

Extended Commentary:

The Good that Came out of the Cold War

In almost all accounts of contemporary history, the Cold War is portrayed as a negative chapter in American History. Given the vast amount of evidence demonstrating that the United States involved itself with illegal conflicts, propped up violent allied regimes in certain regions, imprisoned or killed members of the American citizenry for possible dissent, and produced an arsenal of nuclear weapons—the most dangerous military weapon to date—it is understandable why many view the Cold War as a dark period of the last century. However, due to this conflict, there were many positive policies, movements and ideas that came to be through the actions of both the American government and its people. These measures would hardly have been considered in the world before the Cold War. This analysis will examine the Truman administration's policy on racism, the Civil Rights Movement and its advancement of humanitarianism, NATO's nuclear program and the Space Agency's work, and how they related to each other as they both advanced the American Cold War effort and caused positive changes in the world.

The beginning of the Cold War was also the beginning of America's campaign against racism. The need to gain allies from non-white nations made to the need to clean the racist house of whites versus non-whites in America a focal point. The president that began that effort to quash American racism in the twentieth century was none other than the southern president, Harry S. Truman. Well before Dr. Martin King Jr. delivered his pivotal Washington Speech in 1967, Truman pushed for a civil rights based, humanitarian government, when he established a Commission on Civil Rights in 1946, a Joint Congressional Committee on Civil Rights, a Civil Rights Division in the Department of Justice, strengthened existing civil rights statutes, provided

Federal protection against lynching, protected the right to vote more adequately, established a Fair Employment Practice Commission to prevent unfair discrimination in employment, prohibited discrimination in interstate transportation facilities, provided home-rule and suffrage in presidential elections for the residents of the District of Columbia, proposed the statehood of Hawaii and Alaska and a greater measure of self-government for America's island possessions, equalized the opportunities for residents of the United States to become naturalized citizens, and moved to settle the evacuation claims of Japanese-Americans.¹ Not only were Truman's policies highlighting civil rights that the Communists were not providing, they were also a testament to the attempted uniting of a people and its government behind an anti-racist, humanitarian policy, creating a positive image of the United States in the world, which was inspired because of the existence of the Cold War.

Truman ignited this growing national effort to counter racism by drawing a line in the sand in his 1948 presidential address, "We shall not, however, finally achieve the ideals for which this Nation was founded so long as any American suffers discrimination as a result of his race, or religion, or color, or the land of origin of his forefathers."² President Truman made it clear that the U.S. Government had to start living up to the country's legacy, with its historical importance as the protector of the people's rights, which became a public resolve that non-white nations noticed.

As well as reminding the government of its present duty to uphold the rights of all people, Truman addressed the historical standard of the American Government. Quoting again his 1948 address, he stated

This Nation was founded by men and women who sought these shores that they might enjoy greater freedom and greater opportunity than they had known before. The founders of the United States proclaimed to the world the American belief that all men are created equal, and that governments are

instituted to secure the inalienable rights with which all men are endowed. In the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States, they eloquently expressed the aspirations of all mankind for equality and freedom.”³

Since the standard of racial equality was always with America, Truman’s argument not only established America’s conviction, but showed that America had a plan to combat racism when the Soviet Union did not, making them more attractive to potential non-white allies. Truman’s address summarizing the American policy against racism served as a moral policy and a strategic policy in the Cold War.

Even though it was not a direct occurrence brought on by the Cold War, the 1960s Civil Rights Movement was born during the conflict and helped shape what was happening on the world stage regarding race. This movement was a shining example of a group of people inspired to execute policies against racism, perhaps due to the president’s words decades earlier. Dr. King, one of the founding members of the Civil Rights movement, captured in one of his 1967 speeches a summation of the anti-racist sentiment and humanitarian ideals inspired, and put into action, because of the violence the Cold War had caused. He said in that speech,

I believe everyone has a duty to be in both the civil rights and peace movements; but for those who presently choose but one, I would hope they will finally come to see the moral roots common to both. I hope they will understand that brotherhood is indivisible, that equality of races is connected with the equality of nations in a single harmonious co-existence of all human beings.”⁴

Unlike President Truman’s, Martin Luther King’s speech did not only address issues of racism. After the Civil Rights Bill of 1964, the Civil Rights Movement ran campaigns against violence and war. Citizens who had suffered inhumane, racist violence before civil rights laws in America were also tired of the brutal and violent conflicts the Cold War had orchestrated in the world. In his speech, King stated, “Another reason why I vigorously oppose the war in Vietnam is that its continuation deeply threatens the prospect of mankind's survival. This war has created

the climate for greater armament and further expansion of destructive nuclear power.”⁵ King’s speech summarized how this global war of spying, espionage, and political competition had created areas rife with carnage, such as Vietnam, and also served as an inspiration for protesters to continue to push back against such violence. Insightful, intelligent, and outspoken citizens like King spoke up and pushed for efforts that would unite people of all races around the world to work together.

