The Cold War and its Impact - International Relations

The Cold War was a period of confrontation that took place between 1945 and 1990; although some International scholars held the idea that the Cold War started in the 1917 Russian revolution. Nevertheless, the belligerent was between the USA and its allies mainly the Western countries and what was then the Eastern bloc spearheaded by the Soviet Union (USSR). The two powers did not fight or used weapons against each other, it was fought through Nuclear Arms race, proxy wars, ideological influence and propaganda war. It, therefore, had a great impact on the world. This essay will examine ways in which the Cold War affected international relation between 1945 and 1990. This essay is going to explore its impacts and how such impacts affected the world.

The Cold War had affected international relations in different ways first and for most, the Cold War divided the world into three distinct camps, the NATO camp, the Warsaw camp, and the nonaligned. The first two camps were armed with nuclear weapons. The rivalry between the two superpowers quickly spread to the rest of the world. The USA encouraged other friendly regions in the world to form their own alliance such as CENTO in the Middle East and SEATO in South East Asia, the aim as suggested by Murphy (2003) was to surround the USSR with a military alliance and had resulted in increased tensions.

Furthermore both superpowers possessed nuclear missiles that can reach Moscow and Washington respectively. Thus, the Cold War become global and directly affected international stability (Murphy, 2003). In addition, both superpowers resorted to confrontation and propaganda and this, in turn, was played out in the rest of the world.

The Cold War led the division of Europe in general and Germany, in particular, it also as pointed out by Cornwell (2001) made possible the modernization and “reintegration” of the defeated powers of Germany, Italy and Japan (Cornwell, 2003). Its impact was felt especially in Africa and as stated by Painter (2001) made possible the emergence and
creation of new nation-states, as the colonial masters were no longer able to sustain those colonies. The Cold War considerably affected Europe where it originated as well as internationally. It led the Berlin Blockade, created the divisions of Vietnam and Korea, resulted in the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 which furthers exacerbated the relationship of the West and the Soviet Union. It further exacerbated and fuelled other conflicts and wars in the Middle East (Painter, 2001).

Another aspect of Cold War that had an impact on international relations was protecting sphere of interest by both sides “truly at global level” for example 1956 Hungarian uprising and the subsequent intervention by the Soviet troops, because the soviet did not like the Hungarian’s intention to leave the Warsaw Pact, (Bell, 2001). Similarly, the USA was also maintaining a sphere of interest in other parts of the world, especially in Latin America. During the Cold War, fear of the spread of communism had resulted in US military involvement in Latin America in various ways, for example, the US helped train and provided arms and other assistance to anti-communist in Nicaragua and El-Salvador and by using force to further safeguard its interest in the region. A good example of this was the armed intervention by the United States in the Dominican Republic in 1965, here the US aim was as suggested by Young & Kent, (2004) to stop the spread of communism in the region; in other words, this was a pre-emptive attack against communism. Another example was the overthrow of Jacobo Arbenz of Guatemala and the failed attempt to overthrow Castro’s government in Cuba because America regarded Castro as an unfriendly and enemy (Bell, 2001).

Furthermore, superpower rivalry was played out in parts of the world for example, in sub-Saharan Africa particularly Angola which became a battleground for the superpowers. On the one hand, the USSR and Cuba were supporting and arming Angolan government while on the other hand the USA and South Africa supported the UNITA rebels. In many other cases, the superpowers’ support economically and militarily to various government and rebels in Africa exacerbated the civil war that engulfed the continent (Wayne et al., 2005).

Due to the superpower rivalry played out in the third world, millions of people died as a result of the Cold War because of civil war and other
conflicts that affected many parts of Africa, Latin America, and Asia. Indeed as Painter (2001) pointed out most of the millions who perished during the cold war died in the third world thus, the cold war had a profound effect on those parts of the world.

