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The Cold War

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Introduction

The **Cold War** was the most important feature of the **international system** in the second half of the twentieth century. The rivalry between the Soviet Union (USSR) and the United States (US) shaped the contours of conflict and cooperation among **states** and peoples between 1945 and 1991. **Although the conflict did not drive all aspects of international relations, its force permeated every corner of the globe.** Whether in Santiago, Sydney or Shanghai, the influence of **geopolitical** and ideological conflict was unmistakable. More importantly, the Cold War created rivalries and political fault lines which continue to shape international relations long after the conflict has passed.

The Cold War was a conflict between the USSR and the US (see Box 20.1). The two powers who emerged from World War II as preeminent in world politics became engaged in a protracted global contest which, although actual combat between them never eventuated, involved the largest and most destructive military arsenals in history. The two camps could destroy the entire planet thousands of times over with their nuclear weapons, and each side's military was on a hair trigger for the conflict's duration. **It was a dispute that was driven both by traditional concerns about security – each felt the other threatening to their survival and their interests – as well as by ideological antagonism.** Both embodied universal ideologies which assumed the superiority of **their social system over all others.** In this respect the Cold War was as much a contest about how to organise society as it was a competition for strategic influence and nuclear superiority.

BOX 20.1: TERMINOLOGY

Cold War: meanings and temperature

The term Cold War is generally used in two ways. First, it refers to the conflictual relations between the US and the USSR and their respective allies. Second, it is used as a label for the broader period in which the conflict was the preeminent feature. In spite of the many wars that were caused directly or indirectly by Soviet-American rivalry, such as in Korea, Vietnam and Afghanistan, the conflict is referred to as 'cold' because although there were near misses, such as Cuba in 1962, direct military action between the two protagonists never eventuated.

In contrast to traditional **wars**, which can be dated with some precision, a declaration of war or an invasion or attack, there is no clear starting date for the Cold War; instead there existed a gradual escalation of tensions. **Some historians have argued that the Cold War had its origins in the Russian Revolution of 1917 (Powaski 1998) – understandable given that the tension of the Cold War was in part a function of the revolutionary ideology at the heart of Soviet power.** However, as an overt geopolitical and socio-economic contest, **the Cold War began in the wake of World War II, with the collapse of the Grand Alliance between the US, Britain and the Soviet Union that had been struck to defeat the Axis powers (Germany, Japan and Italy).** Likewise, its termination has no clear surrender date or 'armistice day', although two dates commonly cited are those of the fall of the Berlin Wall on the night of 8–9 November 1989 and the dissolution of the USSR on New Year's Eve, 1991.

The beginnings of the Cold War: 1945–53

During the planning for the post-war world that had commenced towards the end of World War II, tensions between the Soviet and American allies began to emerge. They were already clear when US President Franklin D. Roosevelt, British Prime Minister

Figure 20.1 Allied leaders Winston Churchill (UK), Franklin D. Roosevelt (US) and Joseph Stalin (USSR) at the Yalta Conference, February 1945



Source: Wikimedia commons.

Winston Churchill and Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin met at the **Yalta Conference in February 1945** (see Figure 20.1). The death of President Franklin Roosevelt in April 1945 contributed further to the breakdown of the alliance as his successor, **Harry Truman, was distinctly more anti-Soviet than his predecessor.** After the defeat of Japan in August 1945, the alliance that had been formed in 1941 began to unravel swiftly. When the Soviet Union reneged on commitments to **self-determination** in Eastern Europe, failed to withdraw troops from Iran and demanded territorial concessions as well as bases from Turkey, US policy took a more confrontational line. **This approach was informed by George Kennan's 'Long Telegram' of February 1946, where the Moscow-based diplomat argued that an accommodation between the Soviets and the Americans was impossible** due to the essential character of Soviet power (see Box 20.2).

BOX 20.2: DISCUSSION POINTS

Containment and George Kennan

George Kennan was one of the most influential figures in the early years of the Cold War and is thought by many to be the father of America's grand strategy of **containment**. The 'Long Telegram' was first sent as a diplomatic cable in February 1946. It was subsequently published in 1947 in the influential **US journal *Foreign Affairs*, with the author described as 'X'** (Kennan 1946). In the text **Kennan argued that the best US response to the Soviet**

Union was to establish lines of containment to limit the spread of Soviet power. This would constrain Soviet influence and allow the natural superiority of the US system to win out over what he saw to be a deeply flawed USSR. The policy of containment, limiting Soviet expansion but not interfering around the world, took on a more interventionist dimension as the Cold War developed, most notably in Vietnam. Kennan felt that this interventionism was counterproductive to US interests.

