

## **Super Power Rivalry and Cold War Diplomacy**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The cold war started with the Berlin blockade and the Berlin airlifts and ended with the Paris Agreement on Conventional Forces. The cold war was an ideological war between the eastern bloc, led by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) and the Western bloc led by the United States of America (USA). It was an ideological war expressed through military and political competition. The cold war was 'cold' due to nuclear deterrence as both blocs had the means to annihilate one another. Thus, this paper looks at superpower rivalry during the cold war and its effects as well as the diplomatic strategies employed. The paper concludes that nuclear weapons saved the world from another World War.*

**Keywords:** *Cold war, Deterrence, Proxy wars, Diplomacy.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The cold war was a prolonged state of political and military tension between Western bloc and Eastern bloc powers. The Western bloc included the United States of America with its allies and military alliance (NATO). The Eastern bloc included the United Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) with its allies and the Warsaw pact. It was a war that involved nuclear deterrence, a struggle for dominance expressed through proxy wars, psychological warfare, propaganda, espionage and technological competition.

The term 'cold war' was first used by George Orwell as a general term in his essay, however it was the multi-millionaire and trusted adviser to Truman, Bernard Baruch who coined the term cold war as we know it today. He was quoted saying on 16 April, 1947 that 'Let us not be deceived we are today in the midst of a cold war. Our enemies are to be found abroad and at home ...' (www.history.com, 2018). Walter Lipmann further promoted the concept in his book 'The Cold War'.

A number of reasons have been proposed to be the cause of the cold war. They include America's fear of a communist attack; Truman's dislike of Stalin; USSR's fear of the American atomic bomb; USSR's dislike for capitalism; USSR's action in the Soviet zone of Germany; America's refusal to share nuclear secrets; USSR's fear of an American attack; USSR's need for a secure western border; USSR's aim of spreading world communism (Truman, 2015). However, most scholars agree that the cold war started out of disagreements after the Second World War regarding how the spoils of the war should be shared; particularly with regards to reparations and the German territory (Udoka, 2012; Leffler, 2005; Subrahmanyam, 2010; Painter & Leffler, 2005).

The cold war originated from the disagreements that attended the implementation of the Yalta Treaty and the Potsdam agreements. The Yalta Treaty of 11 February, 1945 spelt out the administration of Germany and the Potsdam agreement in August, 1945 was a conclusion of the Yalta Treaty. Both treaty and agreement covered issues concerning Germany in respect to reparation, occupation of Germany, and Poland's stake in East Prussia and Upper Silesia. The Potsdam agreement provided for the political and economic framework under which Germany as an occupied territory will be

governed (Udoka, 2012). The cold war started when signatories to the agreements refused to fulfill their obligations and commitment due to selfish interests. This resulted to Berlin blockade and the Berlin airlift, which was the first act of aggression from the two blocs.

The Cold war was a war of opposing ideologies. It was a war of two different ways of political and economic life. It was a war between capitalism and communism. Capitalism is an ideology that promotes a free-market economy and liberal democracy. It is an ideology that posits that the economy should be guided by the market forces of demand and supply. It is an ideology that boasts of the freedom of man and the protection of civil rights and liberties. Communism on the other hand is the brain child of Karl Marx. Its key elements are a state-controlled economy, lack of private property and proletarian control of government. Communism is guided by the philosophy of “from each according to his ability and to each according to his need” (Marx, 1875).

This paper uses a historical approach and secondary data to describe super power rivalry and diplomacy during the cold war. This is done by taking an overview of the cold war and the internationalization of the war. The consequences and implications of the cold war is also explored. This paper also looks at secret diplomacy, propaganda/ public diplomacy and espionage during the cold war. Notwithstanding, let us look at the theoretical foundations of this paper Vis a Vis the cold war.

## **THEORY OF DETERRENCE**

Deterrence is a policy or strategy based on threat of massive retaliation in the event of an attack. It is frequently associated with nuclear weapons and the concept of mutually assured destruction. (Obuah, 2016). “Deterrence is the capacity to discourage the adversary from taking military action by posing for him a prospect of cost and risk which outweigh his prospective gains” (Akpan, 2012: 98).

