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The Mimetic Origins of the Cold War

Washington-Moscow: still two rival powers?

*Claudio Lanza*

*University of Bologna - Forlì Campus*

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*University of Bologna - Forlì Campus*

## Table of contents

Abstract .....	5
Theory of international rivalry .....	9
Enduring rivalry .....	10
Strategic rivalry .....	10
Cognitive approach between psychology and “folk psychology”....	14
Theory of mimetic desire .....	19
Mimesis, violence and conflict. Construction of a model of analysis .....	21
Operationalization of the mimetic rivalry model .....	30
Origins of the cold war .....	32
US- USSR: destined to collide? .....	32
FDR and Stalin: pragmatic cooperation with the “evil” .....	37
Outbreak of the rivalry – Truman’s administration .....	40
Conclusions .....	47
Bibliography .....	50
Author .....	55

## Abstract

New “cold” winds seem to come back in international relations (Baker, 2014). Because of the events of Ukraine, relations between the United States (US) and Russia have been rapidly deteriorating. A new, modern, American containment policy against Moscow, based on economic sanctions, now affects the relations between West and Moscow. Economic sanctions ordered by Washington supported by its Western allies, Brussels and the European Member States (MS), since March 2014 (CCTV America, 2014). A framework that seems to find its explanation in what has been called “Cold War logic”.

Is a new Cold War just a media fascination? In fact, the return of this logic seems to be an indisputable fact of contemporary international relations, at least between Washington and Moscow. Although there is no longer a bipolar division in two spheres of influence, US-Russia relations still have implications that go beyond the interests of their respective nations. For example, the lack of Russian support for the United Nations’ (UN) intervention in Syria, by its veto in the Security Council, is emblematic. Although downgraded by the super power rate, Moscow is demonstrating that it never buried the rivalry that characterized East-West relations during the Cold War years. In other words, it still opposes itself to the spread of what is perceived as the liberal order promotion by Washington and Bruxelles. Exacerbated by the “question Ukraine”, this antagonism is still able of having global influences within international politics (Buras et al., 2014).

The debate between rationalists and constructivists has gained new vigour over the reasons linked to this renewed antagonism. Realists claim that the opposition between Vladimir Putin on the one hand, and Barack Obama, Angela Merkel and François Hollande on

the other, on the fate of Ukraine, has a solid rational basis. Firstly, because Washington, Brussels (Paris and Berlin) and NATO have sought to expand their influence in Eastern Europe and wrest the control of Ukraine from Russia. In return, Moscow has responded by defending its vital national security interest, occupying Crimea and trying to annex the eastern part of Ukraine. These divergent interests, plus the West indirect intervention in the conflict – sending weapons to the Ukrainian government – has created a military escalation that led to the current situation. It was not an ideological confrontation, but a divergence of power interests that has led to a military escalation because it encompassed a vital national security interest of the Russians.

Constructivists argue that this thesis is full of contradictions. According to them, in fact, realists' argument does not explain the absence of any empirical evidence about Western strategic interest above Ukraine since its "birth" in 1991. Secondly, given that NATO is only a "paper tiger" now,<sup>1</sup> Moscow's perceptions and reactions against NATO's influence in Ukraine cannot be explained by logics of power. Thirdly, from a geopolitical point of view, Russian's interest for Ukraine cannot be explained by avoiding any cultural, religious and historical factor. Moreover, the fear of further disproportional military escalation by Moscow – which often has driven the adoption of new sanctions – it is based on pseudo-psychological analysis of Putin's way of thinking (Motyl, 2015).

According to this paper, the debate between realists and constructivists is misleading. In fact, if there is no doubt that Ukraine has acquired a greater symbolic value than its intrinsic real value. It is also true that the actors involved take their decisions based on this altered perception of reality and, because of that, according to their points of view, their actions are very rational. Then, according to this paper, the right answer is the third. It is the rivalry, still present between the two powers, which has altered their perceptions of reality, leading them to consider rational what actually did not appear. Thus, the ideological aspect of the conflict would be an endogenous product of US-Russia rivalry. A latent rivalry that would result every time one of the actors' behaviour is driven by a particular desire.

<sup>1</sup> In the sense that its military power is more apparent than real.

In order to investigate the dynamics that led to the emergence of an ideological confrontation between US-Russia, this paper suggests a new model of analysis of international rivalry, based on a cognitive approach to international relations (IR) as well as an individual level of analysis. This paper's goal is to investigate the origins of the Cold War providing a better understanding on the emergence of those dynamics. The expected results are new useful insights to understand in depth the reasons for the US-Russia contemporary tough confrontation. The question that this paper seeks to answer are: is the Cold War a unique and unrepeatable moment in the history of international relations? If not, can it re-emerge, in different ways, driven by certain dynamics?

The first part of this paper is based on the theoretical analysis of US-Soviet Union (URSS) rivalry.<sup>2</sup> Their relations will be analysed from the theoretical perspective. In particular, it will be offered a brief summary of the approaches used to understand international rivalry. Furthermore, a critique of these approaches will be offered. This critique has a twofold implication. On the one hand, it highlights how the various rivalry definitions proposed have strong explanatory limits due to the lack of understanding on those factors triggering the rivalry itself, before an open conflict occurs. Additionally, it stresses out the need for a cognitive-psychological approach to churn out a new definition of rivalry as well as a model of analysis provided with explanatory and predictive abilities to grasp the emergence-phase of an international rivalry.

In the second part, a new model of international rivalry analysis, based on a cognitive approach, will be designed. The aim is to provide a deeper understanding of how decision-makers grasp the surrounding environment, that is, how they internalize, interpret and react by external stimuli. A new definition of rivalry will be proposed, in order to identify those dynamics and factors that lie under the rivalry emergence, taking into account the political, economic and psychological dimensions of dyad inner relations. This new definition of rivalry, called mimetic rivalry, will

<sup>2</sup> Precisely because of the suddenness of the end of the Cold War, in fact, the study of international rivalry took place as an innovative and revolutionary model of conflict analysis. (Thompson, 1995: 1).

be based on René Girard's<sup>3</sup> theory of mimetic desire application to international politics.

In the third part, the mimetic rivalry model will be used to identify three phases of US-URSS emergence of rivalry. Firstly, the relations between Washington and Moscow at the ending of WWI, during the years of a new world order reconstruction, will be re-framed. Secondly, the post-WWII period will be analysed. Particular attention will be driven to the peace conferences, held by Allies, with the aim to define the new structure of the post-WWII world order. Finally, this chapter will focus on the stage that preceded and led to the Cold War formal outbreak: the Korean War.

In conclusion, we will try to answer the following questions: are we facing a new - potential - "Cold War" between Washington and Moscow? Is the Cold War a unique and unrepeatable moment in the IR history? Can Cold War re-emerges in different ways, though?

The hypothesis advanced by this paper is that the constructivist and realist arguments are flawed because they cannot provide a full understanding of those dynamics that lie under US-URSS rivalry emergence. The reason is due to their strict linkage with the actors' altered point of view within the rivalry. In fact, rivalry traces are to be found elsewhere, namely in the mimetic origins of actors' ideological behaviour.

<sup>3</sup> René Girard's thought defies classification. He has written from the perspective of a wide variety of disciplines, namely Literary Criticism, Psychology, Anthropology, Sociology, History, Biblical Hermeneutics and Theology. Although he rarely calls himself a philosopher, many philosophical implications can be derived from his work. Girard's work is above all concerned with Philosophical Anthropology (that is, 'What is it to be human?'), and draws from many disciplinary perspectives. Over the years, he has developed a mimetic theory. According to this theory, human beings imitate each other, and this eventually gives rise to rivalries and violent conflicts. Such conflicts are partially solved by a scapegoat mechanism, but ultimately, Christianity is the best antidote to violence. [Source: Internet Philosophy Encyclopaedia/René Girard].

## Theory of international rivalry

The international rivalry debate is not green. One of the first cases analysed was the Cold War, as the result of the Soviet-American rivalry. However, instead of being focused on beginning, escalation, and the end of the Cold War, the scholars were focused on the reason of the old models' fiasco in predicting its end. Nevertheless, the literature on international rivalry has grown, more and more away, producing abstract models strongly linked to the extreme form of international conflict: the war.

The growing interest in this new model of IR analysis is based on an empirical evidence: war occurrence is not independent by the historical background of the dyad. This implies the need of looking at the whole range of- cooperative and competitive – relations that take place within it. Furthermore, this implies that conflicts outbreak is not a phenomenon that occurs between two independent actors. Instead, the historical context influence the result of the dyad. In other words, this approach takes into account time as a key factor to understand the causes that drive decision-makers' foreign policy decisions to make war or not (Crescenzi & Enterline, 2001).

Therefore, if violence as well as solidarity between rivals shape and influence their "historical mnemonic" baggage, this implies the need to sort the contents of that baggage out before diverging the focus on the conflict outbreak contingent reasons. Indeed, because of that historical and psychological baggage, the relations between two rivals present peculiar dynamics. These relations can result in "special friendships" or "special competitions". In the first case, actors find easier to solve peacefully the crises among each other, while, special competitors dyads are characterized by higher frequencies of armed

conflict occurrence (Colaresi & Thompson, 2002). In other words, once dyads get into a spiral of violence, the more it escalates and the more actors' relations exacerbate, up to the conflict and war.

### *Enduring rivalry*

The first approach emerged in the literature was the “enduring rivalry” (Diehl, 1985). This approach provides a rivalry definition closely linked to the conflict, since the existence of an enduring rivalry is determined by the frequency of the armed conflict within a dyad. In particular, it emerges when a dyad does experience at least three armed conflicts – “militarized interstate disputes” (MID)- over fifteen years. In order to continue over time, the rivalry must experience at least a military conflict within a period of fifteen years since last MID (Diehl, 1985: 1,204). A highly arbitrary definition of rivalry, then, because it focuses its attention only in numbers, duration, and frequency of disputes.

Therefore, the dynamics that lead to the emergence of a rivalry are not addressed (Huddleston, 4). This approach can only highlight the presence of an international rivalry when it has already escalated into a military conflict. In other words, this approach has only a descriptive ability to recognize those rivalries that already show the worst result of the rivalry itself. Then, the explanatory and predictive abilities of an international rivalry approach are not fully developed, (Thompson, 2002). This approach does not address that set of behaviours that have led both states to a stage where the violent resolution of the conflict is seen as the only available alternative. As a result, it does not analyse the psychological and historical baggage that affects decision-makers' decisions and, in this way, influences the actors' foreign policies.

