

Review Article

The Cold War and Bipolarisation of International System

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Abstract: This work focused on the Cold War and Bipolarisation of International System. The Cold War, a reference to the ideological warfare between the West and East blocs. The era, had its origin from the East/West relations which before 1945 appeared to be cordial, but the cordiality was however superficial, the true situation of their relations was like an atomic bomb waiting to explode. In other words, the relations were far from cordial, it was a situation of mutual distrust, a form of mutual ambition aimed at colonising the world with either capitalist or socialist ideology which was made manifest in the years after the Second World War, where their intentions were always in disharmony with characteristics of deceit, lies, manipulation and eventually metamorphosed into the concept of Cold War after World War II. This era heralded the advent of the most destructive instruments in the annals of humans' development – the Atomic Bomb and the Ballistic Missiles. The presence of these instruments in the midst of humanity, gave rational beings something to worry about. The study employed the historical methods which emphasise description, thematic presentation, interpretation and analysis of facts. Information for this study was obtained from secondary sources like textbooks, journal articles, magazines, and so on were used. The findings show that the Cold War between United States of America and Soviet Union Relations violated international peace and polarised the international system.

Keywords: Cold War, Bipolarisation, International, System.

INTRODUCTION

The World War II, ended with the emergency of two opposing ideological blocs in international system led by the United States of America on one hand and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) on the other hand.ⁱ The Cold War, a brain-child of the second world war, originated from the war-time illusions of the Western Statesmen.ⁱⁱ These actors notably, Winston Churchill Prime Minister of Britain and President Truman of America, anticipated a post war co-operation of Soviet Union, but the post war development disillusioned them. This is aptly stated by Fleming D., *The Cold War, originated in the chagrin of Western leaders, notably Churchill and Truman, over Soviet control of central and Eastern Europe after World War II.*ⁱⁱⁱ

The Cold War has been boiling between Western and Eastern bloc nations since 1949, with brief diplomatic rapprochement until 1975. The years in between were tension – ridden. Mankind lived under the perpetual fear of nuclear holocaust, with every stage of the Cold War, the world stood like a status waiting for Armageddon to come. The question uppermost in men's mind was, when will the Third World War occur? What nature will it take, and probably who will trigger it off. By 1970, following the imperative imposition of détente on international system, it became obvious that World War, the third in the history of mankind, is not likely to occur, because of this, some analysis argued that the Cold War did not violate international peace. Our concern here is to know what roles the Cold War played in aggravating the global tension on one hand and at the other, the ways it embraced the peaceful resolution of international conflicts.

The Soviet violation of the allies post war peace treaties at Teheran, Yalta, and Potsdam, her outright blockade of her portion of Berlin from the Western, the communist expansionism in East Europe, and the Soviet's frustration of free election in Eastern Europe alarmed the Western leaders. "From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, Sir Winston Churchill warned, an iron curtain has descended across the continent".^{iv}

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The Second World War ended in a most spectacular way – the emergence of the two super-powers and the birth of the atomic bomb. This destructive instrument was used by the United States to end the war with Japan. Britain having secretly possess the atomic bomb, took steps to conceal it from Soviet Union and other actors of international political system. In his iron curtain speech on May 3, 1946, Winston Churchill of Britain said:

It would nevertheless be wrong and impudent to entrust the secret knowledge or experience of the atomic bomb, which United States, Britain and Canada now shares, to the World Organisation, while it is in its infancy. It would be criminal madness to cast it adrift in this agitated and untried world. No one in any country has slept less well in their beds because this knowledge and the method and the materials to supply it, are at present retained in American hands. I do not believe, we should all have slept so soundly, had the position be reversed, and if some communist or neo-fascist state monopolised for the time being these dreaded agencies.^v

The monopoly of the atomic bomb by the West and the war time strategy of the western allies nations whereby they delayed the opening of the second front for lack of sufficient barges for such enormous undertaking and which the Soviet's interpreted as a "deliberate attempt by the World's two leading capitalist powers to destroy both of their two major ideological opponents one and the same time",^{vi} naturally led to mutual suspicion of Western powers by the Soviet Union. She saw her Western allies, war time delay in opening the second front as a calculated attempt by the West to expose the Red Army to massive onslaught of the Nazi's. during the war-time and post war-time peace conferences, the allied powers laid down modalities for post war settlement. Hence the end of the World War II, heralded the division of Europe between the victor powers – Britain, America, Soviet Union and France.

The Cold War had had meaningful impact on international peace. These can be seen in the areas of the preservation of international Peace, its violation, the introduction of arms race, its escalation and imposition of highly destructive weapons on international system, the permanent division of the world into bellicose camps and the evolution of neutralist feelings among peace loving people.

