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THE COLD WAR (1945 - 1991): A REAPPRAISAL IN THE CONTEXT OF THE 21ST CENTURY

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INTRODUCTION:

The period between the end of the Second World War and the end of the 20th century was marked by military preparedness of the highest level along with watertight compartmentalization of the world into two ideologically opposite camps. These camps provided economic assistance and nuclear umbrella to two groups of nations without actual conventional war ever breaking out between them. This period of constant confrontation between the two rival blocs has been described as the Cold War of the 20th century.

Towards the close of the 20th century, the Cold War came to an end with disintegration of the Socialist Bloc and dismemberment of the Soviet Union, unleashing forces of economic liberalisation to cope with strong currents of globalization and free trade. The consequent redrawing of the maps of Europe and Asia paved way for the formation of Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) including Russia on December 8, 1991.

Given this backdrop, the 21st century was expected to be a century of peace and progress. But contrary to expectations, the nascent CIS faced unprecedented political distress and economic crisis on account of absence of political decentralization and liberal economy in the first decade of this new century. Whether this was an altogether new development or a fallout of the Cold War, needs to be examined in the light of a review and reappraisal of the Cold War itself.

The Cold War, to begin with, is understood to be a conflict between the Soviet Bloc led by the Soviet Union and Liberal Bloc led by the USA encompassing almost the entire world. Its end following the demise of the Soviet Union in December 1991 was hailed as the watershed in 20th century world history in much the same way as the end of the two world wars was considered in its former half.

The Origin:

The rumblings of the Cold War could be heard towards the end of the second world war in 1945 when Germany became the focal point for tensions between the Soviet Union and the Western Allies.

At the Potsdam Conference of July 1945 convened to consider the fate of the defeated Germany, the Four Power Allied Control Council comprising the Soviet Union and the

Western Allies planned a new, disarmed, and de-Nazified Germany. However, the talks failed as Western Allies refused Stalin's territorial demands for strategically crucial parts of Turkey which would have given the Soviet Union a de facto control over the straits of Constantinople which the Russian tsars had always wanted since the eighteenth century.

The subsequent failure of the Soviet, British, French and the U.S. foreign ministers to agree on the nature of a peace treaty with Germany in the spring of 1947 led to the beginning of the Cold War which first got manifested in the ideological division of Germany in 1949 and eventually ended with the fall of the Soviet Union in December 1991.

The Soviet-occupied eastern zone of Germany was called the German Democratic Republic or GDR while the American, British and French occupation zones became the Federal Republic of Germany. Later, the Berlin Wall became the symbol of this ideological divide.

In fact, the phrase "the Cold War' gained currency after the highly influential American journalist Walter Lippmann used it as the title of his book on U.S. foreign policy in 1947. [lxviii] (Lippmann 1947: 1)

Thus, the Cold War saw the world divided into two ideologically distinct warring camps. The USSR controlled or exercised predominant influence in one part of the globe – the zone occupied by the Red Army and other communist armed forces at the end of the war, and did not attempt to extend its range of its influence further by military force. The USA exercised control and predominance over the rest of the capitalist world as well as the western hemisphere and the oceans, taking over what remained of the old imperial hegemony of the former colonial powers. In return, it did not intervene in the zone of accepted Soviet hegemony.

It epitomized the ideological conflict between communism and capitalism. The communist system of organizing the state and society was based on the ideas of Karl Marx who believed that the wealth of a country should be collectively owned and shared by one and all. To achieve this, the economy should be centrally planned and the interests of the working class be safeguarded by state social policies.

The capitalist system, on the other hand, espoused private ownership of a country's wealth. The driving forces behind capitalism are private enterprise for making profits and the preservation of the power of private wealth.

The liberal democratic capitalist bloc consisted of highly developed industrial nations – the USA, Canada, Western Europe, Japan, Australia and New Zealand – believed in private enterprise and private ownership of wealth with profit as the great motivating influence with minimum of state interference. In contrast, the authoritarian communist bloc believed in state controlled, centrally planned economy to eliminate the negative fallout of capitalism in the form of slumps, unemployment and the unequal distribution of private wealth.

