

The Cold War: Over, Renewed, or Never Ended?

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Abstract

The Cold War has been studied repeatedly since the war supposedly ended in 1991. However recent events are starting to cause some concern and make many question whether or not the Cold War actually ended, if it took a different shape or perhaps has just been on pause. I argue that the Cold War has been a conflict that has been going on since 1947 and although the conflict has looked differently in recent decades the conflict was never properly put to an end. The research analyzes US decision making with respect to Russian and Asian relations over the last 24 years. I draw comparisons between the actions of the USSR and current Russian actions to help complete the argument. I focus upon several primary and secondary sources including scholarly articles, published letters, current news stories and interviews. It seems the promises of European cooperation and harmony that were so encouraging in 1991 have been tested by the cold realities of imperial interests and lack of communication between the US and its Russian counterpart.

The Cold War is over: the End of the Domino Theory

The research on this topic is vast although the issue is still ongoing. There is a lot of debate on this topic; some historians and analysts argue that it is impossible for the Cold War to still be an ongoing event due to several main issues including the argument that the New Cold War will not encompass the entire global system. Robert Legvold, a professor at Columbia University and writer for Foreign Affairs. In his Journal article, *Managing the New Cold War*, suggests that the New Cold War will not encompass the entire global system simply because the world is not as bipolar as it once was and the fact that they have just simply learned from the past. (Legvold, 2014) The next major issue that the New Cold War won't have that the original Cold War had is what they call the domino effect. This is the idea that once one country becomes communist those ideals will spread like falling dominos. The New Cold war does not share the issue of communism spreading like in the past; these analysts argue that without communism, the New Cold War can no longer be the same conflict. (Legvold, 2014) Another major argument that historians and analysts use to suggest that we are no longer in the Cold War era is the major change in the way civil wars were fought in the world once the Cold War ended in 1989. There was a major shift towards peace throughout most of the world following the Cold War, this was due to the major decline in the amount of funding that rebel forces were receiving following the fall of the Soviet Union, therefore they were no longer able to fund their

wars which increased peace throughout the world and induced this major shift from proxy wars funded by the east and west to more state funded wars. These arguments are all very valid. However, I argue that wars can evolve and mutate over time. Just because certain issues no longer exist doesn't necessarily mean that the conflict ended all together. It is very possible that Cold War values are still very much alive even though several issues may have concluded over twenty years ago.

The End of U.S.-USSR Proxy Wars

Since 1990 historians have been trying to distinguish the difference between the "New and Old Wars." (Melander, Oberg, & Hall, 2009) The universal term for the conflicts that are currently occurring between the U.S. and Russia is the "New Cold War" this term is confusing, and is constantly a topic of debate. (Melander, Oberg, & Hall, 2009) Does the New Cold War mean that this conflict is completely independent of the "Old Cold War," or is it just a way to simply state that this is a continuation of the Old Cold War? This is one of the main questions that I will attempt to answer. There is no doubt that after the fall of the Soviet Union and the destruction of the Berlin wall that there was a huge wave of peaceful negotiations that took place throughout the world with the decrease in civil wars worldwide. However, with the increased peace in international relations the world saw an enormous increase in civil conflicts in Africa, the Balkans, and the Caucasus. Kalyvas and Balcells of the American Political Science Review, suggest that the reason why these civil conflicts erupted was due to the fact that the worlds two major superpowers had withdrawn and it created a vacuum that allowed for a new

type of civil war. (Balcells & Kalyvas, 2010) During the Cold War both the United States and Russia infused a huge amount of military and economic assistance into allied and rebel states. These were the type of actions that lead to a change in the way civil wars were fought. These historians and analysts suggest that since the end of the Cold War we have seen a dramatic decline in battle severity and the amount of deaths during battle. In Old Wars (wars during and prior to the Cold War) the casualty rate was far higher than in New Wars (Wars after the Cold War) (Melander, Oberg, & Hall, 2009) (Balcells & Kalyvas, 2010) The real question we have to ask is how long this time of relative peace will last? Is the New Cold War an ending to this relative peace we have seen since 1989? John Feffer, Director of Foreign Policy in Focus, suggests that it is not impossible to think that the Cold War never ended; He uses the Hundred Years War as an example of a war that went through a similar time of relative peace before renewing the conflict altogether. Was it just a matter of time before the conflict re-emerged and put the two Superpowers face to face again? Perhaps this time of relative international peace is now over.