To this end, this work is devoted to finding out United States of America and Soviet Union relations and the influence the Cold War in bipolarisation of International system between the period of study.

Conceptual Clarification

The study engages a few words or concepts which may seem quite ambiguous. These concepts require some clarifications. It is my intention to define them in brief to enable readers to understand and digest the work without racking their brain.

Cold War: This is a state of intensive competition devoid of armed conflict between states – a policy of making mischief by all methods short of War between nations.

Balance of Power: This is a theory of international relations which according to Isaak, "Balance of Power system is an equilibrium made up of approximately equal power or nations set against each other so that no one power can predominate".^{vii}

Iron Curtain: Is an ideological barrier separating the Soviet Union and the communist countries of East Europe from the Western countries, which hindered trade and communication.

International System: In the words of Stanley Hofmann, "is a pattern of relations between the basic units of world politics, who is characterised by the scope of the objectives pursued by these units and of the tasks performed among them, as well as by the means used in order to achieve those goals and perform these tasks".^{viii}

Deterrence: Deterrence "is persuading an enemy that attacking you will not be worth any potential gain".^{ix}

Balance of Terror: Is a state of equilibrium in the possession of nuclear weapons by which both ideological powers could destroy each other.^x

Diplomatic Rapture: this is a situation of severance of diplomatic or formal political relations between nations who hitherto were enjoying cordial relations.

Western Powers: The term western powers is used to indicate the capitalist nations of Europe led by the United States.

National Interest: These are those interests and priorities of a nation, for which she could go to war to protect or maintain.

Theoretical Framework

Cold War is a research field that poses serious problem of choice in adopting a theoretical framework for its analysis. This is because of the abundance of contending frameworks. There are System Theory, Mutual Aid Theory, Conflict Resolution, Centre Periphery, Marxist and Game Theory. These theories can equally provide a perfect theoretical mould for the analysis of the war of nerves between United States of America and Soviet Union Relations on international peace..

It is my intention to use the Game Theory as my tools of analyses because, it seems to be most relevant to the topic under investigation. Though not without blemish, the game theory, has universal applicability to international political system. In this work, I intended to liken the actors of the Cold War to players of various kinds of “parlour games” – drought, chess, chicken, poker, scramble or bridge games. The games are prone to conflict decision – making and co-operation.

Game theory is a mathematical discipline, that is designed to deal with the question of optimum behaviour of participants in games of strategy and to determine the resulting equilibrium. In game theory, each participant endeavour to maximize their advantage in situations where the outcome depends on their actions, and the nature. The interests of participants in the game theory, are often opposed and sometimes parallel, to one another. In other words, conflicting interest and possible co-operation among participants are likely to be there. There is also mutual suspicious among participants because, some of them can forecast with certainty the next action of others.

Games are described by specifying possible behaviour within the rules of the game. In a game, the rules are given by physical and legal environment within which an individual's actions may take place. In the game of international politics, I regard each actors as being rational beings, who has definite objectives and having at their disposal, some resources with which to confront their opponents in conflicts. The actors are expected to act rationally. Game involves moves and countermoves, which tends to explain the unfolding of the moves, the states of information of the players, and the alternative choices available to each actor at each encounter. Each actor, unaware of the opponent's choices, choose a single number that identifies a strategy from sets of strategies allowing for all contingencies.

In game theory, the player's is also expected to have perfect knowledge of the strategies open to him in pursuit of his aims. The players should also be able to design a strategy that covers all contingencies and ensure minimum risks and maximum – pay-off. In all game, there are outcomes – the pay-off. It is the relationship between player and the price of objective, they aim at – a win, a loss, or draw. In game theory, theorists are interested in analysing the strategies that will enable the players to maximise their outcomes, and the prospect being usually small in range, requires careful study of the alternative course of action. The rules of the game is simply the distribution of resources and the employment of these resources. In Cold War, players, are expected to know that nuclear missiles are not to be used – they are not part of the rules of international game.

Alliances are often formed in international politics. In game theory context, alliances means, the combination of resources for the best advantage of the players. This is an indication that the players are many. Consequently, those who have common objectives, pool their resources together to enable them achieve their objective interests. This co-operation among actors is known as the variable – sum game which assumes that two or more parties can gain more individually by co-operating, especially in the long run, for according to Isaak:

Rather than arguing over existing economic pie, it is more satisfying to co-operate and create more pies, for every one by means that individual parties would not have available, if they merely worked on their own.^{xi}

Conversely, the Zero-sum game – a pure conflict game or situation assumes that “Whatever one party gains, the other party necessarily losses and that co-operation is, therefore, irrational”.^{xii} A more appropriate model in international relations, is the multiparty non zero-sum game; for, as Zawodny reminds us, “We must recognise that some types of international conflict today can be resolved only by situations in which neither side losses and in which sometime both sides may win”.^{xiii}

The Cold War and Bipolarisation of International Peace

The Cold War had greatly affected the International political system. This affection could be seen in the bipolarisation of international system into hostile blocs as a result of religious political and ideological differences.

