

To what extent were the policies of the United States responsible for the outbreak and development of the Cold War between 1945 and 1949?

Although the dominant military confrontations of the 20th century were centered on the wars that ravaged through Europe, the larger fear resided in the Cold War, a half century long event that kept the world constantly fearing extinction. The origins for such a “war” are deeply rooted in the non-military policies of both the United States and the USSR, although we will examine this issue primarily from the viewpoint of American policies. Using a post-modern approach to the issue, this paper argues that the United States was only somewhat responsible for sparking the Cold War through its aggressive collective security approach in Europe, but sought to soothe tensions through the end of World War II in terms of victory treaties and direct dealings with the Soviet Union. Understanding this event’s origins would assist in understand the current geopolitical climate, explaining events such as the current standoff of Russia in the Crimea.

The United States engaged in an aggressive collective security approach in Europe that directly led to the escalation of tensions, causing the Cold War. Following the Second World War, the United States adopted policies of containment that rejected former ideas of isolation in order to maintain global peace. Because World War II was seen as a “good war”, policy makers were encouraged to keep up collective security mandates in Europe with little regard to the reaction of neighboring countries, especially the Soviet Union. This paper adopts a postmodern reading to this issue, arguing that while the United States did not directly intend for the Cold War to occur, the containment policies in Europe were unjustified and led to an unnecessary escalation of tensions. The United States were just far too aggressive in providing economic, political, and military aid to European countries, which was a direct threat to the security of the

Soviet Union. Therefore, the Soviet Union was justified in responding, which directly led to the beginning of the Cold War.

The policies of economic aid in Europe, collectively referred to as the Marshall Plan, were intentionally created to divide East and West Europe into warring states, which was an aggressive move against communist expansion and led to increased tensions that caused the Cold War. This was the primary aggressive action that the United States took against Soviet Communism in Eastern Europe. Truman's intention in implementing the plan was to draw Western countries away from the power that the Soviet Union had, directly undermining Soviet powers in the region. By having "strings attached" to the financial aid packages that they provided to Europe, the United States maneuvered to have a larger control over the domestic and foreign policies of Western European countries. Many of these strings directly dealt with implanting collective security in Western Europe, as seen with the subsequent Mutual Security Programme, an extension of the Marshall Plan that dealt directly with installing security programs in Western European states. By conducting such a policy, the United States provoked the Soviet Union to respond, as seen in the tightening of control in the Soviet satellite. Suddenly, previously free countries were placed underneath a harsher rule by the USSR. Therefore, those economic policies led to a poisoned environment, precipitating the formation of the Cold War.

United States policies towards Germany after World War II were intentionally antagonistic against Russian economic and territorial development in the region, which was an unjustified attack on Russian claims. The Potsdam Conference led to the idea of partitioning Germany into four zones to be split between the United States, France, the United Kingdom and the USSR. This was done to discourage the rise of Germany as a superpower, as many were still worried about the nation's power. However, in 1947, the Western powers were more fearful of

the spread of global communism than they were of Germany's superior industrial skills. Therefore, the United States proposed a plan to merge the US, UK and France regions in order to manufacture more goods to fight communism. This plan was intentionally aggressive, as the primary purpose of this policy was to create supplies that could be used against the USSR. In addition, it was done without negotiation from the Soviet side, leading to Stalin feeling like he was given the cold shoulder. Therefore, Stalin was provoked into engaging in the Berlin Blockade, which was a reasonable reaction to the more unjustified unification of Western Germany. Stalin was also forced to reconsider security along the Eastern Germany border, as the unification of the Western zones was depicted as a direct threat against the buffer zone that he had previously set up. By forcing Stalin into this uncomfortable position, the United States was setting up the stage for the outbreak of the Cold War.

