



Theories of the Origin of Cold War

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KEYWORDS :

The international relations after World War II have been an area of academic debate. The area of significance was in related the issues causing conflict and cooperation between the East and the West. The post war super power relations were studied in the context of their global rivalry. The strained relationship developed during and after the War made US and the Soviet Union stand forth as each other's rivals on the edge of another war known as "Cold War". Baruch used this term in April 1947 and Walter Lippman wrote a book with this title and received overwhelming appreciation for his work.

The Cold War presumed an ideological bifurcation of World into concentrated blocks of states, resources and weapons expressing a competition between alternative political and economic systems, a conflict between East and West and a contest for global leadership between the US and the Soviet Union.

The genesis of East-West conflict can be traced back to the birth of Soviet Russia after the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917. The Western power took the Bolshevik Revolution as a shocking event. The western nations including the United States intervened in the civil war in Russia and aided counter revolutionaries. The western aid could not overturn the succession of Bolshevism in Russia. This effort, however, hardened the Soviet attitude towards the capitalist world.

The revolution introduced for the time being, the conflict of social philosophies and made it an important factor in the sphere of international relations. The zeal with which the Bolshevik leaders and propagandist proclaimed the inevitability of world communism, alienated Russia's from its former allies as these alliance saw in Bolshevik Revolution a great menace to the existing political and social system. The East West conflict in the international arena however remained muted for as long as one of the antagonist, the Soviet Union was a relatively weak state.

The Workable relationship between them gradually established, but their mutual distrust prevented them from combining against their common enemy viz, Nazi Germany at the outbreak of the Second World War. Hitler's sudden attack on Russia in June 1941 made the Soviet Union an ally of the west and her contribution to the victory ushered a new era of cooperation between East and West.

After the end of World War II, the position and stand of three powers were quite distinct. Beyond survival Great Britain's aim was to establish (after the reduction of Germany), a reasonable European and international balance of order. Beyond survival, Soviet Union's aim was to establish (together with the reduction of Germany), its control over most of Eastern Europe. The US future plans were not clear.

Never before had any nation attained such immense power as had the US at the end of the second world war with a status of great power. On the other hand, the Soviet Union though badly crippled in manpower and destructed materially emerged as the second great power with a biggest landmass in the world.

Wartime amity could not last for a long and hostilities emerged. The Soviet Union charged western world deceiving it on several occasions. Soviet Union could be complained of the delay of the west in opening a second front, suspected about western ambitions to eliminate Russia and Germany in their mutual warfare; American insistence on keeping the secrets of atom bomb; the abrupt termination of lend lease aid; and last but, not the least, the rejection of a Soviet request

for a post war reconstruction loan deepened the Soviet suspicion of American goodwill.

The emergence of United States and Soviet Union as super power with faithful blocks of European supporters quickly produced tensions in Europe. The rivalry between East and West became a cold War, fought mainly with economic weapons and with propaganda. The balance of power was achieved partly through fear, both sides were well aware of the destructive power of nuclear weapons.

Reasons behind the outbreak of cold war

In 1945, the western power faced a new Russia, vastly augmented in ambitions, aggressiveness and size, determined to pursue its historic interests which the Atlantic Charter could not serve in world affairs. Russian interests required territorial and political guarantees against the recurrence of direct invasion from the west. In the Soviet occupation and control of Eastern and Central Europe lay the only apparent reward of victory. Using his political and ideological identification with local communist leaders, Stalin gradually established a series of communist regimes in areas occupied by Soviet troops.

In May 1945, when peace came to Europe, Truman abruptly cut lend lease aid to Russia. The US representative in Moscow assured Stalin that the US as a powerful country had no desire to put pressure on the Soviet Union but this decision antagonized the Russians.

Truman, Churchill and Stalin met at Potsdam in mid July 1945 to establish the foundations for peace. On the concrete issue of Germany and Eastern Europe there was no possible compromise. Stalin remained adamant on the question of Eastern Europe's future. At Potsdam world politics began to assume a bipolar structure.

In the context of big power rivalry, it was clear that the new organization i.e. The United Nations, (like League of Nations before it), would serve largely as an instrument of evasion. The United Nations could not terminate the struggle for power and prestige among the countries of the world. Nor could it achieve genuine concert in International affairs or force its decisions through collective action on any major power. It provided merely a public forum where nations added new political instruments to traditional weapons of diplomacy- where they resorted to legalism in manipulating the procedure of the organization and turn all serious debate into appeals for world sentiment. Since such weapon could not have viable effect on the actual distribution of power in the world, the battles of the UN remained barren. The leading nations, already distrustful of the UN, began to seek security in their own resources.

