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Analysis of the Outbreak of the Cold War and Its Impact on Armed Conflict

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Abstract: The Cold War has always been a historical stage that has attracted much attention. This historical stage has profoundly affected today's international situation and people's perception of great power competition. The Cold War lasted for nearly forty-four years. During this nearly half a century, the US and the Soviet Union used almost all means of confrontation except direct armed conflict to achieve the effect of suppressing each other. By analyzing past historical events and cases for example, this paper mainly discusses the causes of the Cold War and how it prevent armed conflict from becoming two topics of widespread concern, and it concludes that the outbreak of the Cold War was related to the anarchy among the great powers, and also related to the differences in economic systems between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. The Cold War prevented nuclear war but intensified conventional war to some extent. This paper aims to tell people that the Cold War is not an ideal state of the international community, all countries should learn lessons from the Cold War to avoid the recurrence of this unhealthy international pattern.

Keywords: anarchy, great powers, armed conflict, conventional armed conflict, nuclear war

1. Introduction

With the U.S. withdrawing from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the Sino-U.S. trade war and the Ukrainian crisis erupting, whether a new Cold War will break out has become a question that people often discuss. It is significant in this period to review the reasons for the outbreak of the Cold War and the extent to which armed conflict was averted by it. This paper focuses on the relevant international relations theories and historical cases, and also discusses whether the Cold War was a benign state of international society, so as to provide some references for those who are interested in international relationships and the Cold War.

2. Causes Analysis of the Outbreak of the Cold War

The reasons for the outbreak of the Cold War are various. Among the many factors, anarchy among great powers is an important reason. According to Luard [1], in 1945 after World War II, in order to avoid conflicts, people summed up the failure experience of the League of Nations and established the United Nations. Although the coverage of UN member states is significantly larger than that of the League of Nations, the UN did not end the anarchy among the great powers [2]. Although the UN General Assembly follows the principle of one country, one vote, the resolutions passed by the

UN General Assembly are not mandatory for all countries. However, the UN Security Council, which has coercive power, has five permanent members, and these five countries have veto power in the UN Security Council. Moreover, these five permanent members are all big countries, and they will not allow resolutions that are unfavorable to themselves to be passed in the UN Security Council, and the U.S. and the Soviet Union are among them. Thus, the relationship between the U.S. and the Soviet Union was still in a state of anarchy. Under the catalysis of this anarchy, both countries have fallen into a serious security dilemma, and thus began to continuously improve their military strength and suppress each other in all aspects. And this state of continuous arms race and competition with each other in almost all directions without direct armed conflict is known as the Cold War.

Besides the anarchy between the great powers, the outbreak of the Cold War was also because of the huge difference in economic policy between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. As Pryor believed [3], the U.S. economic policy favors a market economy, whereas the Soviet Union's policy favors a planned economy. As pointed out by Roth [4], a market economy is a type of economics in which the market is used to distribute social resources. The planned economy is different. According to the research of Horvat [5], an economic system with scheduled production, resource allocation, and product consumption is referred to as a planned economy., and these production schedules are usually formulated by the government, such as Gosplan in the Soviet Union [6]. Close economic ties can improve the relationship between the two countries in many cases. The friendly relationship between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia is a very typical case. The U.S. and Saudi Arabia have huge differences in religion, culture, language, and ideology, but before the shale oil revolution, the U.S. needed to buy Saudi oil to meet the domestic needs, and Saudi Arabia needed to buy American weapons to meet Saudi defense needs. Closing economic ties have allowed these two very different countries to maintain a long-term friendly relationship [7]. However, due to the essential difference between the market economy and the planned economy, this directly led to the difficulty of large-scale trade between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, which left the U.S. with no strong economic ties with the Soviet Union. The lack of strong economic ties made the U.S. and the Soviet Union less apprehensive about confronting each other, allowing the Cold War to break out.

3. The Impact of the Cold War on Armed Conflicts

The impact of the outbreak of the Cold War on armed conflicts cannot be underestimated. Among the many impacts of the Cold War on armed conflicts, the Cold War was of great significance in avoiding an all-out nuclear war. During the Cold War, the technology of nuclear weapons developed rapidly but a full-scale nuclear war did not break out. This is related to the fact that both the Soviet Union and the U.S. used nuclear weapons to destroy each other's strength during the Cold War. According to Glasstone [8], this phenomenon is also known as Mutual Assured Destruction. The Cuban missile crisis is a typical example. Since the U.S. deployed medium-range ballistic missiles in Italy and Turkey in 1959, the strategic nuclear strikes of the U.S. were able to threaten the hinterland of the Soviet Union, and the U.S. gained a comparative advantage over the Soviet Union in the field of nuclear strategy [9]. In response to this situation, the Soviet Union decided to deploy medium-range ballistic missiles in Cuba to threaten the hinterland of the U.S.. According to Weldes [10] In August 1962, the U.S. discovered that the Soviet Union was deploying ballistic missiles to Cuba and took formal countermeasures in October 1962 to impose a naval blockade on Cuba. The Soviet Union also took immediate action. And disclosed part of the Soviet missile forces in Cuba to achieve the effect of a showdown with the U.S.. The two countries have been in a standoff for nearly 13 days. During this period of nearly two weeks, the world has come to the brink of a full-scale nuclear war, but due to the arms race brought about by the Cold War, both the U.S. and the Soviet Union had very large nuclear arsenals at that time. If a nuclear war breaks

out, both sides have completely destroyed the opponent's ability. Therefore in the end, this crisis ended with a mutual compromise between the Soviet Union and the U.S.. It can be seen from this case that the nuclear arms race brought about by the Cold War successfully avoided nuclear war to a certain extent.

