

# Atomic Diplomacy: A nuclear arms race between the United States and the USSR

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## Abstract

As the tension between USSR and the United States heightened, the battle of atomic weaponries were crucial to determine who was in the upperhand. First began from the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, nuclear weapon was interpreted as a global threat, or a phenomenon for some. The USSR, deeply stimulated by the United States pertaining the power of the deadly weapon, were also inclined to do the same. Here, one of the features of game theory, prisoner's dilemma intertwines with the actions both country makes. The United States publicly opened up their nuclear power, the first in the Berlin Blockade in 1948 to 1949 when President Truman used B-29 bombers to encourage the decisions of the Soviet Union, and the second in the Korean war. The Soviets on the other hand were contrasted, keeping the principle of mutually assured destruction against the United States. The two countries drove the world into chaos, despite the end of the devastating world war. If either side have crossed the boundary, this war would have even cost more lives than the two great wars.

## Process Paper

Doing broad research on the topic of debate and diplomacy in history led me to the idea of the Cold War between the US and the USSR. Narrowing the scope, I chose atomic diplomacy because both countries' covert actions against each other to win the nuclear race were fascinating to learn about. The nuclear arms race of the almost five-decade Cold War was one of the most significant times for diplomacy ever in history. There were various alternatives to analyze both countries' moves, just like in a game. I conducted research by initially watching some useful Youtube

videos that gave me a notion of my chosen topic. I also thought that the prisoner's dilemma could be an intriguing concept to apply in diplomacy. Thus, I began reading relevant articles on prisoner's dilemma/perceptual dilemma within the Cold War. Using JSTOR to recommend the best correlative articles, I started researching, getting a more detailed understanding of atomic diplomacy. I then organized all the relevant ideas in chronological order. With all the ideas I have gathered throughout my research time, I began to brainstorm the sections I will be analyzing. It turned out to be quite simple: successes and

failures of atomic diplomacy were the outcomes. There are several arguments that can be garnered from this essay. In modern history, the United States and Russia's nuclear arms race represents the battle of holding dominance, exploiting the most catastrophic weapons in history. Ever since their development, it was also noticeable that global organizations encouraged both countries to use diplomacy and try to find a solution that would lead to disarmament. As a result, it is evident that the importance of the race was enormous. Additionally, my paper also explains how a prisoner's dilemma effectively analyzes both sides' perspectives. The best solution, or the *nash equilibrium*, can be predicted by drawing a simple diagram of different scenarios. Even in other different modern diplomacies, there are pre-existing analyses of outcomes using game theory. The topic of the nuclear arms race is intrinsic in history because it has been the spark of the tension between the two most powerful countries of the world, the United States and Russia. The two countries have tried to create dominance over each other using nuclear weapons as a mechanism, which made the world a much more dangerous place. Doubtlessly, the persisting duel between them has been intensified after the nuclear arms race.

## **Introduction**

The phrase Atomic Diplomacy has been used severally to refer to attempts that nuclear-capable countries use to threaten warfare so that they can achieve diplomatic goals. The Atomic bomb was first successfully tested in 1945 on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The United

States considered the potential benefits that came from American monopoly of nuclear power. The years that followed have been characterized by the consideration of atomic diplomacy. The United States has a policy in which it uses implied threats to coerce concessions from other countries such as Russia with the potential of arming themselves with nuclear weapons. At first, atomic diplomacy was a domestic response to the political climate that came from the influence of right-wing forces that used anti-Communism as a way of attaching the New Deal Reforms found to be detestable. At one point during World War II, the US, Britain, Germany and the U.S.S.R were involved in scientific research aimed at developing the atomic bomb. The United States only succeeded in doing so by mid-1945 and used the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki to force an end to the war. During the engagement, the United States considered how the bomb and its impressive power could affect ties with the Soviet Union, and the balance of power in Asia and Europe. A disturbance to the balance of power was witnessed during the Cold War, doing anything possible to gain advantage over each other through the build-up of nuclear weapons, and a new tactic of post-WII 20th Century international relations, Atomic Diplomacy. This essay analyses Atomic diplomacy, and its successes, failures, and consequences.

## **The Prisoner's Dilemma and the Arm's Race**

During the early years of the Cold War, the United States and Russia were engaged in the supremacy for armament with nuclear weapons. Game theory helps on to analyse the motivations for Russia and the United States in their race to

control nuclear warfare by pouring trillions of dollars and other resources into the manufacture and use of nuclear weapons. The arms race featuring the United States and the Soviet Union is a type of the Prisoner's dilemma. It is a situation featuring two players that may act with selfish interests even when acting selflessly would be in the best interest of both. Russia and the United States have the option of disarming or arming; naively speaking, the best outcome is for the two to disarm and save the two countries resources while ensuring that the threat of warfare gets diffused.