At Yalta, the western leaders had arrived at a settlement with Stalin as to the needs of Russian security and accepted Stalin's own claims to German territory and the Polish boundary in return for the Russian leader's assurance about the holding of free elections in the countries of Eastern Europe, Each side began to complain soon afterwards about other's doubtful intention. Moscow saw it as the western acceptance of a divided Europe. The west on the other hand, emphasized the clauses ignored by Stalin, on self-determination and free elections.

Similarly, in case of nuclear technology, in mid-1946, Truman adopted the plan formulated by Bernard Baruch which would have placed atomic control in the hands of the United Nations, but under conditions which would have protected the U.S. monopoly for a number of

years. The Soviet Union rejected the plan and proceeded to develop its own atomic program.

The struggle (political, ideological, economic and geographical) crystallized into cold war within two years after World War II. It commenced within two years from Yalta conference and culminated in the Truman Doctrine when Great Britain weakened by World War II asked US to help in retaining Greece under its control against the communist guerrillas.

German problem became one of the main bones of contention between them. Almost everything that happened became subject to different interpretations on the two sides of Iron Curtain until it became almost automatic that west and East bickered about point at different issue. 1950-53, Korean War was considered as the height of the Cold War. From this time, the cold war became heavily militarized.

The relationship between the two improved after the death of Stalin. The 20th Congress of CPSU displeased China, however, ideological innovations introduced by Khrushchev were welcomed by the West:

- (1) He denounced Stalin:
- (2) He announced there were different roads to socialism: and
- (3) He declared that war with the west was no longer inevitable and claimed the two social system could live in peaceful co-existence.

These shifts in ideology were important but insufficient to end the cold war. Khrushchev's ideological flexibility in the third world provided west a new challenge.

The 1958-61 Berlin crisis and the 1962 Cuban Missile crisis finally belied the notion of the cold war being over. The Cuban Missile crisis was the time when world came closer to nuclear war and thereafter super powers competition found expression through arms race and proxy wars in the third world.

The 1960s was the period when tensions declined and East and West found the division of the European continent more acceptable. During this time, Washington and Kremlin realized that in the nuclear age they had to co-exist. Their rivalry however, was given another impression by intervening in the Third world and justification to this was given in terms of containing each other.

In 1970s, a more ambitious policy of détente was carried out by the super powers. Washington reviewed its policy of world policeman and simultaneously, the Soviet Union perceived China as more potential threat than the United States. The Soviet Union saw improvement in East West trade as a substitute for economic reforms at home.

Disillusionment from detente quickly emerged as the Soviet Union began to expand its influence in the Third World especially in Africa and Indo-China. The invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 was an example of Soviet assertiveness in the Third World. Washington believed that détente had become a cover favouring Moscow. The United States carried the revival of policy of containment based on military strength as the only effective method of defending its interests. Consequently, the rhetoric of the cold war returned, military spending rose dramatically and President Reagan adopted a more active foreign policy line in the third world.

In the late 1980s the most dramatic change occurred in Europe. The economic collapse coupled with a lack of basic human rights led to the East European revolution of 1989. The disintegration of the Soviet Empire finally led to the disintegration of European military alliances. The entire structure of cold war European security has undergone a radical change. The World became multipolar and the big power cooperation considered to be a better option than competition to solve the problems of world poverty, national and religious differences, and ecological and resource problems.

Origins of Cold War: Some Theoretical Interpretation

Throughout the decade of 1960s, controversy among the students of US foreign policy had been between the advocates of "Orthodox and Revisionist" interpretation concerning the origins of the cold war. There had been considerable debate, over the extent of various explanations as to how the cold war began and who was responsible for it, were influenced by the assumptions of neo-Marxism and traditional

Anglo American liberalism.

