

The Cold War - A Self-Fulfilling Prophecy?

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Introduction/Abstract

The application of U.S. Military intervention in localized conflicts, as juxtaposed against the “Cold War”, can be shown to have been a haphazard approach that had many unforeseen consequences. The Truman Doctrine as revised from the Monroe Doctrine and the Roosevelt Corollary to the same was meant to protect the interests of the United States abroad against the advancement of Communism.¹ However, the missteps early on in World War II Europe, the Levant, Africa, the Korean Peninsula, China, French Indochina and Latin America that led directly to the broadening of many conflicts as well as the image of the “Ugly American” abroad. The oft mishandling of these situations and personalities by the American and allied leadership can be shown to have direct and lasting consequences in almost every situation during the Cold War. Historical accounts along with written policy of the era are often at odds with the seemingly altruistic mission of the United States in these areas.

The United States and her allies are perhaps as culpable for the successful spread of Marxist ideology in the third world as the Marxist themselves through these flubs and gaffs. This paper intends to examine the missteps in policy and intervention by American and allied leaders during the Cold War and detail the relationships between these missteps and the subsequent conflicts as well as the after effects and long term impact. In a sentence – Did the actions of the United States and her allies negatively affect the attitudes and relationships of troubled areas, causing those troubled areas to perpetuate the ongoing Cold War mentality on both sides of the Iron Curtain?

¹ "Truman Doctrine," World at War: Understanding Conflict and Society, accessed September 10, 2012, <http://worldatwar2.abc-clio.com.ezproxy1.apus.edu/>.

An examination of Yalta and the policy documents that led to, and effectively established the Cold War will support the thesis of this paper. Following this line of exploration, this paper will pursue the tragic mishandling of the Korean War. Both the historical documentation and previous authors have explored the missteps in the beginning of this war. Concerning this, it has been suggested by other historians that the Truman administration was guilty of leading the North Koreans and its allies to believe that the U.S. and her allies would not support the South. Historical documentation as well as historical examination suggests that Truman's ennuui toward French-Indochina left the United States guilty of ignoring its own policies laid out in the Truman Doctrine. Historians have both challenged and praised following administrations for their handling of situations across the globe and close to home. This paper intends to tie these theories together, and place the context of the Cold War into that of Yalta through the fall of the Berlin Wall, while demonstrating that while the Cold War was probably unavoidable, it was most assuredly lengthened and depend by the very policies and leadership meant to prevent and ultimately end it.

These supporting questions, along with the thesis of this paper can both challenge the status quo concerning the Cold War and its long, drawn out conclusion, while supporting some opposing viewpoints that suggest that the Cold War was simply a daemon of the allied Military Industrial Complex. However, the basic contention of this paper actually supports neither camp in total. This paper contends that the Cold War, while not avoidable, could have been "fought" much better diplomatically. Finally, the importance of examining the Cold War for the missteps that perpetuated it, while maintaining the context of those historians that told the story both soon after the events and more recently, we can better understand the situation and diplomatic efforts

with the benefit of hindsight and hope to prevent similar “Domino Effect” situations in future diplomatic endeavors.

Yalta and the Truman Doctrine

The relationship that developed between the major participants in the allied cause during World War II was nothing less than a dichotomy of attitudes, objectives and ideology. As the adage goes, “Strange Bedfellows” is as apropos as any other. The United States in its industrial glory was nothing less than the epitome of what can be accomplished by Capitalism. Her aging and bewildered mother country Great Britain was still powerful but in the twilight of empire, also built on a market economy. The Soviet Union was a totalitarian regime that rejected Western values of capital and although governmentally the youngest member of the triumvirate was an ancient empire as well.

The Yalta Conference in 1945 was intended to settle the post war squabble over influence and territory before the war’s end.² However, just as each of the participant nations differed in outlook and attitude, so too did their representative leaders and the conference become the cornerstone for what would become the Cold War.³ Stalin was a notorious political operator bent on Soviet and personal glory.⁴ Churchill was no less the Machiavellian, knew Stalin for what he was and wanted to see post war Europe preserved for Western style democracy.⁵ Roosevelt, ever

² Craig and Logevall, 39-42.

