

# The Cold War is Over

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**W**ith Washington once again adopting a provocative stance toward the Soviet Union and warning that the Russians are furiously re-arming to gain military superiority over the United States—and expanding their power into new areas of the world—it is important to get a different, nonofficial perspective on these matters. It is instructive in this connection to reconsider Soviet–American relations from a revisionist perspective. Neither the course of international relations over the last decade nor the latest historical writings has refuted the revisionist interpretations of the cold war and of the worldwide rivalry of the two superpowers. With few exceptions, the revisionist historians who blamed *both* Washington and Moscow for the cold war never denied or condoned the sovietization of the Warsaw bloc, any more than they ever justified the Gulag within Bolshevik Russia. But they have argued that since 1917 the relentless hostility of the major non-Communist powers has contributed significantly to both developments. Revisionists have also stressed that, unlike the Nazi regime, which needed both war and (at a minimum) the complete mastery of Europe in order to survive, the Bolshevik regime required neither external conflict nor limitless expansion to perpetuate itself.

In fact, from the seizure of power in 1917 and throughout the interwar years, the Bolsheviks tended to behave defensively and reactively in diplomatic and military affairs, even when intervening in the Spanish civil war and signing the Nazi–Soviet pact. Anchored in ideology and above all in military, diplomatic, and economic weakness and isolation, this defensive reflex has become no less intense since the Yalta and Potsdam conferences. After 1944–45 and until his death, Stalin did not have to be particularly paranoid to fear that the Western allies might seize on Russia's exhaustion to force the "liberation" of Eastern Europe, notably Poland. During the first beginnings of the nuclear age and the divided Germany, this east European rimland was widely conceded to be vital to Moscow's security. Indeed, if immediately following the war the Soviet leaders sought

to restrain and moderate the Communist parties of France, Italy, Greece, Yugoslavia, and China, they did so largely as part of a selfish but resolute effort to transmute the grand but uneasy military, diplomatic, and political alliance of World War II into a peacetime *détente*. With the Sino-Soviet split in the early '60s, Moscow's military vulnerability increased still further, the Soviets being forced to guard a lengthy border and vast air space with China in addition to protecting their Eastern European and Southwest Asian flanks.

In the Western world, Bolshevik Russia continues to be portrayed as having made inordinate foreign-policy gains during and after World War II. Admittedly, after fighting their way to the Oder-Neisse line, the Soviets resolved to establish and maintain a preponderance of power over the east European rimland, which, unfortunately, the Big Three failed to "Finlandize" or neutralize militarily. But the Soviets have not expanded their imperialist sway very far beyond their strategic glacis. Early in the resurgent cold war they readily backed down in Greece and Iran, and compromised in Korea. Thereafter they were kept out of southwest Asia and all of Africa except South Yemen, Ethiopia, and Angola; out of all of Southeast Asia except former French Indochina; and out of all of Latin America except Cuba (minus Guantanamo Bay). Although the Soviets penetrated Egypt, the (former) Belgian Congo, and Somalia, their positions in these Third World countries were as unsure as they were short-lived, and the continuing Soviet impress on Syria and Iraq seems equally precarious. As for Russia's frontal invasion of Afghanistan, it appears to be less calculated to invest Southern Asia than to prevent being forced out of that critical region altogether. Indeed, Moscow's move into Afghanistan was a desperate show of conventional military might, primarily ground units, in a geopolitical area in which the Soviet-American rivalry will be decided by more complex forms of power. Ultimately the outcome will hinge on the projection of naval and air power in combination with not only rapid-strike forces but also economic and technological power, in which the United States clearly excels. But quintessentially, this violent incursion is closely linked to the explosive instability in neighboring Iran that, while certainly not of Russia's doing, nevertheless concerns Moscow no less directly and vitally than it does Washington.

All in all, the USSR has not exactly built a large empire, either formal or furtive, in the years since 1945. The extent of Soviet expansion is the less impressive or daunting compared with the prodigious growth of America's imperial reach during these same thirty-five years. Besides, in the struggle to maintain and enlarge its world position, the United States has resorted to many of the same violent and reprehensible methods of foreign intervention as the Soviet Union. It has also installed or propped up authoritarian governments that are at best different in degree rather than kind from Russia's presumably totalitarian satellite and client states.

