

Jack F. Matlock, Jr.

LOOKING BACK TO LOOK AHEAD

Thoughts of a Nonagenarian
Halfway through His Tenth Decade



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Issued to mark Jack Matlock's 95th Birthday

Not for sale

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Nel fino del cammin di mia vita...
 At the end of my life's journey
 Apologies to Dante Alighieri

PREFACE

IT HAS BEEN A PRIVILEGE and a blessing to live into the tenth decade of my life and to have spent substantial portions of it in turns as student, educator, diplomat, journalist and historian. I came of age with the atomic bomb: I was sixteen and had just graduated from high school when nuclear bombs demolished Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Their sheer destructiveness convinced me that a world government would be required if civilization, and maybe humanity itself, were to survive. I became an active organizer of United World Federalists. I took a semester off my studies to organize chapters in colleges through-out my native state of North Carolina.

As I learned more about the world, its varied cultures and histories, it became clear that a world government was not only an impossible goal; it was not even a desirable one. We live physically in one world, but not culturally. I came to understand that if nuclear war was to be avoided disputes between nuclear powers would have to be settled by diplomacy and compromise.

I decided to prepare myself for a career in the American Foreign Service or college teaching if I should fail to pass the tough entrance examinations for the former. I studied for three years at Columbia University in New York City, was awarded a Master's degree in Soviet Studies after which I completed the requirements for a PhD in Slavic Languages and Literature except for the dissertation.

For two years I taught Russian language and literature at Dartmouth College while entry into the Foreign Service was suspended by Senator Joseph McCarthy's unfounded charges that the State Department had been infiltrated by Communists or their sympathizers. When recruitment resumed I passed the examinations and was commissioned as Foreign Service Officer, Class Eight, the bottom of the career ladder, equivalent to a second lieutenant in the army or an ensign in the navy.

My thirty-five years in diplomacy coincided with the last three decades of the twentieth century Cold War. I served in the Soviet Union eleven of those years, in Africa for seven years observing Cold War competition as European colonialists yielded to native rulers, and in

Washington at various times totaling nine years, as intelligence analyst, director of Soviet Affairs in the State Department and special assistant to the President for European and Soviet Affairs.

From 1981 to 1991 I was given the opportunity to advise on strategy to end the Cold War and to participate in the highest-level diplomacy. This gave me the opportunity to know personally Presidents Nixon, Reagan and Bush, Secretaries of State Henry Kissinger, Alexander Haig, George Shultz and James Baker, III, along with Soviet leaders Mikhail Gorbachev, Boris Yeltsin and Eduard Shevardnadze as well as many of the leaders of our European allies such as Margaret Thatcher and Helmut Kohl.

As a participant in the diplomacy, I have tried to explain that the Cold War ended by negotiation to the benefit of all parties, not by the victory of one side over the other, and that the collapse of the reforming Soviet Union was not a victory for the “West.”

I now feel that the political leaders of my country, with the help of others, are leading us dangerously astray, ignoring the lessons we should have learned from two world wars and the invention and spread of weapons of mass destruction. In the past, war could devastate whole areas but mankind as a whole survived, even as various civilizations came and went. Now, a nuclear war, perhaps conducted not by humans but by weapons operated by “artificial intelligence” threaten not just humanity but the continuation of life on our planet. Yet our governments in what we call the West are literally playing Russian roulette with weapons loaded with nuclear charges.

Not only that: we are borrowing the money to do it. The U.S. deficit now approaches thirty-five trillion dollars—much more than our economy produces in a year—and will continue to grow until we have a government capable of balancing the budget. None is even distantly in sight as I write. Every war that we have fought or fueled in this century has been financed by borrowing, not taxation. The chairman of the Federal Reserve Bank recently warned that current U.S. fiscal policy was “unsustainable.” Nevertheless, neither the Republican nor Democratic candidate for President has a plan to bring the budget in balance much less reduce the unprecedented debt.

The United States government is indulging in a veritable orgy of proclaiming economic sanctions against other countries and their citizens for political reasons. Not one of these is succeeding in achieving its declared goal. In most cases the sanctions, which usually affect people in the target countries more than their rulers, have had an effect the

opposite of that intended. Nevertheless they are not only continued but even intensified and expanded.

It seems to me that the most important long-term danger facing mankind aside from nuclear and biological war is the effect of environmental degradation rendering larger and larger areas unfit for human population. This, along with political unrest and uncontrolled population growth will only intensify mass migration. Even without war a deteriorating environment will inevitably produce failed states and strain the political fabric of even the most affluent.

It is not just foreign and economic policy that concerns me. The United States is now dangerously divided and neither of its two dominant political parties attracts the support of a majority of its citizens. Yet, as the result of our electoral college system, we have in this century elected two presidents with substantially fewer actual votes than their opponents. The U.S. Supreme Court now seems to be acting more as a legislative than judicial body, among other things undermining basic democratic principles by legitimizing practically unlimited financial contributions to promote or vilify candidates for political office.

Our political discourse has coarsened, replacing reasoned argument with emotional explicative and personal insult. These elements have never been absent from political battles at home, but in the past there were instances of reasoned argument. Compare the Lincoln-Douglas debates with any “Make America Great Again” rally or any recent debate by political candidates.

This has occurred not only in our domestic politics but even in our dealings with other countries. When presidents excoriate a foreign leader by name, they abandon diplomacy and exacerbate differences rather than solving problems. At the height of the Cold War President Reagan defined our foreign policy goals not as demands on the other party but as invitations to cooperate in order to solve problems. **While he severely criticized communism, he never publicly vilified a Soviet leader personally. He treated them with respect, recognizing that peace was as much in their interest as in ours.**

Even in a world without war the dangers confronting mankind are formidable: global warming and environmental degradation are real and measures so far inadequate to prevent future catastrophe; even without war we will continue to face mass migrations for both safety and economic reasons. Barriers to trade (economic sanctions and high tariffs) militate against solutions to these broader problems.

The views I hold today are the product of experience and of an effort to learn from experience

I supported the war in Vietnam at first but came to understand that it was a horrible mistake, based as it was on the presumption that a Communist Vietnam would be controlled by a communist empire headed by the Soviet Union.

Assigned to Africa during decolonialization in the 1960s, I arrived with the assumption that independence would inevitably give birth to democratic governance and economic progress. All too often, the opposite occurred, with the kleptocratic native rulers oppressing their people, sometimes even more than their earlier colonial masters. Democratization and equitable economic progress are not inevitable when bonds of external dominance are lifted.

The philosopher Karl Popper explained that mistakes are inevitable but can contribute to progress if we learn from them. Since the end of the Cold War and the break-up of the Soviet Union American political leaders have doubled down on mistaken ideas rather than learning from them.

As I write these lines (September 28, 2024), the United States is considering supplying Ukraine with long-range weapons that could strike deep in Russian territory and Russia has revised its doctrine to permit use of nuclear weapons against states that do so. Israel continues to devastate Gaza and is conducting carpet bombing in Lebanon, using largely weapons supplied by the United States. Senior American officials are talking openly of preparing for a war against China.

A hurricane has just ripped through Florida's panhandle and up through Georgia and the Carolinas catastrophically flooding large areas yet one of our candidates for president denies that global warming exists. The pollution of the atmosphere by war, much with American weapons, negates expensive efforts to reduce climate-warming gases.

The Israeli prime minister gave a speech at the United Nations yesterday vowing to continue his genocidal wars. President Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris have proposed cease-fires in Gaza and Lebanon but continue to supply the weapons used by Israel to intensify attacks on its neighbors.

I am reminded more and more of the situation in Europe in the spring of 1914 when, in the words of one historian, Europe sleepwalked into war. Evidence is mounting that history may be repeating itself.

Since the end of the Cold War and the breakup of the Soviet Union, I have written three books.

Autopsy on an Empire (1995) described how the Soviet Union collapsed and pointed out that it was not the end of the Cold War (which had occurred earlier) and also not a “victory” for American diplomacy. President George H.W. Bush supported Mikhail Gorbachev’s attempt to create a voluntary federation of the non-Baltic Soviet republics.

Reagan and Gorbachev: How the Cold War Ended (2004) described how the United States negotiated an end to the Cold War to the benefit of all, not as a victory over the Soviet Union.

Superpower Illusions (2010) describes how the successors to Reagan and the first Bush abandoned diplomacy and started us on the road to the dangerous situation we face today.

For this book I have selected articles I have written since the end of the Cold War on themes that have a bearing on the troubles we face today.

I am often asked whether I am a pessimist or an optimist. A frank answer would be that I am neither: I cannot foretell the future. Experience has taught me that life and politics can take unexpected turns. What I do believe is that attempts by the United States and its allies to dominate the world by military and economic coercion will fail. We and our allies must find a way to promote the peaceful settlement of disputes rather than encouraging and supporting violence. Until we do this the future of humanity is in jeopardy.

Chicago, Illinois
September 28, 2024

I

U.S. Policy Since the Cold War

WHEN THE COLD WAR ENDED and the Soviet Union shattered into fifteen independent countries, the United States had the opportunity to trim back security commitments to far-flung areas of the world. The door was open to share more of the responsibility of peacekeeping with regional powers—including those from both sides of the Cold War divide—as their economic and military capacity grew. America had the opportunity to cooperate with Russia and other nuclear powers to continue the path Ronald Reagan, Mikhail Gorbachev, and George H.W. Bush had set, to reduce reliance on nuclear weapons and resist further proliferation.

But instead of working to create an international order that would address the issues most important to its own security—an order in which power and responsibilities would be shared, local conflicts contained, and weapons of mass destruction brought under reliable control—the United States allowed itself to be distracted. It involved itself in struggles hardly relevant to American well-being, and did so in a way that engendered the hostility of countries whose cooperation was in the long run essential to American security.

In the first article below I explain why the American policy of attempting to create democracy abroad by the use of military and economic coercion reminds me of the Soviet effort to export and defend what it called “socialism”

The second expressed my dismay that the America I described in a speech in 1982, an America at peace with the world, is not the one I witness today.

“False History” points out that America’s founding fathers would not have approved permanent alliances with European (or other foreign) powers or intervention in other people’s struggle for liberty.

The final two deal with the fact that the Biden administration, with the approval of Congress, is fueling acts of genocide that it has the power to prevent.

