

Compare and contrast the impact of two Cold War crisis, each from a different region, on the development of superpower tensions. (N18)

This essay will discuss the Berlin Blockade, which took place from June 1948 to May 1949, and the North Korean invasion of South Korea, that took place from June 1950 to October 1950 when UN forces began pushing back North Korean forces, sparking the Korean War that would last till July 1953. In both cases, these crises ultimately exacerbated superpower tensions, resulting in the geographical expansion of the Cold War, and lasting tensions in the region.

Firstly, both crises resulted in an increased commitment to combating communism from the US, resulting in an escalation of tensions through aggressive foreign policy. The Berlin Airlift had demonstrated US technological superiority and an unwillingness for the Soviets to stop them for fear of a nuclear war, giving the US an edge in superpower tensions. Lightbody suggests that the triumph of the USAF acted as a proof of concept for Containment, and emboldened Truman to make more aggressive foreign policy decisions. The subsequent fears of Western Europe also led to a far stronger US presence in Europe, with their participation in NATO, and their creation of the Mutual Defence Assistance Program, which allocated \$1.4 billion to assist the member states of NATO. This was highly significant as this marked the first peacetime agreement of the US outside the western hemisphere, and was a clear abandonment of its previous policy of isolationism. This would lead to an increased US presence on the European continent, establishing military bases in NATO countries in the 1950s, and establishing the Thor ICBM system in the UK and the Jupiter ICBM system in Turkey in the 1960s, establishing a proverbial “nuclear umbrella” over Eastern Europe. This was critical as it marked the beginning of the penetration of US forces into the European hemisphere, which posed a serious threat to the Soviets, who viewed it as a threat to their security.

Similarly, the Korean Crisis led to an increasingly confrontational US foreign policy. Lightbody suggests that the losses of tens of thousands of American lives hardened the Cold War attitudes. Popular opinion was against Truman’s cautious handling of the war, with the advance of communism in Asia intensifying anti-communist settlements that had been heightened by the Red Scare. After the Korean Crisis, Dulles developed the doctrines of the “rollback” of communism and “massive retaliation” as a deterrence to the USSR. In short, the US transitioned from a policy of containment and confinement of the spread of communism, to an active role in combating and reducing the influence of communism, with the use of massive military force as a threat. This was demonstrated by Truman’s adoption of the recommended increased defence spending in NSC-68. In response to the public sentiments about the war, Truman almost tripled defence spending, creating the military-industrial complex that would precipitate greater conflicts in Vietnam or Afghanistan. The aggressive US rhetoric continued into Eisenhower’s presidency, with his New Look policy opening up the possibility for a “massive retaliation” of a nuclear first strike. This was a rhetoric that ran counter to the Acheson line, similar to how the increased containment from the Berlin Crisis resulted in a reversal of

isolationist policies. However, the effect of the Korean War on this increased aggression was limited, as the shift in policy was also driven by McCarthy's actions and the resultant Red Scare. His attacks on foreign trade with China, as well as his aggressive anti-communism campaign, resulted in increased pressure for an aggressive response to the Soviets. Furthermore, the effects of this "rollback" stance was limited, as demonstrated by the lukewarm US response to Soviet repression in East Germany in 1953 and the Hungarian Uprising in 1956. However, the Korean Crisis ultimately did hold sway over the American public. This can be demonstrated by the popular backlash received by Truman after he refused to take nuclear action during the war.

Furthermore, both crises expanded the geographical scope of the Cold War conflict. In the Berlin Blockade, the formation of NATO and subsequently the Warsaw pact would result in lasting tensions in Europe. Soviet aggression would result in the strengthening of NATO ties, with the treaty expanding to include a mutual defence agreement, and countries like Denmark, Iceland, Italy and Portugal getting involved in the pact under the fear of Soviet aggression. The addition of West Germany into NATO under the Paris Accords resulted in the creation of an armed West Germany on Soviet borders, which the Soviets denounced as an aggressive alliance against the USSR. Their response was the creation of Comecon and the Warsaw Pact. Comecon ensured economic inter reliance of Eastern European States through specialisation, resulting in dependence of these states on the USSR. The formation of NATO and the Warsaw pact resulted in the consolidation of two blocs in Europe, and increased tensions as these military alliances solidified the division of Europe. The significance of this division can be seen in the continued failure of disarmament in Europe post 1950s, with the constant threat of conflict ultimately resulting in complexities in evaluating the conventional forces of NATO and the Warsaw Pact, and the failure of the MBFR talks. However, the role of the Berlin Blockade in fuelling these tensions was limited. The US, France and UK had also previously merged their zones into Trizonia prior to the blockade, and the Treaty of Brussels had been signed by major Western European powers like UK, France and Belgium, to prevent the spread of communism in Europe, indicating some level of cooperation before the blockade. Furthermore, while the division of Europe into two blocs caused rising political tensions, it actually diminished any chances of military confrontation in Europe itself or between the US and USSR directly, resulting in a decrease in military tensions in Europe. The Berlin Blockade successfully proved that the USSR was not going to retaliate to the Berlin Airlift by force, due to the fear of inciting a nuclear war, and the formation of military blocs resulted in collective security, as US nuclear power acted as a "nuclear umbrella" over Europe. Thus, while the Berlin Blockade had a limited role in building up political tensions in Europe, it was critical in strengthening military ties and defusing military tensions in Europe.

