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Causes & Prevention of War

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THE COLD WAR AND KOREA

I. HOW THE COLD WAR ERUPTED: EVENTS

- A. Poland and Eastern Europe:
 - 1. Warsaw uprising, 1944. Stalin induces the Polish non-communists into a futile rebellion against Hitler, then watches inertly while Hitler slaughters them. Americans wonder what else Stalin intends.
 - 2. Stalin makes a vague promise at Yalta (Feb. 1945) to allow democracy in Poland; then he imposes communism instead.
 - B. Iran 1946: Stalin won't leave northern Iran until he is pressured.
 - C. Turkey 1946: Stalin says he wants some Turkish territory; instead Truman sends the Missouri to the Mediterranean, a threatening show of force.
 - D. Greece 1947: the West thought Stalin was instigating the Communist revolution in Greece. (He wasn't. Yugoslavia's communist Tito government was aiding the Greek communists, but not Stalin.)
 - E. Berlin Crisis of 1948-1949--an outgrowth of the struggle for Germany.
 - F. Military aspects:
 - 1. The illusion of Soviet military superiority. American intelligence and the Western press depicted a vast Soviet conventional superiority in Europe and downplayed the implications of the American atomic monopoly. Hence a Soviet threat that was largely political--the Soviets had some capacity to disrupt or subvert Western Europe--was also perceived as military.
 - 2. The Soviet atomic bomb explodes, September 1949. Now the West is really scared. What if Stalin isn't deterrable?
- Western responses: the Marshall Plan (1947); the Berlin airlift (1948-49); the formation of NATO (1949); and a vast American military buildup (1950-53). This triggered a large Soviet counter-buildup.

II. WHAT CAUSED THE COLD WAR? WHO CAUSED THE COLD WAR? SIX EXPLANATIONS

- A. Communist totalitarian expansionism? "The totalitarian Soviets were the aggressor, the democratic West the defender. Soviet aggression sprang from the aggressiveness of Communist political systems. Communist governments are aggressive either because they are (a) inherently messianic--Communist ideology preaches the necessity for global conquest; and/or because they are (b) frail, hence aggressive for Orwellian reasons--they needed enemies to legitimate their totalitarian rule."
 - Variant #1: Soviet expansion into Eastern Europe, driven by these motives, threatened West European and American security, causing the Cold War.
 - Variant #2: Soviet expansion into Eastern Europe aroused Western opposition less for security reasons than for cultural reasons. The Soviets had seized the homelands of powerful American ethnic groups, especially the Poles; they demanded American action.
 - Variant #3: Western softness early in the Cold War made things worse--the West led the Soviets forward by appeasement. In this view the problem wasn't Western aggression, but insufficient Western toughness. What if the U.S. had given Stalin an ultimatum in 1946: "Get out of Eastern Europe or we'll throw you out! By atomic war if necessary!"? He would have folded! (For this view see Adam Ulam, The Rivals.)
- B. Communist totalitarian cruelty and barbarism? "The West opposed the USSR less because the USSR was aggressive than because it was tyrannical--i.e. the Cold War was a Western human rights crusade." But if true, why didn't the Cold War blossom fully in 1919?
- C. Capitalist expansionism? "The U.S.-led capitalist west was the aggressor, the socialist Soviet Union was the defender. The U.S. feared a new depression. It hoped to avoid such a depression by finding market outlets for surplus goods. It sought to control Eastern Europe to compel it to be such a market. U.S. imperialism in Eastern Europe collided with a

legitimate Soviet desire to maintain a neutral buffer to its west." This is the now-largely-discredited left-revisionist view. See e.g., the writings of Gabriel Kolko and Lloyd Gardner.

- D. Revolutionary vs. Oligarchic states? "Both sides were aggressors, for reasons Stephen Walt describes; revolutionary states are messianic and frightened; their neighbors are defensively aggressive, and polluted by emigres." (But if true why didn't the Cold War blossom fully in 1919?)
- E. The Unshaped Postwar European Order/Collapse of German Empire? "The lack of a clear Soviet-American wartime agreement on the postwar partition of the German empire caused a collision of the two major allied powers in a zone of uncertainty. Had each side's sphere of influence been more clearly delineated earlier, the Cold War might have been milder."
- F. International System: Bipolarity and the Security Dilemma? "The world's two strongest states never get along well, as each is the main threat to the other. They will always compete for security. The Cold War was an inevitable result of the rise of the U.S. and USSR to the pinnacle of world power."

Variant #1 (realism variant): The two superpowers were in fact insecure, and contested for resources of real value: buffer room in Eastern Europe.

