

Global perspective



The conclusion of World War II signalled the division of the world into two, violently opposed, ideological camps. The United States and the Soviet Union emerged as the world's two superpowers and as each was the ideological antithesis of the other, they embarked upon a race for the acquisition of supporter/satellite nations, just as they did on an arms race. Their respective military might dictated the imperatives of their refraining from direct military engagement with one another and hence, the conflict between them took the form of a Cold War - a war which did not translate into direct military confrontation.

The military power which both the US and the USSR accumulated, most especially weapons of mass destruction, quite effectively dictated the impossibility of their engaging in direct armed conflict. Such a conflict would have led to the deaths of millions upon millions of people, not to mention the probable obliteration of entire cities. At the same time, however, these two nations were adversaries and, because of their ideological differences, disagreements between them were as intense as that between warring nations.

The US and the USSR were caught in a war with one another but had to avoid the possibility of this war turning hot.' Accordingly, their conflict assumed the form of a race for industrial development, a contest over the acquisition of satellite states, an arms race and even a space war. They may have avoided direct military confrontation but they quite often engaged in indirect warfare through proxy states, as in the Vietnam War or the first Afghanistan War, to name but two examples. Indeed, they divided the world between them.

As may have been inferred from the foregoing argument, the United States

and the Soviet Union were in a war with one another and the conflict between them was as contentious and as dangerous as any which had ever unfolded between two nations. It was, however, by virtue of the military might which both commanded, a war which had to be fought indirectly, whether through a space race, an arms race, an industrialization race or a race for allies. It was, nevertheless, a cold war, or a war which never translated into direct and outright military confrontation, because the outcome of a hot' war would have been unsustainable.