The Christmas Gift That Keeps Giving

From *American Diplomacy*, August 2024

On December 24, 1989, Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Ivan Aboimov informed me on behalf of the Soviet government, ‘We have given the Brezhnev Doctrine to you with our compliments. Consider it a Christmas gift.’”

Now, some thirty-four years later, I should explain what the Brezhnev Doctrine was, the circumstances under which the gift was conveyed, and why I believe that it was a gift that has infused US foreign policy to this very day.

The Brezhnev Doctrine

The Brezhnev Doctrine alleged that “socialist” (communist-dominated) countries had the right and duty to intervene in any country where a “socialist” government had been threatened. The term developed after the Soviet Union invaded Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968. The underlying rationale was that “socialism” was an inevitable stage in human development and that, if it was threatened in a given country, it was the duty of other “socialist” states to intervene to preserve it. Karl Marx had predicted that the “proletariat” would rebel against the ruling “bourgeoisie” and by dictatorship would produce a socialist society that would evolve from socialism (to each according to his contribution) to communism (to each according to his need). Although the “socialist” states had not reached the goal of communism, they were led by the Soviet Union ruled by a party whose name evoked the ultimate goal: the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

The Circumstances

In world politics, December 1989 began with the first summit meeting of George H. W. Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev, which took place on a Soviet passenger ship in the Malta harbor. (Stormy seas prevented planned meetings on an American destroyer anchored nearby.) The two knew each other since they had met several times when Bush was vice president, but this was their first meeting since Bush had taken office as president. For both, it meant the end of the Cold War.

Their joint announcement stated that the Cold War was over, that the USSR would not intervene in Eastern Europe to prevent political change, and that the United States would not “take advantage” of Soviet restraint. President Bush reaffirmed these commitments in a letter to Gorbachev which I was instructed to deliver when I returned to Moscow from Malta.

On December 16, violence against the Ceausescu regime erupted in Romania. Up until then, the fall of Soviet-dominated governments in Eastern Europe had been remarkably peaceful. Gorbachev was true to his word that the Soviet Union would not intervene. In fact, his policies favored the transition of power since he insisted that the communist governments in Eastern Europe needed to reform and refused any help to keep them in power. He welcomed the ambassadors the new democratic governments sent to Moscow as they replaced the ones representing the communist-dominated satellites. By late December, Romania was in the throes of a bloody revolution.

Then, on December 20, the United States invaded Panama to remove its drug-dealing dictator Manuel Noriega, an invasion that lasted through the following January. According to Wikipedia, it caused 516 Panamanian casualties (314 military and 202 civilian) and 26 American (23 military and 3 civilian). A pretty steep price to arrest a drug lord who once worked for the CIA.

On December 23, I received a telegram from the State Department instructing me to seek an appointment with Deputy Minister Aboimov, who had responsibility for Eastern Europe, to get the Soviet assessment of the situation in Romania. The appointment was scheduled for 12:30 the following day.

Meanwhile, I received on our recently installed secure telephone a call from the Deputy Secretary for Political Affairs instructing me to make clear to Aboimov that if the Soviet government found it necessary to use military force in Romania—for instance to extract its citizens—President Bush would not consider this a violation of their agreement during the Malta meeting. He added that I should be careful not to imply that we were encouraging intervention. I commented to him that I didn’t see how I could convey that message without it seeming that we were encouraging intervention, but of course I would follow instructions.

I wondered at the time why this request had not been in my written instructions, but assumed that was an afterthought by Secretary James Baker’s staff (or perhaps Baker himself) when they saw the cable to me, presumably drafted and cleared by EUR (the Bureau of European Affairs). It did not occur to me then—though it should have—that senior

officials in the Bush administration actually hoped that there would be some Soviet intervention in Romania in order to “balance” perceptions about appropriate behavior in respective spheres of influence.

It was no surprise to me when Aboimov assured me that the Soviet Union would not intervene in Romania. It did surprise me that he would use the term “Brezhnev Doctrine” to refer to earlier Soviet practice since, though it was in common usage in the West, it was not normally used by Soviet officials to describe their policy toward Eastern Europe. Therefore, I accepted his statement as a clever quip and reported it as such to the State Department. The rebellion in Romania ended the day following our meeting with the capture and execution of the Ceausescus.

At the time I had no idea the invasion of Panama would last another month or take anything like the number of lives it did. I believed that the invasion of Panama was a one-off action, taken because so long as Noriega was in control of Panama it was unlikely that the US Senate would ratify the Panama Canal Treaty. Vote on ratification was imminent and ratification was considered of vital importance for our future relations with our neighbors in Latin America.

It did not occur to me then that military intervention would be adopted by the American government as a favored instrument to promote “democracy” in other countries. After all, if democracy is, as Lincoln stated, government of, by, and for the people, how can an outsider create it? Overt intervention in another country’s politics is likely to boomerang, strengthening the autocratic forces who can claim that the democratic forces are agents of a foreign adversary—or worse—an enemy.

From the Brezhnev Doctrine to the “Liberal World Order”

Marx had predicted that communism was the inevitable future of mankind, therefore attempts to assist it were simply acting in accord with the flow of history. In the mid 1980s, Soviet leaders still held to that belief. When President Ronald Reagan, during their first meeting, asked Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko if he believed in a world-wide communist state, Gromyko replied that he did, but it was like his belief that tomorrow the sun would rise in the east. It did not require Soviet help. (He didn’t add, “But there is nothing wrong with helping,” which he probably thought.)

Later, when Reagan first met Gorbachev, he complained about Soviet support for revolutionary movements in Africa and Latin America. Gorbachev explained that the Soviet Union was acting in harmony with the inevitable decolonization of these areas and the United States should understand that this was the future. In effect, he advised Reagan to get used to it; it's going to happen so stop complaining.

By the end of 1988, Gorbachev had changed his mind on that question. In a speech to the United Nations General Assembly in December, he declared that Soviet policy would be based on the "common interests of mankind." This was an implicit but clear rejection of the Marxist "class struggle" which had earlier been the foundation of Soviet foreign policy, including the Brezhnev Doctrine. Gorbachev then showed that the change of ideology was genuine by not attempting in 1989 to thwart the democratic revolutions in Eastern Europe. Therefore, the Brezhnev doctrine was available for transfer when Aboimov conveyed the gift.

The Soviet Union passed into history on December 25, 1991, when Gorbachev announced, "I am ceasing my activity in the post of president of the USSR," the Soviet red flag was lowered from the Kremlin flagpole, and the Russian tricolor raised. This event engendered widespread belief in three questionable assumptions: (1) that the United States, or the West "won" the Cold War; (2) that Western pressure caused the break-up of the Soviet Union; (3) that Russia was a defeated party.

Close attention to all the facts would have suggested: (1) that the Cold War ended by negotiation when the Soviet leader abandoned the policies that caused it in the first place and was as much in the interest of the USSR as it was in the interest of the United States and NATO; (2) the Soviet Union broke up because of internal pressures, not external ones from the United States and NATO, and (3) Boris Yeltsin, the elected president of the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic, declared Russia's independence and engineered the break-up of the USSR.

This happened over the period of a few months in 1991. During that time, the Bush administration hoped Gorbachev could preserve a voluntary union minus the three Baltic countries. In a speech delivered to the Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada on August 1, 1991, Bush advised the Ukrainians (and implicitly the other non-Baltic Soviet republics) to join a voluntary union as Gorbachev proposed and to avoid "suicidal nationalism."

Therefore, the total break-up of the USSR in December 1991 was a defeat for American policy at the time, not a victory as would subsequently be claimed and believed by most people, in both the United States and Europe.

2

After the Soviet collapse, America's Neocons—who had argued that negotiation with the USSR would be fruitless—suddenly proclaimed that the United States was the sole surviving “superpower,” which meant that while world politics had been “bipolar,” controlled by the US and the USSR, it was now “unipolar,” controlled by the US alone. The only debate in those circles was whether “unipolarity” would be a permanent condition or only temporary, a “unipolar moment” as some dubbed it. The problem with this interpretation was at least twofold: military power could destroy but was hardly useful in building something new, and military threats to another country were much more likely to encourage authoritarianism than democracy.

In 1993, Francis Fukuyama, a political scientist who worked for a time on the State Department's Policy Planning staff, provided another foundation element for what came to be called the “Liberal World Order” in a widely cited book entitled *The End of History and the Last Man*, published in 1993.

What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.

The prediction that any present system could be “the final form of human government” was a breathtaking allegation totally void of any supporting historical fact. It was just as fanciful as Karl Marx's prediction that a proletarian revolution would result in a world free of competing classes, government compulsion and strife. Yet it led to a presumption that the United States could use its military and economic power to transform other societies into democracies with capitalist economies that would live in peace with one another.

The goal came to be called the Liberal World Order. Note the following correspondences:

BREZHNEV DOCTRINE

Ability and duty of USSR and its allies to spread and defend “socialism” from internal or external threats.

LIBERAL WORLD ORDER

Ability and duty of US and its allies to spread and defend “democracy” from internal or external threats.

Note also that in neither case did the sponsors of the Brezhnev Doctrine and the Liberal World Order define precisely what they meant by socialism or democracy. In practice, only nation-states they dominated were considered to meet the necessary criteria.

End of Cold War to Hot War?

In the early 1990s, it appeared that the world was headed for a period—maybe even a future—of peace between and among the larger nations. There were conflicts here and there, some involving serious atrocities, but they were local and, it would seem, possible to mitigate or even resolve without the direct participation of the United States on one side or the other. The United States, itself virtually invulnerable to attack by other countries, had an opportunity to develop a security system based on cooperation among the larger countries. Instead, the US too often chose hegemony over cooperation, just as the Soviet Union had done in its heyday in Eastern Europe.

Let me suggest just a few examples which illustrate why Aboimov’s gift has kept giving. They are extracted from highly complex situations which require much more detailed examination and discussion to understand in full. But, in all, there is a constant thread of American attempts to use military force or economic power to favor one side or the other in disputes that can only be solved by diplomacy and compromise.

Europe

Following the Cold War and the Soviet collapse, Europe needed a security system that bridged the earlier East-West division and guaranteed the security of all. Following World War II, the United States had wisely insisted that France and Germany bury the hatchet and start uniting rather than dividing Western Europe. This was an implicit but real condition for the economic aid the Marshall Plan provided.