Variant #2 (realism + misperception variant): The superpowers were secure, due to the nuclear revolution, their vast size, and their distance from each other. But didn't know it; and they contended for assets--Eastern Europe--of no real value. Controlling Eastern Europe made USSR less, not more, secure, by scaring the rest of the world; and the Soviets could secure themselves with nuclear weapons alone.

Variant #3 (spiral model variant): The two superpowers felt insecure, and contended for security, but both thought the other pursued unprovoked aggression for non-security reasons, and overreacted accordingly.

Question: what does this systemic explanation predict for the future of U.S.-China relations?

III. THE KOREAN WAR, 1950: WHAT HAPPENED

- A. The partition of Korea, 1945. This event was key. Had Korea instead been united and neutralized, as was done with Austria, this would have avoided the Korean war.
- B. The U.S. pulls all U.S. troops out of Korea, 1949. A U.S. blunder.
- C. Communist victory in China triggers a bitter "who lost China?" debate in the USA.
- D. Dean Acheson gives a speech at the United Press Club in January 1950 delineating the "American defense perimeter in Asia." He omitted South Korea! Another U.S. blunder.
- E. North Korea attacks South Korea, June 25, 1950. Why? Kim Il Sung and Stalin expect the U.S. will not intervene, or that the North can crush the South before the U.S. can intervene effectively. A huge miscalculation.
- F. Truman decides to intervene. Reasons:
 - 1. To preserve American credibility. But was it engaged in Korea?
 - 2. Domestic politics--1950 was a bad year to lose another Asian country to Communism.
- G. The U.S. lands at Inchon, Sept. 15, 1950, and shortly routs the North Korean army from South Korea. Truman then decides to cross 38th parallel and conquer North Korea in late September. Part of the U.S. reasoning: "We must punish the aggressors to deter them from other aggression elsewhere." An American mega-blunder.
- H. Oct. 3, 1950: China warns the Truman administration: "Don't cross 38th parallel or it's war with us!" Truman and Acheson don't listen; UN troops cross the 38th parallel Oct. 7. Why?
 - 1. The warning came via an Indian diplomat not trusted by Truman.
 - 2. China didn't explain the reasoning behind its warning or include Congressional Republicans among those who received it.
 - 3. The Administration had already decided to cross the parallel in late September; backtracking is painful.
 - 4. Truman feared attacks from Republican hawks if he stayed South.

5. American contempt for Chinese military capability. One U.S. commander told his troops they faced "a bunch of Chinese laundrymen" before China's attack.
 - I. U.S. forces encounter small Chinese forces in Korea, 26 Oct. 1950. MacArthur thinks: "If this is all they can do, they'll be a pushover," and orders an advance to the Yalu. Another mega-blunder.
 - J. A massive Chinese surprise attack on U.S. forces in North Korea, Nov. 26, 1950, routs the U.S. army and drives it from North Korea. The worst ground defeat in U.S. military history!
 - K. A long and bloody war ensues, Dec. 1950-summer 1953, ending in a tie. China tries and fails to drive the U.S. from Korea. Note: this war included a long-hidden Soviet-American air war! See the course notes on this air war.
- IV. KOREAN WAR, U.S.-CHINA WAR: WHAT CAUSED THEM?
- A. Background misperceptions:
 1. American self-sugar-coating: "We've always been nice to China--so China has nothing to fear from us!"
 2. Chinese myths about U.S.: "America helped Japanese aggressors in the 1930s! America is plotting to rebuild and unleash Japan in Asia again!" Marxist-Leninist dogma shapes Chinese thought.
 - B. Non-strategy: By the USA? No--the problem was that Acheson did state US strategy, but misstated it. A misstated strategy is worse than none. By China? Yes. China told the US in late September that it wouldn't intervene, then changed its mind, but too late.
 - C. Absence of Sino-American diplomatic relations. A mega-blunder by both sides.
 - D. McCarthyism in the U.S.? A powerful force--what caused it?
 - E. First-strike advantage. This is the likely reason why China never issued an ultimatum and sought to convince the U.S. of China's weakness.
 - F. U.S. window after Inchon ----> too-hasty diplomacy, Sept. 15-Oct. 7.
 - G. False optimism--by everyone.
 - H. Security Dilemma: security was the basic goal pursued by both the U.S. and China.
 - I. War ----> War
 1. U.S. aims widen due to the war itself:
 - a. "We must conquer the North to punish the aggressor."
 - b. "We should hold POWs to scare future communist aggressors into thinking we'll do it again."
 2. Chinese aims also widen. Mao inferred malign U.S. intent from the interposition of the U.S. fleet off Taiwan, and the U.S. invasion of North Korea; he responded by expanding China's aims to include expelling the U.S. from South Korea.