Ideological Warfare

As the title of Melvyn P. Leffler’s book states, the Cold War was a fight For The Soul of Mankind. In this sense the Cold War was unlike any other war that has ever been brought before the world stage. The Cold War was indeed a new breed of war involving two very distinct and rival ways of life—capitalist democracy and command communism—and which of the two would triumph globally. This bipolar clash between the U.S. and Soviet Union resulted in heated tensions, proxy wars, and severe migraines for leaders of both states; this war could only end one way—with one of the two coming out on top. The Cold War was fought over which superpower—United States or Soviet Union—would be able to project their influence, through economic aid and development, on to the global peripheries in order to promote and preserve their way of life; in some instances influence was projected through proxy wars fought between U.S. and Soviet backed states. The U.S. and Soviet Union both felt that the others government system threatened their security and through economic, political, and occasionally military action in the global peripheries, they were able to achieve—or attempt to achieve—national and global security.

To attain global and national security the U.S. and Soviet Union, based on their own self interests, became increasingly involved in the affairs of states. In doing so, they began to compete for ideological superiority. Following the aftermath of World War II many states looked to
communism to relieve their sufferings. However, the U.S. could not allow communism to spread—they had to contain it. These people, “believe that governments can alleviate their sufferings, that they will demand that the whole business of state control and state interference shall be pushed further and further.” Private enterprise and free markets became endangered by rising communist support, which the U.S. couldn't tolerate.\(^1\) Truman and his administration saw that the American way of life was under siege. In a speech delivered on February 9, 1946, Joseph Stalin denounced capitalist countries and praised the might of the communist system, which would sound very appealing to the underdeveloped global peripheries who sought rapid industrialization. He proudly said, “Our victory signifies, first of all, that our Soviet social system was victorious, that the Soviet social system successfully passed the test of fire in the war and proved that it is fully viable.”\(^2\) These words worried the Americans because Stalin exposed capitalism as the inferior ideology. The U.S. then asked for the thoughts of Soviet expert, George Kennan. Kennan’s response on February 22, 1946 called for the U.S. to take action against the increasingly aggressive Soviet Union. Kennan claimed Soviet policy toward the global peripheries, “will be directed toward weakening of power and influence and contacts of advanced Western nations… which will favor Communist-Soviet penetration.”\(^3\) In other words, Kennan is saying that the U.S. must do the same. In response to these beliefs Kennan proposed the idea of “strong resistance”—containment. To fight communism the U.S. would have to prevent communism from spreading. So the U.S. adopted a policy to contain communism—the Truman Doctrine.

\(^1\) Melvyn P. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union and the Cold War*. (Hill and Wang 2007), 59.

\(^2\) Joseph Stalin, “Bolshoi Theatre Speech” (Speech, Bolshoi Theatre, Stalin Electoral District, Moscow, February 9, 1946), 27.

This policy, according to Truman, would “be the policy of the United States to support free people who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures” (communist insurgencies and the Soviet Union). Similarly, Stalin proposed that the Soviet Union should, “energetically promote the revolutionary struggle of the oppressed peoples of the dependent and colonial countries against the imperialism of America…” Stalin saw an opportunity in the third world to expand communist influence and erode capitalist power. Both powers, in their attempt to weaken the other, increased their involvement in the 3rd world to promote their ideologies; where opportunity arose, the U.S. and Soviet Union couldn’t resist.

The U.S. and Soviet Union, in order to gain political influence, provided states in the global periphery with economic and developmental aid. The U.S. first began giving aid to other states after Secretary of State, George Marshal, saw that recovery in the aftermath of World War II was moving very slowly. He also believed that the need for rapid recovery would lead states to turn to communist ways, therefore, the U.S. would need to spur recovery in Europe through widespread economic aid. The Marshal Plan promoted the recovery of states through the capitalist system, and set the stage for more and more development. The Soviet Union interpreted the Marshal Plan as a way of political influence—it was, and expressed their opposition in a speech given by Andrei Vyshinsky to the United Nations General Assembly, “[The U.S.] attempts to impose its will on other independent states, while at the same time obviously using the economic resources distributed as a relief to individual needy nations as an instrument of political pres-

4 Leffler, For the Soul of Mankind, 62.
5 Leffler, For the Soul of Mankind, 67.
6 Stephen Macekura, "The Origins of the Cold War in Asia (East)" (Lecture, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN, September 22, 2016).
sure… relief supplies to other countries ‘should (…) at no time be used as a political weapon’.”