### *Strategic rivalry*

For this reason, the debate continued towards a broader conceptualization of the rivalry definition, trying to provide a deeper understanding of the dyads' relations before any militarized dispute

has occurred (Thompson, 2002: 201). The further approaches increasingly moved the focus away from military disputes frequency ratings (Bennet 1997; Maoz & More 2002; Klein et al 2006), to shift the focus over the ways whereby decision-makers' perceptions influence the outcome of the dyad, rather (Thompson, 2001, 2002; Colaresi et al., 2007; Mitchell & Thies 2011). In other words, starting from quantitative-based approaches, the research has moved more and more close over qualitative-based approaches – based on interpretations than calculations (Thompson, 2001).

Strategic rivalry, defines those dyads in which actors' relation is characterized by a “special competition”. In particular, this competition emerges when actors perceive each other as: (a) competitors, (b) actual or latent threat likely to trigger a militarized conflict, and (c) enemies (2001: 560). Then, according to this approach, at the beginning of the rivalry there is a selective-phase. This means that each actor chose its rival on the base of those three perceptions. This implies that an asymmetry in military capabilities does not preclude to a rivalry, as it was for the enduring rivalry approach. Since the rivalry outbreak is based on states' perceptions, rivalry can occur even between weak-strong states, though it would lead to different results (Thies, 2001).<sup>4</sup> Ultimately, this approach is very similar to a socio-psychological process,<sup>5</sup> which mainly focuses its attention on how actors' negative perceptions lead dyads relations into a zero-sum game situation, that is, the stage immediately before the first MID outbreak.

Nevertheless, even this approach has its limits to shed new light on the rivalry emergence. Indeed, if its aim is to improve the explanatory skill of a rivalry-based analysis of international conflicts, it still has some lacks. Firstly, since the emergence of a strategic rivalry is based on decision-makers' public statements, this approach does not provide any predictive tool to understand the emergence of a rivalry before it becomes overt. Secondly, its explanatory power is flawed because an

<sup>4</sup> However, what most influences the decision-maker is the perception to deal with a state “plays in the same league.” Because his approach its base on perception, according to Thompson, this does not preclude a competition between a stronger and weaker states. Nevertheless, it is more likely that an armed conflict emerges between actors with similar military capabilities, and not vice versa (Thompson, 2001: 560).

<sup>5</sup> Rather than a definition closely linked to frequency of conflicts and symmetry of military capabilities.

overt declaration of rivalry, that is, the beginning of a strategic rivalry, can be a product of the rivalry itself. By that moment, indeed, one actor publicly states to perceiving another actor as its ultimate enemy, that is, a vital threat to its welfare.<sup>6</sup> Then, if the beginning of the strategic rivalry can be considered as a product of the rivalry itself (Huddleston, 6), this means that the overt rivalry declaration is only a finale stage of an escalation process. In other words, it is needful to address those dynamics that lead the actors to perceive each other as dangerous enemies, instead of fair competitors.

In sum, the existing approaches seem to be unable to go beyond the mere identification of an already broken out rivalry, yet. Thus, the predictive ability of international rivalries models have not yet been truly exploited. On the one hand, the model of “enduring rivalry”, as well as those based on quantitative-based approaches, does not analyse the rivals’ relations before three military disputes’ outbreak have occurred. On the other hand, the “strategic rivalries” model, yet too much linked to issues of strategic security, fails to grasp those economic, geopolitical and diplomatic dynamics that concur to form the psychological and historical baggage of a nation. Thus, it does not provide any further understanding about how decision-makers’ perceptions, shaped but the psychological and historical baggage, emerges. The outbreak of a strategic rivalry seems to be the culmination of another process, yet hidden, that concurs to worsening decision-makers’ perceptions and, thus, the foreign policy of each actor.

For example, the Cold War, that is the beginning of the US-URSS strategic rivalry is dated in 1945, while its end in 1989 (Thompson, 2001: 573). This categorization would correspond to the US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s (FDR) death, and the sixties years old Henry S. Truman designation of new US President, who, after being unexpectedly elected, addressed the Senate stating that “the actions resulting from the Communist philosophy are a threat to the efforts of free nations to bring about world recovery and lasting peace. [While] “our people desire are determined to work for peace on earth – a just and lasting peace – based on genuine agreements freely arrived by

<sup>6</sup> When a decision-maker make the rivalry public, he is claiming to be in a relationship of special competition with an actor considered as it bitter enemy, since that statement pose serious consequences among the relations between the two states. The other actor, indeed, would probably declare the same, leading to an overall worsening of relations.

equals ... In the pursuit of these aims, the United States and other likeminded nations find themselves directly opposed by a regime with contrary aims and a totally different concept of life” (Truman, 1989).

However, this Truman’s statement, recorded in history as the Truman Doctrine, was uttered overtly only in 1947, not before. In fact, before FDR’s death, it can be said US-URSS relations were better than those with London.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, in 1945, US administration was primarily concentrated in defeating its truly rival, because of which it had gone to war: Japan. Yet, the very first act of Truman’s international policy was the nuclear ending of US-Japan war, obtained with Tokyo’s unconditional surrender. A decision in continuity with FDR’s administration, which had secretly approved and funded the Manhattan project.

These historical details, however, are not given to delay the formal beginning of the rivalry between USSR and US. Rather, this paper, aiming to investigate the emergence of the American-Soviet rivalry, argues the need of further deeper analysis on those dynamics that shaped the historical and psychological baggage, which has led to the emergence of the rivalry. Through the approached outlined before, it is hard to move away from a simplistic description of the rivalry as an ideological confrontation. However, the Communist ideology was not different before FDR’s death. Truman’s administration, differently from its forerunner, simply chose to evaluate URSS existence as naturally antithetic to the US. Where this huge difference came from? A deeper psychological-cognitive investigation is needful.

<sup>7</sup> An attitude evident within the conferences held by the Allies to determine the future world order. In any case, the subject will be addressed in the third chapter.

## Cognitive approach between psychology and “folk psychology”

In order to investigate those dynamics that led to the overt declaration of URSS-US rivalry, this paper provides a model of international rivalry analysis based on a cognitive approach to international politics.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the Cold War cannot be explained without addressing the “Truman factor” as well as that of other representatives close to him, such as George Kennan, who played a significant role in the sudden change of relationships between USSR and US, starting from the early months following the end of World War II.<sup>9</sup>

The cognitive approach is chosen because even the Holocaust cannot be explained without investigating the role of Hitler. The values of anti-Semitic Hitler as well as those of ordinary Germans, flanked by their cognitive orientations are key variables to explain how they have been transformed into performers and volunteers aware of the Nazi expansionism policies (Rose, 2000; Goldhagen, 1995). In other words, this paper wants to highlight that behind the policies of a nation, there are individuals, called decision-makers. They are the material performers of nations’ foreign policies. Any analysis of a foreign policy that does not take into account the cognitive aspect of who takes in place those policies

<sup>8</sup> The cognitive approach, as an approach of political psychology, has born from “the application of the human psychology to the study of the policies” (Huddy et al., 2013: 2). In particular, it applies the discoveries related to human cognitive system to explain the behaviour of individuals within a specific political system. Although, political psychology “alone cannot explain the Holocaust, wars and conflicts” (Huddy et al., 2013: 4), its role cannot even be “minimized or ignored” (Rosati, 2000: 2).

<sup>9</sup> Here the reference is to the famous telegram sent by the Secretary of State Marshall Kennan. Issue that will be further explained in the third chapter.

are flawed. It means losing a large part of the explanation of the foreign policy determinants.

Addressing the cognitive aspect of a foreign policy means addressing the realists and constructivists debate over rationality. On the one hand, realists dealt with decision-makers and states as a mere “black-box”, because they look for few key objectives and interests under the pressure of determining systemic forces (Waltz, 2010). On the other hand, constructivists’ arguments, despite they take into account more variables such as identity and social forces, they have failed to open that “black box”: humans’ mind. Through a cognitive approach, this paper aims to examine decision-makers’ perceptions formation. In other words, it aims to understand those mechanisms by which internal and external stimuli are converted, that is, turned in external action.

The need for a cognitive approach of international politics is urgent. Indeed, although their presence dominate the works of the most important IR analysis, the influence of cognitive factors such as ideas, opinions, perceptions and identity is weighted without dealing with their psychological dimension (Goldgeier, 1997: 145).<sup>10</sup> Due to this lack, any effort to design a conflict model of analysis with both explanatory and predictive power are flawed (*Ibid.* 139). Although some scholars remain sceptical about the use of this dimension of analysis,<sup>11</sup> this scepticism does not take into account the scientific advances and new discoveries made today in the scientific field (Garrels, 2006). However, another school of thought simply chooses of not analysing the human mind’s role behind his behaviour, preferring to explain human behaviour through arbitrary diagnoses.

Most scholars believe that human leanings are cognitive distortions, that is, a factor that negatively affects human decision, which would be logical and rational, otherwise. A belief that is substantially shared by the constructivists. Indeed, despite the increased complexity through

<sup>10</sup> Even realists describe the behaviour of an individual as looking for “reasons to act”, i.e. security, honour, freedom, competition and self-interest.

<sup>11</sup> Morgenthau’s thought, still influent today, is a good example. He says that it is useless to investigate the thinking of decision-makers because it would be a waste of time. Another example, St. Augustine would conclude his thought by stating that the futility is due to the complexity of human thought, or rather to too much complexity (Mercer, 2005).

which they describe human behavior,<sup>12</sup> they assume, as realists do, that, ultimately, human behaviour is rational.<sup>13</sup> Even the international rivalries models, from the simplest to the most complex, are based on this assumption: they assume that actors would be able to resolve peacefully any conflict if that historical and psychological baggage did not influence their rationality. In other words, the historical and psychological baggage turns decision-makers and states in irrational actors.

Contrary to the cognitive approach, the former approaches focus their attention on preferences and results, while the cognitive approach “tends to focus on opinions and process as well as on how preferences are formed and where they come from among the decision-makers” (Rose, 2000: 6). In other words, the cognitive approach, unlike the others, analyses how human mind works, or how individuals, through specific mental processes, form their own opinions. Rather than speculate normative way of behave, the cognitive approach only focuses on how thought is formed, without labelling it a priori as rational or irrational.<sup>14</sup>

Although some models pretend to address conflict psychological dimensions, they use psychological factors to explain “deviant” behaviours, that is, those behaviours that deviate from rationality (Mercer, 2005: 3). A real paradox because if political psychology helps to explain human mind’s influence over decision-makers’ behaviour, those models implicitly assume that, “when human mind does act”, it deviates individual’s behaviour from rational to irrational outcomes. (Mercer, 2005). Thus, paradoxically, both rationalists - who discard

<sup>12</sup> If the realists’ claim that the actor is rational because pursues its own interest, constructivists integrate this statement by analysing how people’s preferences are influenced by internal and external forces, taking into account not only economic interests but also perceptions. For example, a state may distort the information it makes publicly available, in order to obtain more benefits (Enterline & Crescenzi, 2001: 655), or the lack of confidence in the actions between two states, could lead to conflict even if they knew all the information to resolve the dispute peacefully (Enterline & Crescenzi, 2001: 656).