Nuclear deterrence is based on the notion that if two nuclear powers go to war there will be no straight victory for any of the belligerents but rather a pyrrhic victory. The cold war did not only further validate the theory of deterrence but also the theory explains why the US and the USSR did not take military action against each other directly. The war was a war of deterrence whereby the US and the USSR actively sought to outdo one another in terms of military capability and sphere of influence to discourage one from attacking the other.

According the Slantchev (2005), there are two classifications of deterrence. The first classification is based on the relationships between the defending actor and the challenger. Thus, we have direct deterrence and extended deterrence. The second classification has to do with timing of the action. In this case we have general deterrence and immediate deterrence. Direct deterrence is aimed at preventing direct attacks from the challenger on the defender. Extended deterrence is aimed towards protecting a third party. During the cold war the US and the USSR directly deterred one another, however extended deterrence is seen in the various alliance both states entered with third parties through NATO and the Warsaw pact. General deterrence is a situation where there is no imminent threat but actions are taken to deter any potential aggressor. For instance, the US treaty with Japan in 1954. Immediate deterrence is action taken in a situation when the aggressor can attack at any moment. China attempted to deter the US from invading North Korea in 1950. This attempt failed and can be regarded as failed immediate deterrence because the US ignored the threat and China was forced to engage US forces.

Deterrence depends on capability and credibility. Capability means that the state attacked must be able to preserve enough strength to retaliate. Credibility means an opponent must believe that the possessor of nuclear weapons can and will use it if attacked (Akpan, 2012). During the cold war a number of nuclear tests and technological advancement were made to display the capabilities and credibility of members from the western and eastern blocs. During the Truman administration, the US kept a couple of nuclear armed B-52s in the air so that in the event of any nuclear strike on the US homeland it will not be completely disarmed (Subrahmanyam, 2010). Other means of displaying capability during the cold war included the use of missile silos; establishment of nuclear bases in allied states; and the use of nuclear armed submarines.

## **AN OVERVIEW OF THE COLD WAR**

Despite the perceived hostilities between the US and the USSR before the end of the Second World War, the beginning of the cold war can be traced to the disagreements between the victors of the Second World War. As stated earlier the cold war was a result of the parties to the Yalta treaty and Potsdam agreements not fulfilling their obligations and responsibilities (Udoka, 2012). While the allied powers were deciding on how much reparations to be paid, the USSR demanded she be paid \$10 billion. In lieu of this money, the USSR dismantled industries in her occupied zones in Germany and sent machinery, vehicles and equipment to the Soviet Union. The USSR also manipulated the German currency so she could buy German products at ridiculously low prices.

Berlin was divided into four, but Berlin was deep into the USSR occupied zone. The USSR set up a blockade to frustrate the western powers from accessing Berlin. The western allies were forced to use airlifts to send supplies and personnel to the Western controlled zone in Berlin. The Berlin blockade and the Berlin airlift marked the beginning of the cold war. As Udoka put it, “set the tone for the tension-soaked conflict which appealed to the moral, cultural, political, social and economic sensibilities of the world.” (Udoka, 2012: 390)

The main features of the cold war were arms race, deterrence, technological competition, alliances and counter alliances, a mini cold war and proxy wars. The US was the first country to split the atom and create the atomic bomb. The US showed her nuclear prowess during WWII in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. However, the USSR subsequently attained nuclear capabilities and competed with the US for a comparative advantage in terms of nuclear weapons. The Soviets developed a long-range TU-16 bomber which was capable of reaching the US. The launch of sputnik demonstrated Soviet missile might to the entire world. In the 1960s, the US and the USSR developed thermonuclear bombs with explosive capabilities of 50 – 58 megatons. The US and the USSR competed with their space programs. It was a race to the moon between both countries. Both countries were capable of sending men to space but it was in July, 1969 that the US became the first country to land men on the moon (Subrahmanyam, 2010).

