

Realpolitik has been the traditional paradigm in the field of international relations. It presents an anarchic world order in which states must guarantee their own security in a constant struggle for power. Realists attribute international conflict to endemic misperceptions within this context of constant power struggles. Realpolitik therefore ascribes the rise of the Cold War to U.S. reaction to Soviet territorial expansion. In short, the unbalance of power in favor of the Soviets presented a threat to American security, to which the U.S. responded with the creation of NATO and military engagement in Korea.

To that end, McDonald (1995) is correct in attributing fault in starting the Cold War to the Soviet expansion. In arguing that ideology was the primary impetus for the spread of the Cold War to East Asia, McDonald separates ideology from state-level analysis. For McDonald (1995), the level of coordination among the Communist bloc altered ideology into a “system-wide threat with a significant amount of unity... under Moscow.”

In order to assess the accuracy of this statement, one must first analyze Soviet motivations for expansion into the Far East. First, state-level influences include Russian history and the dominance of communist ideology. Second, on the individual level, Stalin's cult of personality gave him a preponderance of power over new communist governments. Both levels were strongly shaped and constrained by the realities of the international system. Ultimately, the inclusion of Asia in the Cold War was a result of the Soviet response to the security dilemma in a bipolar world. Ideology did not replace the security dilemma as the primary motivation for communist expansion in Asia. Instead, ideology was merely a tool used to amass allies and establish Soviet dominance relative to the U.S.

### **Systemic Level**

The security dilemma posits that given the anarchic world order, a state must ensure its survival by continual pursuit of power via internal and external strengthening. Previous to the Second World War, the distribution of power was multipolar; Britain, France, Germany, Russia, and the United States all shared relatively equal distribution of power. Each nation had spheres of influence throughout the world, usually in the form of colonies or territories. However, by the end of the Second World War, Britain, France, Germany and Japan were all reduced to the status of peripheral powers. With a bipolar distribution of power, the United States and the USSR were posed to be inevitable enemies “since the security of each could only be threatened by the other.” (Larson, 1985)

With the fall of Imperial Japan and colonial France and Britain, East Asia became a breeding ground for revolutionary activity. “The revolutionary situation in Asia was the result of a complicated combination of the destruction of indigenous patterns of authority during occupations and the power vacuums created by their defeat.” (MacDonald, 1995) The Soviets therefore came to regard East Asia as the perfect opportunity for fomenting world revolution. Thus while “the Cold War in Europe had become a war of position... the Cold War in Asia was a war of maneuver.” (McDonald, 1995)

The Soviets based their willingness to support communist revolts on two criteria: the likeliness of Western response, and chances for communist success. (MacDonald, 1995) The most important take-away from this is the emphasis on U.S. intervention in these same Asian countries. Since the original occupiers, France, Britain, and Japan, were considerably weakened, the United States was the only state with the economic and political power to respond effectively to any revolutionary uprising in these countries. When the U.S. failed to respond to

the Chinese Revolution, the Soviets took that to mean that United States would not involve itself in the Far East like it did in the West.

Indeed, Soviet expansion into the Middle East and Europe had been halted by a unified Western response in the form of NATO. Since the United States was successful in curbing Soviet expansion to the West, the Russians looked to the East to spawn its own legion of allies against the U.S. The Russian response to NATO's success in the West testifies to the systemic realities of the security dilemma and bipolarity. Had the international order remained multipolar, the original occupiers such as Britain and France could have quashed any communist uprisings and thereby discouraged Soviet entry into Asia. Since the post-war period was bipolar, the only two major actors were the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Security under such a system was a zero-sum game in which any power gain by the U.S. meant a weakening of the USSR. Therefore, in order to redress the imbalance of power created by NATO's success in the West, the USSR was forced by the prevailing international conditions to seek or create allies in the East.