**T**he question then arises why the Soviets failed to make vast and long-term capital out of the revolutionary upsurge in Europe and the anti-colonial rebellion throughout the Third World during and after World War II. Or, to put it more crudely, why has Moscow lost the cold war?

From the start of this cold war—even going back to 1917–20—the Soviets have been outclassed in every major area, except, until recently, ideologically. After 1945 the United States successfully devised and orchestrated a policy of comprehensive containment. As the only major power to emerge unscathed and even strengthened from the carnage of the Thirty Years War of the twentieth century, America had the wherewithal to build and deploy a formidable war machine, including a deadly nuclear arsenal, with which to deter Soviet Russia from direct military expansion. At the same time the U.S. government was able to forge a foreign-policy weapon of even greater importance and efficacy, mobilizing vast economic, financial, technological, and cultural resources to encourage, not to say press, incumbent regimes throughout the world to defuse or repress internal insurgency, both real and imagined. Invariably Washington justified this mix of foreign “assistance”—in which military aid was only one of many components—with the charge that all movements for radical or revolutionary change were engineered or guided by Moscow and that no single domino could be allowed to fall for fear of toppling the rest of the free world.

This global military deterrence and foreign aid actually bolstered rather than exhausted America’s political and civil society, though not without seriously perverting its democratic and humane temper. It is not necessary to argue that U.S. capitalism was the principal agent and beneficiary of this double-edged world policy in order to recognize that the development of a towering military–industrial complex and foreign-aid establishment furthered America’s economic growth, foreign trade, monetary primacy, and per capita income and welfare. The inheritance or appropriation of most of Western Europe’s colonial stake significantly contributed to these striking economic and social gains: the United States finally became the political and financial pivot for the extraction of immense profits from Third World countries that, as producers of primary commodities, were locked into economic dependency.

Clearly, then, the United States—and, by extension, eventually also its trilateral allies—managed to fight the cold war abroad while simultaneously expanding the economic and social product required to maintain or fortify their structures of class, status, and power at home. And they were able to do so because the Western world entered the struggle with Soviet Russia with a tremendous economic, technological, and educational head start. In fact, the cold war facilitated not merely the recovery and rationalization of organized capitalism, which had suffered a grave crisis during the 1930s; it also expedited the transformation of European-centered overseas colonialism into an American-directed economic

and financial ascendancy over the Third World. Paradoxically, after 1945 the Soviet challenge eased this conversion of the direct and mercantile overseas colonialism of rival capitalist nations into a superimperialism of organized and corporate capitalism dominated by the United States.

**T**he free, capitalist nations, including Japan, were able to fight the cold war while at the same time substantially strengthening their economic and social fiber; the Soviets, for their part, were neither capable of nor impelled to provide guns *and* butter. The Bolsheviks, having inherited a predominantly agrarian and protoindustrial society, have since 1917 had to support their foreign and military policy on an extremely narrow economic base. The new regime had to repair the ravages of the Great War, the Allied intervention, and the civil war, and it was not until 1928-29 that the Russian economy was rebuilt to its pre-1914 level. There then followed the untried and uncertain five-year plans of the 1930s. These were intended to force the rapid expansion of the heavy and modern industrial sectors of what was still an economy of small-scale agriculture and manufacture.

There can be no question of denying or condoning the unconscionable costs of collectivization, nor is this the place to assess the economic rationale and outcome of forced industrialization. But any explanation of the etiology of the chronic state of cold war between Soviet Russia and the anti-Communist powers must emphasize that Stalin's despotic ukase to mount a savage drive to collectivize and industrialize was in no small measure conditioned by all but unbroken economic and diplomatic quarantine of Bolshevik Russia by the developed or capitalist nations. In particular the resumption of international tensions, inflamed by the rise of National Socialism in Germany and fascistic militarism in Japan, quickened the fatal corruption of the Bolshevik project. The lack of foreign economic aid and the unfavorable terms of foreign trade during the Great Depression heightened the Soviet resolve to squeeze the peasantry and the agrarian sector for the capital necessary to finance industrialization. The mounting threat of war further warped industrial and technological development. Military preparedness was assigned priority over the production of consumer goods.