<sup>13</sup> The rational paradigm is bases on the assumption that the war is never the first preference of the actor since it represents a burdensome and reliable cost, and its benefit are likely and uncertain. Thus, if they had the chance they would prefer to invest their resources in a peaceful and satisfactory agreement, rather than in a war (Fearon, 1995).

<sup>14</sup> If the rational approach defines what is an accurate judgment, that is an argument that is based on a rational process, cognitive approaches, such as the theory of *correspondence approach theory* highlights how individuals adopt a decision, regardless of its accuracy (Mercer, 2005).

emotions and cognitive inclinations to define a rational way of behaving – and constructivist-psychologists – who use psychology only to explain human error- agree in believing mind as a source of negative influences over human process of ideas, opinions, perceptions and rational behaviours.

This paradox has created bizarre consequences. Firstly, according to this axiom, “rationality is not based on the psychology” (Mercer, 2005: 3). Since psychology explains mental phenomena, and since mind is a source of errors, then, rational behaviour is not based on psychology or on mind because it produces right results. For example, according this thesis, political psychology can only explain why an individual, because of certain emotions, does not behave as the model of rational choice would impose to behave. In that case, and only in that case, the use of psychological models is accepted as useful.<sup>15</sup> However, this example brings us to another bizarre consequence of a “rationality free from psychology: scholars may know what is rational, in psychology, only after establishing what is rational “(Mercer, 2005: 4), a sort of arbitrary rationality threshold. Evidently, the paradox represents the use of typically psychological concepts as honour, security, freedom, and confidence without any linkage to the psychological dimension because the latter is only useful to understand deviate behaviours.

Furthermore, if rationality explains right behaviours, this means that psychology cannot explain accurate judgments (Mercer, 2005: 4). Paradoxically, when they are driven by their mind, individuals are brought to error. Then, this axiom, based on a rationality that lacks of a psychological dimension, is clearly irrational. In fact, it is not possible to divide human mind and rationality when it comes to analyse how individuals grasp their surrounding environment as well as how they behave. In order to investigate individuals’ behaviour a deeper understanding on how human mind behaves, how individuals process the environmental stimuli, how they human mind’s mechanisms work is needful.

<sup>15</sup> Approach similar to that of Crescenzi and Enterline (2001) explained above. The system of thought focused on *realpolitik*, limits the ability of policymakers to be able to give the right value to the information they possess. In other words, for scholars, the agreement would always be possible, if do not intervene cognitive distortions that make the actors irrational. According to this paper, however, it is this evaluation that prevents an agreement. A superficial assessment, which is based on the behaviour of the adversary, without going into a deeper analysis of the cognitive process that led to that decision.

However, most scholars use an intuitive approach to analyse individual's action (Mercer, 2005: 8). According to "this" psychology, to think it is to act. It is possible to grasp what people think or want through their acts or behaviours,<sup>16</sup> and vice versa.<sup>17</sup> Yet, this approach does not address the psychological dimension, because human mind's analysis is still avoided. Therefore, it is necessary to use a theory of causal explanation of human action, which does explain human behaviour integrating human mind's role. In other words, without knowing desires and opinions of an individual, it is not possible to understand how environmental stimuli are processed and, thus, it is not possible to understand which stimulus works and how (Mercer, 2005: 10).

Some psychological explanations use schemes of belief in order to match external stimuli with decision-makers' behaviours. Yet, the way through which schemes of belief are formed is just presumed by those decision-makers' behaviour. Thus, for example, Stalin's foreign policy decisions are always described as ideologically based, i.e. guided by the Communist ideology. For this reason, Stalin's behaviour has been labelled as anti-pragmatic. However, as it will be described in the third chapter, this label is clearly flawed and perhaps based on ideological assumption itself.

In short, without any notion about how individuals' mind processes external stimuli and incentives, it is not possible to make any inference about what may be individuals' intentions and, thus, what drives people behaviours. The same stimulus or incentive can trigger different reactions among different people. Then, investigating what are the decision-makers' desires is needful to understand how they shape foreign policy decisions. Only through a cognitive approach, that evaluates mind's role influence on people behaviour, will be possible to understand what rational behaviours or accurate judgments means for each individual. In this way, a cognitive approach fully develops the explanatory and predictive power of human behaviour model of analysis.

<sup>16</sup> Fundamental assumption of the behaviourist approach (Skinner, 1972).

<sup>17</sup> For example, Samuelson (1948) proposed a theory of revealed preferences, which reverses the previous assumption, analysing the behaviour of the individual to infer his preferences. Yet, in this way, the mind is still eliminated by the calculations. A similar approach also used by Crescenzi and Enterline (2001).

## Theory of mimetic desire

Therefore, how does this learning process work? How do people formulate their desires? A theory that tries to solve this puzzle is René Girard's theory of Mimetic Desire. According to Girard (1996), "there is almost nothing, in human behaviour, it is not learned, and all learning is reduced to imitation. If men suddenly ceased to imitate, all cultural forms vanish "(22). In other words, mimesis and mimetic mechanisms are the core of human relations and every learning process are based on mimesis.<sup>18</sup>

However, Girard does not intend mimesis as the human ability to copy a gesture of his similar. According to Girard, through human mimesis, people are able of inference and appropriation, that is, they are able to grasp the goal – or desire – behind another person's behaviour and, ultimately, to copy that desire. Thus, through human imitation, people learn how to desire making inference and internalizing other people desires.<sup>19</sup> Girard calls this ability the *acquisitive dimension* of human imitation. In this way, people desire what other people desire. This makes human desire no more an original individual product but social product, that is, desires result from individuals' interactions. However, as it will be stressed out later, human mimesis also represents the root of the "slavery of mankind," that is, the need to "prevent conflicts inevitably caused by the convergence towards the same object, two or more equally greedy hands" (Girard, 1996: 23). Stripped of its

<sup>18</sup> According to Girard, it is human mimesis, different from animal's, which shaped human cultural evolution.

<sup>19</sup> Girard distinguished between imitation and mimesis. Inference and appropriation are the characteristics of human mimesis, while representation is the only feature of imitation in the animal world - especially observed in monkeys.

individualistic and romantic fascinations, human desire genesis holds the key to the conflict between people.

Therefore, if human desire is socially constructed, this means that humanity consciously stands for desire (Souillac, 2014: 343). Indeed, it is through imitation that people would be able,<sup>20</sup> since new-born, to develop their understanding of others based on experience (Meltzoff & Decety, 2003). In particular, this mechanism develops in three phases: firstly, recognizing the equivalence between perceived actions and that performed, thanks to the human innate ability to imitate.<sup>21</sup> Secondly, constructing a direct experience, through a daily map of the combination of actions performed-observed and mental experiences – i.e. feelings. Thirdly, deducing others' experiences, grasping the others' states of mind observing how they behave (Garrels, 2006: 67).

If this is true, what are the consequences? What influences have imitation on human experience as well as his ability to grasp the surrounding environment? The main result is that between thought and action there is not a linear relationship. Mind, through mimetic mechanism, does “alter” or “manipulate” the information internalized/learned by people.<sup>22</sup> In particular, this alteration consist in two ways of understanding: *strictly congruent and largely congruent*. In the first case, people understanding would coincide perfectly with the action observed, which would be useful when a detailed analysis of what has been observed is needful. In the second case, human understanding is broader. Then, his response is similar, but not identical to observed action. Through this mechanism, people would identify the implicit goal behind the observed action. Thus, they sought to reach the same desire using different tools or methods than those observed. In

<sup>20</sup> An innate capacity that would result from the presence of neurons mimesis. Neurons are brain cells that are activated when an individual observes a movement or when it is performed by one another. They are able to create an instant shared experience from the action observed or performed (Rizzolati et al., 1996). In addition, they represent the first identified neural mechanism “that allows a direct matching between visual description of an action and its execution” (Rizzolati et al., 2001: 663).

<sup>21</sup> Recognized as equivalent action observed or perceived and performed is a crucial fact because of what the authors infer that, like monkeys, the man since he was born, has mimetic neurons and that these are active from birth.

<sup>22</sup> Through imitation, infants learn the target or the target behind their peers' behaviours. This means that perception and production speak the same language (Meltzoff and Moore, 1999: 54). In this way, external stimuli and incentives are perceived, learned, developed, and executed.

sum, these mechanisms would be at the core of human socialization, allowing people to communicate and react to a specific external stimulus appropriately (Fogassi & Welsh, 2002: 19).

Therefore, the centre of human learning, i.e. the mind, is nothing more than a great mimetic organ that, through strictly congruent and largely congruent imitation, is able to learn/internalize the mental states of other people, such as desires, opinions, intentions and goals.<sup>23</sup> This has prompted several researchers to advance the idea that the innate ability to imitate would allow humans being, since their infancy, to directly copy others' desires, giving little attention to instrumental gestures/behaviours.<sup>24</sup>

In summary, it can be said that the numerous empirical studies, conducted among the field of developmental psychology, neuroscience and neuropsychology, tend to converge in the same direction described by Rene Girard. Contrary to what has been assumed up to now, imitation plays a crucial role in human learning process as well as in the socialization processes. Indeed, through imitation, people understands the surrounding environment and react appropriately to it. Thus, imitation does act as a processor of external stimuli and incentives. It would be the key to do understand how the Theory of Mind develops, that is, a crucial factor in understanding how conflict emerges between people since it allows to understand: a) how a decision-maker interprets other actors' desires as well as b) how he determines their values and goals. It would also provide a new tool to grasp what influences have the external social forces over decision-making process.

### *Mimesis, violence and conflict. Construction of a model of analysis*

How does the social matrix of human desire lead people to violence and conflict? How mimetic desire triggers the emergence of conflict

<sup>23</sup> Unlike animals, children can understand the desired behind the gesture of an adult even though the goal was not reached (Meltzoff, 1995). In addition, they choose what to imitate consciously, and try to accomplish the goal, rather than repeat the gesture superficially (Meltzoff, 1996, 2002). This led Meltzoff and Decety (2003) to conclude as early as children, human being is able to imitate what he intends to do and what he actually does (496).