The New Cold War: Not a Global Conflict

Analysts continue to argue that it would be difficult to compare the Cold War and the New Cold War because there just seems to be too many differences. Legvold argues that the New Cold War will not encompass the entire global system; therefore this has to be a completely different conflict all together. (Legvold, 2014) He suggests that China and other major world powers will not be drawn into this conflict like they were in the past and without

an Asian influence these issues cannot be considered a part of the Cold War. However, Legvold also contradicts himself in his article *Managing the New Cold War* by stating that he acknowledges that these events are likely to have major implications on every important aspect of the international system and if the conflict is not properly contained it could possibly escalate. Analysts acknowledge that there is a real threat that a nuclear war could quickly become a reality once again, some analysts even suggest the New Cold War is even more likely to produce a nuclear conflict than in the Cold War. (Legvold, 2014) (Kroenig, 2015) They show that the number of total number of nuclear weapons have decreased dramatically throughout the world. However the amount of nuclear capable countries has increased and with that came instability. (The Economist, 2015) They also suggest that the best way to contain this threat is by both sides to look at the Old Cold war and learn from their past. (Legvold, 2014) These analysts infer that this situation is close enough to the past to draw comparisons between the two, but they aren't close enough to be considered a continuation to the original conflict. It is these types of contradictions that cause confusion of the seriousness of the issue and begin to show that there are legitimate concerns that show that perhaps the Cold War conflict never truly came to an end.

Unresolved issues

There are distinct differences between the Cold War and the issues that are currently taking place, but some of the biggest issues that were on the forefront of the original Cold War are still issues today. There is still a divided Korean peninsula, there are major issues with the

Russian Government and NATO, Russian and U.S. relations are very tense, and the issue of missile defense still lingers on. These issues are enormous and none is bigger than the issue of the nuclear capabilities. The United States still recognizes Russia as the only power that can single handedly destroy the United States because of their vast nuclear arsenal. (Nazemroaya, 2009) In the recent months since the Crimea incident started, Russia has test launched an intercontinental ballistic missile, Russian nuclear submarines were detected off of the coast of Western European countries, and they even sent nuclear capable bombers to North America. Through these actions it has become clear that Putin has decided to use Russian nuclear ability as a form of deterrent to the rest of the world so that they won't get involved in whatever plans Russia has. (Kroenig, 2015) These actions from the Russian President show that this may once again put the U.S. in a major nuclear face off against Russia. Since the 1997 Founding Act, NATO and Russia have been working to have a cooperative relationship. However, that is all it has become, it is a work in progress.

In 2010 NATO re-structured its original plan and submitted the Strategic Concept which was an attempt to have a true strategic partnership with Russia and once again it seems to be something that NATO wants more than Russia. There seems to be a very wide gap between NATO's idea of what they want to accomplish with their relationship and their Russian counterpart. The research shows that NATO has really been trying to make this a working relationship but Russian politics continue to hinder the relationship. It has been no secret that Putin wants to "re-establish a greater Russia in areas that were formerly controlled by the soviet union" (Kroenig, 2015) In 2010 President Obama and Russian President Medvedev

signed the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New Start) the idea was to reduce each Nations Nuclear arsenal by thirty percent and also limit the amount of nuclear submarines, and bombers. This went into effect February 2011 but it didn't end the continuous issue between the two nations. Obama has stated that he would like to put even more limitations on their Nuclear Arsenals but acknowledged that it would be difficult to do because the Russian government has stated that they will not reduce any further unless the "U.S. agrees to legally binding limits on their Missile Defense programs," which the United States isn't overly excited to do. (Plumer, 2013)

Mental Health: Vladimir Putin

Understanding Vladimir Putin and who he is can possibly help us understand why Russia is making some of these very drastic moves. Putin has been compared by some analysts to Henry the Fifth because of his seemingly unwillingness to see the "glory in peace." (Feffer, 2014) This may be a harsh and an unrealistic comparison but Putin's critics do have a point. Since Putin has re-taken the reigns as Russian President for his third term, it seems like he is more determined than ever to expand Russia's borders and regain some of the glory that the Soviet Union once had, Russia's relationship with NATO and the United States has suffered tremendously because of it. There has also been speculation that Putin has a serious mental illness called Asperger's syndrome it is a form of Autism that is known to impair a person's social skills and is also associated with eccentric and repetitive behaviors. (WebMD) (Lee, 2015) Several news sources suggest that a government study was done and leaked to the media that

suggest that this illness is truly affecting Putin and his decision making. (Lee, 2015) The research suggests that if Putin does indeed have Asperger's syndrome then his illness may contribute to the radical and outlandish moves that Russia has made in recent years. However, these studies do admit to be based purely off of videos of Putin, The research has had no medical backing but it is still an interesting development that may actually have a major impact on how the United States and NATO propose to handle the New Cold War situation. (Lee, 2015)