In the 1990s, the task in Europe was to bring Russia and the successor states of the Soviet Union into a system of mutual security so that they could undertake the difficult task of converting their state-controlled command economies into market economies. As they did so, they could negotiate economic relations with the European Union as a group, planning the gradual development of a common market. Instead of supporting this process, the US tried to split the former Soviet republics from Russian influence.

In the security sphere, from the late 1990s each succeeding American administration added new members to NATO and then began to station military bases on the territory of the new members. The Clinton administration and its successor failed to continue efforts to reduce nuclear weapons and by the second Bush administration the US started withdrawing from the arms control agreements that had halted the nuclear arms race and permitted an end to the Cold War. This process continued until the one remaining nuclear arms control agreement (New Start) was suspended by Russia after its invasion of Ukraine.

In Europe, we are approaching the third year of war in Ukraine, a war that could have been prevented if the US had been willing to guarantee that Ukraine would not be granted NATO membership. Instead, the US and its NATO allies are trying to strangle Russia economically with sanctions of a severity that normally would be permissible only during a formal declaration of war. In the process, Ukraine's very existence as an independent, sovereign nation is under threat and there are few impediments to the use of nuclear weapons if this war continues.

Middle East

War is also underway in what we traditionally have called the Middle East: Israel continues to attack Gaza, where for decades it has

kept Palestinians, many of them refugees from Israel proper, in an open-air prison. A war of this intensity bears the earmarks of genocide since the avowed Israeli purpose is to eliminate or expel Palestinians from their traditional home. It is not a war initiated by the United States, but it is one that might well have been prevented by a different diplomacy. In the 1990s, quiet diplomacy by Norway brought the Israeli government and leading Palestinians to the brink of a settlement that would have provided two states in the Palestinian area, one Jewish and one Palestinian.

Ultimately this failed and, despite US opposition and warnings, Israel continued to increase the Jewish presence in the occupied “West Bank,” to maintain a blockade of the two million plus Palestinians in the tiny Gaza strip, and when it perceived threats (often inaccurately) to attack its neighbors in violation of international law.

Elsewhere in the Middle East and contiguous areas, the US has initiated or participated in at least three full-scale wars and numerous other military interventions. Since 2000, the US has invaded and occupied Afghanistan (for a time), Iraq (where we destroyed an entire government and gave impetus to the terrorist forces we were ostensibly fighting), and Syria, where we intervened without the request of the government we recognized and, in part, in an effort to remove it. For decades we have maintained extensive economic sanctions against Iran.

After the Obama administration participated in a multilateral agreement to prevent Iran’s acquisition of nuclear weapons, **President Trump withdrew**. As a candidate for the presidency, Joseph Biden promised to re-enter the agreement but failed to do so after he took office.

Now, in mid-January 2024, the entire Middle East and adjacent areas (note the recent military exchanges between Iran and nuclear-armed Pakistan) seem to comprise a giant powder keg on the brink of explosion. Attacks from Aden threaten shipping in the Red Sea. Most Arab and many non-Arab Muslim countries are seething over what they consider ongoing genocide in Gaza and violent ethnic cleansing in the Palestinian West Bank. Missile exchanges continue between Lebanon and Syria on the one hand and Israel on the other.

The point is not that the US created all this violence. In some cases (the invasion of Iraq) it did, but in others it was not the main offender. Nevertheless, Israel could not continue pounding the entrapped population of Gaza to extinction if the US refused to supply the ordnance. As for the other conflicts, they may well have been contained or avoided if the US, rather than jumping in with military

force, had used its influence to calm or keep local the area's many territorial and doctrinal disputes.

East Asia

Since the end of the Cold War, China has made unprecedented progress in meeting the human needs of its population. Despite its apparent rejection of “democracy” when it quelled the uprising in Tienanmen Square in 1989, the Chinese Communist Party started promoting capitalist development in a big way. It did so without losing its ultimate grip on power, in contrast to the experience of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union when its leader, attempting to democratize, lost control. The result was spectacular: from the early 1990s to 2020 (the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic), China probably set a world record for achieving the greatest improvement in the lives of the most people in the shortest time. This happened without free, competitive elections or any pretense at “Western style” democracy.

Now, in the grip of Chinese leader Xi Jinping, some political dissidents have been arrested, some of the high-flying capitalists have been brought to heel, the electoral freedom of Hong Kong has been restricted, and members of the Uighur minority in Xinjiang have been herded into “re-education” camps. All of these are regrettable developments which will affect the quality of life for many Chinese, but they are developments that only the Chinese can reverse or modify. They are not going to be ameliorated by reprovals from the US government, particularly when accompanied by policies designed to “contain China” or hobble its economic development.

Nevertheless, US economic policy in itself is not likely to produce armed conflict with China. The danger comes from US policies and actions that the Chinese government perceives threaten China's security, national dignity, or deserved status in the region. The US practice of patrolling the coast of China by air and sea and controlling adjacent waterways is seen as provocative. American support for Taiwanese independence is seen as an impermissible interference in a Chinese domestic struggle.

Senior American politicians and military commanders are urging preparations for a war with China if necessary to defend Taiwan. As much as one may admire the economic progress the people of Taiwan have made and sympathize with their desire not to be controlled by an autocratic government in Beijing, it would be reckless to the point of insanity for the United States to risk war with China in defense of Taiwan.

While overall the United States has a much stronger military establishment than China, China has developed a modern army, air force, and navy with a growing number of nuclear weapons. China is not able to compete with the United States as a global hegemon as some seem to fear. **But China is acutely sensitive to foreign attempts to limit its sovereignty, having been carved up by Western imperialists in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, then invaded by Japan in the twentieth. China can almost certainly prevail locally in a conflict near its border. If it chose to use nuclear weapons against the US fleet in the Taiwan Strait, how could the US retaliate without endangering its own homeland?**

The Common Thread

I have cited just a few examples of American military intervention in faraway conflicts that did not threaten the American people's security or well-being. Just as the USSR supported revolutions to create "socialism" and military intervention in other countries to preserve it (the Brezhnev Doctrine), **so has the United States justified its military activity abroad as necessary to create, support, and defend what it calls "democracy."**

Numerous questions arise. Here are a few, chosen almost at random from some that are basic and at least one trivial:

If, in a Liberal World Order (sometimes called the "rules-based order"), one country does not invade or make war against another unless attacked or authorized by the United Nations Security Council, how is it that the US and its NATO allies unleashed an undeclared war by bombing Serbia in 1999? A more egregious offense occurred subsequently when the United States, along with Great Britain and a few others, invaded, occupied, and destroyed the entire government of Iraq, justifying the action by the false assertion that Iraq had illegally retained weapons of mass destruction.

How is it that the United States and NATO are conducting an all-but-declared war against Russia because of its invasion of Ukraine, but are providing the weapons and political cover to Israel to conduct a genocidal campaign against the people living in Gaza?

Does a "rules-based order" allow a country to invade another and attempt to remove its leader? (Note Syria.)

Is it proper for a powerful country that has more than once violated the rules of the Liberal World Order to assume the role of

enforcer of rules it has violated, even to the point of conducting economic warfare against an alleged offender?

If the US goal is to create and defend democracies, how is it that it arms one of the world's last remaining absolute monarchies, Saudi Arabia?

If NATO is an alliance of democracies, how is it that Montenegro, an autocracy and one of the world's most corrupt countries, qualified for membership?

The list could be extended much longer, but the overall conclusion must be that with all the complexity and uncertainty that marks today's conflicts, there is one common thread: military intervention by the US to resolve conflicts between and within other countries. Just as Brezhnev invaded "socialist" countries to preserve socialism, our American government is attempting to use its military and economic power to impose its political system on the world. It is not working any better than it did for Brezhnev. **It is time the United States discarded the poisoned chalice Deputy Minister Aboimov handed me that Christmas Eve of 1989.**

What Has Happened to America

December 2, 2023

Rummaging through my accumulated papers, I just came across the English translation of a speech I delivered in Czech on July 4, 1982, when I was American ambassador in Prague. At that time Czechoslovakia was ruled by a Communist regime imposed by the Soviet Union.

As I perused it, I realized to my dismay that today I could not honestly make many of the statements in this message.

Here are some of the key paragraphs and my reflections as I read them today:

I am pleased to send greetings to the people of Czechoslovakia on this 206th anniversary of my country's independence. It is a day when we Americans celebrate the foundation of our nation as an independent, democratic republic, and a day on which we dedicate ourselves anew to implementing the ideals of our founding fathers. For us, the bedrock of these ideals is the proposition that states and governments are created by the people to serve the people and that citizens must control the government rather than being controlled by it. Furthermore, we believe that there are areas of human life such as expression of opinion, the practice and teaching of religious beliefs, and the right of citizens to leave our country and return as they wish, which no government has the right to restrict.

Can we really say that our citizens “control the government” today? Twice in this century we have installed presidents who received fewer popular votes than their opponents did. The Supreme Court has nullified rights supported by a decisive majority of our citizens. It takes far more votes to elect a senator in a populous state than it does in one with fewer citizens so the U.S. Senate can be controlled by a minority of the country’s voters. Corporations and individuals are virtually unlimited in the amount they can spend to promote or vilify candidates and to lobby Congress for favorable tax and regulatory treatment. The Supreme Court has, in effect, ruled that corporations are citizens too! Is this not more akin to oligarchy than to democracy?

We are a nation formed of people from all corners of the world, and we have been nurtured by all the world's cultures. What unites us is the ideal of creating a free and prosperous society. Through our history we have faced many challenges but we have been able to surmount them through a process of open discussion, accommodation of competing interests, and ultimately by preserving the absolute right of our citizens to select their leaders and determine the policies which affect their lives

Since when have we seen an open discussion and accommodation of competing interests in the work of the U.S. Congress? When in this century has there been a debate on foreign policy? Why has Congress repeatedly authorized violence normally legal only during a state of war without voting a declaration of war as the Constitution requires?

