ''summit'' conference—a term popularized by Churchill—and eventually met at Geneva in July 1955.
- But the occasion was largely symbolic. Despite growing concern about the nuclear threat now that both sides were developing hydrogen bombs, the arms race was spiraling out of control. Britain had joined the nuclear ''club'' in 1952; France followed in 1960. In November 1953 the first battlefield nuclear weapons were introduced into West Germany, presaging the ''Nuclearization'' of war at the tactical as well as the strategic level. In November 1956 the brutal Soviet repression of the Hungarian revolt marked a return to confrontational politics.
- This was not, however, the acute tension of the early 1950s. Under the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev (1894-1971), the slogan was ''peaceful coexistence,'' which meant an intensified competition by all means short of war. Khrushchev was anxious to reduce the arms burden on his own economy. Like the Americans, his aim was to cut down conventional forces and rely more heavily on the deterrent effect of nuclear weapons. The successful launching of Sputnik, the first artificial Earth satellite, in October 1957 suggested that the Soviets were ahead in the development of long range missiles. Hitherto the Soviets had no long range aircraft to deliver their nuclear bombs against the United States; now, it seemed to panicky Americans, they could hit Washington within thirty minutes. On the back of this technological triumph, Khrushchev boasted that the Soviet Union would outstrip U.S. per capita output within fifteen years.
- Khrushchev exploited his advantage by trying to force an agreement about Berlin, still occupied by the four wartime allies and as such the only point where East Germans could escape to the West. After a series of crises from November 1958, Khrushchev decided to stop the hemorrhage of young talent by blocking off the Soviet zone of the city. Barricades and barbed wire on 13 August 1961 quickly became a twelve-foot-high concrete wall, flanked by minefields, watchtowers, and searchlights. Despite West German anger, the West accepted the fait accompli: a divided Germany seemed an acceptable price for a more stable Europe. But the Berlin Wall cost the Soviets dear in propaganda terms. To those who did not grasp what was at stake between ''the free world and the Communist world,'' President John F. Kennedy (1917-1963) declared, ''Let them come to Berlin.''

CUBA, VIETNAM & THE PRAGUE SPRING (1962-1969)

- East Germany was a Soviet showpiece in the Cold War. Another, more recent, was Cuba. After Fidel Castro (born, 1926) and his guerrillas seized power from a corrupt Americanized regime in 1959, they became increasingly dependent on Soviet aid as they turned the country into a socialist state. Cuba was only one hundred fifty k.ms from America, and Kennedy did his best to overthrow the Castro government. In the autumn of 1962 Khrushchev responded by introducing medium range nuclear missiles into Cuba. He tried to do so secretly, but American spy planes detected the buildup and Kennedy went public on 22 October, announcing a blockade of the island. After an increasingly frenzied week of negotiation, Khrushchev, aware that the U.S. nuclear arsenal was far superior to his own, backed down and pulled out the missiles. This massive humiliation, played out on the world stage, was a major factor in his enforced resignation in 1964.
- But Kennedy's advantage was short lived. He was assassinated in November 1963, having already laid the groundwork for America's own nemesis— Vietnam. After the French pulled out of this divided country in 1954, the United States propped up the anticommunist regime in the south with massive amounts of aid, and in 1960 the North embarked on a massive guerrilla war. Kennedy, seeing Vietnam as a Cold War test case of American virility, began to introduce ''military advisors.'' Although the Soviets were not anxious to escalate the conflict, the increasingly radical government of China, now bitterly at odds with Russia, provided aid to the North, and Moscow had to follow suit or lose face in the communist world. With South Vietnam in danger of collapse in 1965, Kennedy's successor, Lyndon B. Johnson (1908-1973), committed combat troops and started massive bombing of North Vietnam. But his escalation failed to end the conflict and also caused immense popular protest in America and across the world.
- The growing anti American feeling in Western Europe was reflected at the top of the Western alliance. Critical of what he saw as excessive American domination, the French president Charles de Gaulle (1890-1970) withdrew his country from NATO's integrated command system in 1966.
- But the 1960s also brought another reminder of the nature of Soviet rule. Reformers in Czechoslovakia under Alexander Dubcek (1921-1992) promoted democratic change in what became known as the ''Prague Spring.'' Eventually Warsaw Pact troops reimposed Soviet control in August 1968—another military success that was also a propaganda disaster. The 1960s ended with both sides in the Cold War having lost the moral and ideological high ground.