The Cold War and its ideological conflict was described as a period of "constant confrontation". This led the renowned French political scientist Raymond Aron to call the Cold War an ideological conflict of 'impossible peace' and 'improbable war' in 1948. (Hobsbaum 1995: 226)

It gained momentum with the invention of the atom bomb by German and American scientists in the 1950s that were far more lethal and destructive than those dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the United States. This invention virtually started the nuclear arms race between the two superpowers.

It soon spread to their allies as Britain followed suit and exploded its first atomic bomb in 1952 and France in 1960. By 1970, China also had the bomb while India, Pakistan and Israel too joined the nuclear bandwagon.

The ensuing nuclear arms race between the two rival camps resulted in "a permanent nuclear confrontation based on the assumption that only the fear of 'mutually assured destruction' (correctly concentrated into the acronym MAD) would prevent one side or the other from giving the ever-ready signal for the planned suicide of civilization. It did not happen, but for some forty years, it looked like a daily possibility" . (Ibid)

The Genesis:

However, the actual genesis of the Cold War and the ensuing ideological clash between the two rival blocs is traced back to the First World War and the Russian Revolution (1917-18) when Lenin and Woodrow Wilson outlined mutually hostile ideological visions of the postwar world. Both had their own ideas on how peace should be achieved. Wilson's vision for the postwar world was direct and accommodative of the entire world unlike Lenin's vision who stood for carrying out communist revolution. Wilson believed that peace could be obtained through diplomacy.

In 1918 during the First World War, President Wilson gave a Fourteen Point ideological framework for war-aims that included, among others, self-determination, collective security and open markets. (Wilson's address 1918 cited in Woolley and Peters eds. 1999) This was evident in 1919 when the United States, along with Britain and France, sent troops to help those Russians who were working to destroy the Bolshevik regime. However, things changed during the Second World War when both the USA and the USSR worked together to defeat the Axis Powers. Russia dealt a crushing blow to Hitler's Germany and emerged as the superpower on the strength of its military prowess. Towards the end of the Second World War, the bonhomie developed during the interwar years between the USSR, the USA and Britain gave way to old suspicions and distrust. (Merriman 2010: 1111)

The First Phase:

Although no open conflict took place between the two rival camps, the period after 1945 marked the beginning of the first phase of the Cold War. Consequently, the power struggle between the two superpowers got manifested in different spheres – ideological, political, economic, military affairs such as arms race, proxy wars and limited military conflicts in client states.

The sheer advantage of its mammoth size enabled Soviet Union to install communist regimes in seven East European countries namely East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania and Albania. The victory of communists in Chinese civil war by 1949 gave a big boost to Communism which spread its tentacles over the huge landmass from the

Pacific Ocean to the middle of Germany. The Soviet Union established its influence over Cuba, North Korea, and North Vietnam as well.

The Truman Doctrine:

In view of the growing spread of communism, President Harry S. Truman came out with a policy of containment known as the 'Truman Doctrine' in March 1947. (Davies 1996: 1362) It aimed at preventing the spread of communism, not just in Europe, but throughout the world, Including Korea and Vietnam.

In 1949, President Truman launched the 'Marshall Plan' named after the US Secretary of State George C. Marshall. It was an economic extension of the Truman Doctrine. It was a name given to the European Recovery Programme (ERP) which was meant to offer economic and financial aid wherever it was needed, including the Eastern European countries like Czechoslovakia which wanted to avail it to ease its dire food shortage.

Also known as the Point Four of the Truman's Four Point Programme and 'Truman Doctrine', it was the US policy of technical assistance and economic aid to underdeveloped countries, announced in the President Truman's 1947 address before a joint session of Congress. (Daniel 1951: 1)

In his Harvard University address of June 5th, 1947, that initiated the Marshall Plan, Secretary of State George Marshall said: "It is logical that the United States should do whatever it is able to do to assist in the return of the normal economic health in the world, without which there can be no political stability and no assured peace. Our policy is directed not against any country or doctrine but against hunger, poverty, desperation and chaos." (https://www oecd.org/en/about)

During the next four years, over 13000 million dollars of aid under the Marshall Plan was poured into war-ravaged Western Europe for its reconstruction and economic stability through recovery of agriculture and industry.

