

**Major arguments advanced in Levering/Botzenhart-Viehe, “The American Perspective”**

The stage was set for a US-Soviet cold war long before the defeat of the Germans in 1945. The fundamental differences between the two systems of government and their conflicting ideologies and geo-political interests made tensions all but unavoidable.

FDR’s assumptions that the Soviets would become more flexible, less hostile, and abandon ideological rigidity if sufficiently “charmed” proved incorrect and were probably unrealistic from the start. Though both sides genuinely wished to avoid military conflict, their incompatible interests and long-term goals – strategic, economic, and ideological – precluded cooperation after 1945.

American policy started out trying to find ways to preserve the Grand Alliance and to accommodate the Soviets. By 1946, a major shift occurred from trying to offer the Soviets concessions to trying to contain Soviet expansion. This shift was primarily a *reaction* to Soviet behavior in Eastern Europe (Poland), the Mediterranean (Turkey), and the Middle East (Iran).

The United States had an advantage in implementing its Cold War policies in Europe since it did so with the consent (and even the urging) of the European nations. On the other hand, the Soviets faced difficulties in pursuing their ideological and strategic interests because their tactics were often brutal and the European populations they sought to influence or control did not welcome their presence. There was no “moral equivalence” between U.S. and Soviet behavior.

American policy was conceived in and motivated by a variety of essentially Wilsonian notions – free trade, free elections, the primacy of individual liberties and basic human rights. Though Americans desired prosperity and expected their government to defend U.S. economic interests, to claim that the United States’ “real motive” in leading an anti-Soviet alliance was *exclusively* economic is too narrow and mono-causal an explanation for U.S. policy.

American policy makers generally *followed* public opinion which was anti-Soviet and anti-communist. They did not “manufacture consent” for Cold War policies at home or abroad. There was no need to do so since so many groups from across the political spectrum – Catholics, immigrants from Eastern Europe, liberal anticommunists, conservatives – backed such policies and, in fact, often supported even more aggressive anti-communist and anti-Soviet policies than the government proposed.

After 1949, due in part to its own successes, US foreign policy became more rigid and self-righteous. Policymakers came to see communism as monolithic and all communist movements as instigated and controlled by Moscow. The plans for an aggressive military buildup outlined in NSC 68 and the more repressive steps taken against communists and other alleged “loyalty risks” on the home front demonstrated how, in Shakespeare’s words, “virtue itself turns vice, being misapplied.”

### **The Assignment**

Choose **THREE** of the above seven arguments. Then, drawing on the reading in Origins of the Cold War: The American Perspective, compile a list of evidence that supports each of the three arguments you have chosen.

The easiest way to approach this assignment may be to take one sentence at a time. For each sentence in the argument, find specific evidence in the article that shows the sentence is true. You can quote or paraphrase, just make sure the evidence you list actually supports the claim made in the sentence.

Type your lists and bring them to class with you on Monday.