<sup>24</sup> For further information on the theory of the objective of imitation (Trevarthen, Kokkinaki, Fiamenghi & 1999; & Wolschlagler Bekkering 2002).

between two actors? According to Girard, violence is a phenomenon of mimetic contagion. In particular, Girard says that violence is “a perfect mimetic relationship, therefore perfectly mutual,” where “everyone imitates the violence of the other and returns it to him” (Girard, 1996: 370). It would emerge when people sought to acquire others’ desires that, by their nature, are not acquirable. In this way, because of the more and more obstacles that people encounters, mimetic competition can lead to violence and conflict. These mechanisms were known even by primitive societies. Indeed, Girard observes that because of the reciprocity nature of human violence, among primitive societies, mechanisms of violence prevention were based on the prohibition of those desires that could generate conflict: acquisitive desires.<sup>25</sup>

According to Girard, representative and acquisitive dimension are not the only one that characterize mimesis. In order to understand how mimesis leads to violence and conflict, Girard identifies a third dimension, intrinsically linked to the acquisitive: the *dimension of appropriation*.<sup>26</sup> According to Girard, if “acquisitive imitation and the appropriation dimension were included, imitation understood as a social phenomenon would become” a phenomenon of conflict based on mimetic rivalry. (1979: 9). In summary, human mimesis can be dangerous when it is not canalized to non-acquisitive behaviours. These dimensions trigger a mimetic competition – between the desiring subject and its model – that could ultimately turns into violent rivalry.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> For example, in Indian society, the ancient caste system is a good model of behaviour established by the whole community and religious legitimacy. Through intermarriage, on the one hand, it prohibited the move from one caste to another. On the other hand, it banned the contest for women of different castes. In a society where man control both the government and the military institutions, this rules prevent any mimetic rivalry that has as its object sexual desires between members of different castes. Indeed, the most serious danger was an internal conflict between classes, which would inevitably lead to the collapse of the entire society. The “purity” of the caste was, thus, instrumental in maintaining a balance in Indian society. For offenders, there was no mercy. Become untouchable, they were expelled from the caste system – i.e. the whole society.

<sup>26</sup> In some writings, Girard has markedly distinguished the second and the third dimension (Girard, 1979: 9). However, in subsequent works, this distinction is not repeated, preferring to emphasize the fact that both these dimensions are needful to define human mimesis. In essence, the acquisitive dimension always follows the dimension of appropriation, as two parts of a single dimension.

<sup>27</sup> At the individual level, the model of rivalry between master and disciple is an effective analogy. On the one hand, the disciple does not simply imitate the gestures of the teacher, but he acquires them. He tries to be like him, to take his place. On the other hand, at first, the teacher feels gratified from being treated as a model. Then, he begins to

Therefore, not the whole kinds of learned behaviours concur to generate violence. Those that do not arouse rivalry – drove by not-acquisitive desire – are behaviours whose objects are real and linked to the basic needs of a community. In other words, they have intrinsic value because the community existence can be objectively in danger without them.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, those behaviours that elicit rivalries – drove by acquisitive desires – are the whole kinds of behaviour that develop between two actors who have already reached their subsistence level. In other words, those behaviours are not pursued to meet basic needs; instead, their targets are metaphysical desires: honour, prestige, glory etc. Without any guide, human beings find themselves without any means to discern between these two kinds of behaviour leaving the whole community in danger.<sup>29</sup>

Once the player has chosen to acquire a certain behaviour, a sort of triangular relationship between the subject (who desire), object (desired) and model (imitated) is established. This particular relationship established by mimetic mechanism suggests that the subject perceives that object desirable not because of its intrinsic value, rather because it is owned by the model. In other words, acquiring that object, the subject is trying to imitate the model. The subject’s real intentions are not the acquisition of the object, then. In fact, his aim it to imitate his model to become like him, that is, to replace it. In this case, the more the subject imitate, the higher the competition.

Indeed, as for the master-disciple relation, the imitation of the model results in negative consequences. Since acquisitive imitation leads to a replacement of the model (imitated) by the subject (who imitates),

perceive that disciple his protégé. However, the more the pupil becomes like the master, the more the master feels his authority threatened. Without consciously realizing it, the master starts to imitate his pupil in desiring with more ardour to remain a master – to preserve his identity of a model. Soon, then, the positive and constructive relationship between the couple turns into a destructive relationship, where the disciple tries to break the domination of the master – becoming itself a master and craving recognition as equal. While the master hampers the disciple efforts in order to defend its dominance or superiority over the disciple itself – reaffirming his identity as master. Therefore, violence and desire are closely linked to mimesis.

<sup>28</sup> The terms object and behaviour are used interchangeably, since the object of rivalry may be real, physical, or simply a behaviour, or a particular foreign policy strategy. Therefore, they will be used interchangeably in this paper.

<sup>29</sup> Sometimes, indeed, what seems real - as the value in a particular subject, in fact, it is not.

the more mimesis develops, the greater the threat to model's identity. When one of the actors perceives the tie that binds them as a threat mark, the breaking point is reached. From this moment, the transition from mimesis of appropriation – towards the object – to mimesis of antagonism – towards the model – is occurred (Souillac, 2014: 344). However, several aspects need to be clarified before any further analysis of antagonism mimesis last-phase is possible, namely rivalry.

#### From competition towards objects to rivalry towards desires

How does transition from mimesis of appropriation to mimesis of antagonism occurs? Mutual mimesis between subject and model originally develops around an object. The latter has no intrinsic value, yet it gains more and more value because of the mimetic competition intensification. Although it seems the core of the competition, the object can be any, because its “value grows in proportion to the resistance its acquisition encounters”, which leads to an increase in the perceived model's value as well (Girard, 1996: 364). This statement implies that: firstly, the core of mimesis is the model, rather than the object. Secondly, the object value depends on the subject-model [mimetic] competition itself. Thirdly, accompanied by this competitive relation, a selective attention concurs to increase – alter – the competition weight. Finally, mimetic competition turns a free-intrinsic value object in a “prohibited object”,<sup>30</sup> leading the two actors to compete harder and harder up to the violent escalation.

At this point, the “elements of the system react on each other; the prestige of the model, the strength that he opposes, the object value, the force of desire that inspires, every elements continue to strengthen in a process of positive feedback” (Ibid., 365). In other words, mimetic competition is becoming increasingly vicious. The final phase is reached when mimetic competition turns the actors as “double”.<sup>31</sup> When total symmetry of desires is reached, both actors start to perceive each other as competitor, enemy, and vital threat to

<sup>30</sup> It is forbidden in the sense that each of them forbids the other to acquire that object.

<sup>31</sup> Double does not intend to describe two specular entities, but rather an endogenous product of the acquisitive mimesis which led both actors to have the same desire, and then, for this reason, to rival for any object.

each other security. Since the same desire drives each behaviours, both actors perceive each other desire as genuine and rational, while, at the same time, they perceive the other's identity as a vital threat to their security.

At this point, the object totally disappears from the competition, and the subject-model relationship becomes an overt rivalry towards a metaphysical thing: the will to fulfil each other desire. In other words, the more mimetic competition increase, the more both actors' focus shifts from the object disputed to the actors' mutual impediments deadlock. When mimetic rivalry emerges, the corollary result is that both actors starts to perceive each other as mutually different – antithetic – though they are nothing more than double. Then, in contrast with the other model of conflict analysis, this model claims that when it comes to metaphysical object – such as power, prestige, honour – the conflict of interests between actors is not rational. They claim to be rational, but each set of interests is designed to fulfil the same desire, which is perceived as original but it has a mimetic matrix. Therefore, within mimetic rivalries, decisions and perceptions of those involved are the result of the rivalry itself.

Therefore, the emergence of an overt mimetic rivalry takes place when two thresholds are crossed:<sup>32</sup> *threshold of metaphysical desire and threshold of differentiation*. When the metaphysical desire threshold is reached, it means that competition has ceased to be conducted towards the acquisition of real objects; rather it is conducted to fulfil a metaphysical desire – honour, glory, prestige. “If you ask their opponents why they fight, they call on notions such as the prestigious” (Ibid. 375). Although perceived as real by the actors involved, concepts such as prestige, honour and credibility “have no tangible reality, and yet, the fact of competing for them makes them seem more real than any other object” (Ibid. 366). “Fighting for prestige means fighting literally for nothing. In the absence of any concrete object. [Then], the nothingness of prestige should look like everything... for all opponents” (Ibid. 376).

The *threshold of differentiation*, instead, is achieved when mimetic competition reached is final stage. At that point, coexistence within the dyad is perceived as no longer possible. Actors' perceptions reached the point of incompatibility. According to this paper, the whole process

<sup>32</sup> It means an overt rivalry explicit.

starts from the mechanism of un-differentiation (or imitation) that made the actors increasingly similar to each other. Then, when their mutual desire has formed, they cannot tolerate each other's presence, because it is perceived as a threat to their identity, that is, to their original and genuine – national – desire. From now on, it seems that the two actors start to differ because of their objective conflict of rational interests. In addition, the point of incompatibility is reached because actors are driven by irrational beliefs/perceptions, which hamper any peaceful resolution to their conflict. According to the mimetic rivalry model, instead, incompatibility and “rational-irrationality”<sup>33</sup> emerge due to the in-differentiation process of mimesis that lies behind the differentiation among the actors.

Therefore, even though they genuinely believe in their claims, the antithetic difference among rivals is just a myth, used to conceal, intentionally or not, mimetic competition result: the double (*Ibid.* 373). In other words, treating the actors as antithetic entities means to do believe in each mythical claim of genuine difference. In fact, differentiation is a mythical framework resulted from the hallucination in which they fall down within the rivalry. Taking for granted those claims means not going to the source of the problem, beyond their hallucination: the double mimetic bond. When mimetic competition is triggered, both actors imitate the object and they impede the full acquisition of the object itself, at the same time. The ambiguity that comes up, always hidden by mimetic dynamics, generates the “blind rationality” that characterizes both actors' behaviour.<sup>34</sup>

In conclusion, according to this model of conflict analysis, rivals' conflict is not generated by the antithesis of interests, rather by the similarity of desires. In other words, rivalry does not arise because two or more actors have the same interests – for example, a specific

<sup>33</sup> That is the irrational behaviour – acting, as they were antithetic – perceived as rational by both actors.

<sup>34</sup> For example, as in the case of the master-disciple, on the one hand the disciple feels he must imitate with even more ardour its model, on the other this feeling engenders more frustration because his master hampers his efforts to gain the object (i.e. master status). Despite the disciple justifies, at first, this behaviour of the model, the more intense becomes imitation, the more the justification becomes fragile, until the disciple can no longer justify the reason of a lack of recognition of the level reached. Then, the result is that the disciple feels entitled to rival with their master as an equal in order to gain its desire: being recognized as a master.

real asset, such as oil. Rather, rivalry emerges because both actors imitate each other until they become so similar that the presence of one becomes a deadly threat to the other. Level of incompatibility is reached due to the mimetic competition, which progressively increases the symbolic value of the object. When the actors find themselves as double, the competition turns into a rivalry, where everyone craves the same metaphysical desire. The latter, however, genuinely perceived as rational and original, cannot accept the presence of its own double. Therefore, “each model is turned into anti-model... Instead of looking like, it is now to defer” (*Ibid.* 371).