*Our society is not a perfect one and we know very well that we have sometimes failed to live up to our ideals. For we understand the truth which Goethe expressed so eloquently when he wrote, "Es irrt der Mensch, so long er strebt" (Man errs so long as he strives.) Therefore, while we hold fast to our ideals as goals and guides of action, **we are convinced that no individual and no group possesses a monopoly of wisdom and that our society can be successful only if all have the right freely to express opinions, make suggestions and organize groups to promote their views.***

Unless you are a Member of Congress who speaks out in defense of the rights of Palestinians to live in freedom in their ancestral lands, **or students at Columbia University who wish to do the same.**

As we Americans celebrate our nation's birthday and rededicate ourselves to its ideals, we do so without the presumption that our political and economic system--however well it has served us--is something to be imposed upon others. Indeed, just as we preserve diversity at home, we wish to preserve it in the world at large. Just as every human being is unique, so is every culture and every society, and all should have the right to control their destinies, in

their own ways and without compulsion from the outside. This is one of the principal goals of our foreign policy: to work for a world in which human diversity is not only tolerated but protected, a world in which negotiation and accommodation replace force as the means of settling disputes.

Unless you live in Afghanistan, or Iraq, or Syria, or Palestine...or, for that matter, in Iran, Cuba, or Venezuela.

We are still a long way from that world we seek, but we must not despair, for we believe that people throughout the world yearn basically for the same things Americans do: peace, freedom, security, and the opportunity to influence their own lives. And while we do not seek to impose our political system on others, we cannot conceal our profound admiration for those brave people in other countries who are seeking only what Americans take as their birthright.

Unless they live in Gaza or the Palestinian West Bank.

While this is a day of national rejoicing, there is no issue on our minds more important than the question of preserving world peace. We are thankful that we are living at peace with the world and that not a single American soldier is engaged in fighting anywhere in the world. Still, we are concerned with the high levels of armaments and the tendency of some countries to use them instead of settling disputes peacefully. We share the concern of all thinking people with the destructive potential of nuclear weapons in particular.

At that time the Soviet Union had invaded Afghanistan and the U.S. was demanding their withdrawal. Subsequently they did withdraw in accord with an agreement the U.S. negotiated. But then, after 9/11, the U.S. invaded and stayed for 20 years without being able to create a democratic society. A subsequent invasion of Iraq, on spurious grounds, removed the Iraqi government and gave impetus to ISIS. Then, the U.S., without a declaration of war, invaded Syria and tried unsuccessfully to

overthrow its government (which we recognized) and also to combat ISIS, which had been created as a result of the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

American soldiers are now stationed in more than 80 countries. We spend more on arms than all other budgets for discretionary spending, and now the Biden administration is making all but formal war against Russia, a peer nuclear power.

It is for this reason that President Reagan has proposed large reductions of nuclear weapons. ... We have also made numerous other proposals which we believe would increase mutual confidence and reduce the danger of conflict. All aim for verifiable equality and balance on both sides. That way, the alliance systems facing each other would need not fear an attack from the other. ...

Yes, and by 1991 we negotiated massive reductions in nuclear weapons, banned biological and chemical weapons and limited conventional weapons in Europe. The Cold War ended by agreement, not the victory of one side over the other. But, beginning with the second Bush administration, the U.S. unilaterally withdrew from every important arms control treaty and embarked on a trillion dollar “modernization” of the American nuclear arsenal. Meanwhile, although there was no Warsaw Pact after 1990, the U.S. expanded NATO and refused to negotiate an agreement that would have guaranteed Russia’s security.

The task ahead for all the peoples of the world to establish and preserve peace is not an easy one, The issues are complex and they cannot be solved by simplistic slogans, but only by sustained effort.

Nevertheless, from the late 1990s the U.S. seemed motivated by a false and simplistic doctrine that the world was destined to become like the U.S. and the U.S. was justified in using its economic and military power to transform the rest of the world to conform with its image of itself (the Neocon thesis). It was, in effect, an adaptation of the failed “Brezhnev doctrine” pursued by the USSR until abandoned by Gorbachev. As with the Brezhnev doctrine, the attempt has been an utter fiasco, but the Biden administration seems, oblivious to the dangers to the American people, determined to pursue it.

Nevertheless, I speak to you today with optimism, since I know that my country enters the 207th year of its independence with the determination not only to preserve the liberties we have one at home but to devote our energies and resources to maintaining peace in the world.

But, today, during the 248th year of American independence:

The US is sending 100 “super-bombs” for dropping on Gaza. The BLU-109 “bunker busters”, each weighing 2,000 pounds, penetrate basement concrete shelters where people are hiding, the *Wall Street Journal* reported Dec. 1.

America has sent 15,000 bombs and 57,000 artillery shells to Israel since [October 7](#), the paper said. Details of the size and number of weapons sent have not been previously reported.

Also on the list are more than 5,000 Mk82 unguided or “dumb” bombs, more than 5,400 Mk84 2,000-pound warhead bombs, around 1,000 GBU-39 small diameter bombs, and approximately 3,000 JDAMs, the *Journal* said.

The news dramatically contradicts statements of Foreign Secretary Antony Blinken that avoiding civilian casualties is a prime concern for the United States.

The US also provided the bomb that was dropped on the Jabalia refugee camp, killing 100 people, possibly including a Hamas leader, the *Journal* said.

Repeated calls by the countries of the world, through the United Nations, for a ceasefire have not been supported by the U.S. and its follower nations.

Military spending makes up a dominant share of discretionary spending in the U.S., and military personnel make up the majority of government manpower.

The weapons are being airlifted on C-17 military cargo planes directly from the U.S. to Tel Aviv.

OH, LORD, WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO US?

False History: General Mattis on Our “Founding Fathers”

When the memoir *Call Sign Chaos: Learning to Lead*, co-authored by General Jim Mattis, former Secretary of Defense, and Bing West, arrived I did not have time to start a serious read but flipped rapidly through the pages. The flipping paused on page 177 and the following sentence seemed to jump to my attention: “If we didn’t have NATO today, we would have to create it in order to hold on to our Founding Fathers’ vision of freedom and rights for all. We must remember that we are engaged in an experiment called democracy, and experiments can fail in a world still largely hostile to freedom. The idea of American democracy, as inspiring as it is, cannot stand without the support of like-minded nations.”

WHOA! How can an American general be so ill informed about our nation’s history and the views of the founders of our republic as to state the opposite of their well-known views? It boggles the mind. I have no doubt that both Mattis and West are decent persons who value honesty, but it is impossible to excuse a statement about history that is not only false but, in fact, the opposite of the truth.

Surely General Mattis and Mr. West would concede that George Washington is a Founding Father. They might even agree with most of us who consider him the most important of our Founding Fathers. How do they reconcile their statement to Washington’s advice in his famous “Farewell Address?” In it, as the Wikipedia author points out,

Washington goes on to urge the American people to take advantage of their isolated position in the world, and to avoid attachments and entanglements in foreign affairs, especially those of Europe, which he argues have little or nothing to do with the interests of America. He argues that it makes no sense for the American people to become embroiled in European affairs when their isolated position and unity allow them to remain neutral and focus on their own affairs. He argues that the country should avoid permanent alliances with all foreign nations, although temporary alliances during times of extreme danger may be

necessary. He states that current treaties should be honored but not extended.

So, actually, Washington's advice was the opposite of what Mattis and West state. One can argue, for example, that the creation of NATO to prevent the expansion of a hostile Soviet-controlled bloc was essential to contain the spread of Communist rule. Washington did not argue against that since he conceded that "temporary alliances during times of extreme danger" may be necessary. But when the Soviet Union voluntarily relinquished its hold on Eastern Europe and then shattered, peacefully and with the support of Russia, into fifteen independent states, there was no need to continue the alliance in its former form and certainly none to expand it and incite a struggle for control of territory. It was as if we had learned absolutely nothing from the two disastrous world wars that disfigured the twentieth century.

As for the nation's founders' "vision of freedom and rights for all," John Quincy Adams expressed in great precision an approach that is the antithesis of the Mattis-West assertion. In a famous speech delivered on July 4, 1821, he stated:

Wherever the standard of freedom and independence has been or shall be unfurled, there will her heart, her benedictions and her prayers be. But she goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own.

Furthermore, he saw a real danger in "going abroad in search of monsters to destroy," or of active involvement in the freedom struggles of others. If we do that, he said in the flowery language of his day, we will become imperialists ourselves. Here is how he put it:

[America] well knows that by once enlisting under other banners than her own, were they even the banners of foreign independence, she would involve herself, beyond the power of extrication, in all the wars of interest and intrigue, of individual avarice, envy, and ambition, which assume the colors and usurp the standard of freedom. The fundamental maxims of her policy would insensibly change from liberty to force. The frontlet upon her brows would no longer beam with the ineffable splendor of freedom and

independence; but in its stead would soon be substituted an imperial diadem, flashing in false and tarnished lustre the murky radiance of dominion and power. She might become the dictatress of the world: she would be no longer the ruler of her own spirit.

Of course, America has not become “the dictatress” of the world, but much of the world views our attempts to enforce a misleadingly named “liberal world order”—which is neither liberal nor orderly—as precisely that, a blatant attempt to rule the world. The resistance to this policy is not an attack on our own freedom but reaction to our attempts to control and dominate others.

If our freedoms are under attack—and they certainly are—it is from within and to a great extent the result of policies Mattis and West mistakenly attribute to our Founding Fathers.

One other point. The authors state that “We are engaged in an experiment called democracy...” Well, I hope we are, but don’t imply that this is something our Founders started. They did not use the word democracy. In fact, most hated it, considering it a form of mob rule that can lead to tyranny. They created a republic and adopted a constitution which contains both democratic and non-democratic elements. The word “democracy” does not occur in the constitution, the oath of office all employees of the federal government take, or even in the pledge of allegiance. We have not yet defined what it means in practice, yet we roam the world in its name using force and economic sanctions which more often than not produce effects the opposite of those intended.

To imply that our military has a role in creating “democracies” abroad, or that our democracy is under threat from abroad is absurd. It is precisely our involvement in other people’s fights that has contributed to the political quagmire that now engulfs us.

“Self Defense” Does Not License Genocide

November 3, 2023

GENOCIDE IS A CRIME—not just a “war crime,” but a crime against humanity. No genuine friend of Israel could support the carpet bombing of Gaza, the order for more than a million Gazans to leave their residences on territory Israel, for decades, has either illegally occupied or isolated as an outdoor prison.

Yes, the Hamas attack on Israel was horrifying atrocity. It has given rise to the most passionate emotions, which we see displayed by the actions and words of the Israeli government and by Palestinians around the world. A true friend would restrain the Israeli government from committing crimes against humanity in retaliation—already thousands of Gazan civilians, many of them children, elderly or infirm, have been killed.