World War II devastated most of the existing major actors. In their place, the United States emerged as a military and economic superpower and the leader of one power pole. The Soviet Union, though incredibly damaged, emerged as leader of the other pole. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republic never matched the United States economically, but the Soviets posed a huge conventional armed force, a seemingly threatening ideology, and, by 1949, atomic weapons. The East – West Axis was established,^{xiv} one of the distinctive nature of the Cold War was the drive among the principal protagonists to maintain the balance of power in international system. In fact, conceptually, the cold war was fought mainly to restore or sustain the status quo.

The bipolarity of power was made even more dangerous by the absence of other power centres, by the ideological differences between communist and democratic systems, and by the growing nuclear arsenals which each of these tendencies of the balance of power system towards polarisation has been the establishment of a new balance by the intervention of outside states, the enlargement cycle of rivalries and wars.^{xv} The bipolarisation of international system naturally, led to an increase of conflicts amongst political actors of global system. This is because in bipolar system, the assumption is that: “An increase in security for one party leads to decrease in the security for the other and therefore results in clashes in which the antagonisms of the two powers are constantly reinforced”.^{xvi}

In as much as one can argue that bipolarity helps indirectly in preserving international peace, it obviously marred the pacific resolution of international conflicts. This is because Isaak’s argument that:

The aim of balance of power system were to preserve the survival of its member states and the system itself, to see that no state predominated in the system and to preserve a peace based on the maintenance of the status quo through the equilibrium principle.^{xvii}

Notwithstanding, the balance of power in bipolar system can not be achieved without exchange of blows and when blows are exchanged, the world become vulnerable to holocaust, especially in a nuclear age. The main message here is that the bipolarisation as the Igbo saying goes “a nut that adventured into the mouth can never come out intact, if the teeth fail to scratch it, saliva must soil it”. In that wise, international peace was dangerously affected by the polarisation of international system, which “the United States sponsored a number of regional alliances, most notably the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO, established in 1949). The Soviets responded in 1955 with the Warsaw Treaty Organisation (or Warsaw Pact). Both sides also vied for power in the developing countries, and both Soviet and American arms and money flowed to various governments and rebel groups in the ongoing communist – anticommunist contest.^{xviii} The endangering of the global arena could be seen in Friedmann’s words, quoted by Roy, “A word divided into two camps is still a word living under the shadow of war”.^{xix} Spanier bought this idea. “A bipolar system, he said, tends to resemble a house on fire. The principal actors feel a high degree of insecurity, indeed, they may perceive their survival as being at stake”.^{xx}

The Evolution and Demise of Non – Alignment

The Cold War is a double – edge sword. It polarised the world into belligerent blocs and set in motion a chain of events that blocs culminated in the formation of neutralist bloc the Non – Aligned Block Nations. Non – alignment was directly related to the Cold War. It was a reaction to the Cold War which was known for “aggressive bloc building (Bipolarism) by the two super powers”. In K. P. Misra, “Dissociation from bloc politics or military alliances became a focal point of non – alignment”.^{xxi} As the escalation of the Cold War made it mandatory for the emergency of new nations of International System to isolate themselves from the ideological conflicts between the mega powers of global system. Premkov and Vlasov argued that:

The non – aligned movement emerged in a stormy period of post war history as a collective protest against imperialism’s efforts to keep them within the sphere of its political and military influence, held in an economic vice by means of neo – colonialism.^{xxii}

Banerjee, J., Contended that: “The inner contradiction of the Cold War gradually led to polycentrism and détente on the one hand and the rapid development of the non – aligned movement on the other”.^{xxiii}

The movement originated from India, where Jawaharlal Nehru identified anti – imperialism and anti – colonialism as the fundamental of India foreign policy, and assumed the impregnable role of counter forcing the balance of power game during the Cold War. Nehru, made it clear on September 7, 1946 that “We shall make history at our choice and propose, as far as possible to keep away from the power politics or groups, aligned against one another, which have led in the past to world wars and which may again lead to disasters on an even vaster scale”.^{xxiv} Palmer and Perkins quoting Professor M. S. Rajan “Non – alignment stands for abstention from power politics, for peaceful co-existence and for active international co-operation among all states – aligned and non aligned”.^{xxv} Thus, the frenzied pursuit of balance of power

by the architects of Cold War made it indispensable for developing nations to take independence posture so as to preserve their sovereignty. Roy stated that:

The contradictions of the Cold War, doubtless, created the context in which it became imperative for the independent states that came into being to announce their determination of avoiding military alliances dominated by the two contending powers blocs.^{xxvi}

The principles of non – alignment were endorsed by the Bandung Conference of the Afro – Asian countries. The movement was formerly inaugurated at the first summit at Belgrade, Yugoslavia in 1961.