In sum, competition among rivals is triggered by mimesis. The process gets the relations worse and worse because of the double bond mimetic hallucinatory effect. Selective attention emerges between the two actors, which leads them to weight the competition for the contended object, a greater meaning than it really has. When both thresholds are crossed, competition turns into a rivalry characterized by a zero-sum game. Once the rivalry has emerged, actors perceive each other as anti-model, thus, the success of one side coincides exactly with the defeat – or death – of the other. At this point, both actors perceive violence and war as the only viable solution to resolve the conflict, that is, to eliminate the vital threat. Since the theoretical base should now be clear, it is possible to delineate some general theoretical conclusions over the opened issues discussed in this paper.

#### Rationality of the process, ir-rationality of the result

What are the implications over human rationality when it comes to mimetic rivalry? Looking at it from the outside, the mimetic rivalry dynamics seem to offer us a crazy, irrational result. Actors imitate each other until they become doubles. However, at the same time, they increasingly perceive each other as competitors, until they perceive the elimination of their enemy as the only viable alternative.<sup>35</sup> However,

<sup>35</sup> The subject wants to acquire that object because he thinks it has great value. The mimetic process starts. However, at the same time, the model still holds the object close by the subject. Then, the more the subject tries to gain that object, the more the model hampers his efforts. Finally, both the actors decide to remove the only obstacle to the attainment or the maintenance of their desire.

this irrational result is achieved through a rational process. Indeed, when the rivalry has been established, the dominant perception, which influences every strategy within the dyad, is the logic of the dominant-dominated. This logic leads the actors to violence, whose form is linked to other factors such as power symmetry, religious difference, cultural difference and so forth.

As we can notice, according to both actors, everything that happens is rational, which is the elimination of their vicious rival. In fact, the only rational aspect of the process is imitation, because it represents the only way through which people learn and develop. However, if the imitation is focused on non-acquisitive objects, then a mimetic competition can start, leading to a more dangerous rivalry. After that, once the dominant logic affects the dyad, the result is irrational violence. Both actors are symmetrically connected by a strong reciprocal mimetic relationship, which leads to differentiation and reciprocal violence.<sup>36</sup>

Ultimately, the mimetic analysis allows the analysis of rivals' relationships to move away from their altered point of view. This is essential in order to understand why a certain behaviour becomes strongly irrational, despite the blindness of the actor itself. When the misleading trap of a natural spontaneity of human desire is unveiled, it is possible to go further towards the decryption of those dynamics and behaviours, based on mimesis, which lead both actors to struggle to death for symbolic objects.

#### Differentiation through the mechanism of the scapegoat

Once the threshold of differentiation is crossed, actors' perceptions suddenly deteriorate turning the competition in a vicious explosive rivalry. However, the simple recognition of a huge difference does not provide us any tool to understand why the rivalry escalation is so dangerous. This recognition must be accompanied by a mechanism

<sup>36</sup> For example, when the disciple seeks to replace their master and the latter resists, the result can be explosive. The disciple does not recognize his master as such, but he considered him as an equal; the master, on the other hand, behaves with symmetrical reciprocity and disavows his disciple. The result is that, as long as the master is alive, the disciple cannot become the master, while, as long as the disciple will threaten his identity, the master cannot feel safe. Conflict is bounded to result in violence.

able to channel all the frustrations and all the growing violence on the prohibited object towards the model. Girard identifies it as the scapegoat mechanism.

Through this mechanism, a community on the edge of an internal collapse finds new identity through the elimination of a sacrificial victim arbitrarily designated: a scapegoat. Thanks to this channel, a powerful polarization emerges within the community: the entire community does coagulate against the external enemy – or an internal member perceived as out of the community. According to the executioner point of view, the victim is guilty of endangering the very existence of the entire community. However, though the scapegoat elimination can provide a certain peace within the community, the reached peace is flawed. In fact, since the scapegoat, by nature, is not the source of the problem, if the rivalry has a winner, this does not mean the end of the rivalry itself. The winner will go in search for a new rival, that is, for a new scapegoat to kill.

In international politics, this mechanism finds place as the linkage decision-makers' perceptions to the whole community. Through the scapegoat mechanism, indeed, the entire population is mobilized/plagued by the zero-sum game perceived among the elite, or vice versa.<sup>37</sup> When the perceived enemy is a member of the community – such as an ethnic, political, religious or linguistic minority – the result is its elimination from the community. When it comes to an external scapegoat – such as another nation – then this mechanism of violence channelling may results from diplomatic disputes, economic retaliations, and military disputes.

In conclusion, mimetic rivalry model allows an “external”-analysis of international rivalry phenomenon, that is, an analysis not affected by the altered subjectivity of the actors involved. This implies, firstly, the ability to identify the irrational basis of a claimed rational foreign policy. Secondly, the chance to understand the real causes that led states to do act irrationally. Thirdly, it provides the ability to identify the consequences of a violent channelling process, before its emergence.

<sup>37</sup> A mechanism that works in both directions: the elite can plague the rest of the population and vice versa. In the first case, the elite consciously influences public opinion (for a discussion: Levy, 2011; Levy & Vakili, 2014). In the second case, however, public opinion influences the élite – such as within democratic systems.

## Operationalization of the mimetic rivalry model

### Initial phase of emulation

The emulation phase represents the first stage of a mimetic rivalry. In this phase, the triangle subject-object-model is formed. The object contended tends to be real, such as a particular behaviour or a particular resource. Then, the subject emulates its model, that is, the actor on which he focuses its attention, trying to acquire certain characteristics, gaining certain resources, which can be real as far as their symbolic value is much higher than their intrinsic one.

The objects contended are those from which do not depend the actor's existence. Furthermore, they have already an owner – the model, thus, their symbolic value strictly depends on the model whose are linked. The main distinction is between strategically vital objects – truly linked to the independence, autonomy and sovereignty of a state – and those acquired for reasons of prestige, credibility, and honour.<sup>38</sup> Then, the model shifts its focus from the object contended to the competition between subject and model.

### Reciprocity before the break

<sup>38</sup> This applies not only to the objects quality, but also to their quantity. Regarding behaviours, it does not weight their type only, but also the specific intensity with which they are carried out.

In the phase preceding the differentiation, the relations between the two actors are characterized by progressively higher degree of reciprocity. The more the object value increases, the more the subject-model competition/contrast becomes intense. Triggered by the emulation, competition is characterized by higher and higher levels of reciprocity. Engendered by the already emerged selective attention, the dominant-dominated logic starts to affect more and more the dyad result, that is, actors' foreign policy. Empirically, this alternation emerges both in foreign and domestic policy. Then, the domestic and foreign realm cannot be separated since they strongly influence each other. This model suggests that a mimetic competition affects the domestic policy of both actors and vice versa.

### Reciprocity after the break

When the breaking point is reached, rivalry is overt. This leads to greater reciprocity between the two actors. Moreover, they start to perceive each other as antithetic, weighting the opposite rival as a vital threat to their security, ultimately a scapegoat. Even the domestic realm is plagued by the consequences of mimetic rivalry namely the scapegoat mechanism. Public opinion and stakeholders can find themselves both polarized against the rival. If this happen, dyad's outcome would be characterized by more and more violence and conflict. Reciprocity, which pervades the dyad, can occur in every sectors.<sup>39</sup> Particularly important are historical, economic and political factors.

In conclusion, to be able to identify the emergence of a mimetic rivalry is necessary to use both types of analysis, quantitative and qualitative. On the one hand, through a quantitative analysis, it is possible to determine the real value of the emulated object. On the other hand, through a qualitative analysis of public statements and public debates within the dyad, it is possible to identify those symbolic objects that sign the presence of a mimetic rivalry.

<sup>39</sup> The greater or lesser reciprocity depends on the level of subsistence achieved or not by one of the two actors in that particular sector.

## Origins of the cold war

### *US - USSR: destined to collide?*

Known in history as the “Truman Doctrine”, the newly elected President of the US Truman’s speech to the Congress marked a landmark in the history of US-URSS relations. In that occasion, the head of the American administration strongly declared to consider USSR as the American bitter rival. First results of this overtly declaration of rivalry were the Marshall Plan, which raised the political and economic tension with Moscow in West Europe (Del Pero, 2008: 286), and the containment policy, which led the rivalry to a global military escalation (*Ibid.* 285).<sup>40</sup> On the Soviet front, Roosevelt’s death and the Hiroshima and Nagasaki events marked the beginning of a long period of uncertainty for Stalin (Harper, 2011: 53). Distrust and suspicion triggered a new vicious circle that led to the first military clash between the two actors through the Korean War.

If this represents the beginning of the Cold War, what are its origins or causes? Many scholars claim that the traces of the bipolar rivalry are to find in the contrast between the internationalist Wilsonian manifesto and Lenin’s *Third International*. A rivalry, then, triggered by ideology and power competition (Del Pero, 2008: 211). In fact, according to this paper, the ideological factor is not a cause, yet a consequence of another phenomenon, namely the emergence of mimetic rivalry. Indeed, ideology is only a descriptive factor bare of explanatory power. It does not help to understand the origin of the ambiguity that

<sup>40</sup> Although some authors state the opposite, namely that there was a specific plan, the Truman Doctrine, along with the telegram Kennan, provided a “clear indications, strategic and discursive” (Del Pero, 2001: 284).

characterizes the emergence of Soviet-American rivalry. According to this paper, instead, both Soviet and American *messianisms* reflect the metaphysical desire of these two nations towards the subversion of the dominated-dominant logic imposed by what they perceived as a foreigner oppressor, which both expelled from their country, namely the British power-influence.

### Origins of American and Russian metaphysical desires

Both countries achieved the independence at the end of an enduring rivalry against the British.<sup>41</sup> However, both logic of counter-dominion against the British emerge only at the end of the WWI. US, indeed, through Wilson’s Fourteen Points, for the first time, chose to take “full responsibility” of world leadership – replacing the British (Del Pero, 2008: 206). The Soviets, on the contrary, through their internationalist manifesto, expressed the desire of not being-dominated by any external actor anymore, namely by imperialist capitalist nations. Two metaphysical desires that has occurred when both actors have reached their independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Therefore, each model of dominion – emerged to fulfil their metaphysical desires – has been affected by the enduring rivalry with the British.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, both models imitated the British, in terms of similar goals but through different methods to achieve it. The goal was to do rule; the desire to become preponderant power, as UK was. Methods were different but always alternative to the British’s.<sup>43</sup> In particular, US model was based on economic and cultural influence – the relation

<sup>41</sup> US - UK: 1837-1861; Russia - UK: 1877-1923 (Thompson, 1995: 199). In particular, in the case of the USSR, after the armed uprising in October 1918, it took other three years – Treaty of Riga of 1921 – before the Soviets were able to consolidate their power, precisely because of the influence of outside powers, including UK (Kennan, 1960: 166-167).