Although the Cold War avoided nuclear war to a certain extent, this does not mean that the Cold War played a positive role in avoiding armed conflicts. On the contrary, the Cold War intensified conventional armed conflicts. An important manifestation of the exacerbation of conventional armed conflicts during the Cold War is proxy warfare [11]. Among the many proxy wars, the Yom Kippur War that broke out in 1973 is a good case. This war is also known as the Fourth Arab–Israeli War [12]. The fundamental reason for the outbreak of this war is the territorial dispute between Arab countries and Israel, but since Middle Eastern countries basically do not have strong industrial production capacity, this means that even if a war breaks out between the two sides, the intensity of the war will not be very large. But at the time of the Cold War, due to the special geographical location and rich fossil resources in the Middle East, both the U.S. and the Soviet Union wanted to intervene in Middle East affairs and reduce each other's sphere of influence in the Middle East, so the U.S. and the Soviet Union intervened in this conflict. The Soviet Union opted to back Arab nations, while the U.S. chose to back Israel [13]. Because both the U.S. and the Soviet Union have industrial capabilities far exceeding those of Middle Eastern countries. They provide proxies of their choosing with vast quantities of arms and ammunition. When both parties involved in the war obtained a huge amount of weapons and ammunition, the intensity of the war also increased, and finally the war ended under international mediation after both parties involved in the war paid a heavy price. It can be seen from this case that due to the outbreak of the Cold War, both the U.S. and the Soviet Union hoped to overwhelm their opponents in various regions of the world but did not want direct conflicts between major powers, so they expanded their power for themselves through proxy wars scope, and made an otherwise low-intensity war very intense and bloody.

In addition to proxy wars, hegemonic aggression is also an important way in which the Cold War intensified conventional armed conflicts. Both the U.S. and the Soviet Union sought to widen their spheres of influence as much as possible during the Cold War. and compress their opponents' spheres of influence. This phenomenon caused the emergence of hegemonic ideas in both the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Under the guidance of this kind of thinking, both the U.S. and the Soviet Union should take it for granted that they need to dominate all affairs of neighboring countries. If a neighboring country behaves inconsistently with their own expectations, they will think that this country may fall to the opponent, and thus directly launch hegemonic aggression to maintain their sphere of influence. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan is a classic example. Because the then-supreme leader of Afghanistan, Hafizullah Amin, wanted to pursue a more balanced foreign policy and hoped to restore diplomatic relations with the U.S. [14]. The Soviet Union believed that this situation could lead to Afghanistan falling to the U.S.. Therefore the Soviet Red Army invaded Afghanistan in 1979 [14]. Aside from that, the US invasion of Grenada is also a good example. In 1979, the New Jewel Movement, a left-wing party in Grenada, seized power because the U.S. worried that the left-wing government in Grenada would completely fall to the Soviet Union [15]. Therefore in 1983, President Ronald Reagan ordered the invasion of the Caribbean nation of Grenada, citing the threat posed to American citizens by the leftist regime [16]. From these two examples, it can be seen that, during the Cold War, because of the comprehensive confrontation between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, many small countries did not actually pose a substantial threat to these two superpowers. However, under the influence of hegemonism, as long as neighboring small countries did not comply with themselves, the U.S. and the Soviet Union would

directly invade this country to ensure that their sphere of influence was not encroached upon by their opponents. This has led to an increase in conventional armed conflicts.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the outbreak of the Cold War is closely related to the international order after World War II. Although the establishment of the United Nations, there was still anarchy among major powers in general. This phenomenon provided the conditions for the Cold War, and the huge difference in the economic system between the U.S. and the Soviet Union also became the fuse of the Cold War. During the Cold War, because both the U.S. and the Soviet Union had the ability to destroy each other, the Cold War successfully avoided a nuclear war. However, in order to compete for spheres of influence, the U.S. and the Soviet Union also engaged in armed conflicts through proxy wars. At the same time, both the U.S. and the Soviet Union directly invaded other sovereign countries due to hegemonic ideology. It can be seen that although the Cold War successfully avoided the outbreak of nuclear war, the Cold War did not prevent conventional armed conflicts. On the contrary, the Cold War also increased the intensity and possibility of conventional wars. There are also some shortcomings in this paper, which put too much emphasis on realism theory when analyzing the causes for the outbreak of the Cold War. The Non-Aligned Movement and regional powers are not discussed in the analysis of the extent to which the Cold War prevented armed conflict. In future research, more liberalism and constructivism theories can be introduced, and discussions on international organizations and regional powers can be added.

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