Morality and legality aside, Israel’s current course is going to backfire. The Israeli government has set an impossible goal—to eliminate Hamas. That is going to be an impossible task. The more Palestinians are killed, the more resentment will be stimulated in those that remain, and there are millions in surrounding countries and the West Bank that will make living in Israel a security nightmare. What kind of life will that be?

Obviously, passions on both sides, Israeli and Palestinian, are so high today that immediate reconciliation is quite impossible. The only way to stop the slaughter and to prevent an Israeli crime against humanity would be an immediate cease fire without conditions. Negotiations over hostages could then proceed.

This latest atrocity should make clear that Israel will never be safe until it creates conditions for the Palestinians to live in a state that grants them the full rights of citizenship and does not try to force them to leave. That could be one state, two states, or a confederation. That will require a different Israeli administration and a different Palestinian leadership. It will not be easy and, at best, will take a lot of time.

To its shame, the United States has not used its power to prevent genocide. Most of the world is insisting on a cease fire; the United States vetoed such a resolution in the United Nations Security Council and is actually supporting Israel's genocidal activity. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu—whose policies did much to create conditions that led to the Hamas atrocities—has even refused a temporary humanitarian corridor, a direct insult to America's secretary of state and the country he represents.

The Biden-Stalin Doctrine

February 23, 2024

Yesterday President Biden announced extensive economic sanctions against firms and individuals in Russia and in countries trading with them. The cited reason was Alexei Navalny's death in prison. As of yesterday 29,708 persons have been killed in Gaza with munitions supplied by the United States and the United States has repeatedly vetoed calls by the vast majority of UN members for a cease-fire in Gaza.

Josef Stalin once remarked that a single death is a tragedy; the death of a million is a statistic. Apparently, President Biden shares that view.

Relevant Quotation

The line between tactics and strategy may not be useful in the case of Israel, a state that has been at war since its creation. The identity of the enemies changes - the Arab armies, Nasser, the PLO, Iraq, Iran, Hizbullah, Hamas - but the war never ends, because Israel's entire existence, its search for what it now brazenly calls "living space", is based on a forever war with the Palestinians, and with whoever happens to support Palestinian resistance. Escalation may be precisely what Israel seeks, or what it is prepared to risk, since it views war as its destiny, if not its *raison d'être*.

Adam Shatz in *London Review of Books*. 19 Sept 2024

II

Challenging Russia

INSTEAD OF BRINGING RUSSIA into an all-European security structure that would protect it along with other European countries, the United States chose to expand the alliance and exclude Russia. This was a move that reneged on promises made by the United States and its allies who had promised that if Gorbachev accepted the unification of the two German states, NATO would not move “one inch” to the east. Furthermore, from 2003, the U.S. started withdrawing from important arms control agreements that ended the Cold War. Today none are left.

The first selection is the text of my testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1986 when I warned that “If it [NATO expansion] should be approved by the United States Senate, it may well go down in history as the most profound strategic blunder made since the end of the Cold War. Far from improving the security of the United States, its Allies, and the nations that wish to enter the Alliance, it could well encourage a chain of events that could produce the most serious security threat to this nation since the Soviet Union collapsed.”

Note: This week (September 26, 2024) Russia revised its nuclear doctrine thus increasing the possibility of their use.

The second article is a summary of comments made to a meeting in Berlin about European security. I pointed out that the most serious threats are global. They cannot be mastered by countries acting alone or by traditional measures of defense against military threats.

The third contains testimony before the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee when I pointed out that “Today’s tensions are not about ideology. Russia is now a capitalist country and is not trying to spread communism in the world. Today’s tensions are more like those that, through incredible misjudgment, brought on World War II.”

The fourth and fifth deal with the hyped “Russiagate” scandal which in fact had no substance, but continues to fuel anti-Russian thinking to this very day. British historian Richard Sakwa has offered a detailed, fully documented, refutation of the charge that Russian propaganda helped Donald Trump’s election victory in 2016. See his *Deception: Russiagate and the New Cold War*, 2022)

In the last I share a few glimpses of Vladimir Putin.

Should NATO Expand?

Statement of Ambassador Matlock

Senate Foreign Relations Committee

October 30, 1997

In contrast to the other persons invited to testify today, I consider the Administration's recommendation to take new members into NATO at this time misguided. If it should be approved by the United States Senate, it may well go down in history as the most profound strategic blunder made since the end of the Cold War. Far from improving the security of the United States, its Allies, and the nations that wish to enter the Alliance, it could well encourage a chain of events that could produce the most serious security threat to this nation since the Soviet Union collapsed. Those are strong words, but I am convinced that they are justified, and I appreciate the opportunity to explain why I use them.

In Russia today there are somewhere between 40,000 and 50,000 nuclear warheads, 22,000 of them tactical weapons, relatively easy to transport. Furthermore, there are enormous stocks of HEU and plutonium at research institutes, naval facilities, and warehouses throughout that vast country. In addition, Russia has something like 50,000 tons of chemical warfare agents and an amount which one can only guess of biological warfare agents. Equally important, it has a veritable army of scientists and engineers who are adept at turning these materials into weapons and devising ingenious delivery systems.

There is no serious danger now, or in the foreseeable future, that the Russian government intends to use any of these weapons against us, our Allies, or for that matter against any other country. It would be totally irrational to do so, and though Russian governments may sometimes see things differently from the way we do, they are not irrational. The danger these weapons pose is not that they may be intentionally used by a Russian government, but that they may fall into irresponsible hands or rogue states.

It is very much in Russia's interest that such weapons and the materials and know-how to make them not leak out to other quarters, but the sad fact is that the Russian authorities may no longer have an ability to insure their

safety. When the people guarding them have not been paid in six months and weapons scientists literally have trouble feeding their families and heating their apartments in sub-zero weather, it is totally unreasonable to expect that all are going to resist the temptation of selling dangerous materials to local criminals, or of going to work for some unsavory regime. Let us count it a miracle that there has as yet been no documented diversion of a nuclear weapon (though we may never know for sure until one turns up in some unexpected place).

I do not use the term “vital interest” lightly. But by any definition, secure, responsible control of weapons of mass destruction has to be one of them. If any get in the hands of a rogue regime, the United States will be right at the top of the list of the terrorists they sponsor. And they could do it in a way that our deterrent force would be useless. If we didn't know where it came from, how could we retaliate? And, very likely, we would not know, until we had lost a city or two. Nor will a missile defense protect us from weapons delivered by means terrorists are most likely to choose: a ship, a small plane, a minivan, even perhaps a large knapsack two men could lift. Chemical and biological weapons are potentially equally dangerous, as the attacks on the Tokyo subway a few months ago showed. They are even easier to deliver than nuclear devices, and would not require a suicide bomber.

What does this have to do with the question before us? Simply this: adding Members to NATO will do nothing to protect us from the real threat I have escribed. But it does convey to the Russian nation, and particularly their military, that we still consider Russia a potential enemy, unsuited for the same security guarantees and the same degree of cooperation that countries in central and eastern Europe are being offered. Even if the Russian government is forced to acquiesce to the enlargement of NATO, there is no question that our decision to take in new members now, when no country in Eastern Europe faces a security threat from the outside, will greatly complicate our efforts to see to it that the vast stocks of nuclear weapons now in Russia are never used against us or our Allies.

We are constantly being assured that nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction in Russia are under full and responsible control. This may be correct when it is a question of ICBMs and other large missiles in the rocket forces. But smaller weapons and much weapon-grade nuclear

material is much less secure. General Lebed has recently said that 84 tactical weapons were missing from Russian arsenals. His allegation has been denied by Russian authorities, but still it is impossible to be complacent about the question. Even if it is a matter of sloppy record keeping rather than actual theft of nuclear weapons, it seems most likely that neither the Russians nor we know how many weapons they have and where they are at all times. Given the prevalence of organized crime and the high prices some regimes or terrorist groups would pay for nuclear weapons or materials, the possibility of diversion is clearly the most immediate and tangible threat to American security today. The progress we have made in assisting Russia to improve security of its weapon stocks is substantial, but still inadequate.

It is going to become increasingly difficult to obtain Russian cooperation in securing this material if our actions are interpreted as attempts to exploit Russia's current weakness, as they are by most officials in those Russian institutions responsible for weapons security. Adding new members to NATO, in what is announced will be merely the first stage in a continued process of enlargement, will inevitably undermine our ability to influence Russian attitudes on nuclear questions. This policy has already caused a delay of at least two years in the Duma's ratification of the START II treaty, and has produced pressures for the Russian Army to rely more rather than less on nuclear weapons in the future.

It is hard to overestimate the importance of this issue to the safety and well being of the American people. Although the Administration has paid some lip service to its importance, its efforts have been hobbled by bureaucratic infighting, lack of senior level attention, and most of all a failure of the President and his senior associates to give the matter the priority and the day-to-day attention it deserves. In fact, I see no evidence of an overall strategy to deal with the problem. What little we are doing came from an initiative from this end of Capitol hill. Instead of a strategy which would enhance our ability to work in an effective partnership with those Russian agencies responsible for weapons security, we see enormous efforts to promote an ill conceived plan that does not meet the real security dangers we face, and in fact makes it substantially more difficult to deal with them.

The plan to increase the membership of NATO fails to take account of the real international situation following the end of the Cold War, and

proceeds in accord with a logic that made sense only during the Cold War. The division of Europe ended before there was any thought of taking new members into NATO. No one is threatening to re-divide Europe. It is therefore absurd to claim, as some have, that it is necessary to take new members into NATO to avoid a future division of Europe; if NATO is to be the principal instrument for unifying the continent, then logically the only way it can do so is by expanding to include all European countries. But that does not appear to be the aim of the Administration, and even if it is, the way to reach it is not by admitting new members piecemeal.

All of the purported goals of NATO enlargement are laudable. Of course the countries of Central and Eastern Europe are culturally part of Europe and should be guaranteed a place in European institutions. Of course we have a stake in the development of democracy and stable economies there. **But membership in NATO is not the only way to achieve these ends. It is not even the best way in the absence of a clear and identifiable security threat.**

The effect on Russia, however, is perhaps not the most important reason for saying that the Administration's proposal is misguided. I am a strong supporter of NATO, which I believe is essential for the future stability of the European continent. And I am convinced that the process which the Administration proposes to start is going to weaken the alliance ultimately. For a decade or more we will be debating who should or should not be a member, and these debates are bound to be divisive within the Alliance. Meanwhile, these debates will distract us from dealing with the real threats that exist. If ever there was a case of misplaced priorities, this is it.