Andrei Vyshinsky and his fellow Soviet leaders believed that the Marshal Plan undermined the rules set forth by the General Assembly and was a way for the U.S. to impose the American way of life on desperate countries. This was very hypocritical considering the Soviet Union would soon be doing the same thing. The Marshal Plan led to more means of aid in the 3rd world; in Afghanistan the U.S. (Truman) was actively building dams to, “…address the backwardness of the world and address economic growth…”

The U.S. would share its knowledge with the world in hopes of promoting capitalism and democracy. The Helmand Valley Authority—U.S. funded dam project—built dams in the Helmand Valley of Afghanistan to demonstrate to the world the wonders of American achievement and modernization. *HVA* was a way of steering people from communism, “A nation does not accept technology without ideology. A machine or a dam is a product of culture.” Once Nikita Khrushchev rose to power he greatly increased Soviet aid for 3rd world development. The Soviets provided aid on the basis that the Soviet path to modernization was quicker and more effective than the capitalist way. Occasionally, the relentless efforts of the U.S. and Soviet Union spurred armed conflicts in the nations of the global periphery, turning the Cold War “hot”.

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8 Stephen Macekura, “How the Cold War Began to Shape International Politics” (Lecture, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN, September 27, 2016).
11 Macekura, “How the Cold War Began to Shape International Politics.”
In perhaps the most prominent proxy war of the Cold War, the U.S. and Soviet Union, conflicted with each other over the ideological fate of Vietnam. The Geneva Convention in 1954, following Ho Chi Minh’s successful quest for North Vietnamese independence, split Vietnam in two; the North led by Ho and the South—independent from Ho—led Ngo Dinh Diem. The U.S. and France, with the intention of creating a democratic republic in the South, supported Diem.\textsuperscript{13} The Soviet Union, with the help of China supported Ho. At the time U.S. national security policy—following the events of 1963—was, “…to immunize ‘vulnerable societies’ against the threat of communism.”\textsuperscript{14} In this case “vulnerable societies” means the global periphery—Vietnam. This policy meant that the U.S. would do anything to prevent communism from penetrating the third world. In doings so, the U.S. and Soviet Union had just started a proxy war in Vietnam; the recent uprising of South Vietnamese rebels—the Vietcong—funded by Ho who was funded by the Soviets, versus the forces of South Vietnam, funded by the U.S.. Opposition in Vietnam was important to the U.S., because America’s position in the region would be jeopardized otherwise.\textsuperscript{15} The U.S. believed that if they lost Vietnam the Domino Theory would take effect; if Vietnam fell other states in the region would follow.\textsuperscript{16} This subsequent consequence was unacceptable in the eyes of the U.S. and would lead America into further involvement in Vietnam. The U.S. and Soviet Union, by supporting their proxies, protected their national and global security by combating the ideology of the other.

\textsuperscript{13} Stephen Macekura, “The Vietnam War” (Lecture, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN, October 11, 2016).

\textsuperscript{14} Leffler, For the Soul of Mankind, 207.

\textsuperscript{15} Leffler, For the Soul of Mankind, 213.

\textsuperscript{16} Leffler, For the Soul of Mankind, 220.
For the U.S. and Soviet Union national and global security meant the restriction of each others ideology while simultaneously promoting their own. The U.S., “was in a worldwide battle with the communists for the hearts and minds of mankind.”\textsuperscript{17} During this battle the U.S. felt like they owed it to not only the world, but also to themselves to prevent the spread of communism and promote the free markets of capitalism and the politics of democratic governments. Furthermore, the Soviets explained the battle like so, “The Americans would like to plant capitalism everywhere, and we would like that communism was everywhere.”\textsuperscript{18} These two superpowers attempted this through means of influencing their ideology onto the “vulnerable societies” in the global periphery, by providing them with economic, developmental, and military aid. The overriding reason of the Cold War was an ideological struggle between two contrasting systems. Unfortunately for the countries of the global periphery, they were dragged into a conflict between two ideology-fearing nations.

\textsuperscript{17} Leffler, For the Soul of Mankind, 220.

\textsuperscript{18} Leffler, For the Soul of Mankind, 227.
Works Cited