#### **How the US Used Atomic Diplomacy**

Both the United States and the USSR used atomic diplomacy during the first two decades of the Cold War. There are a number of occasions where atomic diplomacy was employed in the course of the Cold War by either party in the conflict. The first instance was in the Berlin Blockade in 1948 to 1949 when President Truman used B-29 bombers to influence the decisions of the Soviet Union; the bombers were capable of delivering nuclear bombs, and signal the Soviet Union that the United States could implement a nuclear attack, and was willing to go through with such an execution at the point it was deemed necessary.<sup>1</sup> This was also used in the Korean War. President Truman deployed B-29s for signalling the resolve of the United States. The same tactic was considered by President Eisenhower in 1953, though he eventually did not go through with it.

#### **How the USSR Used Atomic Diplomacy**

There are two instances in which the USSR used atomic diplomacy. The first instance, the Soviet Union used atomic diplomacy was when deploying missiles to Cuba to force concessions from the United States concerning European affairs.<sup>2</sup> The event has been dubbed the Cuban Missile Crisis; it is termed as the closest point at which the world could have experienced an exchange of nuclear weapons between two nuclear-capable countries. Nikita Khrushchev had his military deploy missiles with nuclear tips to Cuba as a reaction towards President John F. Kennedy.<sup>3</sup> The crisis was ended after an imposed naval blockade and negotiations that took place between the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).<sup>4</sup> It through a peaceful settlement where the USSR removed missiles from Cuba, and the United States removed missiles from Turkey.

The USSR used atomic diplomacy by using the principle of mutually assured destruction against the United States. The USSR used atomic diplomacy by ensuring that the United States had lost credibility in using the same tactic to ensure hegemonic control of Europe and Asia. The United States and USSR achieved approximate parity.<sup>5</sup> In this way, the USSR diluted the ability to the United States to flex its nuclear muscle against it on the threat of mutually assured destruction.<sup>6</sup> The assured destruction principle is used on the pretext that no other country can make the first strike without a counterstrike from the other party. As such, there are no benefits of using nuclear weapons when involved in a conflict – even by proxy. This is part of the reason why Nixon did not react in the Vietnam War. He has

considered using the threat of a bomb to end the Vietnam War but realized that Russia could counter the threat with a retaliation against the United States on behalf of North Vietnam. International and domestic public opinion could not accept the use of a bomb for such reasons.

### **Successes of Atomic Diplomacy**

Atomic diplomacy has helped in maintaining the position of the United States through the mutually assured destruction principle. When the United States used nuclear weapons in 1945 on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the intention was for the country to have a stronger post-war position in diplomatic bargaining with the Soviet Union. The use of the weapons was not with the intention of making the Japanese surrender. There are those who argue that Truman's use of the bomb on the two Japanese cities was necessary for the United States to achieve the surrender of Japanese military leaders that had the determination of fighting to the death.<sup>7</sup> In the event that Truman had no intention of using the implied threat of nuclear weapons to have an upper hand over Stalin, the monopoly of the United States in atomic monopoly after a successful atomic test in July 1945 bolstered Truman's confidence in subsequent meetings in his determination to obtain certain compromises from USSR. The United States has successfully used threats through the mutually assured destruction principle to keep countries such as the USSR at bay. The threat of the bomb has softened the Soviet resistance to the proposals of the United States to ensure free elections in Eastern Europe; the US has used the threat to reduce the level of

control that the Soviet Union had over the Balkans. This is despite the reality that the Soviet Union became even more anxious to protect its borders using a buffer zone.

The United States has used atomic diplomacy to forge alliances with European countries under NATO by placing them under their nuclear umbrella against the Soviet Union. In the World War II, the United States has developed confidence in the nuclear monopoly that it has created, though with ramifications to the diplomatic agenda. The bomb has created the notion that countries in Western Europe can rely on the United States to guarantee security, even against ambitious countries such as Russia. The United States did not need to have huge troops in Europe, but could protect the region using the "nuclear umbrella" where a number of areas would be placed in a group they professed to be willing to use bombs in defence of. The United States has insisted on its Hegemonic control of the East through the occupation and rehabilitation of Japan. This stemmed from the idea that the United States is the sole nuclear power, and in response to that power is the total surrender of Japan to the forces of the United States. The US nuclear monopoly inspired confidence for some time during the post war years.

### **Failures of Atomic Diplomacy**

The failure of the Baruch Plan demonstrate how atomic diplomacy has failed. After the failure of the Baruch Plan, there are enormous consequences for world peace that the United States has experienced as a result. The Baruch

Plan was a proposal Bernard Baruch for the United States to reduce atomic arsenal using carefully defined stages associated with international agreements on control.<sup>8</sup> After the implementation of each stage, the Plan foresaw a scenario in which the United States would take steps to reduce its stockpile. These experiences continue to draw the attention of scholars and policymakers as the precedent for arms control and disarmament; but the failure of the plan demonstrated how atomic diplomacy can be ineffective.<sup>9</sup> The Baruch Plan has been called a bold and magnanimous proposal by the United States. Failure is often attributed to negotiations said to have been pressed in an atmosphere characterized by atomic diplomacy. Further, the plan is said to have ineffective international control from a constitutional standpoint. The Soviet response compromised the Baruch Plan and atomic diplomacy in general.

