

The main features of the cold war essays example

[War](#), [Cold War](#)



The Cold War is a phenomenon in international relations, a tense period of confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union that took place since the end of the World War II till the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Its prehistory, according to some historians, dates back to the very beginning of the 20th century, when the Russian revolution led to the Bolsheviks overtaking the power in the former tsarist Russian Empire and promoting similar revolutions all over the world with the aim of creating a society, which would be an alternative to capitalism, the ruling ideology in the United States. Soon after the American political elite recognized that tsarist regime has been substituted by an even more dangerous Soviet Communism that challenged, inter alia, Americanism, the United States joined the anti-Communist and anti-Bolsheviks military interventions starting from 1918 (Westad, 2005, p. 17). However, it was not until the end of the Cold War that the two countries clashed in an open rivalry and competition for the world dominance. The World War II left the world with only two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, as the European countries were weakened by the disastrous economic outcomes of the War and were in deep political and economic crisis, first and foremost needing the financial support for the recovery of the economic strength. This time marked the start of the division of spheres of influence by the two world superpowers by the means of media, propaganda, espionage, the build-up of military, political and economic power through the means of arms race, space race, international treaties and establishment of international organizations and interstate ties based both on economic and military pressure, as well as on mutually profitable partnership. It is the use of these

means and the absence of direct military confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union that promoted the use of the phrase “ cold war” to the period of tense confrontation. The aforesaid characteristics of the Cold War are the key features of the period, whose outcomes can be clearly traced in the relationship between the Russian Federation and the United States nowadays, as the confrontation between the two countries is escalating fast with the ongoing conflicts all over the world, in which both countries usually indirectly participate by supporting the opposing groups. The first key feature of the Cold War is that it has been fought between the two world superpowers, whose ideologies, political and economic systems were completely different and unaccepting of the views of the confronting party. The United States were promoting free market and considered that socioeconomic improvement in the stagnating and Third World countries could be conducted by accepting and implementing the American capitalist model of society. These views were challenged by the emerging Soviet Communism with state-controlled economy, markets, media, infrastructure, etc., leaving little individual freedom, but instead promoting the spirit of collectivism, which was hostile to the individualistic beliefs of Americans. However, the two world powers could have agreed to co-existence, unless they were threatened by the increasing political power of the opponent. The lack of understanding and cooperation between the two countries became visible right after the end of the World War II, as each of them started promoting their plans and views on the future of Europe, Germany and the Eastern European countries. While the United States and their allies suggested that the Eastern European countries and Poland, in particular,

chose their own governments through the execution of right for self-determination, Stalin wanted the installation of the Communist puppet-governments, which was unacceptable for the Western European and American politics (Phillips, 2001, p. 20). It is important that both superpowers were virtually imposing their views on their allies in exchange for economic and political help, and while many pre-revisionist historians believed that Stalin was the ultimate originator of the Cold War, in fact the war was the confrontation between the two countries that were trying to promote their ideal international reality among the weaker and weakened countries by means of military pressure and cooperation through a set of mutually profitable agreements. This war between ideologies resulted in a number of very important political moves, such as the Truman Doctrine that presented the Communist Soviet Union as the totalitarian world evil power that should be contained and fought with by the nations that valued freedom, the Long Telegram by George F. Kennan that criticized Soviet Union, the Novikov telegram that was sent by the Soviet Union condemning capitalism and claiming that it would lead to the new world war, and the speech by Winston Churchill that called for cooperation between American and the United Kingdom to fight Stalin, who created the so-called Iron Curtain that divided Europe and the whole world in confrontation between communism and capitalism. The United States also included the domino effect doctrine into its policy during the second phase of the Cold War, leading to the involvement of the U. S. military and financial assistance in local conflicts around the world, where communists represented one of the fighting sides. These proxy wars involved participation by both superpowers, although they

never fought with each other directly. One of such wars was the infamous and very unpopular Vietnam War, which was lost by the United States. This propaganda of ideologies was conducted both on the international arena and inside the countries through various media that portrayed the rival as an evil force that was leading to the next global war. In particular, according to Nancy Bernhard, the United States spent about a billion dollars each year in 1980s on the public relation programs, controlling the release of information to the American people primarily through television, printed press and radio (Bernhard, 2003, p. 6)

The second key feature of the Cold War is that it was fought through economic policies. They were directed at providing economic and financial aid to the countries, whose economy suffered from the outcomes of the World War II, as well as to the Third World countries. The two most powerful countries, thus, gained power to pressure the countries into cooperation by providing them help to revive economies. Two of such most famous policies were the Marshall Plan created by the United States and the Comecon created by the Soviet Union. The former was aimed at providing financial assistance to the European countries to rebuild their economies devastated by the War. The United States were primarily interested in implementing the Plan because of the ongoing overproduction in the country and the weak markets in Europe. American politicians, thus, concluded that allocating such a big amount of money was necessary to ensure the viability of both the American economy and of the target markets. Although the Soviet Union was offered to receive the assistance, it was expected that the country would decline the offer because of its conditions, including the revitalization of

