
Essay on the Causes Of The Cold War

The Cold War was a period of tension and hostility between the United States of America and the Soviet Union from the mid-40s to the late 80s. It began with the end of the Second World War. It was called the Cold War because there was no active war between the two nations, which was probably due to the fear of nuclear escalation. There were many indirect conflicts like the Vietnam and Korea wars. There was the Cuban missile crisis in 1962 which was the closest the world ever came to a nuclear war. An American U2 spy plane took photographs of Soviet intermediate ballistic missiles capable of carrying nuclear payloads. The Soviet Union sent a total of 42 medium range missiles and 24 intermediate range missiles to Cuba. The US threatened to invade Cuba over the issue. Ultimately the Soviets removed the missiles on America's promise of not invading Cuba (Buzzle.com, 2010)

The cold war is not only a period in international history but also a description of the overall relationship between the USA and USSR during that period. There are three main views about the cold war. Each of them generates a set of discrete claims about the causes of the cold war, the nature of the cold war, the end of the cold war, and its legacy in contemporary international relations. Perhaps the most popular of these views is that the cold war was an intense struggle for power between the superpowers. (Callaghan et al, 2007)

Who was to blame for the Cold War

Russian historians blamed Churchill (the British Prime Minister) and Truman (the American president, 1945-1953). They said Truman and Churchill wanted to destroy the USSR, which was just defending itself.

The Traditional View: At first, western writers blamed Russia. They said Stalin was trying to build up a Soviet empire.

The Revisionist View: Later, however, some western historians blamed America. They said Truman had not understood how much Russia had suffered in the Second World War.

The Post-Revisionists: Later still, historians think BOTH sides were to blame – that there were hatreds on both sides.

Most recently, historians agree that the Cold War was primarily a clash of beliefs – Communism versus Capitalism. (Johndclare.net)

Causes of the Cold War

The Soviet Union wanted to spread its ideology of communism worldwide, which alarmed the Americans who followed democracy.

The acquisition of atomic weapons by America caused fear in the Soviets.

Both countries feared an attack from each other.

The Soviet Union's action of taking control over Eastern Europe was a major factor for US suspicions.

The US President had a personal dislike of the Soviet leader Josef Stalin.

America was annoyed by the Soviet Union's actions in the part of Germany it had occupied.

The Soviets feared that America would use Western Europe as a base to attack it. (Buzzle.com, 2010)

Underlying causes

Ideological: The United States and the Soviet Union represented two opposing systems of government. In the United States, the government was elected by free elections unlike the Soviet Union. The people could form political parties to voice their political opinions.

(ii) **Economic:** The United States wanted to encourage free trade throughout the world. The Soviet Union wanted to shield off her own sphere from international commerce. These differences led to much ill feeling between the United States and the Soviet Union.

(iii) **Power rivalry:** After the Second World War, with the decline of Europe, power was largely shared between the Soviet Union and the United States. As one wanted 'to dominate the other, conflicts were inevitable.

Immediate causes leading to the Cold War

Incipient conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States began at the peace-time conferences. Their conflict was intensified after President Truman declared the Truman Doctrine and launched the Marshall Plan in 1947.

Extension of Russian influence in Europe: Even before the end of the war, the Soviet Union had gradually extended her influence in Europe. As the war was drawing to a close in May 1945, the Soviet Union quickly consolidated her control of Eastern Europe. The Red Army began by influencing the post-war elections. Although the non-communists could still gain some votes, most of the votes went to the communists. In late 1946, the French and Italian Communists were becoming the most powerful parties in France and Italy.

The reactions of the United States: Despite the increasing Russian influence in eastern and central Europe, many politicians in the United States were optimistic about the chances of co-operation with the Soviet Union after the war and did not advocate strong resistance against Russian expansion. But from May 1945 onwards, the situation was changed. The U.S. government favored a policy of strong resistance against Russia.

Poor relations between the United States and the Soviet Union: The deteriorating relations between the Soviet Union and the United States were reflected in two minor incidents in the year. Lend-Lease was abruptly terminated by the United States and the Russian request for American economic aid for the purposes of post-war reconstruction was ignored by the government of the United States. (During the Second World War, the U.S. supplied much war

material to the Allied nations through a Lend and Lease programme. As the Lend and Lease programme was suddenly stopped, the war-ravaged Soviet Union could not obtain American material support to help her post-war economic reconstruction.)