World War II merely accelerated and vindicated this implantation of a top-heavy military-industrial complex in the planned economy designed initially to build socialism in one country. Then, after 1945, with Russia once again bled white and quarantined, the burdens of recovery were compounded by the military exigencies of the renascent cold war, including the nuclear and space races. Even after reconstruction the economy was still insufficiently developed to allow the Soviet regime to sustain a credible military posture while at the same time mounting a major foreign-aid program for Third World countries and expanding consumer production toward the long-deferred improvement of the general

welfare at home. Undoubtedly the rigidities of bureaucratic planning, as well as the material and educational privileges accorded to the managerial and technocratic class, help to account for both the quantitative and qualitative shortfalls of essential consumer products and services for the Soviet citizenry. Even so, it seems doubtful that these factors were exclusively or even primarily responsible for Bolshevism's glaring economic failures.

Since the inception of systematic containment, American policymakers have assumed that high levels of military spending would overload the Russian economy to such an extent that the politburo would be hard pressed both to build socialism at home (and throughout the Comecon countries) and to compete with the Trilateral countries in economic aid abroad, most notably throughout the Third World. If first Stalin, and then Khrushchev and Brezhnev, called for arms limitation and détente, they did so in the hope of reducing military outlays in favor of expanding consumer production and nonmilitary foreign aid. Washington applied ceaseless pressure to compel Moscow to allocate a disproportionately high percentage of its—and Comecon's—gross national product to war preparedness, thereby making it difficult for the Soviets to rearrange their economic and social priorities. Over the years nothing has done more to discredit the ideological legitimacy and attraction of the Bolshevik project than the inability of successive Soviet governments to raise living standards at home and provide economic assistance abroad.

**T**his persisting economic deficiency has been a necessary but not sufficient cause of the intermittent popular unrest in Eastern Europe. Although the United States has sought to turn this unrest to its own advantage, it has stopped short of direct intervention. But while deliberately cautious in the security zone in which the Soviets are determined and ready to use their advantage in conventional forces and weapons, nearly everywhere else Washington has been far less circumspect. Again and again the United States, with complete impunity, has backed Third World governments with a view to reducing or ending a Soviet presence left over from the national liberation struggles against the colonial or semi-colonial domination of the European powers. Nor has Washington hesitated to destabilize or overthrow governments that it suspects of being disposed to call for Soviet assistance to put down domestic and foreign resistance to fundamental economic and social reform.

It would be wrong, however, to attribute the success of American policy either to the machinations of the CIA or to the awesome weaponry deployed by the Pentagon. This coercive muscle was effective above all because it was combined with the promise of large-scale financial, economic, and technical aid—a leverage magnified by the expansive vigor of big corporate business and banking.

In addition, wherever the United States intervened, it worked hand in glove with local civil and military elites eager to collaborate to advance their own self-serving needs over those of the working people.

The Soviets, for their part, have had fewer disposable resources with which to reach beyond their nearest security perimeter, with the result that more often than not they have wound up being overextended militarily and economically. The Soviet bloc nations lacked not only the financial and economic leverage available to the United States and its allies, but also local ruling and governing classes avid for their support. To be sure, Moscow was ready to exploit radical oppositional currents for its own ends. But in the Third World countries, revolutionary potential was rarely as great as the Russians hoped and the Americans feared.

**T**oday, even without taking account of their wholly demented nuclear armaments race, the two superpowers are "equally distant from God." At one time, during the heyday of Stalinism, American officials could plausibly have argued that the Soviet Union was congenitally bent on world conquest by a combination of military aggression and political subversion; but recent history has rendered specious any such portrayal of Soviet foreign-policy behavior. In addition, the Stalinist totalitarianism that was said to be the changeless mainspring of Soviet imperialism has been considerably tempered. Above all, the Bolshevik regime has lost its ideological coherence and appeal abroad and at home, in large part because the exertions of hot and cold war have sapped its vitality. But if Soviet Russia is ideologically bankrupt and economically straitened, it is hardly on the verge of collapse. By disingenuously charging Brezhnev and his associates with vast expansionist designs and threatening them with overwhelming military power, if not annihilation, Reagan and his advisers are playing into the hands of hard-line elements in the Kremlin—elements disposed to a military rather than political approach to foreign policy. It should be remembered that in modern times governments suffering from delegitimation and deadlock have been particularly prone to become warlike, the more so if they feel beleaguered or threatened from abroad.

