

## Alternative Perspectives on the Cold War, 1946 – 1989

*“I know not with what weapons World War III will be fought but I know that World War IV will be fought with clubs.”* – often attributed to Albert Einstein in various forms

**Introduction.** With the end of World War II came the end also of cooperation between the Western Allies and the Soviet Union. Mutual suspicion and ideological differences on both sides led to very different foreign policy goals. The United States at the conclusion of the war was the only nation to possess the atomic bomb but the Soviet Union also acquired nuclear capability by 1949. Confrontation between these two powers in various parts of the world almost as soon as World War II ended marked a period characterized by nationalism, espionage scares, distrust of “foreign” ideas, and ultimately as the nuclear arsenals grew, by the all pervasive fear of nuclear annihilation.

As the governments and populaces of the antagonist powers organized their societies for the prosecution of this so-called “Cold War” there also developed alternative perspectives among some of the citizenry of the world to official policy and intelligence declarations. This is a brief survey of resources documenting some of these voices.

**1. Period Outline.** Naturally all commentaries work within a framework of cognitive assumptions and biases. An outline of events that attempts some balance is available as a teaching aid for a history class at the State University of New York and is appended here in PDF format as a conceptual framework for the period. The extent to which popular opinions about the Cold War may be influenced by political considerations, may be gauged from the CNN website material, also appended in PDF format, which appears to intimate a very large role for the Soviet Union in the direction of anti-war and anti-nuclear weapons organizations and protests and fails to mention the claim that the CIA funded many authors and cultural institutions in the West to influence public opinion (Monthly Review). Other included sources are various articles in *Wikipedia*,

which naturally also requires cautious evaluation; these articles frequently contain copious links to other materials, however. **Materials in this essay will be referenced by author or by accompanying PDF filename in parentheses.**

**2. Early Dissent.** In August 1945 at the conclusion of World War II Albert Einstein voiced misgivings about the control and proliferation of the new atomic weapon and advocated the creation of a world government to oversee the emerging nuclear age (Clark 713). As relations between the Western nations and the Soviet Union deteriorated [CIA intervention in Italy against Communist Party, Truman Doctrine of “containment of communism” thwarts communist insurgency in Greece; Soviet non-cooperation in Iran and pressure on Turkey] (SUNY Outline) various nuclear scientists form the Emergency Committee of Atomic Scientists in 1946 with Einstein as president and a board of trustees which included Hans Bethe, Linus Pauling, Leo Szilard, and Harold Urey (Clark 717) to lobby for the peaceful use of nuclear energy. Ultimately this organization produced and continues to publish the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* that maintains a “Doomsday Clock” on the threat of nuclear war.

**3. Early Cold War.** As the United States developed an ever more encompassing “bunker mentality” on the heels of deteriorating relations with the Soviet bloc, exemplified by the blockade of Berlin and subsequent U.S. airlift of supplies in 1948, the success of the communist forces in China in 1949, the detonation of the first Soviet nuclear device the same year, the outbreak of war in Korea (1950-53) the tenor of life in the United States changed. Dissent became synonymous with lack of patriotism. Membership in the Communist Party became illegal and those associated with the organization were investigated, prevented from working, called before Congress and asked to expose others on penalty of imprisonment (SUNY Outline). Sen. Joseph McCarthy fueled a nationwide hysteria that saw communists behind all non-traditional cultural developments and threatening events and movements [such as the African-american civil rights movement (Fox 142)] in the United States. Two citizens, Julius and Ethel

Rosenberg were executed after their controversial trial for and conviction of delivering atomic secrets to the Soviets. As the official policy of the world powers became that of uneasy peace through “mutually assured destruction” or MAD, citizens were urged to prepare for nuclear war both psychologically and physically: schoolchildren practiced “duck and cover” air raid drills and adults were advised to build private bomb shelters. The Cold War was also fought in Hollywood movies with emphases that changed throughout the period from “Red Scare” to skepticism (CNN Red Scare).