Economic Implications

Reacting sharply, the Soviet foreign minister Molotov decried the Marshall Plan as 'dollar imperialism' and a blatant interference in Eastern Europe which Stalin considered to be a Russian sphere of influence (Molotov's statement 1947 cited in the United States, Department of State 1985: 807-809). As a result, not only the USSR and her satellite states rejected it, even Czechoslovakia, the only remaining democratic state in Eastern Europe and a bridge between the Eastern and Western Europe was taken over by the communists in February 1948, was stopped from availing it.

In 1949, in response to the Marshall Plan, Stalin announced the 'Molotov Plan' to offer Russian aid to her satellites. Under the plan, Eastern Europe was to be industrialised, collectivised and centralised through economic integration of the Eastern Bloc countries aimed at the spread of communism. All the communist states were expected to trade primarily within the members of the 'Cominform', an organization set up in 1949, in response to the Marshall Plan. All communist states were also expected to draw together the various European communist parties.

At the same time, 'Comecon' or the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance, was also set up to coordinate their economic policies to convert them into a single integrated economy. All satellite states were to be a carbon copy of the USSR with the same political, economic and educational systems and the same Five Year Plans. All had to carry out the bulk of their trade with Russia.

The Iron Curtain

The Cold War was predominantly centered in Europe where the demarcating line between the Soviet Union and its East European satellite states and the remaining Europe was known as the 'Iron Curtain'. It was a phrase coined by British Prime Minister Winston Churchill in his famous 'Iron Curtain' speech, titled, "The Sinews of Peace" on March 5, 1946, at Fulton, Missouri, in which he lamented that "from Stettin on the Baltic to Trieste on the Adriatic an iron curtain has descended across the continent'. (Davies, 2004: 1364) This demarcating line meant that Europe was "...where the Soviet Union was not". (Ibid)

Thus, the socialist states of Central and Eastern Europe on the western border of the Soviet bloc - behind the so called Iron Curtain - came to symbolize their apparent exclusion from the continental mainstream. It was also known as a 'peripheral and backward region' that soon turned into an epicenter of unprecedented power politics in Europe.

The Cold War raged full swing with the communist takeover of Czechoslovakia in February 1948 and the Berlin Blockade (June 1948-May 1949). The subsequent formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in April 1949 brought the Cold War to its first climax.

Second Phase: NATO vs The Warsaw Pact

Stalin took the formation of NATO as a challenge. He responded by launching its counter foil 'The Warsaw Pact' in 1955. It was the communist counter to what they called the capitalist NATO in which the foreign policies and armed forces of all the satellite states were controlled by Moscow. This greatly enhanced the possibility of a nuclear confrontation in what is known as the second phase of the Cold War.

By the middle of the 20th century, the US had military alliance with nearly 50 countries and over a million American troops were posted in over a hundred countries around the globe. The Soviet Bloc was also not far behind as its vast sphere of influence spread from the Pacific Ocean to the middle of Germany. Thus both superpowers accepted the global distribution of force in what was seen as a highly uneven yet eventually unchallenged balance of power.

However, situation began to change after February 1950 when the USSR and communist China signed a Treaty of Alliance and, a few months later in June the same year, troops from the communist North Korea invaded non-communist South Korea.

While the Cold War continued, fissures within the Soviet camp began to emerge. Death of Stalin in 1953 brought forward new Russian leadership in Malenkov, Bulganin and Khruschev. Unlike Beijing, the 'troika' wanted to improve ties with the USA to avoid any further escalation in tension for fear of an all-out self-destructive nuclear war.