³ S. M. Plokhy, *Yalta - The Price of Peace* (New York: Viking, 2010), xxxiii.

⁴ Ibid, 53-69.

⁵ Craig and Logevall, 39-42.

the optimist, saw Yalta as a chance to appease “Uncle Joe” and shortcut his designs on Europe by offering concessions up front.⁶

These concessions and the wording of the agreement seemed to insure that the bulk of Europe would have the freedom of self-determination and probably end up as a democratic entity of one sort or another. However, Stalin had different plans. Yalta was worth little more than the paper it was written on to Stalin, who annexed or installed puppet governments in almost every nation that the Soviets “liberated” in World War II.⁷ Even as Truman took office, one of his first meetings with a representative of the Soviet Union foreshadowed the ill will between the nations. He scolded Molotov so indelicately, that the Commissar of Foreign Affairs angrily stormed out of the room.⁸ Thus began the Cold War with Eastern Europe under the domination of the Soviet Union and the West under the influence of the United States and Great Britain. However, in spite of years of bluster and militarization, real war would not come back to Europe. The belligerents in this war would fight their battles through surrogates around the globe.

Since early on, the United States has jealously guarded its borders and sphere of influence. President James Monroe’s doctrine of protectionism in the Western Hemisphere set the residence for US intervention, effectively blocking any future colonization by European powers.⁹ The later Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine expanded the role of the US and placed the nation in a situation of direct negotiation with any European power that had a dispute

⁶ Craig and Logevall, 39.

⁷ Ibid, 41.

⁸ Ibid, 44.

⁹ "Monroe Doctrine: Mexican-American War," World at War: Understanding Conflict and Society, accessed August 12, 2012, <http://worldatwar2.abc-clio.com.ezproxy1.apus.edu>.

with a colony in the Americas.¹⁰ Truman expanded the stated influence of the United States in 1947 to limit colonial type incursions worldwide, according to Truman –

"the policy of the United States to support free people who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures."¹¹

However, in practice it seemed to apply only to the expansion of communism – and particularly in areas of major US concern – specifically in Greece and Turkey and later Korea.¹² Nevertheless, a year prior to Truman's protective doctrine, he was asked by Ho Chi Minh to aid in the Vietnamese struggle against the French in Indochina.¹³ It seems that while Truman was a brilliant diplomat and statesman concerning Europe, in Asia he can be found severely lacking. Ho Chi Minh was a communist and Truman supported the French empire in its effort to crush the rebellion of Vietnamese seeking independence.¹⁴ However, his support did not extend to actually helping crush the communist rebels. He effectively shunted the issue for a later president to

¹⁰ "Roosevelt Corollary," *World at War: Understanding Conflict and Society*, accessed August 15, 2012, <http://worldatwar2.abc-clio.com.ezproxy1.apus.edu/>.

¹¹ Robert Beisner, *Dean Acheson: A Life in the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

¹² Craig and Logevall, 110.

¹³ "Telegram From Ho Chi Minh To President Truman," *World at War: Understanding Conflict and Society*, accessed September 2, 2012, <http://worldatwar2.abc-clio.com.ezproxy1.apus.edu/>.

¹⁴ Craig and Logevall, 110.

handle.¹⁵ This was the first of many post-Yalta missteps that would lead to one hot war after another in what was the perhaps inappropriately named the “Cold War.”

The official policy of the United States was, up until Korea, relatively soft toward the Soviet Union exactly because of Yalta. However, the events between World War II and the next war would prove to President Truman that a harder line was needed. The acquisition of the atomic bomb by the Russians combined with the fall of Nationalist China to Mao’s communists shocked the American administration and made them realize that they were no longer the only big dog on the block. National Security Council document number 68 (NSC 68), entitled: U.S. Objectives and Programs for National Security was a realistic portrayal of the world situation and spelled out a general policy for dealing with the threat of global communism.¹⁶ That plan was to meet it head on where possible with every means available.