The mistrust and suspicion soon turned into geopolitical and ideological competition (Yergin 1978). In 1947 the US pursued what came to be known as the **Truman Doctrine** whereby the US provided military assistance to Turkey and Greece as part of a broader response to Soviet aggression and expansion. The view that the USSR sought to take advantage of post-war Europe's vulnerability, where **communism** had considerable appeal in the ashes of war, was the motivating force behind the **Marshall Plan's** economic reconstruction of Western Europe. The US believed that an economically robust Western Europe would be politically stable and much less susceptible to the challenges of communism. The Plan involved large-scale loans which underwrote the economic reconstruction of Europe and added momentum to the creation of the European Communities, the precursor to the European Union. The Plan was offered, somewhat disingenuously, to the Soviets, who turned it down as they recognised that it would compromise their strategic and economic interests in Eastern Europe.

The status of Berlin was the source of the first significant crisis of the conflict. Post-war Germany had been divided into four sectors, each run by an Allied power. Berlin was similarly divided but was located in the centre of East Germany, which was under Soviet control. The Soviets sought to claim Berlin and in mid-1948 severed road and rail communications to the entire city. A massive airlift, which lasted nearly a year, ensured West Berlin remained out of Soviet control, but political tensions had escalated considerably as a result.

A year later the USSR successfully tested an atomic bomb. Now the animosity and rivalry were backed with the terrible power of atomic weaponry. This led to the creation of the **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)**. NATO was intended to provide a formal structure for an American military presence in Europe that was to deter Soviet aggression. In response, the Soviets created the **Warsaw Pact** as a counter-weight in 1955. Thus, ten years after they had fought so successfully to defeat Nazi Germany, the allies were now lined up against one another. Europe was divided between a Soviet-dominated East, where liberated states were run by communist **regimes** loyal to and propped up by the Soviet Union, and a democratic West whose security relied on American military power. Concerns about Soviet expansionism in the West appeared to be confirmed by Berlin and the bomb; fear in the East about American threats was realised by the ongoing presence of US conventional and atomic weapons in Western Europe.

The Cold War had its origins in, and was in its primary motivation, a conflict over Europe. From the outset, however, its challenge was global (see Figure 20.2). Two events in Asia brought this home. The defeat of Japan had reignited the **Chinese Civil War** which had been running since the fall of the Manchu Dynasty in 1911. The surprising victory of Mao Zedong's Soviet-supported communist forces meant that the world's largest state, as well as its most populous one, were now communist.

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Viewed from Washington, Soviet forces and allies spread from the Baltic Sea across the Eurasian landmass to the South China Sea. The second element of the Cold War's spread was in Korea. The Korean peninsula had been a Japanese colony since 1895 and was hastily divided in the wake of Japan's defeat. In June 1950 the Soviet-backed North launched an attack on the US-supported South which confirmed, in the minds of the Western allies, that communist forces were not only aggressive but emboldened by success in China and elsewhere. Aided by the newly formed **United Nations (UN)**, the US and its allies fought a long and bloody war where more than 3 million lost their lives. In 1953 an armistice was signed but to this day the border remains a geostrategic flashpoint.

The Cold War spreads: 1953–69

The Korean War convinced the Americans and their allies that communism was aggressive; it also reinforced the sense that it was a monolithic bloc. Soviets, Chinese and Koreans appeared to be part of a unified system with global ambitions. As such, a concerted global response was thought to be necessary. This prompted the US to sign a series of alliance treaties in the Asia-Pacific, including **ANZUS** in 1951 and **SEATO** in 1954. It was also a key factor driving US policy in Indochina. In Europe, NATO was organisationally and militarily strengthened, with the US committing to a long-term and large-scale military presence to deter Soviet conventional forces. Through the 1950s and 1960s both Soviets and Americans enhanced both their conventional and nuclear arsenals.

After Korea, the dynamics of East–West confrontation began to spread and interact with regional developments across the world. It had particular purchase in the struggles that were prompted by the dismantling of European empires. In Iran, Guatemala and the Middle East in the early 1950s, local political elites attempted to gain domestic advantage by playing on US and Soviet perceptions of their relative strategic importance. Although Stalin's death in March 1953 brought the more conciliatory Nikita Khrushchev to power, Soviet support for national liberation movements such as in the Congo and Cuba, along with its intervention in Hungary in 1956, confirmed the perception in Washington that the **USSR continued to pose a threat to the US and its allies**, and to their economic and strategic interests around the world.