In this intellectual climate voices around the world questioned the official government policies. In 1957 the Committee for a SANE Nuclear Policy was founded, attracting the support of many concerned Americans (NPS SANE). In 1958 prominent British intellectuals founded the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament which mobilized public support with its slogan “Ban the Bomb!” and apparently bequeathed the international peace symbol to the world (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament). In continental Europe the Dutch Interchurch Peace Council found a wide following and in West Germany, aware of its precarious position as battleground for any nuclear conflict a number of peace groups flourished including the important Kampf dem Atontod, or “Fight the Atomic Death” (CNN Cold War). In France the Mouvement de la Paix was founded as early as 1949 to promote peace and remains today an anti-nuclear weapon voice (Mouvement). Sweden has hosted disarmament discussion since the beginning of the Cold War. The Stockholm Appeal in 1950 was a worldwide call for signatures against nuclear armament. Today the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, founded 1966, enjoys wide prestige (SIPRI).

In addition to the alignment of nations allied to either the United States and those allied to the Soviet Union or the People’s Republic of China there existed countries who maintained friendly relations with all sides and refrained from joining military alliances such as NATO and SEATO with the West or the Warsaw Pact with the East. In the 1950’s the prime minister of newly independent India, Jawaharlal Nehru frequently served as spokesperson and negotiator for the interests of the “non-aligned” nations of Asia and Africa.

Initiatives for peace and disarmament in this period often originated with these nations.

**4. Cuban Missile Crisis and Vietnam.** As the revolt against colonialism accelerated in the so-called “Third World” the Western powers seemed often incapable of viewing the emerging nations’ aspirations for self-determination as anything but an extension of Soviet power in the world. Against a generally favorable intellectual estimation of socialist ideas throughout the world, the United States and its allies virtually ceded new nationalism of these former colonies to Soviet and Chinese support, backing generally corrupt regimes favorable to the West. In the 1950s and early 1960s France was defeated in Vietnam and Algeria and came to an uneasy peace with many of its former colonies. Portugal fought losing wars against insurgents in Angola and Mozambique. For decades the European powers were unwilling to aid the aspirations of the majority black population of South Africa in its aspirations to majority rule. Nelson Mandela and his associates were considered leftist terrorists. Great Britain developed a “Commonwealth” of former colonial nations but not without bloodshed in Kenya and Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe. The United States was not able to come to terms with the Castro government in Cuba, launched a disastrous invasion of the island in 1961 and threatened nuclear war over the issue of Soviet missile deployment on the island in 1962. In 1961 President John F. Kennedy addressed an open letter to the American people warning of the possibility of nuclear war and urging all citizens to live their lives cognizant of civil defense measures including the building of bomb shelters (CNN JFK Letter). The war in Vietnam seemed to many to prove the wrongness of containing Communism at any cost, as well as the arms race that underlay the militarized and bifurcated international scene and sparked widespread protests for years within the United States and around the world (SUNY Outline).

**5. Reagan Years.** As early as the 1970s the United States intervened repeatedly in the affairs of Latin American states to prevent what it thought was

the spread of communism in that sphere. This intervention became the hallmark of much of the foreign policy of the Reagan presidency. This administration derailed the SALT disarmament talks, accelerated the arms race through deployment of ever larger numbers of ICBM's and forced European allies to base Pershing II IRBM's on their soil, giving the appearance of a willingness to accept limited war in Europe. In the early 1980s this development sparked massive protests in Europe, particularly in West Germany, which saw itself as the first target of annihilation under this policy, should a war occur. Later, with the generally better relations between the Soviet Union and the United States, the resumption of disarmament talks, and the eventual fall of communism in the Eastern Bloc, the perception of imminent nuclear war became less pronounced (Schatz and Fiske). During the 1990s with the ascendancy of neo-conservative thinking in the United States and in many of its allies, at least intermittently, concerns over nuclear war generally became more muted. Reminders still surface when tensions flare between Pakistan and India, both nuclear powers and in the continuing debates over nuclear programs in North Korea and Iran (SUNY Outline). Since 1945 a large number of potentially catastrophic accidents have been imputed to the world's nuclear powers, but seldom verified (CNN Accidents).