The weapons mania and brinkmanship of the Reaganites are no doubt rooted in America's economic and fiscal crisis and its unsettling consequences throughout the Trilateral world. There is mounting confusion among the power elite about the political economy of the organized capitalism that spans the non-Communist world. The phenomenon of uncontrollable stagflation, which encourages protectionist pressures and diplomatic strains within the free world, appears as an obstinate anomaly to the periodic downturns in the business cycle. In the United States the same conservative and reactionary political and social groups that reject the Keynesian formulas as inflationary advocate vast military outlays

that have the effect of stimulating economic activity and, at the same time, perpetuating inflationary pressures and budgetary imbalances. Above all, military expenditures benefit many of the largest corporations with highly capital-intensive operations, resulting in relatively low employment and welfare for the working class and the underclass. Such arms spending has the earmarks of a New Deal for select sectors of the upper- and professional middle classes, at the expense of the lower-middle class and the workers.

The governments of Western Europe and Japan resist falling in line behind Washington's latest overestimation of Soviet military capabilities and bellicose intentions. Politically, they find it difficult to procure more guns at the cost of butter, as their economies are increasingly hard pressed to supply both. In addition, America's allies balk at joining an armaments race that is bound to intensify their fiscal plight and heighten their economic and monetary subordination to the United States — a condition aggravated by their heavy reliance on fuel that is payable in dollars.

The United States benefits from the same economic discomfiture that makes its allies hesitant to accelerate the arms race. America, distinctly less dependent on fuel imports than its principal commercial and financial rivals in the developed world, derives a competitive advantage from their comparatively higher energy bills. In addition, because these bills are largely payable in dollars and the major U.S. oil companies share in the superprofits of most oil-producing countries, the current energy situation serves to perpetuate, and even increase, America's monetary and economic predominance.

But while the United States is not adverse to imposing this economic supremacy over its allies, it cannot risk their collapse without endangering the world capitalist system as a whole. The allies, in turn, exploit their indispensability to blackmail the United States into shouldering the full military burden of guaranteeing their oil supply, notably the supply from the Middle East. They feel further justified in taking this course because the American Jewish community pressures Washington to support or condone Israel's unbending diplomatic and military position, thus inciting potent Arab and Moslem nations to use oil as a diplomatic weapon and providing Moscow with the opportunity to inject its power into the southern crescent.

**S***ub specie aeternitatis*, the United States has no greater strategic, material, and moral claims to the Middle East than does the USSR. As world powers, both quite naturally arrogate to themselves the right to intervene in their own self-interest and to cloak their actions with professions of selflessness. It would appear that neither of the superpowers wants the oil for itself in any narrow sense. The United States, principally concerned with securing a supply of oil for

key developed nations as a bulwark for the capitalist world economy, no doubt also means to preserve the Middle East as an investment sphere for itself and the other Trilateral economies. With Russia allegedly preparing to bear down militarily on this critical region, U.S. officials invoke these supranational objectives to justify a huge build-up of deterrent nuclear arms and delivery systems as well as of rapid-deployment air, sea, and land forces for punctual intervention.

In international politics one world power's security and interest are invariably perceived as another world power's insecurity and loss. America's imperial governors are merely following in the footsteps of their British predecessors in their aggressive defense of outposts they consider vital along a line running from the Eastern Mediterranean through the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean. Since the 1880s the Suez Canal has been the chief symbol and pivot of this imperial conception. A century ago the English ruling and political class presumed to use British naval power to protect the crucial "route to India," said to be threatened by Russian aggression and the unsettlement of local regimes that invited the encroachment of potentially hostile major powers. Eventually London, after "buying" the Suez Canal and occupying Egypt, proceeded to shore up shaky governments throughout the Middle East. It claimed to take this forward course in order to maintain and protect—not to expand—the British empire, which had its economic, military, and ideological fulcrum in India. All subsequent diplomatic and military moves, including the war in South Africa, were justified in similar terms: to safeguard the empire and the concomitant balance of power, to serve the welfare and liberty of His or Her Majesty's subjects and wards and indeed civilized humanity.