Korean Debacle

Truman’s policies, while on the surface strongly anti-communist and protective, and demonstrated as such in protecting Greece and Turkey, were apparently not meant to apply as globally as he implied. Even as the North Koreans, Chinese and Russians looked to Washington for a sign that the U.S. would back South Korea in the event of war – the actions of Truman’s administration led the Communist forces to believe that the South Koreans were on their own.¹⁷ Truman’s inaction even after his own strongly worded doctrine was put into effect, led to continued Communist aggression in Asia, costing untold lives and dollars on both sides of the

¹⁵ Craig and Logevall, 110.

¹⁶ Ibid, 39-42.

¹⁷ "Dean Acheson: National Press Club Speech," World at War: Understanding Conflict and Society, accessed August 15, 2012, <http://worldatwar2.abc-clio.com.ezproxy1.apus.edu/>.

fight, when clear diplomatic pressure and strong support of the South Koreans might have prevented a hot war. Although militarily, the allied forces under the banner of the U.N. took control of the situation and got as far as the Chinese border before being pushed back, the situation was dire.

General MacArthur, fought to a stalemate by the combined efforts of the communist forces, pled with Truman to allow him to push the North Koreans and Chinese deep into China, using atomic weapons if necessary. MacArthur saw this as the only viable option, to both hammer the Chinese, with the goal of eliminating their communist government, and to secure a unified democratic Korea under the influence of the United States. MacArthur jumped his chain of command and appealed to Congress. The implications in his letter to Representative Martin was that Truman was simply appeasing the communists and had no heart to win the war.¹⁸

Truman and the rest of the world balked at the suggestion. The British Prime Minister Attlee and Truman conferred and issued a statement making clear that the U.S. would not use atomic weapons in the Korean War and effectively gave up on the idea of a united Korean peninsula.¹⁹

Eisenhower was elected on a platform of ending the war.²⁰ However, the communist forces were less than eager to negotiate. The Chinese and Koreans were only convinced to bargain for peace once President Eisenhower reversed Truman's promise to not use atomic weapons and made it clear that he would use them to force a truce. Eisenhower's steadfast

¹⁸ "Douglas MacArthur: Letter To Joseph Martin," World at War: Understanding Conflict and Society, accessed August 20, 2012, <http://worldatwar2.abc-clio.com.ezproxy1.apus.edu/>.

¹⁹ "Truman-Attlee Joint Communiqué," World at War: Understanding Conflict and Society, accessed August 20, 2012, <http://worldatwar2.abc-clio.com.ezproxy1.apus.edu/>.

²⁰ Craig and Logevall, 140.

courage in the face of Asian communists proved the value of NSC 68 and affected the end, such as it was, to a very bloody conflict.²¹ However, neither Truman nor Eisenhower or their successors found a consistent method of enforcing the Truman Doctrine globally and often made the situation worse through its own machinations.

After the cease-fire took effect, there was a glimmer of hope for a negotiated peace between the superpowers when Stalin slipped loose the mortal coil. However, Eisenhower had grown hostile toward the Soviets after the treatment that personal friends like General Zhukov received at the end of World War II. Stalin and the politburo had purged the most popular of figures from the great patriotic war to prevent a military coup. Thus, although Churchill noticed the conciliatory overtones from the Soviets and encouraged Eisenhower to sue for peace – he failed to take advantage of the situation – again extending the Cold War into the future.²²

Vietnam

Truman's botched handling of French Indochina escalated over the years into what would be called the Vietnam War. However, the war enveloped nearly all of Southeast Asia and securing the particular state of Vietnam as a Western ally was seen as the cornerstone to preventing the spread of communism throughout the region. The tepid response to Ho Chi Minh from Truman left a vacuum that would be filled by communists from the north. Both Soviet and Chinese communists acted to arm and supply the Vietnamese in their fight against the French. The Truman Administration practiced a *laissez faire* foreign policy in the region that was a

²¹ Craig and Logevall, 141.

