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### The Cold War through Political Cartoons

The cold war terrorized all of America. The conflicting ideologies of capitalism and communism led to instability worldwide. The hegemony of the USSR and the USA were on the verge of war against each other, hence creating tensions between both countries to create dominance. The USA felt the urge to 'save' the world from communism, hence started to get involved in foreign affairs to prevent other countries to submit to such an ideology. The newspaper is a powerful tool for people to communicate with each other. Those who possess access to the press have taken it upon themselves to speak for, influence, or inform the people. Political cartoons served the purpose of criticizing, educating, or imposing a political viewpoint. Two political cartoons were published in the 1960's to highlight the high worldwide political tensions that the USA was partly responsible for due to the USSR. Cartoon A "Arm Wrestling" depicts Kennedy and Khrushchev in an arm-wrestling match, this cartoon reflects the USSR and the USA conflict to show military dominance over the Cold War. Cartoon B "Midnight Reading" depicts the other side of the Cold War which was the USA involvement in other foreign countries to prevent the spread of communism. Both cartoons were created with the purpose of criticizing the main powers of the Cold War, the effects of it in the international order and reflect the public's opinion.

During the Cold War, it seemed like one could only be in the side of the USA or on the side of the USSR. Both countries got into an arms race to prove dominance over the globe. During the Potsdam conference in 1945, USA President Truman revealed to USSR leader Stalin

that the USA “had successfully detonated the first atomic bomb on July 16, 1945.”<sup>1</sup> Stalin revealed that he already had knowledge of such events due to the spies. This sparked a rivalry between the two countries and the thirst for being the military superior hegemon. The USA was confident that they were the only ones with atomic weapons, proving their advanced technology in the atomic bomb of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. However, the USSR tested their first atomic weapon in 1949, which to the surprise of the USA, it was much earlier than expected.<sup>2</sup> This put pressure on the USA to develop more sophisticated weaponry, hence Truman order the production of more developed weapons like hydrogen bombs. This sparked the arms race between both superpowers.

President of the USA John Fitzgerald Kennedy (JFK) inherited the exceptions to continue the arms race. The Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 was the closest the world has ever been to a nuclear war. A USA U-2 spy plane found evidence of USSR missiles on Cuba, the spy plane photographed a USSR “SS-4 medium-range ballistic missile being assembled for installation.”<sup>3</sup> This signified a great threat to the USA because now nuclear weapons were within reach. Before, the USSR was not that big of a threat because nuclear weapons were not in close proximity, and the USSR did not have the military technology for such a weapon to travel that long of a trajectory. The missiles in Cuba makes the USA a close target, being only 90 miles away from South Florida coasts.<sup>4</sup> As a reaction, Kennedy ordered to instal a Naval blockade, which put Cuba in quarantine of any USSR shipments to Cuba.<sup>5</sup> This started a 13 day political and military standoff between JFK and USSR leader Nikita Khrushchev. Between letters and telegrams they

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<sup>1</sup> <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1937-1945/potsdam-conf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.historytoday.com/archive/soviet-american-arms-race>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.historytoday.com/archive/soviet-american-arms-race>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.history.com/topics/cold-war/cuban-missile-crisis>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.history.com/topics/cold-war/cuban-missile-crisis>

were able to reach an agreement that prevent the Cold War to become a nuclear war. Khrushchev proposed that the USA should not invade Cuba in exchange for the USSR to remove all missiles. Conversely, the USSR also asked the USA to remove all its missiles from Turkey. The USA agreed to the first demand but rather ignored the second one, not granting an immediate response to Khrushchev. Later on, JFK secretly ordered the removal of the missiles. The USSR was notified of such removal by U.S. Attorney General Robert Kennedy who personally informed a USSR ambassador in Washington. <sup>6</sup>

With the assassination of JFK 1963, USA vice president Lyndon B. Johnson (LBJ) was sworn into presidency. This caused him to inherit a lot of political instability and crises that previous USA presidents had created for him. LBJ had to deal with the aftermath of the USA involvement in foreign affairs. He had to keep up the anti-communist grounds that previous presidents had set up before him, which led to the Vietnam crisis. <sup>7</sup> LBJ was forced to keep attacking communism in the several parts of the world where the USA had previously been involved.