For a decade and a half (after the World War II ended) a view of post war history was presented by the "orthodox". According to this view, the Soviet Union was impelled in its foreign policy by two mutually reinforcing tendencies towards expansionism – a communist ideology avowedly bent on the destruction of the western capitalist system, imposed upon a much older Russian traditions of universal messianism, and second the tsarist policy of constantly probing for areas into which influence might be extended. During the inter-war period the Soviet Union did not disguise its hostility to the western capitalist democratic states. The policy elites responsible for formulating US foreign policy did not find it necessary at being allied with Stalin in the post war period, they found several reasons for the discontinuation of war time collaborations with the Soviet Union, for example-

Soviet suppression of non-communist forces in Eastern Europe

- Moscow's separation policy: Two Germanys and its decision to impose the Berlin blockade.
- 1948 Coup in Czechoslovakia
- Stalin's refusal to allow the satellite countries of Eastern Europe to participate in the Marshall Plan for regional economic recovery.
- The creation of the militarily anti-western Cominform

Orthodox western historians saw cold war as an inevitable result of the sudden intrusion, into the Central European balance of power vacuum, of two diametrically opposite political systems. If blame had to be assigned for the onset of cold war the greater portion must be borne by Stalin's government.

Revisionists on the other hand, in its more extreme form involves the proposition that the cold war could have been avoided if only the western capitalist system had not been so insistent on pursuing its own interest by working for economic recovery and military security of western Europe.

The Revisionists in general stressed the long history of western- opposition of :

- Bolshevik Revolution:
- Allied intervention in Russia
- US non-recognition policy until 1933
- West's apparent hopes in 1941 that the Nazi and communist dictators would destroy each other: and
- Length of the time that had elapsed before the Anglo-American second front was opened in 1944.

The Truman administration was accused by the "revisionists" of failing to recognize the primacy of Soviet interests in Eastern Europe, of terminating wartime lend-lease agreement with the Soviet Union prematurely and laying down conditions that made it impossible for the USSR to participate in the Marshall Plan.

If orthodox view places the blame for the cold war on the Soviet Union's aggressive and expansionist tendencies, the revisionists blamed the United States for not honouring the legitimate demand of the Soviet Union for security zone in Eastern Europe.

The Orthodox View

The liberal and moderate conservatives explain that the very nature of the Soviet regime is responsible for the failure of various attempts of cooperation, and hence for the cold war. The socio-political structure of the communist regime and its ideology are considered to be the real determinants of the cold war. The views of some of prominent orthodox writer are given as under.

Hans J. Morgenthau

According to Hans J. Morgenthau, (who can be regarded as the leading representative of the realist school), the conflict arose primarily out of a clash between the incompatible concepts of order f.e. between the Soviet principle of carving out spheres of influence and American universalism. To this extent, it resembled earlier conflicts. The new dimension which distinguished it from past conflicts and which transformed it to the cold war was the communist character of the Soviet State and its foreign policy: the combination of the principles of communism and traditional Tsarist expansionism.

Arthur Schlesinger

Arthur Schlesinger argued that even the most rational American policy could not have prevented the cold war. The cold war could have been avoided only if the Soviet Union had not been possessed by conviction: both the infallibility of the communist world and of the inevitability of a communist world. In short, communist ideology made the cold war a tragic necessity. Schlesinger succinctly stated: it was "the brave and essential responses of the free men to the communist aggression at the close of world war II.

George F. Kennan:

George F. Kennan in his famous "X" article outlined the policy of containing Soviet Union and argued that American response-remembering the lessons of appeasing Hitler- should be of containment viz., Soviet expansionism. His article implied an automatic commitment to resist Russian expansion, wherever it occurred. In his opinion, the main element of any United States policy towards the Soviet Union must be that of a long term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansionist tendencies. His policy was articulated by the U.S. government in 1947 as the 'Truman Doctrine.'

The orthodox school emphasized the ideological rather than the economic, difference between the systems as the decisive factor in an explanation of the origins of the cold war. Policies of both the Soviet Union and the United States are explained as irreconcilable and suffering contradiction. This conflict between the Communists and the United States was inevitable.

The Revisionist View

Reacting to the prevailing notion, put forward by orthodox that the cold war had come about through the actions of an aggressive and expansionist Soviet Union, The neo-marxist explanations of how the cold war began held U.S. responsible for the outbreak of the cold war. The New left and revisionists are synonymous term when applied to the interpretation of how the cold war began.

For neo-Marxists, antagonism between capitalism and socialism is an inevitable manifestation of the process of historical development which leads to the triumph of socialism on world scale. The irreconcilable struggle between the two social orders is a necessary period of historical transition. The global victory of socialism would emancipate the people from international domination and tyranny. The founding of this system in Soviet Union in 1917 produced the first counter-strategy of liberation from the tyranny of capitalist industrial society at a national level.