**6. Ban the Bomb Movement/International Peace Symbol.** Following World War II the movement for nuclear disarmament was strongest in Europe. The slogan "Ban the Bomb!" was frequently associated with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament or CND in the United Kingdom, organized by leading British intellectuals including the distinguished actress Peggy Ashcroft, the composer Benjamin Britten, the biologist Julian Huxley, and Bertrand Russell, the noted philosopher and mathematician, and many others. Particularly after 1958 many large marches and rallies were held by the organization propelling them forward as a force in the nuclear arms debate in Great Britain. The international peace symbol is reputed to be the stylized logo of this group's acronym (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament).

**7. Soviet Responses.** Under Joseph Stalin the Soviet Union saw the world as divided between the imperialist and capitalist societies and the Communist and progressive nations. Nikita Krushchev in 1956 denied that war was inevitable between the two blocs of nations since Communism had become strong enough to survive in a capitalist world. The Soviet suppression of the uprising in Hungary that year, however chilled relations with the West considerably. After the Cuban missile crisis the United States and the Soviet Union signed accords to improve peaceful coexistence in 1963. In 1967 President Lyndon Johnson and Soviet Prime Minister Aleksei Kosygin attempted to improve U.S. – Soviet relations. The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 was a disturbance to these relations however. In the 1970s the official policy of both states was described as “Détente” or cooperation. The incursion of the Soviet Union into Afghanistan brought greater tensions to the relations of the two nations. Soviet policies in the 1980s under Gorbachev brought more openness to Eastern Bloc societies, improved relations with the United States, despite a continuing and accelerating arms race on both sides, and eventually resulted in the demise of the Soviet Union and its political system.

The opinions of Soviet and Eastern Bloc citizens about the arms race and the spectre of nuclear war are difficult to assess since freedom of expression was not a right under most of the regimes that governed those nations. A number of Soviet citizens were able to function as dissidents in the Soviet Union, however. Andrei Sakharov, a Soviet nuclear physicist, began dissenting from official policy as early as 1957 and eventually was exiled to a remote region of the country. Later he was recalled to Moscow by Gorbachev (New York Times). The poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko criticized Stalinism, the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia, and human rights violations within the Eastern Bloc nations. Some dissidents have considered him as only an “official” dissident, sanctioned by the state (Yevtushenko). Yelena Bonner and Anatoly Shcharanski were imprisoned in the 1970s. The Moscow-Helsinki Group with which both were

affiliated was formed in 1976 to monitor Soviet compliance with the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 on human rights issues (Moscow-Helsinki).

**8. Literary and Intellectual Perspective.** Throughout the Cold War writers, artists, and intellectuals attempted to play a role in shaping public opinion and governmental policies relating to nuclear weapons and the arms race. Claims have been made that both sides in the Cold War supported specific writers in order to deliver their respective messages through cultural discussion. Be that as it may, a short list of major writers who disagreed in their writing and often in their political activities with the dominant Cold War paradigm, follow.

Theodor Adorno

James Baldwin

Simone de Beauvoir

Noam Chomsky

Guenter Grass

Vaclav Havel

Milan Kundera

Norman Mailer

Jean Paul Sartre

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

Yevgeny Yevtushenko

Writers who supported the official societal lines were probably more typical in popular literature during the 1950s and 60s, particularly in the genre of espionage novels. Chief among these were Ian Fleming, Graham Greene, and John LeCarre. More serious writing emphasizing extreme individualist (and thus archetypically pro-American) ideology was produced by Ayn Rand. A popular work critical of the Cold War was Neville Shute's *On the Beach* which attained popularity and provoked thought as a major Hollywood film.

## 9. Quotes and Images

## Quotes

Noam Chomsky

The fact is that both of the superpowers-and many lesser powers as well-are ruining their economies and threatening world peace, indeed human survival, by a mindless commitment to military productions for themselves and for export (1980, Peck 209).