Tensions Not About Ideology

Testimony to House Foreign Affairs Committee

June 14, 2016

I am deeply concerned with the direction U.S.-Russian relations has taken of late. The mutual accusations and public acrimony has at times been reminiscent of that at the height (or depth!) of the Cold War. Yet the issues are quite different. The Cold War was fundamentally about ideology: the attempt of the Communist-ruled Soviet Union to spread its control of other countries by encouraging what Karl Marx called “proletarian revolutions” against existing governments. The Soviet leaders called their system “socialist,” but it was actually state-monopoly capitalism that tried to replace market forces with government fiat. It was a catastrophic failure in meeting people’s needs, but managed to build a formidable—and in some respect, unmatched—military power.

Today’s tensions are not about ideology. Russia is now a capitalist country and is not trying to spread communism in the world. Today’s tensions are more like those that, through incredible misjudgment, brought on World War I. That is, competition for control of territory in and outside Europe. We know how it ended; every European country involved suffered more than they could possibly have gained.

Competition over territory was bad enough a century ago. Since World War II, however, the danger has risen exponentially if countries with nuclear weapons stumble into military conflict. The number of nuclear weapons that remain in U.S. and Russian arsenals represent a potential existential threat to every nation on earth, including specifically both Russia and the United States.

So how did we end the Cold War and reduce this threat? One key element was an agreement that President Ronald Reagan and General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev made in their very first meeting. They agreed on a statement that Reagan had made in two previous speeches: “A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.” And then they added, since both countries were nuclear powers, “That means, there

can be no war between us.” With that statement agreed, Secretary of State George Shultz was able to argue convincingly that an arms race between us was absurd. We could not fight each other without committing suicide, and what rational leader was going to do that? In just a couple of years we had abolished a whole class of nuclear weapons in our arsenals, and shortly thereafter cut strategic nuclear weapons in half. In concluding the New Start agreement, the Obama administration made an important contribution to our national security, but since then nuclear cooperation with Russia has deteriorated and seems practically non-existent. It is urgent to restore that cooperation if we are to inhibit further proliferation. We are unlikely to do so if we proceed with plans to increase our military presence in Eastern Europe.

I am aware that one of our presumptive candidates for president has indicated that he might find some form of nuclear proliferation desirable. I believe that is profoundly mistaken, as is the idea that allies should pay us for their protection. I do not believe we should use our fine military as hired gendarmes to police the world, even if those protected were willing to pay the costs.

These comments, however, do reflect one important truth, and that is that military alliances can create liabilities rather than augmented power. The larger an alliance becomes, the more varied will be the security ambitions of its members. When our interests are not closely aligned, an American security guarantee can create a moral hazard. What is to keep an “ally” from picking a fight unnecessarily and then expecting the United States to win it for him?

To some degree, this may be happening already. To take just one contemporary example, I have trouble finding much concurrence between American security interests and Turkish behavior. Yes, when we have made commitments, we must honor them. But we must be more careful and selective about taking on liabilities. And some of our alliances, formed under the different conditions of the Cold War, should be reviewed. Perhaps it is time to have a European commander of NATO and a supportive role for the United States.

I have views on how we might deal with Russia on current issues such as Ukraine and Syria, democratization and human rights, and will share them if you wish. I believe there are dignified ways we can reduce tension with Russia on those issues and others. However, the main thing we

should bear in mind is that in confronting the greatest dangers to civilized life in this century such as terrorism, failed states, organized crime, and environmental degradation, **U.S. and Russian basic interests do not conflict. As we deal them, as we must, Russia will either be part of the problem or part of the solution.** It is obviously in our interest to do what we can to encourage Russia to join us in confronting them. They are unlikely to do so if they regard us as an enemy, or a competitor for influence in their neighborhood.

Above all, we must return to the position Reagan and Gorbachev set out: **“A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought, and that means there can be no war between us.”** To act on any other principle can create a risk to our nation—and the world—of unimaginable gravity.

“Russiagate” Hysteria

Posted on June 2, 2018

*Whom the gods would destroy,
they first make mad.*

That saying—often attributed to Euripides, though not found in his extant writings—comes to mind most mornings when I bring in the home-delivered *New York Times* and read the headlines of the latest “Russiagate” development, often featured across two or three columns at the top of the first page. This is a daily reminder of the hysteria that dominates both the Congress of the United States and much of our “responsible media,” including those that consider themselves chroniclers of record with “all the news that is fit to print.”

My outrage spiked when I brought in the February 17 issue of the *Times*. In it, on page one, a four-column headline proclaimed: “Warned About Suspect, FBI Didn’t Act.” It was accompanied by the heart-breaking pictures of the seventeen victims of the shooting at the high school in Parkland, Florida. To the right of it, also on the front page, was a headline which read “Indictment Bares Russian Network to Twist 2016 Vote.” One of the two stories it covered had the headline “Mueller Chronicles a Social Media War” while the second had the subhead “Sees ‘Unwitting Ties’ to Trump Forces.”

The juxtaposition of these two stories seemed strange, unless it was to stress the incompetence of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, exposed by a close reading of both stories. The FBI had failed to act on repeated warnings regarding the 17-year-old gunman in Florida, thus failing in its primary duty to protect American citizens, but was making charges against foreigners, not under U.S. jurisdiction, for allegedly helping to elect a sitting president who had been nominated by the party that controls both houses of Congress. Wow! Now that’s real power for some group of foreigners, or—especially—a foreign government to have! But was it true that the tawdry, amateurish participation in the internet, a tiny fraction of the disinformation circulating under assumed names, changed any American’s vote? No evidence whatever of that. And it was no more

plausible than claiming that a mouse had designed a ruse to cause an elephant herd to stampede.

Did the *Times'* editors perform at least the rudiments of due diligence before they climbed on their high horse of moral outrage in the editorial of the day? Most unlikely, for the editorial said nothing about the failure of the FBI, even within our ridiculously loose gun laws, to preempt the Florida tragedy. Instead their long editorial excoriated "Russia" (not individual Russians) for "interference" in the election and demanded increased sanctions against Russia "to protect American democracy."

It had never occurred to me that our admittedly dysfunctional political system is so weak, undeveloped, or diseased that inept and blatant internet trolls damage it. If that is the case, we better look at a lot of other countries as well, not just Russia!

The New York Times, of course is not the only offender. Their editorial attitude has been duplicated or actually exaggerated by the majority of our media outlets, electronic and print. Unless there is a mass shooting in progress it has been hard to find a discussion of anything else on CNN. Increasingly, both in Congress, and in our print and electronic media it has been accepted as a "fact" that "Russia" "interfered" in the 2016 election.

So what are the facts?

1. It is a fact that some Russians paid people to act as trolls on the internet and bought advertisements on Facebook during and after the 2016 presidential campaign. Most of these were picked up from elsewhere and simply repeated. They comprised a tiny fraction of one percent of all the advertisements purchased on Facebook during this period. This continued after the election and included organizing a demonstration against President-elect Trump.

2. It is a fact that emails in the memory of the Democratic National Committee's computer were furnished to Wikileaks. The U.S. intelligence agencies that issued the January 2017 report were confident that Russians hacked the emails and supplied them to Wikileaks but offered no evidence to substantiate their claim. Retired intelligence specialists have examined the computer and reported that, in their opinion, the leak was an inside job since the downloads of the data were

at a speed not compatible with internet transmission. However, even if one accepts that Russians were the perpetrators, the fact is that the emails were genuine and not fake. The U.S. intelligence report states this explicitly. I have always thought that the truth would make us free, not “degrade” our “democracy.”

3. It is a fact that the Russian government established a sophisticated television service (RT) that purveyed entertainment, news, and—yes—propaganda to foreign audiences, including those in the United States. Its audience is several magnitudes smaller than that of Fox News. Basically, its task is to picture Russia in more favorable light than has been available in Western media. There has been no analysis of its affect, if any, on voting in the U.S. The January 2017 U.S. intelligence report states at the outset “We did not make an assessment of the impact that Russian activities had on the outcome of the 2016 election.” Nevertheless, that report has been cited repeatedly by politicians and the media as having done so.

4. It is a fact that many senior Russian officials (though not all, by any means) expressed a preference for Donald Trump’s candidacy. After all, Secretary Clinton had compared President Putin to Hitler and had urged more active U.S. military intervention abroad, while Trump had said it would be better to cooperate with Russia to achieve common goals than to treat each other as enemies. It should not stress the imagination or require the judgment of professional analysts to understand why many Russians would find candidate Trump’s statements more congenial than Secretary Clinton’s.

5. It is not a fact that Russian leaders thought Trump would win or that they could have a direct influence on the outcome. This is an allegation that has not been substantiated by any convincing evidence. The January 2017 “Intelligence Community” report actually states that Russian leaders, like most other people, thought Clinton would win.

6. It is not a fact that Russian activities had any tangible impact on the outcome of the election. Nobody seems to have done even a superficial study of the effect Russian actions actually had on the vote.

7. It is not a fact that there was any direct coordination between the Trump campaign (hardly a well-organized effort) and Russian officials. The indictments brought by the Special Prosecutor so far are either for

lying to the FBI or for offenses unrelated to the campaign such as money laundering or not registering as a foreign agent.

So, what is the most important fact regarding the 2016 U.S. presidential election?

The most important fact, obscured in “Russiagate” hysteria, is that Americans elected Donald Trump president under the terms set forth in a constitution written and approved by Americans. Americans created the electoral college, which allows a candidate with the minority of popular votes to win. Americans were those who gerrymandered electoral districts to rig them in favor of a given political party. The American Supreme Court issued the infamous Citizens United decision that allows corporate financing of candidates for political office. (Hey, money talks and exercises freedom of speech; corporations are people!) Americans created a Senate that is anything but democratic since it gives disproportionate representation to states with relatively small populations. It was American senators who established non-democratic procedures that allow minorities, even sometimes single senators, to block legislation or confirmation of appointments.