Tensions reached a high point in the Berlin crisis of 1961 and the **Cuban missile crisis** in 1962. The first involved a dangerous military stand-off that led to the construction of the infamous Berlin Wall which prevented East Berliners moving to the West. The heavily fortified physical division of the city was a potent symbol of the split and its tragic human consequences – hundreds were killed trying to cross from East to West during the wall's twenty-eight year existence. The second, where the **USSR secretly deployed missiles 90 miles off the American coast** only to withdraw them after tense negotiations, led to a humiliating climb-down for Khrushchev. The Soviet leader had attempted to place strategic pressure on the US but, in spite of achieving a trade-off removal of US missiles from Turkey, was perceived to have been outfoxed by President Kennedy. His position at home was fatally weakened and US decision-makers began to believe that they were gaining an upper hand in the global contest. Both crises had brought the world extraordinarily close to nuclear annihilation and this resulted in improved communications between Washington and

Moscow and a somewhat more stable platform for Soviet-American relations for the next ten years or so.

This did not slow down the rate of the arms race, which continued apace during this phase (see Box 20.3), and did not deter their indirect rivalry across the world. In 1965 the US made the fateful decision to escalate its support for South Vietnam in its struggle with the North, and to participate in a large-scale ground war which ultimately led to an embarrassing withdrawal in 1973 after political support for the conflict collapsed. US policy was driven by the ultimately unfounded fears that defeat of South Vietnam at the hands of Ho Chi Minh's communist forces would destabilise the region and strengthen the appeal and success of communism in Southeast Asia.

BOX 20.3: DISCUSSION POINTS

The arms race

One of the central features of Cold War rivalry was the competition over strategic arms. In the years following World War II technological sophistication in weaponry was growing at a considerable pace and each advance appeared to give the holder a decisive advantage. The arms race was the acute end of the conflict and involved both conventional and nuclear weapons. It began with Soviet efforts to break the US atomic monopoly, in which they succeeded in 1949. It was a race that involved an expansion in the quantity of weapons as well as the development of more sophisticated delivery systems such as intercontinental bombers, ballistic missiles and multiple independently targeted re-entry vehicles (MIRV). In 1950 the US had a stockpile of around 450 atomic weapons and the USSR had several. By 1985 the US had over 11 000 nuclear weapons and the USSR around 9500, including both bombs and missile warheads.

These fears did not come to fruition, in part due to the breakdown of Chinese-Soviet relations. While the West had perceived a monolithic communist entity in the Soviet-China alliance, relations had always been uneasy. After Stalin's death, personal clashes between Mao and Khrushchev, along with ideological differences and competition for leadership of the communist movement, as well as Soviet refusal to pass on atomic technology, led to the deterioration of relations. Few in the West realised that relations had become so bad and it was not until the short 1969 Sino-Soviet border war that it became clear that the communist bloc had fragmented.

Détente and the 'second' Cold War: 1969–85

The policy of **détente** was a deliberate attempt to improve Soviet-American relations, and the hostility that had emerged between China and the USSR provided the strategic opening that made it possible. The US, led by President Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, sought to improve relations with China and Russia – which their mutual antagonism now allowed – so that the US could extricate itself from Vietnam and contain Soviet nuclear weapon acquisition. US recognition of the People's Republic of China in 1972, the signing of the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty in the same year and the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 were the key achievements of détente. The latter was notable for establishing principles of **human rights** as the basis for future Soviet-American discussions. Symbolically, détente was embodied by the meeting of a US Apollo and Soviet Soyuz spacecraft in orbit in July 1975.

Yet the achievements in **arms control**, improvements in communication and the civility of diplomatic language did not remove the underlying hostility between the **two sides**, and their mutual distrust was never far from the surface. **Both sides were entangled in the Arab-Israeli war of 1973 and by the mid-1970s the mood began to shift.** **The USSR was thought to have been taking advantage of the improved relations to escalate its support for revolutionary movements around the world.** The success of **revolutions in Ethiopia, Iran, Cambodia, Angola, Afghanistan and Nicaragua in the second half of the 1970s and, most particularly, the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979,** were seen by many as the results of *détente*.