The U.S. Government was on the verge of pushing such an effort—one that would require a partnership with the people of other nations—well before Dr. King’s speech. Even though it was for a war effort that King and the Peace Movement stood against, the Memorandum on the Subject of Sharing Nuclear Energy was a step in the right direction in terms of globalism and the global involvement of the United States in particular. Since this move by America was motivated by the United States and their rival, the Soviet Union, both having nuclear weapons, the plan was centered around the business of the nations of NATO. The following memorandum demonstrated what the U.S. wanted to accomplish with its allies: “Develop defense plans, train in the use of U.S. owned and controlled atomic weapons, to train in the defense against enemy use of such weapons and to evaluate enemy nuclear capabilities.”⁶ This part of the memorandum specified the efforts that were limited in 1958 and then became the primary focus for America and its allies in 1962, when its allies began procuring nuclear weapons.

The Department of Defense also left the door open for the president to become the leader of this particular NATO operation, which would have led to more presidential leadership roles in global efforts. The memorandum’s discussion of the president stated, “Presidential approval of the proposed agreement and the authorization of their implementation. At the same time, the

President will have to make a determination in writing that performance of the agreement will promote and not constitute an unreasonable risk to the common defense and security.”⁷ Even though the NATO nuclear program was an obvious advancement of Cold War policies against the Russians, as per the memorandum’s fine print, the effort to seek global collective security was a measure that has since produced positive results for American national defense and left the door open for other ventures beyond its geographical horizon.

Whether fueled by a desire to defeat the Soviets in the Cold War, or to pursue avenues that had yet to be discovered, America was motivated to go where it had never gone before. Hence, globalism and the Space Program thrived in the environment the Cold War provided. Agencies within the U.S. Government united to meet the need for cooperation to fulfill the mission to explore uncharted territory. This idea was further outlined within the DOD/NASA memorandum for the president as early as 1959. It stated, “The Department of Defense, the Department of the Army, and NASA, recognizing the value to the nation’s space program of maintaining at a high level the present of ABMA (Army Ballistic Missile Agency), will cooperate to preserve the continuity of the technical and administrative leadership of the group.”⁸

American international policy mirrored the corroboration mindset that existed with the government’s space project, as can be seen when the 1962 NATO memorandum is further analyzed. One passage states, “Current legislation requires that the scope cooperation in the nuclear field be carefully defined, that the cooperating nation attest that the security safeguards as set forth in the terms of agreement will be maintained, and that any material or information transferred will not be transferred to unauthorized persons.”⁹ The Cold War was an environment that demanded a perspective that united countries, agencies and people, and that is what the DOD, NATO and NASA memorandums proved in relation to each other.

The mission to Space also inspired the idea of pushing research towards advancing technology in a joint military/civilian effort. While the armed forces provided the resources and the leadership to get things accomplished, NASA excelled with its civilian inventors pursuing the creation of many space-traveling devices to aid in exploring the stars. The 1959 DOD/NASA memorandum reinforced this confidence in its civilians when it stated, “The management and employment of the transferred activity will be the responsibility of NASA, and no commitment is possible with respect to levels of staffing or funding for the operation.”¹⁰ To summarize, the DOD/NASA document showed that the Cold War arena motivated the U.S. Government to think “outside the box” and push for new protocols that would combine civilian and military goals.

This analysis has shown that the policies addressing racism, human rights issues, globalism, and space exploration served as positive efforts and created a positive image of America amid an unnecessary conflict known as the Cold War. With the above-mentioned efforts still alive and well in today’s world, America is continuing with these positive actions that came out of the Cold War, as those past-made policies continue to procure results. In hindsight, America has learned, and is still learning, from the good that came out of the Cold War

ENDNOTES

¹ President Truman, Address, “Special Message to Congress on Civil Rights,” *Federal Register* 20, no.2 (February 2, 1949), The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=13006>.

² Truman, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=13006>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Martin Luther King Jr. “April 15 Mobilization to End the War in Vietnam, New York City, Saturday, April 15, 1967,” Southern Freedom Movement Documents, <http://www.crmvet.org/docs/mlkviet2.htm>.

⁵ King Jr., <http://www.crmvet.org/docs/mlkviet2.htm>.

⁶ U.S. Department of Defense, *Memorandum on the Subject of Sharing Nuclear Energy*, May 19, 1962, Declassified memo, 1, Kennedy Library National Security Files, <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKNSF-224-003.aspx#>, 2.

⁷ Ibid., 3.

⁸ U.S. Department of Defense and National Aeronautics and Space Administration, *Memorandum for the President on the Responsibility and Organization for Certain Space Activities October 21, 1959*, Unclassified agency memo, 3, Eisenhower Presidential Library Online Documents,

http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_documents/nasa/Binder19.pdf., 4.

⁹ Department of Defense, <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKNSF-224-003.aspx#>.,

4.

¹⁰ Department of Defense and National Aeronautics and Space Administration, http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_documents/nasa/Binder19.pdf., 3.