²² Ibid, 142-145.

double-edged sword. He neither fully supported his ally in the French nor did he support the anti-colonial Vietnamese, according to his own stated doctrine and in support of NSC-68 objectives.²³

More support of the French mission in Indo-China would come with the Eisenhower administration and saw huge increases in funding from the United States. However, even as Dien Bien Phu was besieged and the French threatened to abandon the region if it were lost, all while begging for U.S. military support; Eisenhower failed to act in a timely manner. His inaction doomed the French garrison and French involvement. Nevertheless, Eisenhower got a reprieve as the Vietminh agreed to a cease-fire, temporary partition and future elections in spite of their obvious tactical advantages.²⁴

The temporary leader of the South, Diem seized power and for a time led a relatively prosperous and well-organized South Vietnam. Regardless of the corruption and totalitarian nature of Diem, both Eisenhower and his successor Kennedy saw Diem as an ally to the West that must be supported if for no other reason than to maintain the credibility of the United States in the region and prevent Eisenhower's "dominos" from falling one after another. Diem's actions and U.S. support of the despot led to a growing insurgency in the south funded and fueled by the communists in the north.

The American response was to continue to support the corrupt southern regime and increase its war footing in the region. In a long drawn out conflict, the U.S. made neither a serious and sustained attempt to win the war conventionally, nor a concerted and sustained effort at a reasonable counter-insurgency fight. Over the course of a decade the war raged and brought

²³ Craig and Logevall, 149.

²⁴ Ibid, 150.

the United States little beyond a shameful withdrawal after wasting thousands of young lives and billions of dollars and the reputations of two more presidents in the guise of Johnson and Nixon. The United State's seemingly altruistic anti-communist campaign during the Cold War proved to be a series of political and military disasters – mainly because American leadership was so myopic as to not realize their own mistakes, and so arrogant as to not be willing to fix them when they did.

The Rio Pact

The fear of communist aggression in the Western Hemisphere was, unlike that in Asia, a clear and present concern for the Truman Administration. In 1947, the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (the Rio Pact) was signed in Rio de Janeiro. This mutual defense treaty was meant to prevent the Soviet Union from gaining a foothold in the Americas and gain advantage in the Back Yard of the United States.²⁵ Unfortunately, although the Rio Pact was invoked several times over the course of the large Cold War, the United States seemed to come down on the wrong side of the fight in many critical situations. Mirroring the modern “Arab Spring”, the United States saw itself in some instances as supporting the spread of democracy at the cost of a nominal ally in the form of a dictator.

The Batista regime in Cuba suffered from an embargo of arms and aid in spite of the Rio Pact as rebels chipped away at his military.²⁶ While Castro denied being a communist in early 1959, it was clear by 1961 that both he and his regime were firmly in the camp of the Soviet

²⁵ "Rio Pact," World at War: Understanding Conflict and Society, accessed August 15, 2012, <http://worldatwar2.abc-clio.com.ezproxy1.apus.edu/>.

²⁶ Alex Von Tunzelmann, *Red Heat - Conspiracy, Murder and the Cold War in the Caribbean* (New York: Henry Holt And Company, 2011), 83-168.

Union. Cuba has been a thorn in the side of the United States ever since.²⁷ Again, missteps by the American leadership failed to bring down the Castro Regime when it had the chance. The Bay of Pigs fiasco in which the U.S. promised to back up anti-communist rebels against Castro made the United States appear weak to both the communists in Cuba and their Soviet benefactors.²⁸

Soon enough the Reds would begin installing short-range nuclear missiles in Cuba that were a direct threat to the safety of the United States.²⁹ Brought to the brink of a nuclear holocaust, the Kennedy Administration played hardball with the Soviets but finally conceded the removal of similar missiles of American origin from Turkey.³⁰ These major events led to Cuba maintaining its communist form of government and saw it involved in several military actions against the West throughout the Cold War - and beyond as it remain a communist country today.