The arms race and nuclear deterrence reached a climax in October, 1962 in an event known as the Cuban Missile Crisis. This was an incident that could have led to a Third World ‘Nuclear’ War. In order to gain a strategic nuclear advantage, the Soviets set up nuclear bases in Cuba and was in the process of transporting more nuclear missiles to Cuba. Cuba is in close proximity to the US. This was done by the Soviets to deter the US from using its nuclear missiles in Turkey and Italy. The crisis ended when the US agreed to remove its missiles in Turkey and never to invade Cuba. The USSR subsequently removed its missiles from Cuba (Morgan, 2003).

In the 1970s hostilities between the US and the USSR reduced. This was a period of détente. It was marked by secret diplomacy and a couple of agreements. Following the diplomatic efforts of Henry Kissinger, the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty was signed to limit the missile defense to two sites in each country. This was done at a time when the emphasis between the US and the USSR had moved from creating more nuclear weapons to creating nuclear defense systems. The détente also led the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT). In 1972 and 1973 Presidents Nixon and Brezhnev exchanged visits ([www.history.com](http://www.history.com), 2018). In President Brezhnev visit to the White House, he declared the cold war was over (Subrahmanyam, 2010). Unfortunately, hostilities resumed subsequently with the war in Afghanistan.

According to Subrahmanyam (2010), there were two cold wars. The first cold war ended in 1973 with Brezhnev's visit to Washington. He states that the Afghanistan crisis, Somalia and the boycott of Moscow Olympics were not a continuation of the original cold war but a second cold war.

Cold war rivalry was primarily between the eastern and western blocs but there was a 'mini cold war' within the eastern bloc. There were tensions between the USSR and China. During the communist revolution in China, the Soviets supported the Chinese communists and even provided arms and advisers. The Soviet Union and China also worked together in repelling US troops in the Korean War. The Soviets also assisted in starting up the Chinese nuclear program. Tensions between China and the Soviets started as a result of the latter's relations with India. China accused the Soviet Union of being revisionist and not true communists. In 1963 China denounced the Partial Test Ban Treaty between the US, USSR and UK as a conspiracy. The tension between China and the Soviet Union climaxed when both countries forces clashed at Ussuri in 1969. The USSR and China mobilized their forces along their borders (Subrahmanyam, 2010).

Another major feature of the cold war was the creation of strategic alliances across various regions. Such alliances include the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) and the Warsaw pact. The first three alliances were part of the machinations of US containment philosophy while the Warsaw pact was the USSR's military alliance with Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland and Romania ([www.History.com](http://www.History.com), 2018). There was also the Non-aligned Movement (NAM). Created in September, 1961, the NAM was created to resist East – West pressures and solidarity with Third World interests relating to strategic world political and economic issues (Strydom, 2007).

The cold war ended with the Paris Agreement on Conventional Forces on 19 November, 1990. The cold world ended as a surprise to most because it did not end as a result of military defeat but rather due to internal contradictions within the Soviet system (Subrahmanyam, 2010).

## **THE PROXY WARS**

A proxy war is an armed conflict between two parties, either countries or factions which is taking place on behalf of parties not directly involved (Birchall, The Sun, 16.4.2018). The Cold War was 'cold' because there was no actual fighting between the US and the USSR. Both countries feud was expressed in different conflicts in basically every continent. This section looks at such expressions in the wars in Greece, Korea, Angola, and Afghanistan.

The Greek civil war took place between 1946 and 1949. It was between the Greek government backed by the UK and US and the Democratic Army of Greece, which was the military wing of the Greek communist party. The Democratic Army of Greece enjoyed the support of its socialist neighbors – Yugoslavia, Albania and Bulgaria. The Greek civil war is considered the first proxy war

of the cold war (Marantzidis & Antoniou, 2004). This was a war between communists and capitalists struggling for power. However, the war ended in 1949 due to the bitter split between the Soviet Leader and the Yugoslavian president which demoralized the Greek communists. Stalin was not in support of the Greek communist uprising.