THE RISE & FALL OF DÉTENTE (1969-1979)

- Johnson's successor, Richard M. Nixon (1913-1994), sought to break the Cold War deadlock, which was now pulling down America's once all powerful economy. The first goal of Nixon and his national security advisor (NSA) Henry Kissinger (born, 1923) was to extricate America from Vietnam without loss of face. Part of that strategy was to bomb the North Vietnamese even more heavily than Johnson had. But Nixon also managed to detatch North Vietnam from its communist patrons, through path breaking visits to Beijing (February 1972) and Moscow (May 1972)—the first time an American president had visited either communist capital. At Moscow he also concluded the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT-I) in an effort to slow the arms race. This started a flurry of super-power summits with the Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev (1906-1982) that marked the heyday of detente (French for "relaxation of tension"). It reflected the fact that both sides were now roughly equal in nuclear arsenals and that each could see real benefits from a reduction of the arms race.

THE RISE & FALL OF DÉTENTE (continued)

- Detente had a European dimension as well. In 1970-1972 the new Social Democrat led government in West Germany under Willy Brandt negotiated a series of treaties with its eastern neighbors. These included de facto recognition of the East German government (to permit divided families to pay visits across the border). And in July 1975 thirty five nations concluded the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe with some path breaking agreements. Thirty years after the war, the Western countries effectively accepted Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe. But in return the Soviet bloc committed itself to honoring basic freedoms of speech, information, and travel. This would prove a time bomb ticking away beneath the edifice of communist rule.
- In January 1973, as part of detente, a Vietnam peace agreement was initialed in Paris. Although American troops pulled out, Nixon hoped to maintain the South Vietnamese regime through massive economic aid and the threat of U.S. airpower. But as scandal engulfed his administration in 1973-1974, Congress cut back military appropriations, and in April 1975 South Vietnam was overrun.

THE RISE & FALL OF DÉTENTE (continued)

- It was not until 1977, with the presidency of Jimmy Carter, that detente resumed momentum with renewed negotiations on arms limitation. The SALT II treaty was initialed at a Carter-Brezhnev summit in Vienna in June 1979. By this time, however, Carter was becoming seriously alarmed at the expansion of Soviet influence, particularly in Africa, and the opening of full diplomatic relations with China in January 1979 was intended in part as a warning to Moscow.
- But what really ended detente was the crisis in Afghanistan. Factional and tribal feuds in this Soviet client state escalated into civil war during 1979. At Christmas, the Red Army was sent in to restore order, only to be sucked into a brutal eight-year guerrilla war that became Moscow's equivalent of America's Vietnam. In response Carter withdrew the SALT II treaty from Senate ratification, banned many economic and cultural contacts with the Soviets, and called on American athletes to boycott the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow.

THE NEW COLD WAR (1980-1985)

- The freeze deepened in 1981 with the crisis in Poland, whose fierce anti-Russian nationalism had been fueled by the country's fervent Roman Catholicism. In October 1978 Karol Wojtyla (1920-2005), the archbishop of Krakow, was elected Pope John Paul II, becoming a rallying point for opposition to communist rule. Equally important was the burgeoning free union movement, led by Lech Walesa (b. 1943), which adopted the collective name "Solidarity." In December 1981 the Polish government, under intense pressure from Moscow, imposed martial law and rounded up Solidarity's leaders.
- For Carter's successor, Ronald Reagan (1911-2004), Poland was yet more evidence of the need to confront what he famously called "an evil empire." Reagan presided over a zealously anti communist administration, determined to restore American power. His presidency saw a new arms buildup and a vigorous campaign against communist backed movements in Central America.
- But the president was not a straightforward cold warrior. He genuinely believed that nuclear deterrence—Mutually Assured Destruction, or MAD—was an abomination and hoped to replace offensive missiles with comprehensive antimissile defense systems. In March 1983 he gave his back-ing to the so called Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), nicknamed "Star Wars," but the prospect of a new, high tech twist to the arms race seriously alarmed the Soviets. SDI also upset Reagan's European allies, who feared being left outside America's strategic umbrella.
- Western Europe was even more upset by the introduction of new theater nuclear missiles. This deployment had been agreed to back in 1979, as a counter to updated Soviet SS-20 missiles. But when NATO's cruise and Pershing missiles were deployed, they provoked mass protests and sit-ins across Western Europe. The early 1980s saw the worst NATO crisis of the whole Cold War. It was only because of firm conservative governments in Britain and West Germany that the deployments went ahead. In the mid-1980s NATO seemed the more brittle of the two alliance blocs.

THE GORBACHEV REVOLUTION AND THE SOVIET COLLAPSE (1985-1991)