The spread of communism did not stop with Cuba. It germinated throughout Central America and was in large part the result of U.S. actions supporting or tacitly supporting totalitarian regimes and even helping to crush movements toward liberty. As contrary to the “American Way” as it sounds, the Cold War often saw the United States in support of brutal dictatorships, choosing that evil over communism. From Hispaniola to Nicaragua, poor policy decisions by successive presidents made the U.S. appear to pull the strings of a number of puppet dictators. This was sadly in spite of the personal feelings, motivations and actions of U.S. Presidents.

²⁷ Tunzelmann, 168-187.

²⁸ Jim Rasenberger, *The Brilliant Disaster - JFK, Castro and America's Doomed Invasion of Cuba's Bay of Pigs* (New York: Scribner, 2011), xi-xvii.

²⁹ Tunzelmann, 274-295.

³⁰ Ibid, 275-280.

In Haiti, the repressive and murderous François Duvalier held on to power with his much feared Tonton Macoutes militia murdering and ethnically cleansing dissidents, political opponents and “mulatto elites” wholesale. His expert machinations with the U.S., Soviet Union and Cuba led to Duvalier and his family amassing a fortune in funds from the flow of U.S. Aid and he even finagled the United States into providing training for his Tonton Macoutes by the Marines. Kennedy did cut off funding to Haiti during his administration, but Johnson reinstated the funding after the demise of JFK.³¹

Across the border in the Dominican Republic, the democratically elected Bosch was ousted by a junta in 1965. Johnson wanting to prevent “another Cuba” sent in forces to prevent a communist takeover. While the United States campaigned on its nominally altruistic mission, the “Constitutionalists” that supported both democracy and Bosch were forcefully beaten back from the primary role on the political stage. In the end, the Johnson administration supported Balaguer – another oppressive regime that lasted for over 20 years.³²

Around the perimeter of the Gulf of Mexico, similar and even more confusing situations presented themselves. Notably, in Nicaragua, the long-standing ruler Somoza found himself and Nicaragua reeling after a massive earthquake. Human rights abuses led to U.S. President Carter suspending all U.S. Aid in the mid 1970s. A small band of communist revolutionaries that had started fighting Somoza’s government in 1963 took advantage of the situation. The Sandinistas

³¹ Tunzelmann, 275-316.

³² Ibid, 338-355.

eventually took over Nicaragua as a whole with both Cuban and Soviet support, and yet another American Nation fell into the sway of communists.³³

In all four of these situations, the misreading of the situation led to either a dictatorship or a communist regime or both taking over and thwarting American influence in the region. Eisenhower and Kennedy's failures in Cuba to properly read Castro and his cronies as well as failing to support the invasion at the Bay of Pigs were bad for the U.S. on a local level, but they led to Soviet support of Cuba which lengthen the Cold War and led to the loss of a major bargaining chip in the nuclear détente. Similar mistakes in supporting or effectively installing dictators in both sides of Hispaniola and Nicaragua had the effect of spreading anti-American feelings and strengthening Soviet influence throughout Latin America.

The Middle East

At the close of World War II, the British still nominally controlled much of the Levant via mandate and held interest in the neighboring territories. Their interest in Iran was like the other major players at the end of the war – oil. Supporting an anticommunist regime in Iran, Churchill negotiated a withdrawal of Soviet forces from Persia for the promise of an equal share of oil production. The Soviets complied – but the allies and Iran soon forgot to hold up their end of the deal.³⁴ This sort of duplicitous act on the part of the British was just the beginning of issues that would manifest themselves into the Middle-Eastern theater of the Cold War.³⁵

³³ Tim Merrill, ed., *Nicaragua: A Country Study* (Washington: Library Of Congress, 1993).

³⁴ Craig and Logevall, 74.

³⁵ Philip White, *Our Supreme Task - How Winston Churchill's Iron Curtain Speech Defined the Cold War Alliance* (New York: Public Affairs, 2012), 137-139.