In 1950 North Korea supported by the Soviet Union invaded the US backed South Korea. The West at the time believed that the invasion was planned and ordered by the Soviet Union but recent evidence has shown that it was entirely a North Korean initiative. North Korea invaded the South in response to the artificial separation of the country after the collapse of Japanese rule in 1945 (McLean & McMillan, 2009). The US following the UN's approval sent troops to push back the North Korean invaders. The US successfully repelled the attack beyond the 38 parallel but began an attack on North Korea. This resulted to China entering the war. China successfully drove back the American forces to Seoul and by July, 1953 an armistice was signed ending the war (Udoka, 2012; Delpuch; 2012).

Africa was not spared from cold war diplomacy. The Angolan civil war was affected by super power rivalry during the cold war. In the struggle against Portuguese rule, there were three main nationalist movements. They included the Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). Affected by cold war politics, the MPLA was backed by the Soviet Union and Cuba while FNLA and UNITA were supported by the US and Apartheid South Africa. Following the withdrawal of Portugal in 1975, a civil war ensued. The war was between two nationalist movements struggling for the leadership of Angola. The western bloc assisted by South Africa supported UNITA which had absorbed the FNLA and the Eastern bloc supported MPLA. The war raged on till the end of the cold war and the collapse of the Soviet Union (Udoka, 2012).

The Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan had features of a proxy war. Afghanistan's communist party took power after a 1978 coup and Nur Mohammed Taraki became president. The modernization reforms of the new government were unpopular and there was in-fighting within the Afghan communist party. In September 1979, the president was assassinated under orders from his rival Hafiz Illah Amin. In December 1979 the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan to restore its control of the government. Amin was killed and the Soviet comprador, Babrak Kamal was installed as president of Afghanistan. The US responded by funding insurgents (Mujahedeens) to frustrate Soviet activities in Afghanistan. The war lasted for nine years and ended with the eventual withdrawal of Soviet troops in 1988 by Gorbachev (Saikal, 2010).

## **KEY DIPLOMATIC STRATEGIES DURING THE COLD WAR**

Deterrence has been looked at earlier as a theoretical explanation of the cold war. However, deterrence is not the only strategy employed by the Eastern and Western blocs. This section looks at other diplomatic strategies that were seen all through the cold war. These include secret diplomacy, propaganda/ public diplomacy and espionage.

### **Secret Diplomacy during the Cold War**

Secret diplomacy can be defined as an "unofficial negotiation involving two or more states pursuing essentially peaceful high policy objectives and which expresses itself in explicit communication, business like exchanges and tacit achievable understanding or arrangement of such sensitivity as to preclude sharing these confidences with either domestic or international actors" (Klieman, 1988: 10). It is the conduct of diplomacy behind closed doors and without knowledge or consent of the citizens.

Secret diplomacy was a useful tool during the cold war. It was a useful diplomatic strategy when tensions were high. The cold war would have turned 'hot' if not for secret diplomacy between diplomats from the Eastern and Western blocs. It was Henry Kissinger's back door diplomacy that resulted to the signing of the Anti-Ballistic Missiles Treaty in 1972. Secret diplomacy was what led to the period of détente and what Subrahmanyam calls the end of the 'First cold war' (Subrahmanyam, 2010). In 1971 the US security adviser (Henry Kissinger) paid a secret visit to China. It was through such secret talks that Nixon visited China in 1972, signaling the US opening to China in the midst of the cold war. Back-channel negotiations and secret diplomacy between Kennedy and Khrushchev was the primary reason the Cuban missile crisis did not lead to a nuclear battle. (Subrahmanyam, 2010).

### **Public Diplomacy/ Propaganda**

According to Seib (2016), the term 'public diplomacy' was first employed during the cold war to replace 'propaganda' which was seen to be synonymous with lies. Public diplomacy is the traditional way by which sovereign states communicate with the publics in other states aimed at informing and influencing audiences overseas in order to promote national interest and its foreign policy goals (Obuah, 2016).