Now we have seen how the Cold War led to the formation of non – aligned movement. Let us look at how it led to its demise. The Cold War did not only condition the emergence of non – aligned movement but also led to its demise. This was manifested in the Cold War influence on India and Cuba. In the part of India she was forced to abandon her non – aligned stance to seek overt support from the western bloc when her security was threatened by the Chinese aggression against Indian borders in October, 1962. Also, following the Bay of Pigs, Cuba found it necessary to close ranks with the Soviet Union, hence the Cuba missile crisis ensued in October, 1962. Russell aptly digested the issue, and posited that:

... It can not be wholly pleasant for communist powers to have India turned entirely to the West in spite of the fact that Russia has been friendly to her. But perhaps the worst blow to the peace of the world is the fact that her defection from strict non – alignment weakens the blocs of neutral powers and their potential weight as arbitrators especially since India was more politically mature than most of the others and has been regarded as a leader in all matters where neutrality might be helpful.^{xxvii}

One of the researcher's preoccupation of this work had been to put into investigative parlance the notion held by some that the fact that the Cold War did not generate the Third World War is an indisputed evidence that the Cold War did not violate international peace. Having gone thus far, in the analysis, the researcher is convinced that, notion is far from being a reality. The Cold War threatened international peace, so much that international war i.e the third world war was on the verge of eruption; for how can one argue that the world is peaceable when it was only the unexplained non – intervention of Russia in the Korea War that saved mankind from the scourges of total war. In China, Cuba, Berlin and Vietnam, the world stood helpless against nuclear war. Therefore, the hypothesis that the concept of international peace as seen by some political analysts as the absence of total war among nations of the world; in the sense that cold war nearly, but did not violate international peace is a null hypothesis and as a result be rejected.

CONCLUSION

This research has tried to examine the conflicts of interest between the new world powers which gradually multiplied, and a climate of fear and suspicion reigned. Each country feared the newfound power of the other. The Soviets felt surrounded and threatened by the West and accused the United States of spearheading 'imperialist expansion'. For their part, the Americans were concerned at Communist expansion and accused Stalin of breaching the Yalta Agreement on the right of free peoples to self-determination. The result was a long period of international tension interspersed with dramatic crises which, from time to time, led to localised armed conflicts without actually causing a full scale war between the United States and the USSR.

Paradoxically, the Cold War which gave birth to the nuclear arms race preserved international peace because the destructiveness of nuclear equipment – to be precise, made global war useless, knowing that its usage will herald the extermination of all lives on earth including the deployer of such dreaded instrument this was shared by Essan Gala:

It is considered likely by many that the system of security which is inherent in the strategic relationship between the superpowers based as it is on a balance of terror, has discouraged them for over three decades from initiating military conflicts directly with each other. It is also assumed that it has prevented regional conflicts in which either side might be involved to escalate to global conflict.^{xxviii}

The game theory helped me much in dispelling the mist that beclouded the Cold War and my understanding of its obvious impacts on international peace. During the course of this research, the analysis showed that the protagonists of the Cold War, behaved in a typical player's manner. There were moves and counter moves, during the Berlin blockade and counter strategy of airlifting and the Soviet adventurism into Cuba and the resultant American threat of nuclear attack on Russia, if the missiles were not removed. There were also bluffs as in Khrushchev's threat of nuclear attack on

the West, if they did not move out of West Berlin within a given date. There was also room for negotiations. I found out, that throughout, the Cold War, the actors resorts to negotiation when their strategies, moves and counter moves were exhausted like in the Berlin blockade, Korea War, Cuban Crisis and even Vietnamese debacle.

I concerned myself with investigative analysis of the Cold War and its bipolarisation of international system. I concluded, from my findings, that Europe, divided into two blocs, was at the heart of the struggle between the two superpowers. The Cold War reached its first climax with the Soviet blockade of Berlin. The explosion of the first Soviet atomic bomb in the summer of 1949 reinforced the USSR in its role as a world power. This situation confirmed the predictions of Winston Churchill, who, in March 1946, had been the first Western statesman to speak of an 'Iron Curtain' that now divided Europe into two.

END NOTE

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