They identify the causes of the cold war with the inherently expansionist policy of the capitalist United States. Following the penetrations of the North American continent, the dynamic American economy required new field of action. This domestic need was expressed in the open door policy, which by opposing the creation of zone of influence and preference, was bound to collide with Soviet policy.

According to neo-Marxist version of this theory, the capitalist mode of production and distribution are irreconcilable with the existence of other autonomous center of production and distribution by reason of the development of its own inherent laws and therefore naturally directed towards expansionism. For them the East -West conflict is an aspect of the international class- struggle; that is to say, it can be attributed to the struggle and collaboration between social classes, class faction, social strata and group within socially antagonistic societies.

William A. William

To him, the United States supposedly tried to coerce Russia by manipulation of lend lease and transbrandishing atomic weapons. Evolution of the open door policy in 1890s represented an effort to resolve the internal contradictions of capitalism- chronic over- production, recurrent depression- without inducing fundamental change in the system itself. The open door concept turned into a global policy as American policy makers defined any effort by other powers to obstruct this goal as threatening to the existence of the American system, in other words, extension of Munroe Doctrine.

Stalin was adamant on three points: Russia must obtain friendly Governments on western periphery, the wherewithal to rebuild her war

torn economy and the guarantees that Germany would not again become a threat to her safety. He argued that had the US helped or merely permitted Russia to gain these ends, there would have been no cold war. But in their quest for an open door in Eastern Europe which William meant the existence of pro- western governments there, American leaders contested with Russia.

William paid much attention to the Potsdam conference and showed how American officials pursued their strategies during the conference debates. Stalin came to Potsdam in quest of humble goals; He was still concerned about Russia's frontiers in Europe; about preventing Germany from trying to break these in another 25 year: and about major economic transfusion for the Soviet Union's battered economy concerning the Bomb, William stated unequivocally that the US dropped the bomb to end the war against Japan and thereby stop the Russians in Asia and to give them sober pause in eastern Europe.

D.F.Fleming

To him, train of events in 1945 which led to the cold war closely parallel to what happened at the close of World War I. In the first instance backward looking "isolationists" had sabotaged the structure of international collective security which Woodrow Wilson had worked to create. In the second, vehement anti-communists' undermined F.D. Roosevelt's attempts to achieve a stable post war world based upon cooperation between Great Britain and the US on the one hand and Russia on the other. In both cases Fleming blamed individuals rather than the imperatives of capitalism. Roosevelt and his secretary of State Cordell Hull had worked throughout the war to build a sound relationship with the Soviet Union.

Harry S. Truman 'overwhelmed by the tremendous responsibility placed on him and greatly influenced by men who wished to reverse FDR's (Franklin D. Roosevelt) policies, embarked upon a course that made the cold war inevitable.

Few of Fleming's interpretations became most popular in new left circle. He used highly emotive language to describe Truman's behavior, he exaggerated the new President's militancy just as earlier he had exaggerated FDR's optimism. Fleming described Truman's conduct in apocalyptic terms. The president was ready to begin it (the cold war) before he had been in office two weeks. He also severely criticized many aspects of American diplomacy as manifested at Potsdam. Yet concluded that "a good foundation for further allied collaboration was laid down there."

The "dropping of the atom bombs on Japan had immediate and catastrophic effects on relations with the Soviet Union", he opined. It definitely marked the end of the wartime alliance with the Soviet Union and the beginning of the post war balance of power struggle. The new weapon's existence caused both nations to become even more determined to achieve their goals at whatever cost.

Alperowitz

To Alperowitz, from the time when Truman assumed the presidency, he undertook to reverse FDR's policy of cooperation with the Soviet Union thereby precipitating the cold war. In direct violation of wartime agreements, some explicit and some understood Truman sought to construct American dominated world order at the end of World War II. The use of nuclear weapons against an already defeated Japan amounted to a diplomatic rather than a military act to deny the Soviet Union a role in the Far Eastern settlement and to influence Soviet policy and behavior in Eastern Europe.

Gabriel Kolko

Kolko's work has been greeted as a formidable assault on orthodox interpretations. Kolko's thesis is that American foreign policy during World War II had as its consuming goal, the creation of a postwar economic order, the purpose of which would be to further American expansions and penetration throughout the world. This new order "an integrated world capitalism "to use his term- necessarily required the establishment of political systems amenable to American ambitions. Assuming the defeat of Germany and Japan, American policy makers, during the course of the war came to define the Soviet Union and the emerging left in Europe and Asia as major obstacles to success.