In the midst of a Cold War, the Soviet Union could not accept a plan that would lead to a situation where it could not acquire nuclear weapons to the point of opening its borders to international inspection that would intrude its power; the response has been pillared on the hope that the United States would in the end relinquish the bomb<sup>10</sup>. The Soviets submitted an alternative proposal on June 19, seeking to reverse efforts to stage the Baruch Plan.<sup>11</sup> It was submitted through Andrei Gromyko to prohibit the production, storage and use of atomic weapons; the plan wanted all weapons to be destroyed. The Soviets wanted a situation in which a violation of the alternative would be considered “crimes against humanity” where penalties would be based on

domestic legislation. They wanted consistency with the UN Charter concerning veto authority.

The UN Atomic Energy Commission failed to get a consensus on the use of nuclear energy. In a 1946 report, the conclusion was that international control was a feasible plan from a technological standpoint. However, there was no consensus for such a conclusion. The commission determined that a convention was needed to outlaw nuclear weapons, but such a convention was not enough to ensure there is atomic energy for peaceful use. Further, it endorsed the proposal by the United States to eliminate veto powers enjoyed by the powers.<sup>12</sup> The UN Atomic Energy Commission generated reports in 1947 and 1948 that were opposed by players like the Soviet Union. According to the 1948 report, the commission had reached an impasse that went up to 1949; the US made an announcement that the Soviet Union carried out a nuclear test. The commission was finally dissolved in 1952.<sup>13</sup> Atomic diplomacy has failed because of the vacillation in the United States. The effects of the atomic bomb of 1945 had a cultural shock effect that affected the Truman administration itself. Vacillations have developed concerning how to deal with the Soviet Union. There are those who advocate for using implied threats of atomic bomb which would under gird an aggressive and confrontational diplomacy when dealing with the Soviet Union. Others advocate for a different policy based on the forging of enduring agreements on issues of Europe based on the wartime trust built between the US and the Soviets to control issues of Europe and to control the acquisition of atomic weapons.<sup>14</sup> There are a number of reasons why such vacillations are there.

First, there were divisions in the administration between those who presented themselves as anti-Soviet hardliners at the time and those who wanted for there to be a mutual accommodation between the two countries. Further, those in the political establishment needed to ponder on how significant the bomb was on the conceptions concerning a post-war order.

The limitations of atomic diplomacy did not sink because the United States did not make fundamental decisions concerning post-war Soviet-American relations. The limitations of atomic diplomacy were brought to the fore at the London Council of Foreign Ministers. It became clear that the use of the bomb as a panacea had been shattered and was not working anymore. There are those among the ones that preferred an anti-Soviet stance that feared the repercussions of going into global hostilities on the heels of a war that has been declared the worst in the history of humankind. As such, their resolve was to test the political waters while shifting responsibility for the breakdown of the Soviet-American relations to the Kremlin's doing.

### **Consequences of Atomic Diplomacy**

Atomic diplomacy is responsible for further tensions between the United States and former Soviet Union (now Russia). The rise of Vladimir Putin as the president more than 20 years ago has led to the steady rise of tensions between the United States and Russia.<sup>15</sup> There are those who say that the aggression of Russia against the United States through its foreign policy can be traced to the personality and interests of Putin and his hawkish advisers. There are those who are

of the opinion that Russia seeks to reclaim its status as the greater power than the United States. There are those who suggest that the move by Russia through its foreign policy is informed by the need to protect the country's status as a dominant power in the post-Soviet era; the notion is to have Russia defend itself against the interference of foreign powers in its domestic affairs. The convergence point in all these is that the natural resources that Russia commands and its military modernisation program that was launched in 2008 provide Russia with the ability to have a flexible and aggressive foreign policy and to project its force in neighbouring countries and the Middle East. The foreign policy priorities pursued by Russia have focused on the West and post-Soviet area; these include the tensions and relations with NATO, the United States and Europe. It should be noted that Russia under Putin will pursue a global agenda in its foreign policy. This is based on the adversarial relations it has with neighbours and Western countries. Russia wants to balance its power against the United States and European powers, hence the deeper relations with China.

### **Conclusion**

The US and Russia have been engaged in an arms race with one another in their bid to control the use of nuclear weapons. The use of atomic diplomacy by the United States and Russia has been to gain control of the decisions by either country on the decision-making platform in Europe and Asia. The United States has succeeded in applying atomic diplomacy with NATO. However, the loss of nuclear monopoly

has ensured that the United States does not have an upper hand over Russia, leading to what is known as a prisoner's dilemma. There are tensions between the United States and Russia because of the mutually assured destruction principle and the implied threat of nuclear weapons.

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