The engagement of the United States as an aggressive military backer of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization led to the competing organization under the Warsaw Pact, which was a firm indication of the beginning of the Cold War. In 1949, the world was already experiencing the first symptoms of the Cold War, as Western European countries began to ask for help. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization therefore committed United States military support for collective security in Europe. It permanently linked the United States and Europe's security structures. Stalin was therefore pushed towards responding, as they did with the Warsaw Pact of Soviet satellites. The creation of these two new alliance systems symbolized a clear split between the ideologies of democracy and communism, freezing Europe into a permanent winter of high tensions. By moving towards collective security in Europe, the United States may have only been pursuing their own security interests, but they were reckless in implementing their

strategy. They did so without any consultation of Russia, and led to chilly relationships between the countries and ultimately the onset of the Cold War.

The United States used policies that ended World War II to antagonize communism throughout the world, which led to retaliation the outbreak of the Cold War, but these policies had a lesser effect than the collective security as stated above. Many historians argue that the United States intentionally used the ending of the Second World War to begin the Cold War, but upon analysis of the conferences and intentions behind actions, this claim is not entirely valid. Instead, American policy decisions such as the opening of the second front, atomic policies, and victory treaties had a lesser role on Cold War tensions than did the collective security policies as discussed above.

The United States' policy of opening the second front later in order to preserve American lives had a slightly depressing effect on US-Soviet relations, but it was not a major contributor to the Cold War. Stalin requested an early US supported second front in order to relieve pressure placed on the Russians by Operation Barbossa by the Germans. Although he became frustrated when the Americans seemingly intentionally delayed the strike, the American side of the issue is reasonable. The US army was insufficiently prepared for an early attack and would have potentially been defeated in World War II if they had invaded earlier. There was no intent of depressing Russian powers, as during that time, the focus was on defeating Hitler, not on defeating their own allies, the Russians. Although Stalin expressed his negative perspective on the issue, he was reasonable and understood the American intentions behind the activity. Therefore, this policy by the United States had a very little effect at actually raising tensions to a level that could be considered cold war-like.

United States atomic policies had a small effect on escalating tensions in the outbreak of the Cold War because of the limited nuclear arsenal in the early days of the Cold War. Although the decision behind dropping the bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki are still fraught in ethical issues, atomic warfare after the immediate end of the Second World War was very minimal. In the pre-1949 years, the Soviet Union had not yet developed their own atomic bomb, but the United States was not at a level to mass produce nuclear weapons. Therefore, most diplomatic negotiations, including those at Moscow in December of 1945, placed atomic secrets on the backburner as compared to more pressing issues such as troop withdrawal from China. There was no major threat in atomic warfare at the time, so the decision for the US to continue to research nuclear warfare was not directly influential to the outbreak of the Cold War.

The United States did not have a large role in the victory treaties that gave Russia land as those treaties were primarily governed due to the presence of the Red Army in Eastern Europe lands, and therefore did not have a role in escalating the Cold War. During the conclusion of World War II, the United States was not immediately aggressive towards Russian land grabs in Europe. This is partially influenced by the lingering power of isolationism in America, as well as the status of the Red Army as the liberators of Eastern Europe. America wisely chose to not become involved in forcing complete democracy in Eastern Europe, choosing to only have the USSR vaguely promise ideas regarding free elections. Therefore, American policies after the conclusion of the Second World War actually helped deescalate tensions between the West and the East, delaying the onset of the Cold War for several years.

The United States had minimal direct Russian policies in the aftermath of World War II, electing to not directly antagonize Russian domestic or foreign policies, which allowed for a more cordial relationship between Washington and Moscow. Although the United States did

support the White Army, there were not any direct military confrontations during the post-World War II period. Both Stalin and Truman elected to argue over smaller European states rather than directly facing each other and risking a truly global war that nobody desired. At conferences at Yalta, Potsdam, Tehran, and Moscow, leaders and diplomats from the United States and the USSR were able to discuss their differences and resolve specific strategic issues. Early meetings and policies were focused on those hot spots, not confrontations or economic sanctions. Therefore, it can be concluded that early meetings were more able to resolve differences and prevent immediate fighting rather than bringing about the onset of the Cold War.

In conclusion, the United States had policies that were not intentionally provocative of the Cold War, but given the tense geopolitical climate, led to misinterpretation that spiraled into disaster. Although aggressive collective security policies did provoke the USSR into responding, most of the post-World War II discussions allowed for cordial discussions to be made and tensions to be reduced.