In February 1956, Khruschev came out with a policy of 'peaceful co-existence' with the West, something that China never liked as Mao saw in it a deviation from the Marxist-Leninist

position. The policy was defined by "Three Hallmarks" namely 1. Different roads to Socialism; 2. Conflict in Hungary; and 3. Split with China. This further strained relations between Moscow and Beijing. (Talbott 1974: 284)

Anyhow, Moscow's gesture had a desired effect. The ice between the two superpowers began to melt and led to the removal of occupation forces from Austria in 1955. Germany continued to remain divided and tensions mounted over Vietnam and the Cuban missile crisis in 1962.

But Khruschev persisted in his hard line approach within the Socialist Bloc that led to conflict with Hungary. As a result, the Hungarian Revolution (October 23 to November 11, 1956) against the Soviet hegemony was brutally crushed with an iron hand. The PRC supported this act. Although it agreed with the idea of 'Polycentrism', it persisted in its belief in monolithic Socialist Bloc and any attempt to deflect from it was not tolerated by both Moscow as well as Beijing. (Low 1987: 24)

In 1964, Khruschev was replaced by Brezhnev who hailed from Ukraine. He knew about the Ukrainian nationality issue but did not address it for fear of creating trouble in the way to achieving detente with the West. For him, detente was not the buying of peace but a high-timed military preparedness in a well-defined, careful delimitation of spheres - the communist and the liberal. (Davies 1996: 1401)

Detente during the Cold War was not an effort towards peace and scaling down deterrence but a new scheme of geostrategy in a well thought out manner. Hence, the period between the 1960s and 70s saw the rise and fall of detente. But instead of living in watertight chambers, the two sides engaged in some communication in a way that dialogue and deterrence existed simultaneously as they tried to avoid nuclear confrontation. Yet the nuclear arms race continued unabated till unmanageable fissures appeared within the Soviet Bloc.

Dent in the Soviet Sphere of Influence

The sixties was a decade of turmoil within the Socialist bloc. It manifested itself in various forms, sometimes in the Socialist bloc states and at times within the Soviets of the USSR. In 1961, Albania left the Warsaw Pact and Romania wanted to follow suit. In 1965, there was an open opposition to Moscow's control in Armenia and Ukraine - the food bowl of the USSR. In 1968, reforms were carried out in Czechoslovakia that were a clear deviation from the orthodox socialist line. The Czech leader Alexander Dubcek called it "socialism with a human face". (Lacquer 1967: 194) This was called the "Prague Spring". Moscow replaced Dubcek with Gustav Husak in 1969 who ruled till 1987.

In 1968 itself, there was a student uprising in Yugoslavia demanding better living conditions, education, employment and to establish 'true socialism' by removing economic inequality.

The Soviet reaction to 'Prague Spring' was more than expected. According to Gordon Skiing, the Prague Spring reforms were not as dangerous as perceived by Moscow. There was neither the rejection of Soviet domination as in the case of Yugoslavia, nor a change in foreign policy as in the case of Romania, nor a defection from the Warsaw Pact as in the case of Albania. It was merely a reform programme deviated from the socialist model of economy. (Skiing 1976: 1).

The seventies witnessed a long-drawn political struggle in Poland. It being the largest Socialist bloc country, had economic issues peculiar and different from the rest. There were areas of serious underdevelopment. Agriculture versus industrial divide was too sharp. The economic stagnation was continuing despite foreign loans. The unrest got support from the Catholic Church primarily because of Pope John Paul II who hailed from Poland. His visit to Poland in 1979 gave a fillip to anti-Soviet resistance and opposition. It was spearheaded by a political movement known as 'Solidarity' led by a trade union leader Lech Walesa. It became the largest political revolt of the seventies. In 1981, martial law was imposed causing total suppression of civil liberties and imprisonment of thousands of protestors. The situation lasted till 1983 but even after lifting of the martial law, political disturbances persisted until Poland seceded from the Socialist Bloc in 1989.