In 1961, John F. Kennedy established the Peace Corps. The Peace Corps deploys volunteers to bring American know-how and values to cities and villages where the contest of the cold war were near the surface of daily life (Seib, 2016). Other public diplomacy instruments employed by the US to counter Soviet propaganda included the Radio Free Europe, Voice of America and the United States Information Agency (USIA).

Propaganda has been defined by the Institute of Propaganda Analysis as "the expression of opinion or action by individuals or groups deliberately designed to influence opinions or actions of other individuals or groups to predetermined ends" (Institute of Propaganda Analysis, 1937). The first institutional propaganda machine in the Soviet Union was the Communist International (Comintern). It was established in 1919 to coordinate the revolutionary activities of national communist parties and to expedite world revolution. In 1928, the official Comintern program was to replace the world capitalist economy with a world system of communism. Comintern was abolished in 1943. The Communist Information Bureau (CIB) was established in 1947. The Soviet Union used the CIB to portray itself as the champion of peace and the US as an imperialist war monger (Piotrow, 1958).

### **Espionage**

Espionage is an intelligence activity directed towards the acquisition of information via clandestine means and proscribed as illegal by the laws of the country against which it is committed (Obuah, 2016). Espionage is an enduring motif of the Cold War. The primary objective of Cold War espionage was to gather intelligence and information about the adversary, particularly their military and technical capabilities. The information was gathered from a variety of sources, including paid informants, double agents, stolen documents, intercepted communications, 'bugs' (listening devices), and other means of surveillance. Agents also conducted disruptive missions, such as sabotage, abduction, and assassination of enemy agents and politicians (Alphahistory.com, 2018).

Each of the key Cold War powers maintained at least one intelligence gathering and espionage agency. This responsibility devolved to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in the United States. The Cold War influenced the structure, mission, and methods of the CIA. The CIA also received

assistance from other US government agencies. The National Security Agency (NSA), founded in 1952, gathered intelligence by monitoring, intercepting, and decoding signals and radio traffic. The Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI, established in 1908) was charged with investigating domestic criminal activity, including espionage, sedition, and other treasonous acts.

During the Cold War, the CIA engaged in clandestine operations such as assassinations and human experimentation, as well as general surveillance of suspected foreign agents and the deployment of its own agents abroad. In addition to complementing US foreign policy, the CIA supported, financed, and equipped anti-communist leaders and organizations abroad. In 1948, one of the CIA's first significant missions was to aid non-communist political parties in Italy. During the Cold War, the CIA supported or actively participated in a number of coups and attempted coups, such as the 1973 overthrow of Salvador Allende in Chile. Invasion of the Bay of Pigs is also attributed to the CIA. CIA pilots flew U-2 aircraft over Soviet and Cuban territory to gather intelligence on military installations, weapons, and personnel movements. In 1974, the CIA spent over \$800 million on Project Azorian, a mission to recover codebooks and nuclear technology from a submerged Soviet submarine located 16,000 feet below the surface of the Pacific Ocean (Alphahistory.com, 2018).

Espionage and intelligence gathering had a much lengthier history in the Soviet Union. Russian secret police organizations date back to the late 19th century with the Okhrana, the communist CHEKA (1917-22), the OGPU (1922-34) and Stalin's NKVD (1934-54). All utilized clandestine methods to gather intelligence on political dissidents and potential "state enemies." After Joseph Stalin's death in 1953, the NKVD was succeeded by the KGB (Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti, or 'Committee for National Security'). The KGB assumed domestic security and foreign intelligence responsibilities. Glavnoye Razvedyvatel'noye Upravleniye (GRU) was another department that gathered intelligence for the Soviet military. Decades of experience in espionage, in addition to existing agents and contacts in Western nations, gave the Soviet Union a distinct 'head start' in this field. During the 1930s, the Soviets began mobilizing agents and recruiting informants in Western nations. During World War II, the subversion of the Manhattan Project, America's nuclear weapons research program, was a top priority for Moscow. With remarkable simplicity, Soviet agents were able to obtain and transmit technical information about this program, including blueprints. By August 1945, when the United States detonated its first atomic bomb on Japan, Stalin knew more about this devastating new weapon than the majority of American politicians (Alphahistory.com, 2018).