The poor relations between the East and West were also reflected in a speech by Churchill. In March 1946, Churchill made a speech at Fulton, Missouri in which he said, "From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the continent Behind that line lie all the capitals of the central and Eastern Europe – all are subject in one form or another not only to Soviet influence but also to a very high and increasing control from Moscow." The Fulton speech increased the American suspicion of Soviet aggressive designs in Europe. (Funfront.net, 2010)

The two superpowers often jockeyed for position in the third world, supporting proxy wars in which they typically supplied and advised opposing factions in civil wars. The alignments were often arbitrary. For instance, the US backed the Ethiopian government and the Soviets backed next-door rival Somalian the 1970s; when an Ethiopian revolution caused the new government to seek Soviet help, the US switched to support Somalia instead (Goldstein, 2008).

The United States became alarmed with the growing of communism in Europe and set up the Marshall Plan in order to counteract the spread of communism. The Marshall Plan was an economic support program funded by the United States. They gave relief money to the war torn democratic countries in order to rebuild their economy. They did not give money to the Soviet Union and any of its satellites. The United States' motivation for doing this was to provide themselves with trading partners and to economically exclude the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union also formed an exclusive economic federation between all the states in the Soviet Union called COMECON. This restricted trade to within the Soviet Union. These measures to isolate the enemy and set up economic barriers helped to provoke the Cold War. The Soviet Union and the west also formed political alliances to combat the other side. Western Europe and the United States formed NATO, a military pact. The Soviet Union created a similar pact, the Warsaw Pact, between the states within the Soviet Union.

These military coalitions put a greater threat behind the growing conflicts by involving more countries. These military alliances were supplemented by two edicts set by the Soviet Union and the United States. The United States issued the Truman Doctrine, which stated that they would support those countries resisting communism. Likewise, the Soviet Union later issued the Brezhnev Doctrine which decreed that the Soviet Union would intervene with force in order to protect communism in its satellites. One of the main issues that strained relations between the Soviet Union and the west was the threat of nuclear war.

Both the Soviet Union and the United States knew how to make nuclear weapons. This knowledge made the consequences of their actions much more cautious. This helped to cause the war during the Cuban Missile Crisis where the Soviet Union planted nuclear missiles at the United States from Cuba for a time. The Cold War was brought about by many factors caused at the end of World War II. The ideological differences, economic barriers, political and military alliances, and nuclear weapons all contributed to creating the Cold War. These differences caused the mounting tension between the Soviet Union and the west at the end of World War II. (Essays.cc, 2010)

The Cold War was the result of a clash between communism and capitalism, two opposing

world-views. Another cause of the build up to the Cold War was the intransigent attitude of both sides. The Soviet Union was extremely concerned about its security after having been invaded twice in the twentieth century. In 1945 America created and used the atomic bomb against Japan and the USSR was determined to create one of its own. Both the USSR and the USA built up huge arsenals of Inter-Continental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs). The United States tested a hydrogen bomb in 1952 and in November 1955, the USSR developed one too. After that the USA moved its bombers into Europe. In 1955 West Germany was allowed to re-arm and join NATO. Russia responded by forming the Warsaw Mutual Defense Pact with its buffer zone neighbors.

In 1957 the Soviets used a missile to launch Sputnik 1 into orbit around the earth. The arms race evolved into a space race as the United States rushed to launch its own satellites. The space race was an opportunity for the two nations to show their technological superiority. The Soviet Union launched Sputnik I, the first orbiting satellite, on October 4, 1957. On November 3, they launched Sputnik II with the first living creature, a dog, named Laika. (Essortment.com, 2010)

In the '80s President Ronald Reagan of the US dubbed the Soviet Union as an "evil empire" and predicted that it would be consigned to the ash heap of history. He announced a major weapons buildup and the SDI (Strategic Defense Initiative) also dubbed "Star Wars". The Soviet Union was too economically enfeebled to reply in kind. In 1985 Mikhail Gorbachev became the leader of the Soviet Union. He adopted a conciliatory attitude towards the Americans and many arms reduction pacts were signed. In 1989 there was a Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and in 1990 the Soviets agreed to the reunification of Germany. Movements against communist governments in Eastern Europe followed this. The Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 marking the end of the Cold War.