The Cold War increased tensions within international community because of the actions of the two superpowers; they pursued political and ideological goals some of which were ever more opposing with the objectives of the other for example: the Soviet believed that America is an imperialist power and therefore committed to spreading capitalist ideology with the intention of dominating the rest of world, on the other hand, the USA saw the Soviet as an ideologically motivated and “antagonistically” expansionist evil empire that is committed to the spread of communism (Painter, 2001). Thus as Bell (2001) pointed out both superpowers advocated that their system of belief was the only way forward for a better world.

Another impact of the Cold War was the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 that internationally created fears of an imminent nuclear war between the US and the USSR this clearly further increased tension between the two superpowers and their allies and as Baylis et al. (2008) suggested this was the “most dangerous moment” the world has ever seen since the end of the second world war (Baylis et al. 2008, p.62). Furthermore, in November 1983, NATO carried out operation “Able Archer” exercise which “simulated a coordinated” Nuclear attack against the Soviet this further led the Soviets to believe that America is preparing to attack them and they, in turn, took steps to prepare their Nuclear forces this further exacerbated tension in the region as the tension developed a possible war between them meant that the entire world might be destroyed in an all-out nuclear war (Murphy, 2003).

Indeed the Cold War divided the world into three camps; some of those camps were armed with conventional and nuclear missiles that can reach each other’s cities both superpowers were ready to protect their sphere of interests using whatever means necessary thus, their actions caused tensions within the international community. Although the Cold War caused and exacerbated conflict in some parts of the world, it also maintained order and peace that existed (Mearsheimer, 1990) and made possible the reconstruction and assimilation of defeated powers of
Germany, Italy and the “transformation” of Japan from a war-torn country to the second most powerful economy in the world (McWilliams & Piotrowski, 2005). But this positive aspect cannot be compared with the negative impact it had on the Third Word especially that of Africa where the Cold War fuelled the civil war and caused many deaths and destructions through proxy wars and civil wars. Decolonisation and the emergence of new nation-states attracted the attention of the superpowers, arms and other support poured into the continent and the result was disastrous (McMahon, 2003).

The Cold War led to major impact to International order; because the post Cold War order of bipolarity and the balance of power has ended making the US the only superpower in the world and therefore can take whatever actions she desires with impunity this change ended an era of peace in the world this view is held by Mearsheimer (1994) as cited by (Baylis et al., 2008) Mearsheimer held the idea that, the Cold War era was a period of peace and stability.

Furthermore, towards the end of the Cold War in the 1990s, the Soviet Union suffered a considerable economic decline as a direct result of the Cold War because of huge military spending. (Young & Kent, 2004) thus the effects of the Cold War are far-reaching and they added to the ultimate fall down of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the end of bipolarity, which left the United States as the only hegemony power in the world.

**Effects of the Cold War**

In its course, the Cold War became a growing threat to world peace and when it reached its highest form of confrontation, as a direct and indirect consequence, numerous people suffered great misfortunes. Since the end of the war up until its subsequent century, the Cold War had many effects on nation-states and targeted them in many economical and social ways, for example in Russia, military spending was cut dramatically since 1991 creating a decline in the Soviet Union’s military-industrial sector. Such a dismantling left hundreds of millions of employees (throughout the former Soviet Union) unemployed thus affecting Russia’s economy and military.

After Russia embarked on several economic reformations in the 1990s, it underwent a financial crisis and a recession more oppressive than the United States and Germany experienced during the Great Depression. Although Russian living standards worsened overall in the post–Cold War years, the economy held an overwhelming growth after 1995 and in the early 2005 it became known that it had returned to its 1989 levels of per-Capita GDP.
The legacy of the Cold War continued to influence world affairs, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the post–Cold War world is widely considered as unipolar—with the United States the sole remaining superpower. The Cold War defined the political role of the United States in the post–World War II world: by 1989 the United States held military alliances with 50 countries and had 1.5 million troops posted abroad in 117 countries which institutionalized a global commitment to huge, permanent peacetime military-industrial complexes and large-scale military funding of science.