U.S. claims are equally vast and noble. Washington insists that the Middle East must be held in order to guarantee the military security, economic prosperity, and political stability of the United States and the free world. The region must be made safe for the status quo, it is argued, even if that requires offensive actions to forestall Russian aggressions or the propping up of crucial regimes.

As a world power, Soviet Russia can hardly be expected to dissociate itself from a region that is at best of slightly less strategic importance to the Communist than to the capitalist bloc. From the late nineteenth century until 1945, the European colonial powers, not Russia, filled the vacuum left by the crumbling Turkish empire. Surely it is a sign of Soviet weakness that after World War II Moscow was incapable of standing up to America, the heir of colonial imperialism, in the struggle for influence and power in the Southwest Asian countries and territories that formerly were under British and French tutelage. In particular, the withdrawal from neighboring Iran in 1947 and the failure to reach a modus vivendi with Premier Mossadegh that would have fended off the restoration of the Pahlevis in 1951-53 demonstrated this weakness and caution. Until the overthrow of the Peacock throne in 1979, Moscow stood helplessly by as

Washington forged Iran into a formidable military link in the chain of hostile authoritarian states running from Turkey to Pakistan, thereby blocking or threatening Russia along its entire Southwest Asian border. The Arab-Israeli imbroglio enabled the Soviets to jump this armed moat to establish a military presence briefly in Egypt and then in Syria and Iraq. More recently the Soviets extended their sway to Ethiopia and South Yemen.

Although they did everything to promote the destabilization of America's model client state in Iran, the Soviets soon discovered that, despite their geographic advantage, the religiously charged convulsion in Iran was as much beyond their control as Washington's. In the wake of this discovery both superpowers no doubt are working—or at least lying in wait—for the collapse of the fragile regime in Teheran. Meanwhile, the Soviet leaders are fearful of Islamic fundamentalism spilling over to infect Russia's Moslem populations. They are also far from confident about being able to ward off the reinstatement of a pro-American regime at a time when Washington is distinctly truculent and apparently determined to have a showdown. Fear and insecurity may prompt the Kremlin to be more unyielding and belligerent than in 1947 and in 1951-53.

Iran—the Poland of the Middle East in terms of size, population, resources, and strategic value—is perceived by both superpowers to be of critical importance. In Iran one superpower's security is the other's insecurity—perhaps the best reason for Moscow and Washington to begin working toward the demilitarization of Iran that they failed to explore for Poland from 1943 to 1947. The Soviet Union, with substantial energy resources of its own, might be willing to agree to America's economic primacy in exchange for a military and political Finlandization. Barring some such accommodation, Iran threatens to become, sooner or later, one of the most dangerous flashpoints in an ever larger and more explosive arc of crisis that stretches from the eastern Mediterranean to the Arabian Sea.

**T**he opposing ideological projects that once fired the Soviet-American competition in international politics are exhausted or bankrupt. In that sense, the cold war is over. Now the USSR and the United States are locked into a conventional struggle for power centered in the Third World. Their nuclear deterrents and overall military capabilities make for an armed peace and a balance of power that are not without precedent in history. To be sure, today's nuclear arsenals are infinitely more lethal and suicidal than the instruments of war of earlier times. But the modern-age weapons and strategic systems have only a limited autonomy: they are designed by statesmen and soldiers to pursue political objectives, both foreign and domestic. The most advanced weapons and war plans never activate themselves. The greatest danger of their erupting comes when the

governing classes of sorely pressed political societies are tempted to deflect their internal problems into the international environment at a time when the balance of power is being unsteadied.

Neither Russia nor America is about to permit a major crack in its essential security sphere. Accordingly, Russia will be as vigilant in Eastern Europe and along its southwestern perimeter as America is in NATO Europe and Latin America. But while they are likely to continue exercising mutual restraint in each other's protective zones, the two superpowers' rivalry in the Middle East and Africa is destined to become more intense and explosive.

Because the Soviet regime is economically and ideologically stunted as well as diplomatically and militarily overextended and beleaguered, the leaders in the Kremlin can be expected to become increasingly intractable and bellicose. In other words, Soviet Russia is becoming dangerously threatening less because of its mounting than its failing strength. Some American officials and intellectuals recklessly urge that Russia be pressured on all fronts toward the end of unsettling the Soviet regime and breaking up the Eastern bloc. These groups need to be reminded that overspent major powers are not inclined to dig their own graves. Rather, they will resort to preventive war.