This prompted in the US a sense of weakness in its foreign policy that was matched by a poorly performing economy, which had been badly affected by the oil shocks of the 1970s and the decline of its manufacturing base. These palpable concerns propelled **Ronald Reagan to the US presidency.** Reagan had campaigned on taking a harder line on the USSR, and upon accession to the White House began to put pressure on the Soviets. This involved large increases in military spending, active intervention in Soviet allied states such as El Salvador and Nicaragua, and an increasingly bellicose rhetoric. The shooting down of a Korean Air Lines passenger jet which had strayed over Soviet airspace in 1983 was symptomatic of the increase in tensions and sense of risk at the time. Arms control negotiations collapsed, **the US increased its interventions in Central America and elsewhere,** and Reagan launched a space-based missile defence initiative, dubbed **'Star Wars'**. By the end of his first term as president, Europe was experiencing levels of tension unseen since the early days of the Cold War, and a sense that nuclear war was a very real possibility had returned (Halliday 1986).

The end of the Cold War: 1985–91

The transformation of the Cold War was as radical as it was rapid and was a function of both individual roles and the broader structural circumstances of international relations. **The key development was the selection in 1985 of Mikhail Gorbachev as General Secretary** (see Box 20.4) by the Politburo, the Communist Party's key policy-making and governing body. The USSR's economy had been stagnant since 1978 and its strategic position was being compromised as its capacity to fund its geopolitical commitments was severely tested – to say nothing of the **cost of trying to maintain technological parity with the US.** **Gorbachev determined** to undertake a reform program which was intended to **revitalise the Soviet economy and society.** A central element of the program was the belief that a peaceful international environment was necessary for domestic revitalisation, and to that end Gorbachev launched a program of foreign policy reform.

Following his first-term hostility, **Reagan undertook a significant change in attitude towards the USSR during the re-election year of 1984.** After a summit meeting in Geneva in late 1985 he became **receptive to the arms reduction proposals set out by Gorbachev,** and together they **enhanced the two states' sense of trust** (Garthoff 1994). The **USSR's foreign policy reform program involved a massive reduction in conventional and nuclear weapons,** a shift to a **purely defensive military doctrine,** the adoption of a **liberal posture towards the international system** – that is, one focused on **institutions, human rights and the international rule of law** – and the **cessation of support for revolutionary movements and 'fraternal' communist regimes.**

BOX 20.4: KEY FIGURES

Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev

The final leader of the Soviet Union was, other than Lenin, the only one to have graduated from university. He was made General Secretary of the Communist Party in March 1985 following the death of Konstantin Chernenko. He was a surprise choice, having only been elevated to the Politburo in 1978 and being one of its youngest members. Following decades of dour and elderly political leaders in Moscow, Gorbachev, and his foreign minister, the charismatic Eduard Shevardnadze, represented an important shift in generation, experience and worldview. Gorbachev was educated, had travelled and, most crucially, did not follow the traditional Kremlin path in his dealings with outsiders. British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher famously declared that he was a man 'with whom we can do business', and it was this capacity to 'do business' that was central to his success. Many individual leaders played important parts in the development of the conflict, but none can match the significance Gorbachev played in bringing the curtain down on the Cold War.

The reforms developed in a piecemeal fashion between 1985 and 1989 and famously culminated in the 'velvet revolutions' in Eastern Europe. As Gorbachev was reforming the USSR with policies of *perestroika* (restructuring), *glasnost* (openness) and **democratisation**, popular dissatisfaction with the regimes in Eastern Europe emerged. This sentiment was led by movements for change, most famously embodied in Poland by Lech Walesa's Solidarność (Solidarity) – the Eastern Bloc's first independent trade union – and created huge pressure on Soviet control mechanisms. The Soviet leadership determined that the time had come for an end to the situation whereby the USSR essentially determined the direction of politics and strategy in Eastern Europe (known as the Brezhnev doctrine). Gorbachev felt that the regimes, if they stood for anything, would have to stand for themselves, which they proved utterly incapable of doing. After 1989 the reform program within the USSR also began to spin out of the Communist Party's control, as democratisation and new freedoms mixed with an explosive **nationalism** that eventually destroyed the Soviet Union. As an entity, the USSR was replaced by a series of new **sovereign states** which were based on the organisational structure of its constituent republics, and the geopolitical map of Central and Eastern Europe was rewritten as their Soviet-supported governments were rejected *en masse* (see Box 20.5).