Under the fear of the spread of communism, president Eisenhower had gotten heavily involved in the Korean War, which expanded it. Eisenhower feared that communism would spread all over Asia, he installs massive retaliation where the USSR would be threatened to be completely destroyed. The conflict between communism and capitalism would not be solved until the opposing party was eradicated. The Korean war started when North Korea invaded South Korea. Both Korea's had conflicting ideologies and hoped to unite Korea under one. North Korea supported communist ideology, hence they had the USSR support. Conversely, South

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.history.com/topics/cold-war/cuban-missile-crisis>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/about-the-white-house/presidents/lyndon-b-johnson/>

Korea supported democracy and capitalism, hence supported by the USA. The involvement of both superpowers made the war bigger and drag long for longer than if the opposing hegemony had not gotten involved. In order to cease fire, USA president Eisenhower threatened the use of nuclear weapons in order to end the war. This led to all parties to end the war in 1953.<sup>8</sup>

LBJ also had to deal with the backlash that came with the Atomic Bomb decision by Truman in 1945. This is arguably the hardest decision of all of Truman's presidency. Some historians argue that a big reason for dropping the bomb was to send a message of military superiority to the USSR.<sup>9</sup>

The Cuban Missile Crisis left USA- Cuba relationships on thin ice. It was obvious that both countries had conflicting ideologies and Castro's deep hatred towards the USA. LBJ had to deal with the rocky relationships that JFK left with Cuba after being on the verge of nuclear war.

All of these events led to LBJ Vietnam crisis. The American War on Vietnam followed the trajectory of preventing the spread of communism. This war had a big influence on the USA and USSR relationships. The defeat of French in Indochina sparked fear for the democratic world. Eisenhower created his Domino Effect theory, where if a communist country was already able to defeat a democratic one, then it would be easier for communism to spread. Vietnam was being ruled by two opposing governments, a communist and a democratic one. North Vietnam wanted to unify the country as a whole, under an administration that would be based on the communist leading countries: USSR and China.<sup>10</sup> The South was ruled with heavy influence with the USA, including military support and economic advisors.<sup>11</sup> The USA got heavily involved with

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/armistice-ends-the-korean-war>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.ushistory.org/us/51g.asp>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/event/Vietnam-War>

<sup>11</sup> <https://millercenter.org/president/lbjohnson/foreign-affairs>

Vietnam, costing more the 30,000 American lives and an estimation of over 2 million civilian casualties.<sup>12</sup> The USA had no real reason to get involved in Vietnam but just as a mere tactic to keep showing dominance towards the USSR and to block the spread of communism. The loss of life in Vietnam made Americans angry, causing LBJ approval ratings to drop “from 70 percent in mid-1965 to below 40 percent by 1967.”<sup>13</sup>

An ingenious way to mass-communicate with the public, regardless of their level of education, was political cartoons to show the political turmoil the world was facing. In order to understand them, viewers need to have a certain political understanding and background knowledge. These cartoons are opinion based and criticize the world of politics. They are mainly satirical and include metaphors to represent people or concepts.<sup>14</sup> Artists hyperbolize situations and characters in their drawings, however, facts are never altered in the drawings.<sup>15</sup> A successful “political cartoons can fulfill an important criticizing and controlling function in society. In addition, political cartoons can encourage the process of opinion formation and decision making as well as provide entertaining perspectives on the news.”<sup>16</sup>

Cartoon A is “*Arms Wrestle*” by Leslie Gilbert Illingworth. The cartoon appeared on October 29, 1962 on the British newspaper *The Daily Mail*.<sup>17</sup> The cartoon is criticizing the Cuban Missile Crisis and the rivalry between JFK and Khrushchev. Great Britain lost power as a global influence on the Cold War by losing India and the lack of military advances. This knocked Great Britain down of their military hegemony status, hence Great Britain was resentful

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/event/Vietnam-War>

<sup>13</sup> <https://millercenter.org/president/lbjohnson/foreign-affairs>

<sup>14</sup> Knieper, Thomas. “Political Cartoon.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 20 Feb. 2018, [www.britannica.com/topic/political-cartoon](http://www.britannica.com/topic/political-cartoon).

<sup>15</sup> IBID

<sup>16</sup> IBID

<sup>17</sup> <https://teachinghistory.org/history-content/ask-a-historian/24459>

and ridiculed the USA and USSR Cold War issues with this cartoon. However, the cartoon also illustrates that the issues of the cold war go beyond the USA and USSR, having a worldwide impact. It also illustrates that the whole world was closely watching the events unfold and a reminder that even though it did not happen with the Cuban Missile Crisis, tensions between the two countries still exists and the capacity of a Nuclear War is still present.