The Soviets aided the Chinese once it became apparent that the West would not respond. As a result, Asian revolutionaries became emboldened by the Chinese example and began to apply Mao's brand of revolution to their own countries, namely the use of peasants rather than proletariats. The Korean War was also due to Soviet impressions of a likely U.S. response. The North Korean communists had wanted to invade South Korea before June of 1950, but it was not until U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson publicly stated that "Korea... was exclusively excluded from the American defense perimeter" that the Soviets gave North Korea permission to cross the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. (Gaddis, 1990) Once again, Soviet encroachment on

East Asia was based on a calculus that weighed the possibility of an American response. With the U.S. virtually severing all responsibilities to Korea, Stalin merely seized on the opportunity to gain more power and thereby buttress Soviet security against the U.S. The Korean experience further emphasizes that the systemic forces of bipolarity in an anarchic world order is the primary explanation for Soviet actions in the Far East.

### **State Level**

In addition to the systemic factors are two particular state-level influences that shaped Soviet activities in East Asia. The first is Russia's history with territorial expansion, and the second is the role of Marxist-Leninism.

By the fall of the Romanov Empire, Russia encompassed one-sixth of the world's landmass. Territorial expansion was a historically ingrained foreign policy reaction to centuries of invasion, stretching as far back as the 14<sup>th</sup> century. (Nogee and Spanier, 1988) Such “defensive expansionism” provided the Russian empire with a substantial buffer zone. At the same time, however, territorial aggression spawned more conflicts for Russia. The emergence of new enemies only fueled Russian expansionism and encouraged policies that suppressed indigenous populations. Ultimately, Russia felt compelled to expand as it won more and more enemies. (Nogee and Spanier, 1988)

By the time of Stalin's death, the Soviet Union had not so much extended its borders through invasion and brute military force as it did through a series of treaties and negotiations. As one of the “four policemen” that emerged from the Second World War, Stalin was able to negotiate boundary changes and Soviet involvement in post-war reconstruction within and without Europe. According to agreements reached at Yalta and Potsdam, the Soviet Union

would supervise East Germany, North Korea, and Poland. Consequently, this gave the Soviets opportunity to skew elections and policies in the Soviet's favor. In short, the Soviet Union was able to extend its borders via patron-client relationships with the governments they put in power, thereby creating countries friendly to the Soviet Union and opposed to the United States.

This patron-client relationship is discussed by McDonald (1995) as a manifestation of the Marxist-Leninist ideology in Soviet foreign policy. At the basis of Marxist-Leninism is the need for world revolution. Both theorists argued that given the Hegelian evolution of history and the polarity of the two ideologies, socialism and capitalism could not coexist; only world revolution could destroy capitalism. In application, the Soviet leadership created the Comintern, which connected the world's communist parties to one another and to Moscow. At the heart of the Comintern was the acceptance that Moscow was the capital of the world revolutionary movement. As the first successful revolution, the USSR acted as representative, sponsor, and adviser for revolutionaries around the world. Even the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) acquiesced to Soviet judgment on international issues. For one, the Chinese willingly sponsored uprisings in Indonesia and Burma upon Stalin's request, going so far as to say that "the CCP would follow the decisions of the Soviet Union." (McDonald, 1995) As such, Moscow's bargaining power increased in relation to these other more junior revolutionary parties, thereby giving Moscow ideological allies, but allies that would fully defer to its decisions.

Both state level influences can be better explained as extensions of the international system. First, Russian compulsion for territorial expansion can be explained by the security

dilemma in which security concerns motivated continual conquest of foreign lands. Added to this is a strong centralization component. Both tsarist and Soviet Russia featured tightly controlled complex state apparatus. The Russian empire from the time of Peter the Great strongly emphasize central leadership, which is necessary to effectively manage a large military. Indeed, most political scientists will agree that executive efficiency is best suited for crises such as war. Given that the governance structure is organized to streamline executive efficiency, it is clear that security in an anarchic world (i.e. territorial expansion) was top priority.

Second, the role communist ideology plays in the spread of the Cold War to East Asia can also be explained systematically. For one, ideology shapes how states and individuals define friend and foe in the international order. Shared world views can therefore be as important as power factors in seeking allies. (McDonald, 1995) In this vein, it is important to emphasize the role allies play in the game of power politics. Structural realism, as posited by Kenneth Waltz, provides states two methods of addressing the security dilemma: internal strengthening or external strengthening. The acquisition of allies falls into the latter category. Soviet Russia not only courted allies, but actively participated in their creation by sponsoring communist uprisings throughout the world. The Comintern was an ideological vehicle used by the Soviets to make revolution more feasible. In short, the Comintern was an investment which yielded many returns in the form of Communist China, Communist Cuba and many more ideological allies with which to confront the U.S.