<sup>42</sup> In fact, in the ‘20s, the real Soviet enemy was London (Kennan, 1960: 224). Indeed, there was a huge financial dependence between Moscow and London. Moscow had a debt of 568 million pounds. The British credit represented the  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the Soviet debt (Di Nolfo, 2009: 37).

<sup>43</sup> The programs of both, indeed, “envisioned the sweeping away of the Europe-centered system [as well as] the end of imperialism” (Harper, 2011: 27).

between US and Latin America nations is an evident example.<sup>44</sup> Soviet model, rather, was based on social and cultural influence, that is, on political propaganda (Kennan, 1960: 171). Different methods that also reflected the economic and political gap between Washington and Moscow in the 20's.<sup>45</sup>

The seed of their model of dominance grew up already in the post-WWI period. Indeed, both *messianic* foreign policies failed because of their inner ambiguity. On the one hand, US ambiguity lied in Wilson's attempt to build a new world order by co-opting the European great powers, and, at the same time, using the new world order negotiations as a means to force them to accept the new American supremacy (Del Pero, 2008: 229-230). On the other hand, Soviet's ambiguity lied in Lenin's genuine attempt to normalize USSR relations with the European capitalist powers, and, at the same time, using the recognition negotiations as a means to spread their dominance through the *Comintern* foreign propaganda.<sup>46</sup> Instead, through the "mimetic lens", the relationship between Washington and Moscow, on the one hand, and London, on the other hand, these ambiguities would be solved. According to this lens, like in master-disciple dynamic, the disciple (US, and USSR) was seeking recognition from his master (British preponderant power), because he was trying to imitate his model's behaviour (UK model of dominion). Then, since US and USSR wanted to be recognized as equal preponderant power, they were also acting like a preponderant power, that is, spreading their model of dominance over other countries.

<sup>44</sup> Reference to the so-called Roosevelt Corollary, 1904. For further details, Del Pero, 2008: 185.

<sup>45</sup> The American preponderance power was more than evident if we analyse the consequences of the financial payments imposed by the Allied. (Di Nolfo, 2009: 37). This gave to the US an "unquestioned economic supremacy" (Del Pero, 2008: 214).

<sup>46</sup> Some scholars interpret the ambiguities arising from the Soviet will of deceiving the European powers and, in the meantime, to wage a struggle between capitalist states to grab economic contracts with Moscow (Kennan, 1960: 158). However, this argument is flawed because of its inability to go beyond a simple description of an ideological behaviour. In fact, it fails to explain, firstly, the interest showed by the European powers in recognizing the Soviet government toward a normalization of the relations, rather pursuing mere economic interest. Secondly, the Politburo intentions to pursue a normalization of the relations with the West were to gain the recognition were genuine. Thirdly, it does not explain true and genuine contrast resulting between Narkomindel diplomats, and officials of the Communist propaganda of the Comintern (Kocho-Williams, 2007).

Therefore, Washington and Moscow foreign policies were not so different at the end of the Great War. Both labelled with misleading factors such as ideology and *messianism*, both nations were driven by the metaphysical desire to dominate. On the one hand, US was imitating UK's financial model "by replacing the pound with the dollar" through the implementation in Europe of "Dawes" Plan and "Yong" Plan, accompanied by policies of "Americanization" (Del Pero, 2008: 239-245). On the other side, the Soviets wanted to imitate the British preponderant power with the strongest tool they thought they had: Communist propaganda.

#### The beginning of the mimetic competition- towards the threshold of differentiation

Despite the fact that the signs of a mirror mimetic rivalry between Washington and Moscow against London seemed to bring the two powers to collide, this vicious process suddenly stopped in the early '20s because of both Wilson (1921) and Lenin's death (1922). The first event pushed back in the corner any American desire to dominate and marked the beginning of the Republicans' isolationist period inaugurate by Harding and hold by Coolidge and Hoover. The second one left the power to Stalin (in 1922) and, thus, the shift of the Soviets selective attention from London to Washington – symbolized by the termination of the NEP and the adoption of the five-year plan.<sup>47</sup> This moment can be labelled as the beginning of the Soviet emulation of the American preponderant economic and military power. At this point, the mimetic ties between the two became stronger.<sup>48</sup>

Not surprisingly, this phase of US-URSS relationships has been described as "pragmatic", rather than ideological (Gaddis, 1978).

<sup>47</sup> Starting from the 20's, Russia became a major American market, and by 1930, American exports to Russia exceeded in value those of every other country and American businesses relied on this export market.

<sup>48</sup> American companies shared patents and personnel to assist in the economic development of Russia. By the mid-1920s, American business and industry supplied more than 25 percent of all of Russia's imports. In 1929, blackberries than 2,000 American industrial and agricultural experts, engineers and mechanics worked in the Soviet Union. During the 1930s, hundreds of Soviet students and engineers studied in America and returned to the Soviet Union.

The simple ideology-pragmatism pendulum cannot explain the inner ambiguities that characterized even this phase of the American-Soviet relation. If it is true that, on the one hand, relations between the two nations were voted towards a greater exchange in trading. On the other hand, the issue of Soviet government recognition, formally needful to increase the benefits from the trading relations, became increasingly hot and triggered a strong political resistance in the US Congress (Hoff-Wilson, 1974). An ambiguity that the pragmatism-ideology pendulum can only describe without providing any explanatory arguments. Instead, this situation acquires greater clarity when analysed through the “mimetic lens”.

The question of Soviet government recognition was not perceived as a secondary problem. In the early 20’s, when Stalin decided to launch the Five-Years Plan of massive industrialization of the Soviet economy, the emulation between Moscow and Washington grew up significantly. The more the plan went further, the less the economic gap between Moscow and Washington. Thus, along with a stronger emulation by the Soviets, parts of the American administrations started to feel threatened by the greater power that USSR was gaining, though the gap between the two nations were significantly high yet. Triggered by the Soviet emulation,<sup>49</sup> some political parties started to oppose to the Soviet government recognition because it would allow greater economic benefits for Moscow. Then, because of the emulation process, the issue of recognition gained more value that it actually had. In this way, as the master, Washington could not recognize an actor who, by some influential figures,<sup>50</sup> was already perceived as an US bitter rival. The question of recognition became a sort of “prohibited” object within a context of growing mimetic competition between Moscow and Washington.

Therefore, US irrational foreign policy towards USSR was due to the emergence of the selective attention between Washington and Moscow, and by the emerging mimetic competition between them. Indeed, the more the economic emulation were growing, the more the fear in Washington. Someone were already convinced of the hazard

<sup>49</sup> Rather than by a real competition between two great powers.

<sup>50</sup> For example, George F. Kennan, former leading figure in the American Embassy in Moscow. He will become the head of the Policy Planning Staff, important political and administrative bureau under Truman’s mandate.

that the establishment of normal relations with USSR could provide, because the latter was already perceived as a natural US enemy.

However, this process – which could led to cross sooner the *differentiation threshold* by two powers – was held back by three factors. Firstly, the outbreak of WWII, which placed both nations in a struggle for survival, thus, pushing back in the corner any desire of world domination.<sup>51</sup> Secondly, as we will see, rivalry between Washington and Tokyo over the Pacific hijacked Americans’ selective attention (Harper, 2011: 34-35). Thirdly, when FDR came into power in 1933, his geopolitical vision and his personal beliefs influenced deeply USSR-US relations.

### *FDR and Stalin: pragmatic cooperation with the “evil”*

When FDR came into power in 1932, USSR-US relations profoundly changed. The issue of recognition, which during the isolationist period increased its negative symbolic value, was suddenly resolved. FDR, bypassing the formal diplomatic channels, addressed the issue personally, aided by his own advisers. It was the first of a long series of cooperative signals between Washington and Moscow. In addition, how the recognition issue was resolved represented another landmark of the USSR-US relations. Personal diplomacy, indeed, played a fundamental role within White House and Kremlin relations.

Starting from the first two years of his mandate – 1932-33 – the idea of a constructive cooperation with Moscow drove American foreign policy. The first product of this policy was the opening of diplomatic relations with the Soviets in 1933 (Del Pero, 2008: 248). Rather than being a sign of a global openness to the foreign countries, it was more a sort of “special relationship” between Washington and Moscow. During the same years, through the adoption of what had been called *laws of neutrality*, US strongly limited its bonds with European countries. Indeed, FDR felt “a strong aversion towards Europe”, which was accused of being guilty of the WWI outbreak. A tie that bound FDR’s foreign policy to Wilson’s (*Ibid.* 247).

<sup>51</sup> That is, the decisions that the actors made were likely a reflection of actual needs, rather than metaphysical desires.

It was a period of real cooperation, rather than simple pragmatism, which saw an increase during WWII final years. Even Stalin wanted and expected cooperation with the US in the post-WWII. Yet, these were not false intentions. They represent a genuine will to continue the war-time alliance “based not on accidental or transitory motives, but vitally important and long-lasting interests” towards the prevention of new aggressions or a new war for “an extended period” (Harper, 2011: 43). Intentions that went far beyond the mere pragmatism. Other signs of this deep cooperation between Moscow and Washington were Stalin’s “friendly” intentions about the spreading of Communism over West and East Europe. According to Stalin, it was to be achieved “respecting local sensibilities in Eastern Europe and avoiding an early break with the Allies”. The chosen path was the “national road” towards Communism, that is, the alliance between Communist Parties and other progressive groups in order to transform gradually Western societies working within the parliamentary institutions, rather than adopting the Bolshevik model, i.e. the dictatorship of proletariat.<sup>52</sup> These “democratic” aspirations within Stalin’s plans were even stronger towards Western Europe future (*Ibid.* 44).

This strong cooperation and friendly intentions became overt during the peace conference held in Tehran in 1943 and, in particular, at Yalta in 1945. In Tehran, for example, Churchill’s fears about a possible Soviet advance in Europe went completely unheeded. A sign of a stronger axiom between Washington and Moscow rather than with London. (Del Pero, 2008: 267). At Yalta, the contrast between the British and American priorities became evident. The latter were clearly different from those of the former. In particular, US wanted to ensure the Soviet participation to the Nipponese front (Stefan, 1993: 758), and to realize the FDR’s United Nations project (*Ibid.* 759). The fate of Europe, dear to Churchill, was a secondary issue for FDR.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> The opposite intentions that guided Lenin’s foreign policy in Germany as well as in East Europe (Kennan, 1960: 144). A significant change that cannot be described as a simple result of frustration over the inability to spread the communist revolution in the short term (*Ibid.* 173). If it is true that *Comintern* work was to be taken seriously (*Ibid.* 178), it should be used the same logic with the Narkomindel (Kocho-Williams, 2007).