## **EFFECTS OF THE COLD WAR**

The Cold War affected global politics as a whole. Till date the effects of the cold war can be observed. According to Subrahmanyam (2010), the cold war had the following effects;

- i. It compelled the US to rapidly re-industrialize western Europe and Japan and their democratization;
- ii. It paved the way for the creation of the EU;
- iii. It led to six cases of partition of nations – East and West Germany, North and South Korea, Palestine and Israel, India and Pakistan, North and South Vietnam and China and Taiwan. Four of these still remain today.

According to Udoka, the cold war impacted the Western hemisphere, Latin America and Asia – Pacific region. He is of the opinion that the impact of the cold war includes technological advancements, heightened international terrorism and violent conflicts (Udoka, 2012).

As a result of the arms race during the cold war there have been a number of advancements in technology. In contemporary times, military industrial complexes have merged with industrial technologies with their attendant economies of scale. For instance military research, especially the one leading to the production of nuclear weapons has led to the improvement of industrial productions in pharmaceuticals, agriculture and power. Space technology has also come a long way in improving human life through satellites. From sputnik in 1957 to Intelsat of 1965, satellites have helped improve weather forecast, better television operations, military intelligence gathering and communication (Udoka, 2012).

The end of the cold war has heightened international terrorism. During the cold war most, Arab countries received support and protection from the Eastern bloc. This protection deterred the US from gaining a strong foothold in the Middle East. In the post-cold war era, the US has invaded Iraq twice and overthrown the Taliban government in Afghanistan. These acts of aggression have forced Arab extremists to resort to ‘self-help’ using terrorism. According to Udoka (2012: 405), “terrorism has reinvented itself to fill the gap left by the Eastern bloc.”

After the cold war ended violent conflicts erupted in Yugoslavia and other Soviet territories. They include the raging war for independence of Chechnya from Russia; the 1991 civil war in Yugoslavia which led to the balkanization of the country into Bosnia- Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro and Slovenia. The Serbs launched a two-pronged attack on the Croats and Bosnians. In Africa some conflicts are direct products of the cold war. “If it is instability, it had roots in the overthrow of legitimately elected governments by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) sponsored military officers” (Udoka, 2012: 406). The cold war is the architect of the wars for independence in Angola and Mozambique, the civil wars in Somalia, Congo, Sudan, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Burundi, DR Congo and Rwanda. Each of these conflicts can be connected one way or another to the cold war. (Udoka, 2012)

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper looked at the rivalry between the eastern and western blocs that characterized the cold war era. The cold war era was an era of a bipolar balance of power and nuclear deterrence. In over five decades of the cold war its effects reverberated across every region in the world. States were faced with the decision of picking sides between communism and capitalism. Even members of the supposed neutral Non-aligned Movement were forced to parley with either bloc when it seemed convenient: The Nigerian government during the civil war comes to mind. Super power rivalry was expressed in Korea, Afghanistan and Angola, to name a few.

The US and the USSR engaged in different diplomatic tactics during the cold. Secret diplomacy, propaganda/ public diplomacy and espionage are some of the diplomatic tactics utilized by the US and USSR during the cold war. Some technological advancements today are as a result of the competition between the eastern and western blocs. This is a positive result from the cold war but one should not forget that certain conflicts in the world as well as the rise international terrorism can be linked to the cold war.

It is twenty-eight years since the end of the cold war and this paper concludes with the position that the cold war was caused by the psychological effects of previous wars, particularly WWI and WWII.



The cold war was a product of mutual suspicion that can be traced to the fear of expansionism. This expansionist attitude that caused the two world wars. However, the cold war was about expansion of spheres of influence and not territorial expansion. The growing number of alliances in both blocs made the environment ripe for war. The only difference was the presence of nuclear weapons. In conclusion nuclear weapons saved the world from another war that well may have been the final war.

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