Lingering Issues in Asia

There is substantial evidence that the Cold War attitudes still linger on that come from Asia. Since the Cold war there have been several conflicts that have never been fully settled. Between the communist parties of China, North Korea, Laos, and Vietnam there is an unwillingness to let go of the past and the Korean Peninsula is still divided between the allies of the United States and the Allies of the Chinese. This area of the world could very possibly be the most volatile, and could become a major tipping point at anytime towards a major international conflict. The United States and China still consider themselves as military competitors and there seems to be this merry-go-round effect going on in the relationship between the Chinese and American government. (Feffer, 2014) In 1996, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and China signed the Shanghai Five agreement and then they turned it into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 2001 to oppose "US hegemony." This is not a formal military alliance but it is concerning to Americans none the less. (Roskin, 2014) This alliance shows that the Old Cold War ideals are still very much alive and

well. It seems that almost nothing has changed since the so called end of the Cold War in Asia. If anything the situation has continued to grow more and more volatile. The continuing threats from North Korea and the development of their nuclear warfare program continue to put the whole world on edge. Several sources show that North Korea has up to ten nuclear weapons, this is incredibly concerning because of the major differences that come from North and South Korea. These differences have sparked major controversy in recent months. North Korea has made continuous empty threats, however these threats could quickly lead to a nuclear stand-off. This situation continues to make historians and analysts ponder whether Russia will back China and their allies or the United States and NATO; with the immense strain that is on the relationship between Russia and NATO it wouldn't be impossible for Russia to back the Chinese. (SKY NEWS, 2015)



Putin's Relationship with American Presidents

The last major issue that has confirmed my hypothesis that the Cold War never ended is the rocky relationship between President Obama and Russian President Vladimir Putin. This relationship has been incredibly strained in recent months, and the United States foreign policy leaders have been ineffective in settling these major issues. No one actually thought that Russia would take any action in Crimea in 2014 but they did anyway. Either Putin is crazy or he sees the United States as a weakening state. (Lambro, 2014) Putin has said that the 1991 breakup of the Soviet Union was "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century." Putin has also shown the intent of trying to bring in the "near abroad" to his Eastern Eurasian Union that is supposed to begin in 2015. (Roskin, 2014) Putin has been also chastised for his recent actions even from former Soviet leaders. Mikhail Gorbachev has been quoted saying that Vladimir Putin thinks of himself as "second only to God" after complaining the Kremlin leader never seeks his advice. (Whale, 2014) These actions from Putin are very concerning. It seems as if the world is in crisis prevention mode, trying to avoid any confrontation that might lead to a major conflict.

The New Cold War is not all due to Putin's actions but also due to the lack of effectiveness of NATO and the United States foreign policy. Many historians and analysts argue that Russia's recent actions coincide directly with America's actions in Europe. President

George W. Bush had a plan to place an antiballistic missile shield in Eastern Europe to protect the United States from an Iranian missile attack. However, Russian leaders saw this action as a direct violation and threat to Russia. (Baker, 2009) This program was shut down by President Obama in 2009. However, President Obama suggested a new path and still insisted that eventually antiballistic missile interceptors will be placed in either Poland or the Czech Republic. (Baker, 2009) This research shows that although the United States might think that the New Cold War is completely due to Russia's infatuation with the idea of regaining the glory of the former USSR maybe Russian leaders are just trying to protect themselves from the United States.



Conclusion

The research has directed me to believe that the cold war has never really been concluded based off of all of the issues above, including the tense relations between Russian and U.S. presidents, lingering issues in Asia, missile defense, and the possible mental health concerns of Vladimir Putin. These issues are incredibly important because of the massive roles that Russia and the United States play in the world. They may not have been directly fighting one another but both governments always had a major impact on foreign affairs. A proper conclusion to this conflict would be to see an end to the major differences in ideologies in the Korean peninsula and to see NATO and Russia as allies, not just cooperating states, a full agreement on Nuclear weapons and missile defense between the U.S. and Russia would be the primary intent to end this conflict.

My contribution to this topic takes both sides of this argument through primary and secondary sources and the goal is to sift through the information and find the facts about this topic. My primary intent in doing this research is to better understand the history of the this conflict so that I can better understand the events that currently taking place and the effect that they may have on the future of the world we are living in. the thing that my research adds is that I bring both sides of the argument together and make the connection between the “Old Cold War and the New Cold War.” My research shows that it is possible for the New Cold War to just be a continuation of the original conflict although it is clear that the conflict has changed throughout the years. Suggesting that this conflict has never ended makes the shock of the

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events that are currently taking place less appalling. It was just a matter of time before the tensions of the original Cold War era blew up and reemerged as the major issue in the world as it relates to foreign policy. It will be interesting to see how the Cold War will progress in the future, hopefully by understanding our past and the current issues that are taking place our government can control the issues before they emerge as a major international conflict.

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