Military expenditures by the US during the Cold War years were estimated to have been $8 trillion, while nearly 100,000 Americans lost their lives in the Korean War and Vietnam War.

In addition to the loss of life by uniformed soldiers, millions died in the superpowers’ proxy wars around the globe, most notably in Southeast Asia. Most of the proxy wars and subsidies for local conflicts ended along with the Cold War; the incidence of interstate wars, ethnic wars, revolutionary wars, as well as refugee and Disagreements between the leaders of the nations that were affected by the warfare declined sharply in the post–Cold War years.

The legacy of the Cold War conflict is not easily erased as many of the economic and social tensions that were exploited to fuel Cold War competition in parts of the Third World remain acute. The breakdown of state control in a number of areas formerly ruled by Communist governments has produced new civil and ethnic conflicts, particularly in the former Yugoslavia. In Eastern Europe, the end of the Cold War has ushered in an era of economic growth and a large increase in the number of liberal democracies, while in other parts of the world, such as Afghanistan, independence was accompanied by state failure.

With the fall of the Berlin Wall, the annulment of the Warsaw Pact and the dissolution of the Soviet Union the Cold War had been officially terminated, but despite it all, military development and spending continued, particularly in the deployment of nuclear-armed ballistic missiles and defensive systems, because there was no formalized treaty ending the Cold War, the former superpowers have continued to various degrees to maintain and even improve or modify existing nuclear weapons and delivery systems. Moreover, other nations not previously acknowledged as nuclear-weapons states have developed and tested nuclear-explosive devices.

The risk of nuclear and radiological terrorism by possible sub-national organizations or individuals is now a concern.

**Radiation legacies**

| Due to the military and non-military exploitation of nuclear fission, the Cold War brought forth some significant involuntary exposures to high-level radiation. The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki caused a large-scale destruction as well as an acute and lingering radiation throughout the infected areas, and as a result of decades of nuclear-weapons production, experimentation, and testing, exposure to radiation above normal background levels occurred to scientists, technicians, military personnel, civilians, and animals. Several significant radiation-related accidents occurred at military and civilian nuclear reactors and facilities, causing direct fatalities, as well as involuntary occupational and public exposures. |
Unfortunately, these consequences did not detain the E.E.U.U. and the U.R.S.S. from accumulating a large number of missiles and nuclear weapons thus exacerbating tensions between asymmetrical powers.

Many nuclear legacies can be identified from the Cold War, such as the availability of new technologies for nuclear power and energy, such legacies which created great tensions between superpowers back then, especially since the hegemony of the world was disputed between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Environmental remediation, industrial production, research science, and technology development have all benefited from the carefully managed application of radiation and other nuclear processes.

Security legacies

Due to the potential risk to national and international security, nuclear-weapons states have inherited substantial responsibilities in protecting and stabilizing their nuclear forces.

During the Cold War and post-Cold War periods, nuclear weapons and their delivery systems had been immensely secured and protected over the fear that such weapons of mass destruction were stolen, thus nuclear facilities and devices, such as reactors and propulsion systems, were safeguarded. An appropriate continuing level of security remained necessary through all life-cycle phases, from production to decommissioning as the entire military nuclear infrastructure requires protection, and that requires a commensurate allocation of funding.

Having once had widespread overseas nuclear bases and facilities, both the United States and the former Soviet Union inherited particular responsibilities and costs. Moreover, all nuclear-weapons states had developed not only production and service facilities but sometimes in extensive military staging and storage.

World inventories of weapons-grade fissile materials are substantial, much greater than now needed for military purposes. Until these materials can be demilitarized, they need to be securely safeguarded to evade risks of deliberate, accidental, or unauthorized nuclear devastation. Moreover, terrorists and hackers continue to interfere with nuclear stability and confidence.