It was the shift within the USSR, and the acceptance of this by the US-led West, which brought about the end of the Cold War. It had been a conflict between competing ideologies as well as a geopolitical struggle between states. It came to an end with the rejection by elites within the Communist Party of the USSR's revolutionary ideas, and the policies that sprang from them. While the Cold War had been very much about strategic threats and nuclear weapons, they were a means through which the contest was played out but not the contest itself. Many tend to think that Reagan won the Cold War through out-spending the USSR in the military competition. There is little evidence to support this view. The Soviets were most certainly at a decisive strategic disadvantage by the late 1970s but the motive force behind the foreign policy reform program was not strategic but political and economic.

BOX 20.5: DISCUSSION POINTS

A new European map

The end of the Cold War transformed the geopolitical map of world politics, bringing a raft of new states into the international system. From the collapse of the USSR came the following new sovereign states: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation (Russia), Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. Russia became the legal heir of the USSR's international commitments, such as its seat at the UN, and founded the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), incorporating twelve of the USSR's republics, to try to assert some vestiges of its **hegemony**. In Eastern and Central Europe, more states were created. Czechoslovakia peacefully divided into the Czech and Slovak republics. The collapse of Yugoslavia involved a series of bloody wars that created new states from the constituent republics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro.

The Cold War and International Relations

International Relations **theory** has a close relationship with the Cold War, as many of the **discipline's** theoretical developments were in response to changes in the dynamics of conflict. The **rise of realism** was produced by the dominance of geopolitics during the early phases of the Cold War. **Détente's optimism** helped revive **liberal internationalism** and brought the cooperative possibilities of **interdependence** to the table; and the role that ideas played in the **Cold War's demise** helped facilitate the rise of **constructivism**. Beyond this, the Cold War provokes many questions which theory can help answer. Why did the US-Soviet alliance, which had worked so well during World War II, break down? Why did the US and the USSR never come to blows? What role did the leaders play in shaping the conflict? Why did it end so suddenly? Why did no one predict its demise?

Of the many issues, the question of causation is perhaps most important. What were the causes of the Cold War? The answer to this complex question depends on which theory one turns to and thus which assumptions one makes. **For realists**, the answer lies in the **power vacuum in the international system after 1945** (see, for example, Gaddis 1990; Wohlforth 1993). Prior to World War II, both the US and the USSR were significant powers but neither was dominant and neither was interested in projecting its power much beyond its borders. **Germany, Britain, France and Italy were all major powers** with expansive international interests and considerable military force. **The calamity of World War II destroyed the basis of these states' power and into this vacuum stepped a largely unscathed US and a battle-damaged but militarily dominant USSR**. Here, the Cold War was **a product of the inexorable workings of the international system**, whereby **major powers are compelled to expand their interests or fall prey to others who have expanded**. In Western Europe there was no dominant power and thus the system induced American and Soviet rivalry; this went global as **decolonisation** provided further opportunities for advantage. **For realists**, the Cold War was a contest of **power politics** in which ideology was little more than window dressing. From this perspective, the roots of rivalry lay in the structure of the international system and the distribution of power across the states.

A different theoretical approach, that of **liberalism**, does not look at the system so much as the attributes of its constituent states. While liberals do not deny the importance of the military rivalry, for an explanation of the conflict they look to ineffective policies, misperceptions and miscommunication between political elites (see, for example, Jervis 1976; Larson 1985). While realists see conflict as inevitable, liberals see it as contingent on specific actions. The Cold War was not caused by a power vacuum but instead was the product of **diplomatic blundering and misunderstanding**. Rivalry was not inevitable, but was the product of a mutual sense of insecurity that could have been resolved. Improved communication and better understanding of the other side's intentions and concerns could have produced a workable and cooperative international system and a much more peaceful post-war setting.

There are a host of other explanations as well, with some arguing that the Cold War was a product of **capitalist international relations, which fosters militaristic competition among states**. For others, the Cold War was not really a clash of values and interests but a military exercise that was used by both sides to establish and further their respective domination of domestic society (Chomsky 1982; Kaldor 1990). These theories produce different answers because they place explanatory emphasis on different aspects of the conflict. They can help clarify thinking but careful attention must be paid to the basic assumptions about social behaviour which they make and upon which they place explanatory weight.