Notwithstanding the disclaimers of the Reagan administration, the United States and its allies confront Soviet Russia from an undiminished position of a superior strength. Even a prolonged crisis of the capitalist world economy is not likely to change this balance of forces significantly, though it is apt to encourage a show of brinkmanship.

President Reagan and his advisers have themselves conceded that the cold war is over. In the Third World, the main arena of the Soviet-American power struggle, the United States no longer even feigns to fight for freedom. Despite ringing Wilsonian affirmations in Latin America, Washington never really ceased to pursue a preclusive hegemonic policy that dates from before the cold war, way back to the nineteenth century. All the cold war did was to embolden successive Democratic and Republican administrations to wield the big stick—to intervene—in order to brace, protect, and restore compliant (and usually authoritarian) regimes. Keeping foreign powers out of the western hemisphere was a minor goal. From Woodrow Wilson to Jimmy Carter, the United States helped local elites and vested interests to forestall the liberalization, democratization, and socialization of the societies in America's primary coprosperity sphere. The western hemisphere provides little evidence that authoritarian governments are more prone to self-reform than the totalitarian client regimes of Soviet Russia. And yet the Reagan administration, forswearing the Wilsonian gospel, proposes to use the economic carrot and military stick to preserve and promote the Latin Americanization of the Middle East, Africa, and non-Communist Southeast Asia in the interest of the United States and the rest of the Trilateral world.

It would seem, then, that ideologically and morally America is no less impoverished in its foreign and military policy than the Soviet Union. In fact, from this particular point of view, the USSR keeps a certain edge. Despite its flagrant economic handicap, throughout much of the Third World Moscow benefits from being cast in opposition to an oppressive and exploitative status quo, both international and domestic. By becoming increasingly inured to the depressed classes at home and abroad, and by subsidizing socially retrograde, authoritarian governments to guarantee privileged economic access for the Trilateral bloc, Washington enables the Soviets to strike a spuriously progressive posture on the world scene. Moreover, any serious worsening of the economic and monetary crisis in the heartland of organized capitalism would unsettle the Third World periphery, giving the Soviets the opportunity to prey on and foster social and political unrest from which it can no longer gain in the Trilateral center—which would in any case be dislocated less severely and more gradually. But even in the less developed countries, Soviet chances are less promising than during the cold war, when local revolutionary and progressive forces looked to Moscow as a valued mentor. Today not only are these organized insurgent forces weaker, but the governments they aim to overthrow are stronger and more resolute.

At first sight it does appear that in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Africa, the Americans and Soviets still rely on the same nonmilitary methods of intervention they used during the cold war. The two global powers have poured the new wine of the ideological, cultural, and economic warfare of the cold war into the old bottles of power politics. By supporting or manipulating client states, the United States and the USSR seek to maintain an international balance of power that is inherently precarious. Like their predecessors, they strive not for parity but for that additional increment of indeterminate power that in the event of war is supposed to guarantee victory. Of course, there can be no genuine victors in a nuclear war. But great powers go to war not to maintain or restore some ephemeral international equilibrium; they do it to bolster their own societies as well as those of their allies, clients, and puppets.

In 1947 George Kennan insisted that although Soviet Russia was “by far the weaker party” in the confrontation with the Western powers, its leaders faced the future patiently, confident that history was on their side. But even then, Kennan warned against goading the Kremlin “into a position where it cannot afford to yield even though this might be dictated by its sense of realism.” Thirty-five years later, Russia remains “the weaker party.” In addition the men in the Kremlin now fear that history is running against them both in the world arena and at home, where they face the insecurities attendant on the relaxation of the Bolshevik regime.

Since the ruling and governing classes of major powers become particularly edgy when they sense time moving against them, Kennan’s warning should be

heeded more than ever. Even if the Soviets continue to flounder, they remain a formidable force in international politics. Without ever denying the importance of the ideological sources of Moscow's strength and conduct, Walter Lippmann urged Washington not to forget that the "Soviet Union was the successor of the Russian empire" and that the Kremlin leaders were the heirs "not only of Marx and Lenin but of Peter the Great and the Czars of all the Russias."