Similarly, the Korean Crisis led to an expansion of the Cold War to the Asian theatre, and ultimately a global expansion of the Cold War. Gaddis suggests that the Korean War marked the origin of the US commitment to contain communism globally. The North Korean invasion of South Korea marked a transition from a containment to a "rollback" policy, as US troops worked with UN forces to push the North Koreans back to the 38th parallel. The war also served to establish the Chinese as a credible threat, as they were able to resist the combined UN and US forces, forcing a permanent division of Korea along the 38th parallel. This

precipitated a more active US role in combating Communism in the Asian theatre. The US aimed to increase their presence in the Asian region through stronger alliances, with the ANZUS treaty securing their presence in Oceania, and SEATO securing their presence in Southeast Asia. Furthermore, the US established a stronger presence in East Asia, prioritising the economic reconstruction of Japan and renewing its commitment to protect Taiwan, in an attempt to gain allies in Asia for the containment of communism. This increased global focus was apparent in Eisenhower's Domino Theory in 1964, which stated that the fall of one Asian state to communism would result in the Communist bloc sweeping across Asia, and informed their decision to enter the Vietnam War, marking the continued escalation of military conflicts in the Asian theatre. There would be increased efforts in espionage there as well, with the US supporting the Khmer Rouge in the Cambodian Civil War.

The Berlin Crisis marked the permanent divide between the superpowers. The division of Germany made it clear that a peace treaty was impossible to arrange, with there being no clear successor to Nazi Germany. Neither side was also willing to acknowledge the existence of the other, and with many borders in central Europe not formalised, the impacts of the Berlin crisis created an evident division across the European region, helping to continually foster tensions. Berlin in particular would continue to be a source of contention between the West and the USSR, with the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961 becoming the centre of Cold War tensions later into it. The crisis was particularly critical in giving the US an edge in superpower tensions as the success of the airlift demonstrated the West's sheer technological superiority. With USSR under Stalin who also refused to back down during this period of time, and also displaying the Soviet aggression through this particular crisis, it guaranteed there would be no easy end or concession within the Cold War, spurring on the West to continue putting up more egregious defences, such as the Cold War. Was also used as evidence of the effectiveness and US ability to pull off its Containment policy.

Similarly, the Korean Crisis resulted in China's rise to prominence. Furthermore, the US' hardliner stance on communism in East Asia resulted in the alienation of communist China, which the US treated as an extension of the USSR. This would result in increasingly hostile relationships with China, as the US recognised Taiwan as the official authority of China, and supported Taiwan during the First and Second Taiwan Straits Crisis. Additionally, the UN refused to acknowledge the PRC as the official government of China until the period of detente in the 1970s, further souring relations between the two powers. This had a significant impact on the Cold War, as the increased prominence of China's role in the Korean War precipitated its development as a major player in the Cold War, and its active role in the Vietnam War. Furthermore, the tensions between China and the Soviets intensified. Stalin's opportunism soured Sino-Soviet relations, as Mao resented how he demanded cheap raw materials in exchange for signing the Sino-Soviet Pact, and demanded exorbitant payments for military supplies. This, coupled with China's newfound prominence in the Cold War, resulted in fractures that would lead up to the Sino-Soviet Split in the late 1950s.

In conclusion, the Berlin Blockade marked the first standoff between US and USSR, and the resultant US triumph redoubled their belief that the USSR would only resort to force. The

Korean War, however, marked the rise of China as a distinct communist power in the Asian sphere, and the geographical expansion of the Cold War into Asia.