<sup>53</sup> In fact, before the war, FDR considered the Monaco agreements as the basis for a new world order, while Japan was the only real danger rival (Del Pero, 2008: 251). In addition, FDR decided to go to war after the Pearl Harbour events. Moreover, in the FDR’s *grand design*, the Germany fate was the dismemberment, while Poland was left to the Soviets (Stefan 1993: 758; Harper, 2011: 42).

Divergence of interests that was even larger within FDR’s *grand design* over the new world order. FDR’s project was based on four pillars: Western democracy spread on a global level, concert of power, “four policemen” and, last but not the least, the recognition of a special and privileged role for Washington. Reactions to this project are hard to explain using ideology factor. In fact, Stalin was not only favorable but he considered the “four policeman” idea as necessary and rewarding. “The just rewards Stalin desired included respect for the USSR recognition and himself personally” (Harper, 2011: 43). On the contrary, the project was strongly disapproved by London. It could not be otherwise, since it firstly targeted European colonialism (Del Pero, 2008: 268). A project that, under a mimetic lens, would be explained as the FDR’s will to spread the American model of dominance. However, unlike Wilson’s, FDR’s model was not only alternative to the British’s, but it also addressed Moscow’s desires. Indeed, it realized both Soviets’ desire of a USSR global power role recognition and their desire of ensuring USSR security through a higher control over Europe in order not to be afraid of being dominated – “yet another time”.

Strong agreement between FDR and Stalin that went beyond simple geopolitical interests, even though they were present.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, despite Stalin’s ambiguous attitudes, FDR harboured deep trust in the Soviet leader as well as in their collaboration (Stefan, 1993: 762). Moreover, FDR did not consider Communist regime antithetic to the American’s and, thus, less democratic. Although he “had no particular illusions about the nature of democracies that would arise in the countries under Soviet influence”, he did not think that what would have happened in Polish elections would have been so different from what would have occurred on American soil (Del Pero, 2008: 272).

In conclusion, focusing merely on the relationship between USSR and US, this paper wants to emphasize that the entire set of relations between FDR and Stalin represented a unique moment in the Soviet-American relations, characterized by cooperation and general understanding of each other foreign policy. An understanding not just tied to the personal trust between the two leaders, which in any case there was. Yet, it was also linked to the way FDR considered Soviet power in the international realm, namely a nation that was pursuing

<sup>54</sup> The alliance with the Soviets was vital to defeat Japan in Asia (Harper, 2011: 39-40).

only its own safety, which always denied and subjected to external domination. Therefore, FDR considered Soviet Union as a nation trying to redeem itself after decades of domination. For this reason, through the recognition of the rank of winning power, he believed not to have to worry about any further Soviet annexation not included in signed agreements (Stefan, 1993: 762).

### *Outbreak of the rivalry – Truman’s administration*

Although Washington and Moscow were both driven by metaphysical desires, the first drove by a desire to dominate, while the second drove by a desire of no longer being dominated, FDR’s *grand design* and Stalin’s foreign policy not only coexisted. They seemed to be able to create positive synergies in the future. FDR, indeed, instead of pursuing projects targeting the Soviet desires, pushed for positive compromises that could guarantee Stalin basic “metaphysical need”, that is, more influence in Europe to ensure USSR own safety in the long run.

However, after FDR’s death, his Vice-President, Henry S. Truman became new President of the United States. A turning point in the US foreign policy that changed dramatically and radically US position towards USSR. In few years, US come to perceive the Soviet Union as its bitter rival, that is, a mortal threat to the American security. On the other hand, Stalin became increasingly aware that there was not an actor with whom to cooperate through compromise at the other side, anymore. A factor that genuinely changed Stalin’s plan. Indeed, despite Stalin’s convictions that Communism would triumph over capitalism, his paramount priority was to ensure more and more security to the Soviet Union in order to avoid another period of external dominance.

Thus, using a ‘virtual’ graph to describing Washington and Moscow relations, FDR and Stalin relations represented the cooperation peak between the two governments. When Truman came to power, US-USSR relations worsened instantly and keep worsened until the establishment of a zero-sum game between them. However, how was such a fast deterioration among their relationship possible? What can explain the sudden emergence of severe ideological policies? In 1945,

despite a mimetic competition against Moscow had already begun, Washington’s priority was still the definition of a global international order, ensuring its primacy in Asia against its bitter rival: Japan. However, this priority changed dramatically with Truman. First, at the diplomatic level, already at Yalta but even more in Potsdam, Truman’s arrival meant the emergence of a tough stance against the Soviet counterpart (Del Pero, 2008: 281).

A sudden reorganization of American strategic priorities, which corresponded to a change of its geopolitical priorities. Firstly, both Germany and the fate of the whole Europe became suddenly the nucleus of the American priorities, aligning the latter to the British’s (*Ibid.* 282-3). Differently than in the past, the arrogant and brutal actions in Poland were perceived not only as the *modus operandi* of the Soviet regime, but as the truly nature of the Stalinist system, rather than classical phenomena related to a post-war period (*Ibid.* 282). Europe becomes, for the first time since the WWII ended, a battleground between USSR and US. An object whose value will grow exponentially from now on, reflecting the worsening of the mimetic competition between Washington and Moscow.

Therefore, contrary to what some scholars have argued, according to this paper, Moscow and Washington geopolitical interests were compatibles, but they became irreconcilable because of the new American administration policy. In addition, the global international order was replaced by a regional international order, provoking a violent escalation of the relationship between the two powers. A change that reflected the idea that American preponderant power was antithetic to the Soviet power. For this reason, Europe – in particular Berlin – became the symbolic ground of the conflict between two models of dominance. For the first time, the master-US felt threatened by the mimetic competition of the disciple-USSR and reacted by putting more and more obstacles to the process of emulation started by the Soviets.

From this moment on, the mimesis of antagonism between the two nations increased. In this process, nuclear threat assumed a crucial role. If cooperation between FDR and Stalin was built thanks also to the American need of the Soviet support against Japan, in July 1945, the acquisition of the atomic bomb by Washington led Truman to advert Stalin that Washington had a new dangerous weapon. The result was

twofold: Soviet withdrew its support from the Nipponese-front and, thus, Washington decided to “test” the nuclear bomb over Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Harper, 2011: 52). After that, “instead of a relatively distant, benign America, Moscow had to face a more hostile US leadership, equipped with a weapon that could be used to deny the USSR rewards and counter its conventional military advantage”, particularly in Europe, that is, where Soviets’ desire had grown (*Ibid.*, 54).

Due to the nuclear threat, mimetic competition between the two actors increased. When the war against its old rival ended, American was already prepared to start another rivalry, nay, to make and then eliminate another scapegoat. Starting from that moment, it is evident the shift of the American selective attention towards the “Soviet threat”. Reciprocity between their foreign policy started to emerge in both foreign policies. Indeed, not only Stalin but the whole Soviet government “interpreted Hiroshima as an atomic blackmail against the USSR, as a threat to unleash a new, even more terrible and devastating war” (*Ibid.* 54). Because of that perception, Stalin ordered both a Soviet atomic bomb as well as a harder line at the diplomatic level against Washington. He also ordered the use of more authoritarian methods within Moscow’s satellite states (*Ibid.* 55).

However, though Stalin considered a window for compromise still open,<sup>55</sup> Truman’s administration, drove by Kennan’s indications, was already convinced that no interaction with “the Soviet evil” was possible (*Ibid.* 57). According to Kennan, no compromise was possible because Soviets’ actions were illegal, regardless of their merit and content. They were “flawed from the source of its irrational and aggressive origin that generated them” (Del Pero, 2008: 281). At this point, the relations continue to worsen. After the diplomatic cooperation ending, Washington decided to cease the economic cooperation too. “The US occupation Authorities in Germany [decision of ending] reparations payments to the USSR” as well as the decision to reject a Moscow’s request to Washington for major loans, “inexplicably misplaced” were both two emblematic signs (Harper, 2011: 61).

The relationships between the two powers, thus, continued to worsen until the breaking point. The precipitating event was the Greek

<sup>55</sup> He was still hoping for a united Germany, friendly to the USSR. Moreover, he was still trying to give reassuring to the Western opinion, removing troops from Czechoslovakia and Manchuria, for example.

and Turkish issue. Although there were no evidence that Stalin had a strategic plan for the Middle East and the Mediterranean, Truman’s administration decided to ensure the protection of those territory directly. The economic intervention in favour of the Turkish government was justified as the only alternative to stem the Soviet threat to the Western liberal world.<sup>56</sup> A threat that, according to Eisenhower, however, was only psychological and symbolic, rather than a real risk. A symbolic threat, then, not different from the other contended objects – Berlin, Manchuria, Turkey, Iran. Indeed, the value of those objects was strictly depended on the mimetic rivalry towards USSR.

The decision adopted because of the Truman Doctrine represented a turning point. After that speech, at least by the Americans, the threshold of differentiation was crossed.<sup>57</sup> Kennan’s thesis of containment policy towards USSR was taken up.<sup>58</sup> The USSR, then, became the cause of the world’s problems, according to the Americans. Kennan’s thesis encouraged a black and white view of reality and an anti-communist backlash. In other worlds, the American point of view started to be altered deeply by the rivalry against the Soviets. From this point on, the Washington and Moscow antagonism reached, rapidly, higher and higher levels of tough confrontation. Through the containment policy implementation, indeed, the White House took concrete measures to stem the Communist contagion. Firstly, it created the European Recovery Program (ERP)- called Marshall Plan- in 1948. One year later, it formed the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Therefore, the emergence of the mimetic rivalry changed decisively the relations between the two countries, up to lead them to a military confrontation, that is, to perceive the elimination of each opponent as the only viable alternative to end the conflict.

Officially, the Marshall Plan was intended for the whole of Europe. However, Washington’s real goals were: a) to prevent the spreading of

<sup>56</sup> Acheson said there was the possibility that three-quarters of global lands could fall under Communists’ control, thus, that would be allowing the Soviets to penetrate in at least three continents (Del Pero, 2008: 296).

<sup>57</sup> For the first time, publicly, both two regimes were placed one at the antipodes of the other. Thus, US started to be perceived as antithetic or incompatible each other.