Now, that does not mean that Donald Trump’s election was a good thing for the country just because Americans elected him. In my opinion, the 2016 presidential and congressional elections pose an imminent danger to the republic. They have created potential disasters that will severely try the checks and balances that our founding fathers built into our constitution. This is particularly true since both houses of Congress are controlled by the Republican Party, which itself represents fewer voters than the principal opposition party.

I did not personally vote for Trump and cannot imagine circumstances when I would have. But I consider the charges that Russian actions “interfered” in the election, or—for that matter—damaged the “quality of our democracy” *ludicrous, pathetic, and shameful*.

“Ludicrous” because there is no logical reason to think that anything Russians did had any effect on how people voted. In the past, when Soviet leaders tried to influence American elections, it backfired—as foreign interference normally does everywhere. In 1984, Yuri Andropov, the then Soviet leader made preventing Ronald Reagan’s re-election the second most important task of the KGB. (The first was to detect U.S.

plans for a nuclear strike on the Soviet Union.) Everything the Soviets did in fact helped Reagan win forty-nine of our 50 states.

“Pathetic” because it is clear that the Democratic Party lost the election. Yes, it won the popular vote, but presidents are elected not by popular vote but by the electoral college. (We have a republic, not a democracy!) To blame someone else for one’s own mistakes is a pathetic case of self deception.

“Shameful” because it is an evasion of responsibility. It prevents the Democrats, and those many Republicans who want responsible, fact-based government in Washington, from concentrating on practical ways to reduce the threat the Trump presidency poses to our political values and even to our future existence. After all, Trump would not be president if the Republican Party had not nominated him. He also is most unlikely to have won the electoral college if the Democrats had nominated someone—almost anyone—other than the candidate they chose. I don’t argue that any of this was fair, or rational, but then who is so naïve as to assume that American politics are either fair or rational? (By the way, Russian politics is also neither fair nor rational in terms of what is best for the average citizen.)

Instead of facing the facts and coping with the current reality, the “Russiagate” promoters in both the government and the media, are diverting our attention from where the real threats are.

I should add “dangerous” to those three adjectives. **“Dangerous”** because, making an enemy of Russia, the other nuclear superpower—yes, there are still two—comes as close to political insanity as anything I can think of. Denying global warming may rank up there too in the long run, but only nuclear weapons pose, by their very existence in the quantities that are on station in Russia and the United States, an immediate threat to mankind. Not just to the United States and Russia and not just to “civilization.” The sad, frequently forgotten fact is that since the creation of nuclear weapons, mankind has the capacity to destroy itself and join other extinct species.

In their first meeting, President Ronald Reagan and then General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev agreed that “a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought,” and concluded that it was important to prevent any war between them, nuclear or conventional. Both believed that simple and obvious truth and their conviction enabled them to set

both countries on a course that ended the Cold War. We should think hard to determine how and why that simple and obvious truth has been ignored of late by the governments of both countries.

We must desist from our current witch-hunt insanity and encourage Presidents Trump and Putin to restore cooperation in issues of nuclear safety, non-proliferation, control of nuclear materials, and nuclear arms reduction. This is in the vital interest of both the United States and Russia. Whether or not the Russian government is in possession of embarrassing information about President Trump's personal behavior is an irrelevant question. What is in the interest of the United States and Russia is in the interest of the United States and Russia. That is the central issue on which sane governments, and sane publics, would focus their attention.

The “Intelligence Community,” “Russian Interference,” and Due Diligence

Posted on [June 29, 2018](#)

Did the U.S. “Intelligence Community” judge that Russia interfered in the 2016 presidential election?

Most commentators seem to think so. Every news report I have read of the planned meeting of Presidents Trump and Putin in July refers to “Russian interference” as a fact and asks whether the matter will be discussed. Reports that President Putin denied involvement in the election are scoffed at, usually with a claim that the U.S. “intelligence community” proved Russian interference. In fact, the U.S. “intelligence community” has not done so. The intelligence community as a whole has not been tasked to make a judgment and some key members of that community did not participate in the report that is routinely cited as “proof” of “Russian interference.”

I spent the 35 years of my government service with a “top secret” clearance. When I reached the rank of ambassador and also worked as Special Assistant to the President for National Security, I also had clearances for “codeword” material. At that time, intelligence reports to the president relating to Soviet and European affairs were routed through me for comment. I developed at that time a “feel” for the strengths and weaknesses of the various American intelligence agencies. It is with that background that I read the January 6, 2017 report of three intelligence agencies: the CIA, FBI, and NSA.

This report is labeled “Intelligence Community Assessment,” but in fact *it is not that*. A report of the intelligence community in my day would include the input of all the relevant intelligence agencies and would reveal whether all agreed with the conclusions. Individual agencies did not hesitate to “take a footnote” or explain their position if they disagreed with a particular assessment. A report would not claim to be that of the “intelligence community” if any relevant agency was omitted.

The report states that it represents the findings of three intelligence agencies: CIA, FBI, and NSA, but *even that is misleading* in that it implies that there was a consensus of relevant analysts in these three agencies. In fact, the report was prepared by a group of analysts from the three agencies pre-selected by their directors, with the selection process generally overseen by James Clapper, then Director of National Intelligence (DNI). Clapper told the Senate in testimony May 8, 2017, that it was prepared by “two dozen or so analysts—hand-picked, seasoned experts from each of the contributing agencies.” **If you can hand-pick the analysts, you can hand-pick the conclusions. The analysts selected would have understood what Director Clapper wanted since he made no secret of his views. Why would they endanger their careers by not delivering?**

What should have struck any congressperson or reporter was that the procedure Clapper followed was the same as that used in 2003 to produce the report falsely claiming that Saddam Hussein had retained stocks of weapons of mass destruction. That should be worrisome enough to inspire questions, but that is not the only anomaly.

The DNI has under his aegis a National Intelligence Council whose officers can call any intelligence agency with relevant expertise to draft community assessments. It was created by Congress after 9/11 specifically to correct some of the flaws in intelligence collection revealed by 9/11. Director Clapper chose not to call on the NIC, which is curious since its duty is “to act as a bridge between the intelligence and policy communities.”

During my time in government, a judgment regarding national security would include reports from, as a minimum, the CIA, the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), and the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) of the State Department. The FBI was rarely, if ever, included unless the principal question concerned law enforcement within the United States. NSA might have provided some of the intelligence used by the other agencies but normally did not express an opinion regarding the substance of reports.

What did I notice when I read the January report? There was no mention of INR or DIA! The exclusion of DIA might be understandable since its mandate deals primarily with military forces, except that the report attributes some of the Russian activity to the GRU, Russian military intelligence. DIA, the Defense Intelligence Agency, is the U.S. intelligence organ most expert on the GRU. Did it concur with this attribution? The report doesn't say.

The omission of INR is more glaring since a report on foreign political activity could not have been that of the U.S. intelligence community without its participation. After all, when it comes to assessments of foreign intentions and foreign political activity, the State Department's intelligence service is by far the most knowledgeable and competent. In my day, it reported accurately on Gorbachev's reforms when the CIA leaders were advising that Gorbachev had the same aims as his predecessors.

This is where due diligence comes in. The first question responsible journalists and politicians should have asked is "Why is INR not represented? Does it have a different opinion? If so, what is that opinion? Most likely the official answer would have been that this is "classified information." But why should it be classified? If some agency heads come to a conclusion and choose (or are directed) to announce it publicly, doesn't the public deserve to know that one of the key agencies has a different opinion?

The second question should have been directed at the CIA, NSA, and FBI: did all their analysts agree with these conclusions or were they divided in their conclusions? What was the reason behind hand-picking analysts and departing from the customary practice of enlisting analysts already in place and already responsible for following the issues involved?

As I was recently informed by a senior official, *the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence Research did, in fact, have a different opinion but was not allowed to express it.* So the January report was not one of the "intelligence community," but rather of three intelligence agencies, two

of which have no responsibility or necessarily any competence to judge foreign intentions. The job of the FBI is to enforce federal law. The job of NSA is to intercept the communications of others and to protect ours. It is not staffed to assess the content of what is intercepted; that task is assumed by others, particularly the CIA, the DIA (if it is military) or the State Department's INR (if it is political).

The second thing to remember is that reports of the intelligence agencies reflect the views of the heads of the agencies and are not necessarily a consensus of their analysts' views. The heads of both the CIA and FBI are political appointments, while the NSA chief is a military officer; his agency is a collector of intelligence rather than an analyst of its import, except in the fields of cryptography and communications security.

One striking thing about the press coverage and Congressional discussion of the January report, and of subsequent statements by CIA, FBI, and NSA heads is that questions were never posed regarding the position of the State Department's INR, or whether the analysts in the agencies cited were in total agreement with the conclusions.

Let's put these questions aside for the moment and look at the report itself. On the first page of text, the following statement leapt to my attention:

We did not make an assessment of the impact that Russian activities had on the outcome of the 2016 election. The US Intelligence Community is charged with monitoring and assessing the intentions, capabilities, and actions of foreign actors; it does not analyze US political processes or US public opinion.

Now, how can one judge whether activity "interfered" with an election without assessing its impact? After all, if the activity had no impact on the outcome of the election, it could not be properly termed interference. This disclaimer, however, has not prevented journalists and politicians from citing the report as proof that "Russia interfered" in the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

As for particulars, the report is full of assertion, innuendo, and description of “capabilities” but largely devoid of any evidence to substantiate its assertions. This is “explained” by claiming that much of the evidence is classified and cannot be disclosed without revealing sources and methods. The assertions are made with “high confidence” or occasionally, “moderate confidence.” Having read many intelligence reports I can tell you that if there is irrefutable evidence of something it will be stated as a fact. The use of the term “high confidence” is what most normal people would call “our best guess.” “Moderate confidence” means “some of our analysts think this might be true.”

Among the assertions are that a persona calling itself “Guccifer 2.0” is an instrument of the GRU, and that it hacked the emails on the Democratic National Committee’s computer and conveyed them to Wikileaks. What the report does not explain is that it is easy for a hacker or foreign intelligence service to leave a false trail. In fact, a program developed by CIA with NSA assistance to do just that has been leaked and published.