Albert Einstein

We scientists, whose tragic destiny it has been to help make the methods of annihilation ever more gruesome and more effective, must consider it our solemn and transcendent duty to do all in our power in preventing these weapons from being used for the brutal purpose for which they were invented (1948, Clark 723).

. . . where belief in the omnipotence of physical force gets the upper hand in political life, this force takes on a life of its own, and proves stronger than the men who think to use force as a tool. The proposed militarization of the nation not only immediately threatens us with war; it will also slowly but surely destroy the democratic spirit and the dignity of the individual in our land (1950, Bargmann 147).

Dwight Eisenhower

. . . we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought by the military-industrial complex (Television address, January 17, 1961, can be seen on Youtube).

The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists

It is five minutes to midnight (June 2008).

## Images

Senator Joseph McCarthy:

[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/archive/f/fa/20080208021259!Joseph\\_McCarthy.jpg&imgrefurl=http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image:Joseph\\_McCarthy.jpg&h=1192&w=1503&sz=810&hl=en&start=3&tbid=Eg5G12pMazV](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/archive/f/fa/20080208021259!Joseph_McCarthy.jpg&imgrefurl=http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image:Joseph_McCarthy.jpg&h=1192&w=1503&sz=810&hl=en&start=3&tbid=Eg5G12pMazV)

San Francisco Bay Area Nike Sites Today

<http://www.acme.com/jeff/nike>

Ban the Bomb rally

[www.cofa.unsw.edu.au](http://www.cofa.unsw.edu.au)

Additional images accompany many of the URLs listed and may be available for licensing and use.

### Select Resources

Books:

Bargmann, Sonja. Ideas and Opinions, Albert Einstein. New York: Three Rivers Press, 1982.

Clark, Ronald W. Einstein, the Life and Times. New York: World Publishing Co., Avon, 1971, 1984.

Fox, Steve. "From the Beat Generation to the Sanctuary Movement." In The Cold War American West, 1945-1989. Ed. Kevin J. Fernlund. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, n.d. 139-166.

Peck, James, ed. The Chomsky Reader. New York: Pantheon, 1987.

Journal Articles:

Schatz, Robert T. and Susan T. Fiske. "International Reactions to the Threat of Nuclear War: the Rise and Fall of Concern in the Eighties." *Political Psychology*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Mar. 1992) 1-29.

Additional resources on the Internet:

- Human Rights Monitoring

[http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Moscow Helsinki Group](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Moscow_Helsinki_Group)

- Nelson Mandela and the Cold War in Africa

[http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Nelson Mandela](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Nelson_Mandela)

- Yevgeny Yevtoshenko and Soviet Dissidents

[http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Yevgeny Yevtushenko](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Yevgeny_Yevtushenko)

- British Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the Peace Symbol

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Campaign_for_Nuclear_Disarmament)

- Work of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stockholm\\_International\\_Peace\\_Research\\_Institute](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stockholm_International_Peace_Research_Institute)

- The Peace Movement in France

<http://pagesperso-orange.fr/mvpaix-rennes/frenchmvp.html>

- Andrei Sakharov and Soviet Dissidents

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html>

- Outline of Cold War History

<http://ww2.sunysuffolk.edu/westn/outlinecoldwar.htm>

- Soviet Perspectives on the Cold War

<http://www.ibiblio.org/expo/soviet.exhibit/coldwar.html>

- CNN News Special on the Cold War and Contemporary Culture

<http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/cold.war>

- Book Review Addressing the Interaction of the CIA and the Media During the Cold War Period

<http://www.monthlyreview.org/1199petr.htm>

- National Park Service Publication on the Committee for a SANE Nuclear Policy

<http://www.nps.gov/archive/elro/glossary/nat-com-sane-nuc-pol.htm>

- Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists and the Doomsday Clock

<http://www.thebulletin.org>

- Literature and Film Relating to the Cold War

<http://www.writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/50s/home.html>