

Lesson 5 – Cold War (Passage for Task 3)

Influence of ideologies of communism and capitalism on the Cold War

The ideological character of the Cold War is something often not well understood. The conflict had important strategic, political and economic dimensions, and superpower diplomacy was often cautious and pragmatic. Thus, for example, the United States made no vigorous response to the Soviet invasions of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968, while in Western Europe after 1949 Moscow was similarly careful to avoid challenging the status quo. Nonetheless, ideology shaped each side's image of the other, its assessment of the threat it posed, and its conclusions on the appropriate response to that threat. With rare exceptions (Yugoslavia in the case of American policy), ideology identified the enemy. Alliance or cooperation with ideologically antithetical powers (as, for example, Britain and France had allied themselves with Tsarist Russia before 1914) was out of the question. We know that American determination to join conflict with Russia and communism throughout the globe stemmed from the assumption that the United States was threatened by an ideologically driven and expansionist world communism.

Question: How does Mclean describe the ideological differences between The United States and Soviet Russia?

Did the United States win the Cold War?

The end of the Cold War represented not so much a victory for one side as a matter of the other side declining to continue to take part in the contest. The Soviet empire collapsed because of its own weaknesses. Russian leaders, notably Mikhail Gorbachev, recognised how badly Soviet policies had failed, both internally and externally. Russia's attempt to keep pace with American defense spending may have contributed to the weakness of the Soviet economy, but we cannot say more than that. At least as important seems to have been a loss of faith in the system by the very people who might have been most expected to defend it to the bitter end, namely Soviet leaders and East European communist leaders. It is likely that a similar outcome would have resulted even without the 'Reaganite' defense increases of the 1980s, and it is possible that the Soviet Union would have collapsed earlier had it not been for the Cold War, which had come to provide the chief rationale for the Soviet command economy and national security edifice. The success of West Germany's Ostpolitik from 1970 demonstrated that it was possible to further Western interests in Eastern Europe through a course of negotiation rather than confrontation with the Soviets.

The events of 1989-91 created little genuine sense of Cold War victory in the United States. Thirty years earlier the collapse of the Soviet Union and its empire would undoubtedly have caused widespread rejoicing. That this did not happen at the end of the 1980s can be explained by two points. First, the United States itself faced intractable economic and social problems which it had not experienced thirty years before. These problems, which did not disappear with the end of the Cold War, seemed to many to be more important to the nation's future than the outcome of continuing political competition with the USSR. Concerns about the nation's capacity to maintain its relative power, especially in competition with the successful economies of Japan and Western Europe, gave rise to widespread talk of American 'decline', reflected in the best-seller status of the English-born, Yale historian, Paul Kennedy's 1987 study of the rise and fall of empires [4] Second, the American-Soviet contest had long since lost much of its ideological intensity. In the 1950s the United

States and USSR could convince themselves that they were competing for the loyalties of mankind, and that the world's long-term future hinged on the question of which side would prevail in the Cold War. Such illusions were deflated by Vietnam in the American case and in the Soviet case by a less than successful experience in the Third World. The superpowers' inability to influence the course of events to more than a minor extent in large areas of the globe was demonstrated by problems of terrorism (both state-sponsored and otherwise), the escalation of violent conflict in South Africa, the Iran-Iraq war, chronic tension between India and Pakistan, and the continuing Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East. Despite the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, it could not be seriously maintained by more than a few Americans that the end of the Cold War represented a triumph for American institutions. Moreover, events since 1991 in Eastern Europe have served to dampen much of the initially optimistic reaction to the collapse of the Soviet empire.

Questions: *What ideological changes had been forced upon the 'superpowers' by the end of the 1980s?*

Lesson 6 - Vietnam War (Passage for Task 5)

The Third World was important for the Cold War

Both superpowers were prepared to use force where they could do so without unacceptable risk of war with the superpower rival. While Europe was remarkably stable, crises arose in grey areas, that is, areas in which there existed no mutually shared agreement on the area's status in the context of the superpower confrontation. Korea in 1950, Cuba in the early 1960s, Vietnam in the 1960s and Afghanistan in 1979 are the main examples. In three of these cases America and Russia fought hot wars by proxy.

Both powers viewed developments around the world in terms of their relationship to the Cold War struggle. They tended to ignore indigenous developments: specific characteristics of different societies and different nationalisms were considered irrelevant. It was assumed that nations in Asia, Africa and Latin America were all part of an undeveloped monolith, that these nations might be built, rebuilt or restructured with appropriate injections of American or Soviet resources, and that they would then take their places in an American or Soviet-designed international order. Both superpowers, then, had a distorted view of what was happening in the Third World, and part of this distortion was an illusion of control. By the 1980s such illusions were to be deflated. Here the Vietnam experience was crucial in the American case, Afghanistan for the Soviet Union.

Question: *Why did Third World countries become the focus of tensions between the US and Soviet Russia? Use evidence to support your answer.*