Glasnost and Perestroika: The End of the Soviet Bloc

In the meantime, processes that led to the dismantling of the Soviet Union had also begun. Mikhail Gorbachev, the then Secretary General of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, tried to salvage both the Soviet Union itself and the Socialist Bloc from the economic crisis. To this end, he introduced two terms namely 'Perestroika' or restructuring and 'Glasnost' or openness at the 27th Congress of the CPSU in February 1986.

Glasnost implied greater transparency in functioning of the government institutions and voicing what was hidden unspoken and unpublished. Perestroika implied economic restructuring and political decentralisation. Both these processes curtailed the controlling power of Moscow over the numerous Soviet republics or the constituent regions of the Soviet Union.

Since Poland declared independence from the Socialist Bloc and established a democratic system of governance in 1990, Hungary and all other nations of the Central and Eastern Europe followed suit. (Lewis 1998: 29)

East Germany was the only Socialist Bloc country which was given assurance by West Germany of economic recovery by owning up all the East German debt. The difference in the Human Development Index of East and West Germany was too wide to ignore. With the exit of East Germany from the Soviet Bloc and its merger with West Germany, Germany was unified once again on October 3rd 1990. The earlier historical unification of Germany had taken place in 1871 under Bismarck

Unification of Germany was a fatal blow to the edifice of the Soviet Bloc in Europe. It marked the end of the Socialist Bloc and paved the way for the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

Soviet Union: Towards Extinction

A revolt in the Soviet Republic of Georgia had been brewing since 1989. Popular unrests were reported from Siberia, Kazakhstan and Ukraine. Economic deprivation and excessive political control had caused discontent in all the Soviet Republics.

Perestroika allowed political freedom. Taking advantage of this, the Soviet Republics in their assemblies voted for secession from the Soviet Union. It started with Lithuania, then Estonia in March 1990, followed by Uzbekistan, Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus. At Moscow, all

efforts to prevent disintegration through peaceful referendum on March 17, 1991, and then by staging a political coup in June, failed. Finally Gorbachev resigned as the President of the USSR on December 25, 1991, and the Soviet Union officially ceased to exist as on December 31, 1991/ January 1, 1992. (Davis 1996 : 1431).

Various Soviet Republics existing under severe economic hardships could not have mustered the courage to come out of the Soviet Union had they not been assured of economic recovery and security by the non-communist liberal world. Perestroika had opened up the possibility for economic cooperation with the Capitalist world. Although there was no direct assurance to this effect to the constituent republics of the Soviet Union, yet the Soviet republics thought it wise to come out of the shackles of the Soviet control and try to exist on their own with economic aid from the capitalist nations.

Commonwealth of Independent States

The Russian Soviet Republic, now Russia, was accepted as the successor state of the erstwhile Soviet Union. The other constituent republics that gained independence formed the Commonwealth of Independent States or CIS. Russia was an equal member of it, not the domineering one as was in the Soviet Union. All these new states moved towards market economy and democracy. It was not easy to achieve this due to lopsided economic development and 73 years of communist one party authoritarian rule.

While the Central and Eastern European nations were struggling, Russia, the strongest of all, had its peculiar problems. Poverty was uncontrollable. Providing essential amenities to the people was an issue. Scarcity and non-availability of food coupled with high rate of inflation and abject poverty in long harsh winters that caused innumerable deaths posed huge challenges.

The President of Russia, Mr. Vladimir Putin, who once headed the dreaded intelligence agency and secret service the KGB, spoke about it in his historic new millennium speech entitled, "Russia at the Turn of the Millennium" on December 31st, 1999. He said: "The way to the market and democracy was difficult for all states that entered it in the 1990s. They all had roughly the same problems, although in varying degrees."

In his candid admission of the dire situation, President Putin said; "First, Russia is not a state symbolizing top standards of economic and social development now. And second, it is facing difficult economic and social problems". He elaborated it by saying that its GDP had nearly halved in the 1990s, and its GNP was ten times smaller than that in USA and five times smaller than in China.

