

# Cold War

## INTRODUCTION

Soon after the conclusion of the Second World War, the world was engulfed in a different sort of a struggle for global leadership between the two former allies, the United States and the erstwhile Soviet Union. Both emerged as superpowers immediately after the Second World War. Great Britain was exhausted and no longer was able to hold on to the position of a global power.

Germany being partitioned and Japan being devastated by atomic bombs, failed to emerge as great powers. This left only the United States and the Soviet Union to play a decisive role in the international scenario. However, the relation between the two became strained for a number of reasons and assumed the form of Cold War, which was short of hot war. This resulted in the bifurcation of the world into two rival blocs and creation of a number of military alliances and counter alliances. Though there was a

temporary thaw in their relations, regarded as détente, but that too was short-lived and soon degenerated into another round of tensions and strained relations, often called New Cold War. Ultimately, the Cold War ended in 1990, with the dismemberment of the former Soviet Union.

## MEANING

The term Cold War was popularized by the columnist, Walter Lippmann and it came into common use by 1947. It came to acquire a special meaning, signifying that the relations between the East and the West, though bad and war like, and strained but had not reached the point of hot war. It symbolized intense competition in political economic fronts and even on ideological grounds but never assumed the stature of hot war or actual armed conflict between the two blocs. Cold War was not an episode like other wars, which had beginnings and ends, winners and losers. It signified a state of affairs.

## ORIGIN OF COLD WAR

It is an arduous task to trace the origin and development of Cold War. Young and Kent point out that there had been innumerable debates regarding the nature and origin of the early Cold War which had a definite impact on the ways the historians and social scientists had interpreted the nature of international system, till 1989. The origin of Cold War still remains a matter of long-standing historical dispute.

The orthodox theories assume that the alleged Soviet aggression or Soviet expansionism resulted in American counter reactions. They opine that in essence the Cold War became a battle for global influence because Stalin and the Soviet system made cooperation impossible. For them, Stalin and Soviet Communism had to be confronted and contained by the Western capitalist states for the sake of international peace and security and the survival of the liberal democratic values. To be more specific, an allegedly expansionist Soviet Union threatened

the 'national security' of the United States and the Western Europe which required an economic and military response. This can be viewed more or less as the realist or neo-realist perception of the superpower rivalry. In this perception, power and security as well as functioning of the capitalist and communist states and their respective external requirements figure more importantly rather than ideology or internal structure.

The orthodox view was challenged in the 1960s by the revisionist historians who focussed less on the international state system and the struggle to gain greater power and influence and more on the alleged requirements of international capitalism, especially of the United States in the 1940s. Revisionist interpretation laid emphasis on the foreign policy requirements of the United States, which they viewed was designed to meet the expansionist requirements of capitalism. Whatever may be the different perspectives on the origin of Cold War, it can be said that the Cold War broke out because of

ideological confrontation, post-Second World War complications and irreconcilability of vital interests of USA and the Soviet Union.

## Causes of Cold War

The first and the foremost reason for antagonism between the two superpowers was the opening of the Second Front to divide the German army. The Soviet Union was pressurizing the opening of the Second Front from June 1941 but finally, the Supreme Commander, General Dwight Eisenhower (who later became the US president) opened the Second Front in June 1944. The delay in opening the Second Front created suspicion in the minds of the Soviets resulting in antagonism between the two.

Soon after the conclusion of the Second World War, the two wartime allies stood divided on the Polish and German questions. In the case of Poland, though at the Potsdam Conference of July 1945, the Oder—Neisse line was considered

the de facto line between Poland and Germany whose ultimate fate would be finalized through a peace treaty with Germany, yet the future democracy or governance of Poland remained undecided. The Soviets, considering that Eastern Europe lay within their sphere of influence, installed a Polish government dominated by the communists. The US president Harry S. Truman, after assuming office, with the support of British Prime Minister Churchill demanded that the composition of the Polish government should be equally divided between the communists and the so-called London Poles or the Londongovernment-in-exile backed by the British. Lend-lease aid to the Soviet Union was suspended by Washington but Stalin refused to give in and the emergent Polish government remained firmly oriented towards the Soviet Union.

German question proved to be another stumbling block in the superpower relations, which unfolded at the Potsdam Conference of July 1945. The question of post-war reparations

from Germany led to sharp arguments.

Post-Second World War, Soviet activities in Iran, Turkey and Greece gave birth to suspicions in the West. Initially these factors embittered the relations between the two superpowers, once the allies and gradually assumed the shape of the Cold War. As years passed by the Cold War between the two intensified because of different misconceptions, misperceptions, threats to each other's sphere of influence, increased arms race, and alleged threats to each other's vital interests. Hence, the theatre of Cold War shifted from one part of the world to the other and had unfurled itself in different phases, virtually dividing the world into two antagonistic blocs.