Military legacies

Internal national-security military postures still dominate behavior among sovereign nations, and as the former superpowers did not formally consummated their stand-down from Cold War military equipment the strategic and tactical nuclear and conventional forces remain at levels comparatively high for a peacetime environment. Localized conflicts/tensions replaced the former bilateral nuclear confrontation and as a lingering result, large inventories of nuclear weapons and facilities remain stabilized. Some facilities are being recycled, dismantled, or recovered as valuable substances as well as some chemical and biological weapons that were developed during the Cold War are still in existence, although many are being demilitarized.
Military policies and strategies are slowly being modified to reflect the increasing interval without major confrontation and because of the large extent of inventories on weapons, fissile materials, and rapid-response delivery systems, a mutual danger coexists for accidental, misjudged, or miscalculated incidents or warfare.

Other Cold War weapons states are slowly reducing their arsenals because they have not abandoned their dependency on nuclear deterrence. While a few more nations have attempted or succeeded in carrying out nuclear-explosive tests and thus creating their own nuclear deterrence.

During the Cold War, an international fabric of arms-control constraint had evolved, much of it carried over as a beneficial heritage with institutional mechanisms for multilateral or international function and verification.

Institutional legacies

Aside from the tangible measures of national defense, such as standing military and security forces and hardware, they are various institutional structures of government and functionality that have less to do directly with military or security factors, but more to do with underlying public attitudes and risks. These institutional structures and perceptions have had their own challenges and adjustments after the Cold War.

Strong impressions were made and continue to affect the national psyche as a result of close brushes with all-out nuclear warfare. In some cases this had resulted in aversion to warfare, in other cases to callousness regarding nuclear threats. Peaceful applications of nuclear energy received a stigma which is still too difficult to exercise as it heightens the fear of nuclear risk which can result in a resistance to military drawdown.

Public impressions and insecurities gained during the Cold War could carry over to the peacetime environment. This new peaceful era created a territorial expansion of democratic capitalism which had an open invitation to proclaim the obsolescence of the war itself. Several foreign states built specific institutions of democracy in post-communist areas with the wide belief that it would favor peaceful conflict resolution as wars did not occur in democracies. This exacerbated the idea of having a ‘democracy equaled having peace,’ surged across the nations affected by the Cold War and became a popular opinion across international relation experts because peace laid in the political strength(democracy) of the sovereignty of the people.

After the tensions of the Cold War diminished, the United Nations commenced an extensive journey marked by the sole objective to analyse, reflect and debate in detail around those issues related to aid the advocates for Human Rights and the creation of the construction of a perfect society that lives in a culture involving peace around foreign nations (a utopia-like fantasy).

With the end of communism (the Soviet Union collapsed due to its economic weaknesses), German unification, and even the expected separation of Czechoslovakia everything Historical occurred with immense rapidness. Therefore, the end of the twentieth century will always be marked as the start of widespread peace, in Europe, Western countries, and beyond.
Economic legacies

After the end of World War II in 1945, Europe faced great difficulties in achieving an economic, political and social recovery. Although historians and scholars maintain different positions regarding what were the causes that led to the development of the Cold War and its effects they all concur the tensions between the superpowers that had already been accumulating during this period where the spark that ignited the flame. Such tensions were described by the immense separation between the capitalist and communist countries, the latter having an economy planned by the state, and the capitalists pursuing the idea of a free market economy.\[2\]

The Potsdam Agreement made the Allies to divide Germany into two large blocks, each led by the most powerful nations of the moment—Russia, Great Britain and the United States. The United States, along with Great Britain, represented the western bloc and the capitalist system whilst the Soviet Union was given the eastern bloc and expanded their communist system. Thus creating a huge fiscal mortgage placed on many domestic economies, as financial obligations included those necessary to avoid further dislocations while the change took place from a wartime footing to a peacetime environment. The most important social causes are due to economic influence which caused national military establishments and alliances to be reconfigured. Highly dependent institutional frameworks were to be restructured, and new obligations were acquired by nations that were once bystanders to the East-West confrontation.