

The Cold War era in the USA: foreign and domestic policy

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Abstract

In the general time frame of the Cold War (1947-1991), the U.S. and the USSR participated in an arms race, among other things. This period had a profound effect on American foreign and domestic policy, particularly as the Americans sought to stem the spread of communism and survive a potential nuclear war while maintaining global influence. This paper critically examines the discursive shape of, and challenges to, the legacy of U.S. foreign and domestic policy through the Cold War years that lingers still in the U.S. and global cultural life.

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Introduction

The Cold War was a period that shaped much of the 20th century, it was a war of ideology, there was no actual fighting between the United States and the Soviet Union. It penetrated nearly every area of American life- its foreign policy, its domestic politics, its social customs. To understand this period, it is crucial to study the Cold War, as the United States came into being as it is known today during this time of the world and its position as a superpower.

Post-World War II, several decades saw an epic U.S.-Soviet battle between the two countries as they feuded on ideology and in a balance of interests. This was done under the U.S. policy of containment in order to arrest the spread of communism, alongside military alliances such as NATO and economic initiatives like the Marshall Plan. The arms race led to a "balance of terror," called Mutual Assured Destruction, that prevented direct conflict but made war with one another more likely. Covert operations and proxy wars were relied upon as a way of influencing world events while avoiding full-scale world war. This was the so-called international order that provided the foundation for peace for over forty years.

U.S. Foreign Policy During the Cold War

After WWII, the alliance between the US and the USSR broke down. The two countries became rivals, each promoting its own system—capitalism and democracy for the USA, communism for the USSR.

American foreign policy during that time is explained by scholars using one of three main categories of theories: realism (focusing on power and security), ideational approaches (focusing on beliefs and values), or socio-economic approaches (focusing on economic interests).

The major goal of U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War was to prevent the spread of communism particular, Soviet influence spreading into Europe, Asia and beyond. This policy was first advocated by American diplomat George F. Kennan and was strongly

supported by President Harry Truman. It meant assisting governments and groups that were opposed to communism by providing aid, military support or in some cases direct military intervention; a good example is the Korean and Vietnam Wars.

This strategic approach was called "containment," and it featured prominently in President Truman's Truman Doctrine of 1947. Then came aid for Europe, known as the Marshall Plan, which provided \$13 billion to build up Western Europe and give it strength against Soviet influence. This policy only served to increase tensions, however, as the USSR reacted by intensifying its grip over Eastern Europe.

To assist its containment strategy, the U.S. formed NATO in 1949 and other military alliances. The Soviets countered with the Warsaw Pact of 1955. Both sides amassed enormous nuclear arsenals, so there was a dangerous arms race between them. The strategy of "nuclear deterrence" meant that both sides avoided direct confrontations out of fear for utter destruction. As Dr. Keith Payne points out, this idea was that just a few nuclear weapons could eliminate an enemy's entire society, making war unthinkable.

Sherwin tells of how the world teetered continually toward nuclear war, for example, during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. In the climate of global fear generated by the Cold War, politicians had to play risky games, hoping up to the very last minute that everything would turn out all right. Sherwin is pinpointing incidents like those that happened in the Cuban Missile Crisis. In these circumstances, political leaders were frequently compelled to take calculated risks and to thread a path between conflicting currents of force. Secondly, in conflicts around the world that were fought between the United States and the Soviet Union often gave support to opposite sides. These included the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and several minor operations in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. The CIA played a significant part in these ventures, using espionage, propaganda, and covert actions to bring about events without actual warfare.

The USA also tried to build commerce and economic growth through international organizations such as the United Nations and the World Bank (International Monetary Fund). These were devices to create an international environment congenial for both democracy and capitalism, though it was often claimed by critics that they only stretched out American economic imperium. Additionally, the Cold War was marked by a nuclear arms race between the U. S. and Soviet Union. Both powers created huge stockpiles of nuclear weapons; the idea was called Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD). Practically, this meant that if either side launched a nuclear attack the other would reply with a devastating counterstrike. As long as both sides behaved that way, nuclear war was static in stasis.