JFK and Khrushchev are represented sitting on top of the hydrogen bomb. The bomb represents the arms race between the USA and the USSR. Both countries had access to nuclear weapons and were willing to prove their military dominance by detonating a bomb. The hydrogen bomb proves how both countries have the most advanced military technology.

JFK and Khrushchev are arms wrestling each other. This is a representation of 13 day tense negotiation between them, where they were both about to declare nuclear war against each other. Judging by the position of the arms, it is evident that they both have equal strength. This highlights how both of them have equal military superiority. Both are represented profusely sweating, alluding to the tremendous effort that both countries require in order to keep up with the arms race. This is an allusion for both superpowers trying to prove superiority to one another, yet they are both equal in strength, military weapons, and stability of government.

Their index finger is depicted directly on top of what can be assumed to be the denoting button. The assertive pose indicates that both countries have the means to detonate the bomb and have the capacity to engage in a nuclear war. However, the bombs have an inscription with the country's name. JFK is seating on top of the bomb that says USSR, conversely Khrushchev is seating on top of the one that says USA. This can be an allusion to two things. One could be the fact that detonating the bomb will cause for the direct destruction of the other. Two, is to

highlight the proximity of the bombs. The USSR has its bombs on Cuba, while the USA has its bombs on Turkey. These locations put the opposing country in direct target range.

Cartoon B is "*Midnight Reading*" by Clifford H Baldowski. It was published in 1964 in The Atlanta Journal as part of the Clifford H. Baldowski Editorial Cartoon Collection. The cartoon is now "licensed to the Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries by The Atlanta Journal-Constitution."<sup>18</sup>

The cartoon depicts USA President LBJ staring at a row of books. They are titled "The Atomic Bomb Decision?" by Harry S Truman, "Expanded War in Korea?" by Dwight D. Eisenhower, and "Cuba?" by John F. Kennedy. The three books are being lit up by an overhead light with the inscription "Vietnam Crisis." The cartoon was published in the USA by an American creator. The books are placed in a slightly slanted position, this symbolizes how they were all already read by LBJ. This reflects the popular view of USA civilians on the decision taken by previous presidents and their expectations of LBJ.

The title of the cartoon being *Midnight Reading* highlights how it is seen as something the reading is done for leisure. It is representing how LBJ sees the crisis as something light and is not giving them the correct gravity of the situation. The question marks under each title reflects how all of the crisis were "questionable," in the sense that Americans were not entirely in favor with the decisions taken. All crisis were in foreign countries which to the general public would seem as if it did not have a direct impact on their daily lives.

The facial expression of LBJ seems rather passive. He is looking down at the books, this reflects how he is negatively judging the decisions made by previous presidents.

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<sup>18</sup> [https://dlg.usg.edu/record/dlg\\_bald\\_am-1527](https://dlg.usg.edu/record/dlg_bald_am-1527)

All of the book titles reflect a crisis that the USA has gone through since the start of the cold war, while the author refers to who was president at the time. They are arranged in ascending chronological order. The books are seen like a saga, symbolizing how one event led to the other. Each book is pretty thick, symbolizing how there was a lot of backstory of the event and a lot of political, social, and military issues were involved during it. The thickest book is “Cuba,” which is alluding to the long negotiation and emphasizes that it was the closest the world has been to a nuclear war.

The overhead light with the Vietnam crisis is illuminating the three books. This highlights how the Vietnam crisis is the biggest one. When LBJ came into presidency, he was pressured to keep the strong anti-communist military regime that previous USA presidents had established before him. The decision to keep being involved with South Vietnam was expected, since he had to follow his predecessors, so technically the decision was never truly up to him.<sup>19</sup> It shows how for the Vietnam crisis to happen, all of the previous decisions and events had to happen. Due to LBJ being sworn into presidency right in the middle of JFK’s he was obligated to keep making similar decisions to JFK and approve everything that JFK was already in trajectory.

The Cold War caused a lot of crises between the USA and the USSR. The never ending fight between capitalism and communism represented a major threat to the international order. The USA took as their personal mission to prevent, and end, the spread of communism. Political cartoons inform the public about the political situation of the world, and help people formulate a position on the issue. The political cartoons of “Arm Wrestling” and “Midnight Reading” show both global civilian concerns with the outcomes of the war. Both cartoons were created with the

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<sup>19</sup> <https://millercenter.org/president/lbjohnson/foreign-affairs>

purpose of criticizing the USA and the USSR's behavior in the Cold War, the effects of it in the international order and reflect the public's opinion.

Cartoon A



Cartoon B



Baldy

MIDNIGHT READING

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