American officials pursued their broad economic ends with a single minded ardor and in this process never hesitated to break agreements, betray allies, or to sell out the freedom of smaller countries. By repeatedly colliding with the Soviet Union, moreover, the United States bore the major responsibility for the onset of the cold war.

Lloyd C. Gardner

Gardner's interpretation shows that the American policy makers during World War II were convinced that the nation's domestic well being, following the conflict, would depend upon the existence of a liberal world order based on multilateral trade and investment. Haunted by the specter of another depression, they were committed to securing such a world system as the only alternative to the imposition of comprehensive controls over the American economy. Their assumption led them to oppose the creation of blocs or sphere of influence anywhere in the world and brought the US into a conflict with both Great Britain and the Soviet Union.

Great Britain bowed but Russia defined her security as requiring a sphere of influence in Eastern Europe whatever the costs maybe, she refused to retreat despite American economic diplomacy and at the end of war the possession of the atomic bomb. Gardner charged Roosevelt of following a "complicated strategy of postponement" during the war.

David Horowitz

Horowitz's account of the cold war's origin can best be described as a skeletonized version of D.F. Fleming's work. Wartime relations between the United States and the Soviet Union, though strained at times, were fundamentally sound at the time of Roosevelt's death. With the accession of Truman the situation changed radically. Truman moved to a crude "showdown" with the Soviet Union, following which he initiated series of coercive acts designed to bring the Russian to heel. It became obvious that Truman meant to impinge upon areas Stalin deemed crucial to Russia's national security, the Soviet position stiffened as well. The descent into cold war, according to Horowitz's work, came about largely as the result of unilateral American acts to which the Soviet Union reacted defensively.

The Post- revisionist View

The third view remains the dominant view in the west and in 1990s it emerged in communist circles too. It was a school still developing at that time. Its two elements differentiate it from the others two schools; (1) post- revisionism attempts to avoid the apportionment of blame. The action- reaction concept of orthodox and revisionists view is determined and decisions and action of both sides are seen as inextricably interwoven. Therefore, who started the cold war is not attempt to discover: and (2) this view places stress on the system factors. A new international order had emerged struggling from the ashes of the war. It soon became clear that the post war world would be bipolar with the two centers of power in Washington and Moscow. Any radical shift in the international system was found prone to cause tension and uncertainty. Peace might have been desired by all after the destruction of the war, but both the United States and the Soviet Union wanted to influence the future configuration of the new international order. So both super powers equally bear the responsibility of the beginning of the cold war.

Conclusion

Both the American and the Soviet leadership were convinced that there was an indivisibility in the economic and the political system. Economic superiority would at the same time have meant political pre-dominance. The Soviet policy of possessing spheres of interest was not only a part of an international competition between states, but also an expression of a competition in the matter of political and ideological dominance.

Just as the United States followed the principle of having her cake and eating it with regard to her western hemisphere, the Soviet Union wanted to protect her own sphere of interest from the control of the other great power and at the same time to exercise global influence as an equal great power.

The Soviet Union expected the United States and the western power to allow her with equal status to extend global influence. On the other hand, the U.S. expected the Soviet Union to respect the American sphere of influence in Latin America and to accept the setting up of American bases on a global scale. To avoid another war, the U.S. and the USSR had no choice but to accept the sphere of influence of the other.

Both main schools of thought have given theoretical/ philosophical foundation which reinforced their determinism. On occasions, both schools of thought qualify their arguments by referring to individuals, personal factors, using Stalin's character or Truman's mentality as additional explanatory models. Nevertheless, the most crucial factor is seen to be the inherent need for expansion on the part of the respective societies or states. At their most extremes these versions of the two schools present mirror images of anti capitalist or anti- communist interpretation of modern international history.

The disintegration of Soviet Empire in late 1980s and its consequent breakdown in early 90s has put an end of the prolonged East- West conflict and cold war. The study of international relations of the period ranging from 1945-till the disintegration of the Soviet Union is now of historical significance.

Cold war – thaw (detente) new cold war – new détente and finally the defeat of one contender in the competition, brought the conclusion to a prolonged struggle between diametrically, opposed system. The study of cold war and how it began or could it have been avoided these are the issues which now have only historical validity and are of academic interest.

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