The hand dealt to the United States by the failing British Mandate in the Levant at the end of World War II could not have been more convoluted and dangerous. While both the United States and the Soviet Union immediately recognized Israel upon its declaration of independence, the Suez crisis of 1956 was a direct function of the Cold War.³⁶ Eisenhower's impatience with the Egyptian government's parlay with the Soviets led to the nationalization of the Suez Canal zone. The French, British and Israel then pounced on the Canal Zone in a bid to wrest it from the Egyptians. Both the Soviets and the Americans rebuked the aggressors and put an end to the conflict, stopping the takeover.³⁷ Had Ike been a bit more patient and courted the Egyptians instead of posturing and reacting so negatively, the conflict could have been avoided. Nonetheless, in the end, Egypt became a firm ally of the Soviets, the British, French and Israelis were publically shamed and the episode saw the effective end of the empire for Britain.

Not only had Eisenhower alienated much of the Arab world, with other nations like Syria and Iraq falling into league with the Soviets, his marked lack of support for the fledgling Jewish state perpetuated the Arab-Israeli conflict through the entirety of the 1950s and into the 60s.³⁸ This precedence gave the Arab states an opening to destroy the Jews, in 1967 although they failed miserably, the war was the catalyst to further polarize the region along Cold War lines

³⁶ Keith Kyle, *Suez - Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 1-3.

³⁷ Ian Bickerton and Carla Klausner, *A History of the Arab Israeli Conflict* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1995), 115-128.

³⁸ Martin Van Creveld, *The Land of Blood and Honey - The Rise of Modern Israel* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2010), 124-128.

with the Israelis firmly on the side of the United States and many of the Arabs suckling the Soviet teat.³⁹

Central Europe and Mutually Assured Destruction

In as much as Eisenhower annoyed his allies in quelling the Suez Crisis, he was virtually ineffective in preventing the subjugation of the free people of Hungary that rebelled against communist rule. Similarly, as much as that interjection lengthened the Cold War in the Middle East, so too did his inaction with Hungary. The brutal smiting of the rebels in Hungary with little more than rhetoric from the West at large and the United States specifically showed the Soviets that within their close sphere of influence, the United States would not risk nuclear war for the sake of freedom.⁴⁰

This realization on the part of the United States led to Eisenhower demanding an alternative to nuclear war, and he found it. In a counter intuitive move, the United States ramped up the production of nuclear weapons to support a “nuclear triad” of the Army, Navy and Air Force that had the capacity to completely annihilate the Soviets and their allies several times over, even in the event of a crippling first strike against the West. This policy was designed to overtly advertise to the Soviets that any nuclear strike against the United States or her forces would be met with complete nuclear war. Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) would keep the U.S. and U.S.S.R. out of a direct conflict for the remainder of the Cold War.⁴¹ While this can be

³⁹ Bickerton and Klauser, 133-149.

⁴⁰ Craig and Logevall, 166-168.

⁴¹ Ibid, 169-170.

seen as a good thing overall, there is little doubt that the rhetoric, the build up and the negotiations to end the Cold War were lengthened by the application of this theory.

Conclusion

The coming of age of the Soviet Union and its Asian sister state, the People's Republic of China in aftermath of World War II set the stage for the ideologically opposed Western nations, led by the United States to vie against each other for domination on the global stage. A series of events, taken in context can be shown to have led to the Cold War as we knew it, rather than just tense competition. While one person, event or group cannot have the accusing finger pointed at it, there is little doubt that the United States and her allies are as much to blame for creating situations favorable to the germination of communist sympathies, as are the machinations of the Soviets or Chinese. It is true that both nations were actively pursuing communist domination is a global "revolution." However, much of the heavy lifting can be attributed to the mishandling of policy and setting the stage early on by both Roosevelt and Truman. Eisenhower, Kennedy and others often left their nominal allies feeling betrayed, the very people that they were trying to keep or make "free" feel subjugated and opening doors wide for the Red factions to spread their influence and denounce the West at large and the United States in particular. One can hardly ignore or easily dismiss the clear indications that the United States and her allies extended and expanded the cold war through their own ham-fisted handling of delicate and confusing confrontations involving the Soviets, Chinese and their allies.

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