



Origins of The Cold War

The politics of blame during The Cold War

Christian Bailey:

I wonder whether focusing on European actors helps us to move away from some of the historiographical orthodoxies which tend to lay credit or blame largely on either of the superpowers

Professor Anne Deighton:

Yes I think it does in part, but not totally. I think the way in which the debate about the Cold War's origins and how it played out over the following 40 years is not entirely to do with Europe, but it is indeed a part of that. And I think that we can think now of the Cold War as history but at the time, we have to remember, the Cold War was politics and very dangerous politics. Therefore, it was very natural for both Western European countries but also for the United States to try and lay the blame at the feet of the Soviet Union and then also its European empire. By the same token, it was very natural for Soviet leaders to fear encirclement by the United States and its allies, to fear what West Germany might be plotting against it and to see, as some of the soviet sources tell us, to see West Germany as a kind of great ramp, of springing capitalism into the communist, Eastern part of Europe and beyond. So that there was a sense of politics of blame and in a way that has gone passed us now. We try to look at the Cold War as history, rather than as active politics. We have to remember also that many of the people writing in the late 1960s, 1970s and 1980s until the Second Cold War as it was called, actually thought the Cold War had finished after the Cuban Missile Crisis and that we were in a state of living together, living with the enemy, dealing with the enemy. That was a period then became known as detente, but it was only as the Cold War re-emerged after the 1980s that we realised we were looking at a really long period of time, of 40 years. So the sense of competition at the time and of blame was very powerful and very understandable because people really did fear that there might be a nuclear disaster or deliberate nuclear war.

There was a change, however, after 1955 when the blocs begin to solidify and then another period of change in the 1980s. So this question of blame is one that emerges, declines and emerges again in the periods of really intense Cold War politics. The European powers, which you asked about, were of course involved in that and I think it's interesting when you come to the 1980s, you see the Western European countries very keen to continue a policy of detente towards the Eastern bloc. Even as the so-called second Cold War under Reagan seemed to

intensify the conflict and so you see the European powers moving away a little bit from what the United States was trying to assert on the international stage in the early 1980s. So you can see the emergence of the European powers as actors or players in their own right very much more strongly by the time the 1980s arrives..