German economy. The Soviets were generally concerned that new Germany would join the United States group of allies (“The Soviet Union and the world”, 2010, p. 104). Stalin, on the other, was interested in taking over the Western part of the country, thus, restricting the American territorial basis on the European continent (Wettig, 2008, p. 159). The Soviet Union ultimately rejected the Marshall Plan and forbade the other Eastern bloc countries, such as Czechoslovakia and Poland, from joining it. In response, the Communist countries headed by the Soviet Union established the Comecon, or the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, aimed at providing mutual economic assistance of the socialist countries all over the world. The development of the two opposing policies further antagonized the superpowers that now tied other countries in the plans that put them in economic dependency. Also, these plans further promoted ideological discourses in the countries creating rivalry between their people. The countries also provided economic assistance to the Third World countries, ensuring that their respective governments conducted policies that were in line with the interests of the donors. The United States, thus, funded governments in Taiwan, Vietnam, Chile, while the Soviet Union economically and financially supported Cuba, Angola, Egypt, etc. Finally, primarily the failure of the economic system and policies of the Soviet Union led to its dissolution, as the country entered a period of stagnation, during which it lost its grip on the governments of the countries of the Soviet Union and of the Eastern Bloc. One of the reasons of the economic decline of the country was the incredible amount of spending on the arms race and, as a consequence, the space race.

Arms and space race is another key feature of the Cold War. Being the most powerful countries in the world by the end of the World War II and despite the tremendous losses of the Soviet Union, the economies of the countries were already prepared for the development and production of military objects, including the development of the weapons that would help one country outrun the other in military strength, thus, ensuring the world dominancy. As the tension was gradually building up, both countries started developing the first atomic bombs and later the first nuclear bombs. Showing each other their achievements by detonating the bombs, the United States and the Soviet Union deepened the fear of the World War III throughout the world. At that point the countries were primarily focusing on the development of bombs, but at the same time the Soviet Union succeeded in launching the first space satellite Sputnik. In response, the United States financed the landing of the first men on the Moon with the primary aim of being ahead of the Soviet Union (“ Science, technology, and the Cold War”, 2010, p. 380). The Cuban Crisis proved that both countries were not ready for the suicidal move of bombing each other, as their leaders understood that it would lead to the mutual destruction as laid down in the mutually assured destruction doctrine (MAD). Although the détente period lessened the confrontation, the countries still developed their military potential, as well as provided military assistance to the participants of their proxy wars around the world. This helped both countries build up their military industrial strength that is still present and visible today, when both countries participate in various conflicts directly or covertly.

The fourth key feature of the Cold War is the imposition of their will on the

other countries through a set of treaties and espionage. Both the United States and the Soviet Union entered into or initiated a number of international treaties that ensured that their position was backed up by their allies. For the Soviet Union the main treaty was the Warsaw Pact, while the United States cooperated with the other former allies in the formation of NATO, an opposing organization. Another important organization created in line with the Truman Doctrine was SEATO in the Southeast Asia, which provided the United States the permission for the military presence, especially given that the countries of the region were susceptible to communist revolutions. Both organizations were aimed at ensuring security and defense of the participants. The countries also supported revolutions in other countries, making agreements with the respective governments. Given that the superpowers could not directly fight each other, they both used the means of espionage to create provocations, provide material for the intelligence offices and to help in the revolutions in other countries. For this reason, the Truman administration created the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) that covertly helped overthrow the leaders, who conducted the policies that contradicted the interests of the United States (“ Intelligence in the Cold War”, 2010, p. 423). The same use was made of the Soviet KGB that conducted its intelligence operations throughout the world.

The Cold War became an unprecedented period in the history of the modern world that was devastated by the World War II. The unique nature of the period lies in the emergence of the two countries that held the major political, economic and military power in the world, where the Western European countries were weakened and lost their international influence.

The War was also remarkable for the incredible military spending on the arms and space race that eventually resulted in the doctrine of the mutually assured destruction and the dissolution of the Soviet Union as a result of the loss of its economic power due to the long-lasting period of stagnation. The War resulted in the division of the spheres of influence of the United States and the Soviet Union that is still in power nowadays. It was primarily gained through enormous military and economic assistance that put the countries all over the world in the dependence and under pressure of the superpowers. The propaganda that antagonized both countries and lasted for half a century resulted in the ongoing crisis between the Russian Federation and the United States, where older generation still remember the realities of the Cold War and its outcomes. The tension between the countries is still present, as the analytics talk about the beginning of the new Cold War as a result of the power expansion of the two countries and the current re-division of the spheres of influence around the world (Tisdall, 2014).

References

Bernhard, N. (2003). U. S. television news and Cold War propaganda, 1947-1960. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Intelligence in the Cold War. (2010). In M. Leffler & O. Westad (Eds.), *The Cambridge history of the Cold War* (Vol. 2). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

The Soviet Union and the world, 1944-1953. (2010). In M. Leffler & O. Westad (Eds.), *The Cambridge history of the cold war* (Vol. 1). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Science, technology, and the Cold War. (2010). In M. Leffler & O. Westad

(Eds.), *The Cambridge history of the Cold War* (Vol. 3). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Phillips, S. (2001). *The Cold War: Conflict in Europe and Asia*. Oxford: Heinemann.

Tisdall, S. (2014, November 19). The new cold war: Are we going back to the bad old days? Retrieved December 29, 2014, from <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/19/new-cold-war-back-to-bad-old-days-russia-west-putin-ukraine>

Westad, O. (2005). *The global Cold War: Third world interventions and the making of our times*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wettig, G. (2008). *Stalin and the Cold War in Europe: The emergence and development of East-West conflict, 1939-1953*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.