He concluded his speech with the following words: "Russia is in the midst of one of the most difficult periods in its history. For the first time in the past 200-300 years, it is facing a real threat of sliding to the second, and possibly even third, echelon of world states. We are running out of time for removing this threat. We must strain all intellectual, physical and moral forces of the nation. We need coordinated creative work. Nobody will do it for us." (Putin 1999: 209-229).

The Cold War can be described as a war that did not break out into an all out war between two ideological alligned groups of nations but the conflict assume war like proportions without actual fire power display this is why the term Cold War.

Post 1990, the world ceased to remain divided ideologically but many issues erupted other than political ideology. Nuclear umbrella for those nations that had enjoyed nuclear security under Warsaw Pact was one such issue. It led to nuclear non-proliferation and dismantling of the nuclear warheads possessed by the newly independent states. This was the deal between the new states seeking economic recovery with the help of the capitalist Western European nations through the total surrender of nuclear and other high-tech armaments in return for loans, technology and expertise.

The second issue that emerged was the need for new sources of energy. The new found states though bound to cooperate with each other as members of the CIS had to look for an independent sources of energy - oil, gas and generate power. This required all together new orientation of international relations. Countries like China floated Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) enlisting the new independent states of Central Asia. All the six Central Asian states also became members of the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC).

Among the Central and Eastern European states of the erstwhile Soviet Union and the larger Soviet Bloc, ethnic and religious conflicts erupted adding to the already existing economic hardship and political instability. Many of these issues took years to settle down and led to drawing and redrawing of the political map of Europe.

The world was watching this transition from economic and political chaos to restructuring and orderliness. All the nations of the world came forward to rehabilitate these new states. This unleashed a new trend towards Globalisation i.e. global exchange of goods, ideas, technologies and expertise. The World Trade Organisation was founded to accelerate this process.

With the demise of the Soviet Union, the only superpower left was the USA. Some thought that the world has become uni-polar whereas many believed that the world was becoming multi-polar with Britain, Germany, France and China emerging as powers in their own rights.

With the destruction of the Soviet Bloc, the socialist system of governance through control over economy was rejected and thrown into the dustbin of history. The social welfare schemes under the socialist systems were appreciated and continued with some modifications but controlled economy was replaced with market economy. Hardcore communist nations like Peoples' Republic of China while persisting with the communist one-party authoritarian rule adopted liberal economy and called it 'market socialism'.

In India, Globalisation and disintegration of the Soviet Union gave a rude shock to the ruling dispensation that had been pursuing the Soviet model of Socialism since 1955. Socialism with all its ills - corruption, nepotism, underdevelopment and low HDI had reduced India, a naturally and geographically rich country, into a poor third world country.

India was compelled to embrace liberalisation of economy the effects of which are better than anticipation. The idea of liberal economy was envisaged by scholar statesman Prof. Bal Raj

Madhok who wrote the manifesto of Bhartiya Jana Sangh in 1951. He coined the term "Jankalyanwad" i.e. welfare of the people as an anti-thesis to Samajwad, the Hindi word for socialism.

Globalisation led to the strengthening of the European Union, creation of Euro, currency reforms in the CIS states and strengthening of both the International Monetary Fund dominated by the United States of America and the Asian Development Bank dominated by China. It's been over thirty five years since the end of Cold War and some of the issues have resurfaced causing not only the 'cold' war but also the 'hot' war.

While, the communists, Socialist Bloc and the Soviet Union dominated most of the 20th Century, the first quarter of the 21st Century, it appears, is dominated by the issues unsettled during the Cold War. For instance, while the Warsaw Pact was dissolved, the NATO continues to flourish and is playing a decisive role in the new geo-political and strategic configuration in Europe as evident from the protracted Russo-Ukraine war.

This seems to be in accordance with the foreign policy formulations laid down by one time US Secretary of State Zbigniew Brezenski who believed that the USA must engage Russia and extend western influence in Central-Eastern Europe and Eurasia particularly Ukraine, Azerbaijan and the Balkans. (Brezenski 1997)

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