- Appearances were deceptive, however. The Soviet Union was in a state of zero growth, and the arms race with the United States was consuming perhaps one-sixth of GDP. The root problem was the command economy, ruled by a central but ineffectual plan, administered by a vast bureaucracy, and riddled with corruption. During the 1970s and 1980s the Western economies had painfully transcended the era of ‘‘heavy metal’’—the so called rustbelt industries such as coal, steel, and automobiles—to develop new service economies and begin the computer-driven information technology revolution. But the Soviet economy was starved of consumer goods, and its few computers were mostly pirated from America. As the West entered the information age, the Soviets were still locked in the industrial age.
- In April 1985 leadership passed to a new generation. Mikhail Gorbachev (born in 1931) was energetic, bright, and university trained. His predecessors had been shaped by the era of Stalinism and World War II, which engendered paranoid concepts of stability and security. By contrast, Gorbachev had seen the West and was influenced by concepts of social democracy developed in West Germany and Scandinavia. The key, in his view, to a radical restructuring (perestroika) of the Soviet system was to reduce the arms burden on the economy. Gorbachev seized the initiative in what was nothing less than a diplomatic revolution.
- Geneva in November 1985 started a new flurry of superpower summits, at which Gorbachev made most of the concessions. The meeting in Washington in December 1987 agreed to remove all intermediate range nuclear forces, including the SS-20, cruise, and Pershing missiles that had caused such trouble a few years earlier. It was also the first time the superpowers had agreed to reduce their missile stocks, instead of merely slowing their expansion. Gorbachev also agreed to a regime of on-site inspections—a novel development for the secretive Soviets and evidence of his new philoso-phy of openness and transparency (glasnost).
- The two countries in the vanguard of reform were Poland and Hungary. The Polish Communist government conceded free elections in June 1989, and these resulted in a Solidarity led coalition government. In Hungary, reformers within the Communist Party took control, rehabilitating the leaders of the 1956 revolt, and symbolically opened the country’s border with Austria. This offered an unprecedented loophole for East Germans, thousands of whom fled west and then claimed their right to West German citizenship.

THE GORBACHEV REVOLUTION AND THE SOVIET COLLAPSE (continued. . .)

- Faced with another hemorrhage of young talent, a new reformist Politburo in East Germany bowed to mounting popular unrest and announced travel concessions on 9 November 1989. This was intended as a limited, regularized program, but thousands flocked to the border crossing in Berlin and the massively outnumbered guards let them through. Over the next few days two or three million East Germans went to and fro across the Berlin Wall. The Iron Curtain had fallen, and the East German regime lasted only a few more weeks.
- By the end of November, mass rallies and strikes had toppled Communist rule in Czechoslovakia in what became known as the ‘‘Velvet Revolution.’’ Only in Romania did the end of the brutal regime of Nicolae Ceau§escu (निकोले क्युसिएसको) (1918-1989) involve significant bloodshed, with the dictator and his wife summarily executed on Christmas Day.
- Few had anticipated that the end of the Soviet bloc would be so quick and relatively peaceful. Gorbachev’s refusal to use force, in marked contrast to his predecessors, was of decisive importance. But so was the communications revolution. News of the upheavals in Poland and Hungary were relayed around the bloc by West German TV and radio, emboldening protestors even in Ceau§escu’s police state. The revolutions of 1989 marked the triumph of communication as much as the failure of communism.
- Gorbachev’s reformism had unleashed a whirlwind that was now beyond his control. As West Germany moved rapidly to absorb East Germany, leading to formal unification in October 1990, the Soviet Union itself fell apart. Gorbachev’s attempt to introduce elements of a market economy led to roaring inflation. New powers for the Soviet republics and the legitimation of noncommunist parties made politics less easy to control. And the erosion of the union led to a backlash in Russia, the largest republic and bankroller of the rest, where Gorbachev’s rival Boris Yeltsin was firmly in control. After hardliners tried an unsuccessful coup in August 1991, Gorbachev’s remaining power ebbed fast. On Christmas Day 1991, the red flag was lowered on the Kremlin flagpole as the Soviet Union ceased to exist.

CONCLUSION

- Stated simply, the Cold War ended in 1989-1991 when most of the world's communist regimes collapsed, Germany was reunited, and the Soviet Union ceased to exist. In that sense, the West and especially the United States won the Cold War. This was certainly the verdict of many American conservatives.
- But other factors mattered as well. Leaders, for instance, were crucial, particularly in the Soviet Union: the Cold War grew out of Stalin's paranoid sense of insecurity; conversely, Gorbachev's belief that security was not a zero sum game helped bring it to an end.
- The Cold War was also a phase in social history. It was made possible by the development of mass media, particularly television and film, and their use by governments to shape public ideology in the Soviet Union and the United States. The explosion of new electronic media under looser official control ushered in a new historical era. Equally important in the Soviet bloc was the growth of an educated middle class, which made Stalinism increasingly difficult to maintain.
- At the time, the Cold War seemed an all encompassing phenomenon, particularly to Americans. Yet much associated with the Cold War has outlived it. The People's Republic of China—the world's most populous country and a coming power of the twenty-first century—is still a communist state, albeit in modified form. Final verdicts on Marxism-Leninism will depend heavily on how China evolves. And although the Cold War and the atomic bomb came of age together in 1945, the problem of nuclear weapons has survived the Soviet collapse. Evaluating the Cold War and its legacies will preoccupy historians for decades to come.

SUGGESTED READINGS

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