The most enduring conundrum of the Cold War relates to something that did not happen. **Why did the US and the USSR avoid military conflict?** The greatest source of concern for all who lived through the Cold War was the **apocalyptic prospect of nuclear war**. There are many reasons put forward to explain the absence of war. Some point to **good communication and effective diplomacy in times of crisis**, others argue that it was **their lack of physical proximity that kept the peace**. **The most influential answer to this question is also one of the most controversial: that peace between the US and the USSR was brought about by nuclear weapons**. So massive was the price that would have to be paid if conflict eventuated that both sides were forced to adopt less bellicose policies. From this point of view the long post-war peace (at least between the chief protagonists) was kept by the very weapons they had acquired to destroy one another. The idea that peace was enforced by a balance of terror is hard to refute, for the simple reason that it is logically impossible to say why something did *not* happen. It is no doubt true that the weapons inspired caution, as indeed did the scale of conventional weapons, but we cannot say with any certainty that peace was the product of nuclear weapons. More importantly, the level of risk that is involved in structuring the international system around nuclear deterrence is massive and, as many have argued, it must surely be the least rational means of managing international peace yet devised.

Conclusion: echoes of the Cold War

For its duration, the Cold War rivalry played a dominant role in world politics. Nowhere was its **influence more evident than in anti-colonial struggles** and in the politics of post-colonial states. From Tehran to Tokyo, Jakarta to Johannesburg, **East-West rivalry put local conflicts into a global context**. The political struggles to fill the holes created by departing European powers had a broader consequence as both the USSR and the US

saw the other's gain as its loss in the battle for hearts, minds and strategic influence in the decolonising world. A communist North Vietnam or South Yemen was thought to be not only a loss from the ledger of capitalist states but also a decisive strategic advantage for Soviet communism. Just as Soviet-US rivalry had consequences far from home, the Cold War has left a legacy with which we are still coming to terms (Westad 2005).

Three of the most pressing issues in world politics – the nuclear crisis on the Korean peninsula, the status of Taiwan and the war on terrorism – have their roots in the Cold War. In Korea, the Cold War divisions are most glaring. The peninsula is still divided. North Korea is one of the few states that retains a command economy and a Stalinist political system, and added to this has been its recent acquisition of nuclear technology. Cold War tension continues to shape the strategic balance in Northeast Asia. Taiwan's uncertain political status is also the unfinished business of the Cold War. Created by the nationalists who had lost the Chinese Civil War, Taiwan was initially recognised by the US as the legitimate China, only to have this recognition removed as the US improved its relations with the People's Republic of China during détente. Tension across the Taiwan Straits has grown precipitously in recent years and US commitment to its recently democratised ally Taiwan makes it one of the most likely locations of major power conflict in the international system.

As the horror of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 unfolded before a television audience of billions, few realised that they were witnessing an after-shock of the Cold War. Yet it was the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and the US funding of guerrilla insurgents that gave birth to al-Qaeda and its fellow travellers. Soviet forces were defeated by a combination of Afghan militias and guerrillas of a militant Islamist variety whose funding and organisation were heavily assisted by the US. Most of the militant Islamists active today, from members of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in Algeria to Hambali and Imam Samudra in Indonesia, learnt their trade in Afghanistan in the 1980s. The 'war on terror' which has taken centre stage in the foreign policy of the US and many of its allies is a conflict which is a direct, though utterly unintended, consequence of the Cold War's strategic competition and the indirect manner of its prosecution.

The decade following the Cold War's demise was one of distinct optimism in international relations. Long-unrepresented peoples were able to enjoy self-determination; the prospect of imminent nuclear annihilation had receded; and the strife associated with East-West rivalry had largely faded into the distance. Yet developments in international relations do not spring forth from the ether. They have a history, both political and economic, and in the history of contemporary crises and challenges the Cold War has a heavy weight. In Korea, Taiwan and Islamist terrorism we see only the most acute examples of this legacy. From ethnic conflicts in the states of the former Soviet Union to environmental problems in Eastern Europe, from civil war in Angola to the still unresolved political problems in Cambodia, the Cold War's imprint can still be seen around the world. Some argue that it is not only in the events that we feel its effect: in the very way in which the US and its allies think about international politics we can detect the continuing influence of a Cold War approach to the world. In the search for an enemy to defeat, and for military threats to snuff out, one sees an approach to international politics that is born of the East-West bipolar conflict. The Cold War may be twenty years gone, but it will be a long time before its influence has passed from being among the central concerns for scholars, policy-makers and analysts of international relations.