The Spread of nuclear weapons (1978) carries forward a long debate between Scott Douglas Sagan and Kenneth Waltz. Waltz argues that nuclear weapons make for peace, because they can be the only thing which keeps the great powers from leaping at each other's throat; Sagan says you are wrong. Japanese reactors may be able to meet domestic electricity requirements and there still remain many problems such as adopt to ensure rapid opening (loss of coordination) when supply drops below demand expectations in 1996.

U.S. policy relied heavily on clandestine operations and proxy wars to smother Soviet influence without having to meet it head-on. The CIA helped anti-Communist forces throughout the world, including in Latin America, Africa and Asia. This was a manifestation of a wider "gray zone" struggle that involved political coercion, economic blackmail and paramilitary activities. The Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations polished off strategies such as their "New Look" and "Flexible Response," resorting to covert operations helping allied nations and rebel groups contain communism without escalating to all-out war.

U.S. Domestic Policy in the Cold War Era

On the home front, the Cold War brought with it great changes in the U.S. government's organization to more effectively conduct security. The 1947 National Security Act established critical institutions like the Department of Defense, the National Security Council, and the CIA. These amendments brought under centralized authority intelligence collection, military planning, and covert action that would deal effectively with the Cold War threats.

Leaders sought to strike a balance between security and preserving democracy. Some scholars like Peter Trubowitz contend that there was never a single "national interest" shaping policy; rather, different groups and regions had different interests and priorities, which led to arguments about what was best for the country.

Indeed, the specter of communist subversion dominated internal politics and contributed to a more general atmosphere of anticommunist hysteria. A tense time during the "Red Scare," when believed-to-be communists were investigated and frequently blacklisted. Government and society Before anything else, traditional institutions of government and social life appeared alarmed by the possibilities of enemy espionage and ideological subversion, and thereby detected an impingement on civil liberties and the normal functioning of political discourse.

The Cold War had economic implications as well: the U.S. government's heavy investment in the military led to significant growth in defense industries and technology research, such as the space race. The focus on military spending helped drive economic expansion, but also informed political priorities. The space race, stimulated by great tension with the USSR, produced significant breakthroughs in science and education. But some critics said too much was spent on the military and too little on social programs.

Michael Mandelbaum's "Mission Failure" considers how the United States went from being the Antwerp of liberalism to its Stettin within just 15 years

after the Cold War. He contends that this change produced mismanaged interventions and a reduced global footprint for the United States, pointing to the difference with the more cohesive approach of the Cold War.

The End of the Cold War

The Cold War ended in the late 1980s following the rise of reformist Soviet leader Gorbachev. The USA was instrumental in bringing about these changes, but they were neither immediate nor straightforward. In the wake of the Cold War, American foreign policy was not tightly focused, often leading to failed interventions, as Michael Mandelbaum discusses in *Mission Failure*.

Scott Sagan and Kenneth Waltz argue in *The Spread of nuclear weapons* about whether nuclear weapons make the world safer by making it easier to deter wars or more dangerous by making accidents more likely. Their cases enable us to understand the difficulties of post-Cold War nuclear policy as it unfolds.

Conclusion

The U.S. strove to contain communism through military pacts, aid programs in other countries, spying, and disincentives involving nuclear armament. The government reorganized security institutions for national defense and tackled questions of national security in terms of civil liberties. The nuclear arms race and fear of worldwide nuclear annihilation during the Cold War are reflected in Sherwin's extensive account of the U.S.-Soviet relations crisis, and also the debate on nuclear proliferation, which is Recob Senior Fellow Sagan and Waltz investigate. Cold War policies would continue to shape U.S. action well into the post-Cold War era, Mandelbaum argues.

Through this period, the United States found itself in a world divided on both ideological and military lines, where central issues were military strength, diplomacy, and domestic concerns, which were necessary means to maintain its position and status on the global stage.

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