<sup>58</sup> The adroit and vigilant application of counter-force at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points corresponding to the shifts and manoeuvres of Soviet policy that cannot be charmed or talked out of existence (Harper, 2011: 65).

Communism among pro-US countries – such as Italy and France, and b) to hit the USSR in general. Indeed, the plan was outlined in such a way that the Russians would likely refused it. It was offered to the Soviet satellite countries with the intention to attract them to the West. At first, Stalin genuinely thought that the American offer was genuine. However, though too late, once he discovered the political blackmail,<sup>59</sup> he ordered Molotov to left the table. For Stalin, the Marshall Plan was the breaking point in the relations with Washington. After that, Stalin's strategy changed symmetrically. His answer was to abandon every "popular fronts" and "national roads" to socialism. That strategy made sense when there was the Rooseveltian policy in the West. Since Truman came in to power, those policies proved ineffective results on the ground, thus, it was time to abandon them (Harper, 2011: 75). Only after that event, Stalin proceeded with the Sovietization of Eastern Europe. A vicious cycle of reciprocal decisions that led to the precipitation of Berlin situation (*Ibid.* 76).<sup>60</sup>

The worst phase of the rivalry was reached with the military confrontation. The Communist coup in Czechoslovakia gave to Truman the side to fulfil the wishes of all pro-US European leaders: a strong US military commitment in Europe, which led in 1949 to the birth of the NATO military alliance within the West block. However, Moscow did not issue any direct order to the Czech Communist party, nor offered to move its troops towards the Czech border to intimidate the non-Communists. Thus, at that stage of the mimetic rivalry, hallucinatory vision of the reality took already place within the White House. In contrast to the West bloc actions, Stalin reciprocally answered with the formation of a similar military alliance within the Soviet bloc. Form that moment, every events that happened at the international level were altered by the hallucinatory logic of rivalry.

The final steps that led to the establishment of a zero-sum game between USSR and US were: a) the Soviets' acquisition of the atomic bomb in 1949, and b) the victory of Mao Zedong's Communists (Del Pero

<sup>59</sup> If they had managed to take part, the Soviet would pull them out. If Moscow had decided to block their participation, it would face the anger of material plight by them.

<sup>60</sup> In 1948, after the coup in Prague, Stalin decided to block the access to that part of Berlin under Soviet occupation. A reaction aimed to prevent any further actions by the Anglo-American towards a deeper economic and political unification of West Germany. The Allies responded with an airlift to overcome the Soviet bloc.

2008: 298). Despite the fact that both events did not alter significantly the gap of power between the two nations, they concurred to worsen US-USSR relations. US nuclear capacity, for example, was greater than the Soviets', despite the latter were leading the conventional weapons competition. Secondly, US conquered a much richer and more developed country than China, that is, Japan. However, Truman responded to these events with a net change of strategy, based on: a) the construction of the H-bomb, and b) the realization of a permanent war state whose characteristics were outlined in the NCS-68 document – United States Objectives and Programs for National Security).

According to this plan, requested by Truman and wrote by his staff, Americans risked a new atomic Pearl Harbour, or a nuclear defeat in Europe. Furthermore, "in its quasi-apocalyptic view [the document said that] time was working against the United States; that the choice was between a dramatic expansion of power-or being in retreat and submission"; the NSC-68 logic was "win or die" (Harper, 2011: 93). A document filled by the need to implement a more aggressive policy in order to deal the issue of US credibility lack against the of Soviet threat spread. However, this document based its apocalyptic view on a great Soviet military c capabilities overestimation. Nevertheless, the threat was perceived as permanent and continuous. The document logic legitimized the discourse that "a defeat of free [i.e. Occidental] institutions anywhere is a defeat everywhere". Then, the American policy of global interventionism was set up. From that moment, every object will be treated as vital and strategic, since nothing would have undermined the credibility of both American preponderant power and its allies' determination.

The approval of this document came in 1950, after the North Korean invasion of South Korea. It represents a crucial document to understand US behaviour because it was not a propagandist document. Conversely, it was a secret document, reserved only for the American decision-makers. It was a cognitive and analytic tool, then, useful to understand how the Americans grasped USSR actions (Del Pero 2008: 302). Through a mimetic lens, it becomes the emblematic symbol of the mimetic rivalry hallucinatory results. The contents were similar to those already set out in the Truman Doctrine. However, NSC-68 expressed the need for a more aggressive foreign policy. In

the meantime, on the Soviet side, as long as Stalin was alive, atomic weapons were not integrated into any military doctrine. A constant difference seems to emerge between both US and USSR foreign policy. The former model of dominion was more aggressive than the second one, which primary goal was the USSR domestic security.

The military escalation of the USSR-US mimetic rivalry occurred when Washington decided to intervene in support of the South Korean government – authoritarian and pro-Western – against the invasion of North Koreans’ – communists and pro-Soviet (Del Pero, 2008: 303). Suddenly, Korea was considered a symbol of the struggle for freedom in the world. However, before the outbreak of the war, South Korea was not considered a vital country whose defines was an American strategic priority. It acquired more and more symbolic value because of the American belief that behind the North Korean invasion there was a Soviet strategic plan to spread its influence in Asia. American point of view then was completely altered. Stalin’s real intentions were no longer considered as truly important. The logic of mimetic rivalry already altered the actors’ reality, as the NSC-68 document proved. At this point, then, USSR became the American new scapegoat, and the mechanism of violence canalization proved its violent effects. The Soviet threat had to be eradicated everywhere. It is due to these perceptions that US decided to defend South Korea: a country that had no “intrinsic value”. It was for reasons of prestige that US went to war (Del Pero, 2008: 304).

In summary, the discourse of two countries destined to collide is flawed, because it interprets the history using the point of view of the actors involved. However, sometimes, this point of view can be greatly altered because of particular cognitive and social-psychological mechanisms. Moreover, the ideology-lens through which the discourse of a violent destiny gained its legitimacy is misleading. It does not help to understand why the characteristics of both actors’ foreign policy shifted so quickly from cooperation to conflict. In fact, according to this paper, ideology is an endogenous product of another phenomenon: the mimetic rivalry. The latter begun because of the shift of the historical and political condition engendered by the transition from FDR’s global international order to Truman’s regional international order. In other words, according to this paper, the emergence of a desire of dominance is the truly cause that triggered the Cold War.

## Conclusions

Is a new Cold War just a fascination of the media? In fact, it seems to be an indisputable fact of contemporary relations between Washington and Moscow. Even though the world is no longer divided into two spheres of influence, US-Russia relations still have implications that go beyond the interests of their respective nations. For example, the lack of the Russian support for a UN intervention in Syria, and the resulting veto in the Security Council of the United Nations, is emblematic. Although its rating has been downgraded by that of a super power, Moscow demonstrated that it never buried the rivalry that has characterized its relations with the West during the Cold War years. Moscow actions are still affected by the perceptions of a threat embedded in the of the West liberal order spread.

According to this paper, the relations between Washington and Moscow do not diverge so much from those that characterized the Cold War emergence. The Ukraine issue is emblematic in this sense. Despite the realists-constructivists debate, to the parties involved, Ukraine issue has acquired such a great value that it becomes a symbol of the whole relations between Washington and Moscow. However, realists and constructivists try to interpret the conflict through the altered perceptions of the parties involved. Rationalists cannot grasp this alteration because each party always considers its geopolitical interests as rational. On the other hand, constructivists cannot grasp the influences of the cultural and psychological elements because they do not address the psychological dimension of those elements.

Therefore, the real question that, according to this paper, needs to find an answer is why the value of an object, such as Ukraine or Crimea, though its poor intrinsic value, begins to acquire greater and

greater symbolic value. Indeed, on the one hand, the West perceives the Russian annexation of the Crimea as symbolic attack against the foundations of international law as well as the liberal European order; it also affects other geopolitical scenarios – Asia, North Africa, and Middle East. (Buras et al., 2014). On the other hand, some scholars argue that Russian actions can be explained only through the Cold War logic, that is, the logic of the spheres of influence. Those would be Putin dominant logic, according to Western analysts (Knauer, 2015), who has never hidden his concerns for the Western states intervention as a symbol of the liberal international order perpetuation that has characterized the US foreign policy during and after the Cold War (Salako, 2015).

According to this paper, however, the debate between realists and constructivists is misleading. In fact, if there is no doubt that Ukraine has acquired a symbolic value greater than its own intrinsic value. On the other hand, it is also true that the actors involved make their decisions based on their altered perception of the reality. Thus, even though, from their point of view, their actions are rational, this state of affairs does not provide any explanations. For this reason, according to this paper, the right answer is the third. It is mimetic rivalry, still active between the two powers, which has altered their perceptions of the reality to the point of considering rational what actually it is not.

Again, after many years, the ideological opposition between Washington and Moscow, in fact, is an endogenous product of their mimetic rivalry. A rivalry that has never died, because both the actors are still searching for new scapegoats to eliminate in order to fulfil their metaphysical desire of dominion. Not surprisingly, the events rapidly led to a significant deterioration of their relations. Though the object contested has no intrinsic value, it is perceived as vital for the Russian security. This altered vision of the reality is a sign that the metaphysical desire still drives Russia foreign policy, at least towards the US.

At the same time, US reaction to the Ukraine issue has been significant, as already outlined. Furthermore, White House fears of a possible exit of Greece from the Eurozone and the European system show that even Greece could become a contended object of the rivalry (Mark, 2015; Alexrpt, 2015). Then, since the parallel that seemed to appear between both issue of Ukraine issue and Greek bankrupt,

Washington and Moscow foreign policies still seem to be driven by a hidden mimetic rivalry.

Finally, despite the evidence that any further consequence over the Ukraine are linked to other factors, such as the role of other key players – EU, NATO, and China and the domestic political realm within each nation. It would be wrongful to think that a possible military escalation could be avoided if both states were aware of the economic losses related to a long-lasting conflict. The reasons are the following. Firstly, because the consequences of a conflict between two rivals cannot be analysed like those of any other conflict. It is needful to address the psychological and historical baggage produced by the rivalry. Secondly, even after WWII, there was a certain awareness of the likely negative economic externalities that could provide the end of the cooperation with the Soviets. However, that awareness did not stop Truman from pursuing far more aggressive and “violent” strategies through its foreign policy.

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## Author

Independent researcher with Master's Degree in International and Diplomatic Studies obtained at the University of Bologna. My academic background is in Political Science and International Relations Theory. My current research interests is in International Politics and, in particular, in applying Rene Girard's Mimetic Theory to the field of International Politics.

Email: [claudio.lanza2@studio.unibo.it](mailto:claudio.lanza2@studio.unibo.it)

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**TANIA MAROCCHI**  
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