McDonald (1995) was correct in stating that Soviet systematic dissemination of world revolution elevated ideology from a state-level influence to that of a systemic-level influence on the Cold War. At the same time, the Soviets had no choice given the systemic parameters of

security and bipolarity: it was either going to find allies or face fighting a one-man fight against the West. Given that the socialist camp was greatly outnumbered, the Soviets had no choice but to foment uprisings and create ideologically like-minded states to achieve balance with the U.S. Ideology was therefore only a tool to identify possible friends, and the argument which the Soviets used to convince oppressed peoples to join their camp. In the context of East Asia, the spread of the Cold War was systemic and therefore inevitable.

### **Individual**

Ideology is also strongly featured in the calculus of individual actors. In particular, Stalin and Truman both strongly emphasized ideology in the Cold War. For Stalin, ideology provided theoretical explanations to American actions and reactions. As the unquestioned leader of the Soviet Union, this made Stalin's beliefs all the more important. In particular was his ideological understanding of American unresponsiveness in East Asia following the Chinese Revolution. By mid-1949, Stalin "had come to believe that war [in China] is not advantageous to the imperialists [because] their crisis of capitalism has begun." (McDonald, 1995) In short, Stalin believed that Truman's failure to respond to increasingly hostile conditions to capitalism in China was because capitalism was coming to an end, as predicted by Marxist-Leninism. He then used this to further prove "his ideological infallibility" among Marxist-Leninist.

The consequence of Stalin's interpretation and his hubris was the emergence of the "cult of personality." The image of Stalin as both a father and wise leader to his country was encouraged within and without the Soviet Union, thereby contributing to the credibility of the USSR and Stalin as the unquestioned leader of the world communist leader.

Motivations for propagating the cult of personality included domestic politics and also international concerns. Domestically, popular reverence of Stalin and recognition of his ideological infallibility would insulate him from attack and also provide him with absolute authority on domestic policies. Abroad, the cult of personality gave Stalin the ability to sway other communist countries into contributing to the Soviet agenda. China's involvement in the world communist movement in the early Cold War period is a case in point. While still struggling politically and economically, the Chinese still sacrificed a lot at the behest of the Soviet Union in Southeast Asia and Vietnam. (McDonald, 1995) By doing so, China earned both recognition among the communists and the approval of Joseph Stalin himself. This ultimately translated into ideological legitimacy.

In the United States, President Truman was the unquestioned leader of the West. Following the death of FDR, Truman was the first president to fully recognize and react to Soviet aggression in the East. While American defense against communism was primarily limited to NATO activities in the West, Truman was able to cultivate enough public animosity toward communism and the Soviet Union to push NSC-68's defense programs through Congress. Previous to the Truman administration, the American public was receptive of the USSR. This was primarily due to American gratitude for Soviet sacrifice during WWII, which was also encouraged by the government through films and speeches. In the same vein, Truman was able to equate communism with totalitarianism, emphasizing that this was a struggle to the death.

NSC-68 was the first comprehensive policy toward Soviet aggression, and it featured containment as its leading strategy. Most importantly, NSC-68 increased the defense budget

nearly four-fold. Without being convinced of the gravity of the ideological differences and totalitarian dangers, Congress would have likely denied Truman such a hefty investment.

Ultimately, both leaders were forced by systemic circumstances to exploit ideology. For Stalin, the cult of personality gave him nearly complete control. Stalin's monopoly on ideology was a tool used to convince client states to act on behalf of the USSR or the world communist revolution, thereby saving the Soviet Union a world of manpower and resources. Truman used ideology to galvanize an otherwise complacent Congress to addressing the growing Soviet threat. Ultimately, individual actors on both sides used what tools they had available to address the security threat posed by a bipolar anarchic world order.

Understanding the spread of the Cold War to East Asia requires a clear understanding of the foundations of *realpolitik*. In his seminal work, Kenneth Waltz argued that realism was incomplete because it did not factor state and individual levels. In analyzing the motivations of state and individual actions, it becomes clear that these two levels of influences were merely components to a larger system: the anarchic world order.

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