Retired senior NSA technical experts have examined the “Guccifer 2.0” data on the web and have concluded that “Guccifer 2.0’s” data did not involve a hack across the web but was locally downloaded. Further, the data had been tampered with and manipulated, leading to the conclusion that “Guccifer 2.0” is a total fabrication.

The report’s assertions regarding the supply of the DNC emails to Wikileaks are dubious, but its final statement in this regard is important: *“Disclosures through WikiLeaks did not contain any evident forgeries.”* In other words, what was disclosed was the truth! So, Russians are accused of “degrading our democracy” by revealing that the DNC was trying to fix the nomination of a particular candidate rather than allowing the primaries and state caucuses to run their course. I had always thought that transparency is consistent with democratic values. Apparently those who think that the truth can degrade democracy have a rather bizarre—to put it mildly—concept of democracy.

Most people, hearing that it is a “fact” that “Russia” interfered in our election must think that Russian government agents hacked into vote

counting machines and switched votes to favor a particular candidate. This, indeed, would be scary, and would justify the most painful sanctions. But this is the one thing that the “intelligence” report of January 6, 2017, states did not happen. Here is what it said: “*DHS [the Department of Homeland Security] assesses that the types of systems Russian actors targeted or compromised were not involved in vote tallying.*”

This is an important statement by an agency that is empowered to assess the impact of foreign activity on the United States. Why was it not consulted regarding other aspects of the study? Or—was it in fact consulted and refused to endorse the findings? Another obvious question any responsible journalist or competent politician should have asked.

Prominent American journalists and politicians seized upon this shabby, politically motivated, report as proof of “Russian interference” in the U.S. election without even the pretense of due diligence. They have objectively acted as co-conspirators in an effort to block any improvement in relations with Russia, even though cooperation with Russia to deal with common dangers is vital to both countries.

This is only part of the story of how, without good reason, U.S.-Russian relations have become dangerously confrontational.

Thanks to Ray McGovern and Bill Binney for their research assistance.

Glimpses of Vladimir Putin

September 28, 2024



The picture above was taken at the Russian embassy in Washington around 2001. Former American ambassadors to Russia and the Soviet Union were invited and each had a photograph with a handshake.

The next time I saw him he was delivering a speech in New York. In the question period I asked him what he thought of the proposal to include the three Baltic states in NATO. He replied that he didn't think that was necessary but he would not oppose it so long as no foreign military bases were established there.

Then I saw Putin in 2010 when he met a group of us in the Kremlin and permitted each to ask a question. My question, which I asked in Russian, was "How would you characterize Russia's relationship with the United States today?" (This was two years after his speech in Munich criticizing the United States.)

His reply, “I consider the United States an important partner in dealing with global problems.”

The forth and final time I saw him was in the fall of 2014. I had been invited to speak at the Valdai Conference, held in Sochi that year. Shortly before the conference I was told that my speech had been moved to a panel that included Putin. A former Czech prime minister and the current chairman of the Iranian parliament were on the same panel.

Putin was two hours late, apparently having been conferring with the Iranian, who entered with him. (I was told that it was his habit to keep others waiting for long periods.)

In my presentation I tried to refute the widespread belief that the U.S. and NATO caused the break-up of the Soviet Union. I cited President Bush’s speech to the Ukrainian parliament which endorsed Gorbachev’s proposal for a union treaty and warned about suicidal nationalism, then pointed out that it was Boris Yeltsin, the elected president of the Russian republic, who engineered and led the dissolution of the USSR.

When I finished, Putin asked me what I thought of the U.S. deployment of anti-ballistic missiles in Eastern Europe. I told him that I opposed that deployment because I thought it unnecessary.

He then asked, “Then why did the U.S. deploy them?”

“Our military-industrial complex pushed the idea,” I replied and added that I believed they was not a threat to his “deterrent.”

Later, during the reception following the forum, Putin came to me, shook hands and said in English, “Thank you for your position on the missile deployment.”

The best biography of Putin, to date, is thar by Philip Short published in 2022.

III

The End of the Cold War

MYTHS ABOUT THE WAY the Cold War ended, along with ideologies divorced from reality led America into a series of blunders that drained its power and increased the dangers to its national security.

Myth #1: The Cold War ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union.

NO! It ended well before the Soviet Union broke up.

Myth #2: Military and economic pressure destroyed Communist rule in the USSR.

NO! Mikhail Gorbachev undermined the Party's control of the country because it was blocking the reforms he considered necessary.

Myth #3: The USSR collapsed under pressure from the United States and its allies.

NO! Internal contradictions caused its collapse, not external pressure.

These myths stem from a tendency to conflate three geopolitically seismic events which were separate, though connected:

- (1) The end of the Cold War (1988-89)
- (2) Weakening of Communist Party control of the USSR (1989-91)
- (3) Break-up of the Soviet Union (December, 1991)

The Cold War ended peacefully, by negotiation, on terms that were in the interest of a reforming Soviet Union. President Reagan had defined the terms of settlement on the basis of common interests. In time,

Gorbachev accepted his agenda, since it was in the Soviet interest. As Gorbachev subsequently observed, “We all won the Cold War.”

The end of the arms race permitted Gorbachev to concentrate on reform at home, which in turn led to his ending the Communist Party’s monopoly of power, using contested elections as a major tool. President Reagan recognized, and stated publicly, that Gorbachev’s Soviet Union was no longer an “evil empire.”

While the United States supported the restoration of independence of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, it favored Gorbachev’s effort to create a voluntary federation of the remaining twelve union republics. The break-up of the USSR, caused by internal factors, was a defeat for American policy, not a victory.

Myth #4: Russia was defeated in the Cold War.

NO! Today’s Russian Federation was not a party to the Cold War. It was part of a Communist-ruled empire. Its elected leaders in 1990 and 1991 were strongly pro-Western and aspired to replace communist with democratic values.

The first article below describes the diplomacy that ended the Cold War and contrasts it to the absence of diplomacy during the post-Cold War period.

The second describes how the American embassy in Moscow kept in touch with developments in Gorbachev’s Soviet Union and warned Washington that the Soviet Union could collapse eighteen months before it happened.

Diplomacy That Ended the Cold War

November 25, 2021

MY THIRTY-FIVE YEARS in the American Foreign Service (1956-1991) started when the Cold War was at its height. They ended weeks before the Soviet Union broke up into fifteen independent countries but at least two years after the Cold War itself had come to an end. Eleven of these years were spent at the American embassy in Moscow, seven of them in Washington dealing with Soviet and European affairs, and most of the rest in Africa and Central Europe when the Cold War was the central preoccupation of U.S. foreign policy.

One of the most damaging misperceptions about international relations in the late 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s is the idea that the Cold War ended with the break-up of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991, and that this constituted a “victory” for the U.S. and “Western” policy. As one who participated in the negotiations that ended the Cold War, I can testify that this interpretation distorts, to the point of misrepresentation, what actually happened.

The Cold War ended by negotiation and the results benefited all parties, especially the Soviet Union, by ending the expensive and dangerous arms race and the division of Europe into hostile blocs. Subsequently the Soviet Union shattered into 15 independent states as the result of internal pressures, not external compulsion. **The United States would have preferred to live with a voluntary federation of twelve Soviet republics—that is, one without Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—as President George H.W. Bush made clear in his speech to the Ukrainian parliament on August 1, 1991. Events in the Soviet Union itself, particularly the policies of the elected president of the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic (RSFSR), Boris Yeltsin, made this impossible.**

I will return to these thoughts later as I discuss international relations following the end of the Cold War, but first let us consider what we mean by diplomacy and then how it was used to end the confrontations of the Cold War.

When I google for a definition of “diplomacy,” I get the following reply: (1) “the profession, activity, or skill of managing international relations, typically by a country's representatives abroad” and (2) “the art

of dealing with people in a sensitive and effective way.” These are not two variant definitions. They are two aspects of what should be a single definition. One cannot be an effective diplomat—that is, one that facilitates a settlement of differences acceptable to both parties—without sensitivity to the position and views of his or her interlocutors, in other words without at least the appearance of personal respect. That means, *inter alia*, avoiding public demonization of people who hold power in other countries.

President Reagan was a sharp critic of the Soviet system; in one of his speeches early in his presidency, he referred to the Soviet Union as an “evil empire.” However, he never personally insulted the Soviet leaders. Indeed, when he met them his first words were likely to be something like, “We hold the peace of the world in our hands. We must find a way to cooperate to insure peace.” In time—by 1987—he and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev had implicitly agreed on the same negotiating agenda. And then, in December, 1988, as he was preparing to leave office, Reagan noted in his diary: “The meeting [with Gorbachev on Governors Island] was a tremendous success. ... Gorbachev sounded as if he saw us as partners making a better world.”¹ Earlier that year when he visited Moscow, Reagan had been asked by a journalist if the country was still an “evil empire.” “No,” he replied, “that was another time, another era.” And then, when he was asked who was responsible, he said, “Mr. Gorbachev, of course. He is the leader of this country.”

That was in 1988. Just five years earlier, on September 28, 1983, Soviet leader Yuri Andropov had announced on Radio Moscow “If anyone had any illusions about the possibility of an evolution for the better in the policy of the present American administration, recent events have dispelled them once and for all.”² Andropov then withdrew Soviet negotiators from all ongoing arms control negotiations. Many observers, especially those in Europe, began to talk about a “Second Cold War” as if the Nixon-Brezhnev détente period had ended the first. (It hadn’t.)

My personal involvement in these events began in the spring of 1983 when I was asked to take a position on the National Security Council to work out a negotiating approach to deal with the Soviet Union.³ Although Reagan had earlier made some gestures intended to begin a useful dialogue with the Soviet leader, such as a handwritten letter

¹ Ronald Reagan, *An American Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990, p. 715.

²Reported in *Pravda*, September 29, 1983.

³ Described in Jack F. Matlock, Jr., *Reagan and Gorbachev: How the Cold War Ended*. (New York, Random House, 2004), p. ix-xi.

to Brezhnev in 1981 when he was still recuperating from an assassin's bullet and his decision to end the embargo on grain sales imposed by the Carter administration, his forceful criticism of communism and of Soviet policy overshadowed these gestures. He needed to make clear his desire for a negotiated solution of the issues that had divided the world into competing power blocs and produced a dangerous and costly arms race. He noted in his personal diary just before I took up my duties on the NSC: "Some on the NSC staff are too hard line and don't think any approach should be made to the Soviets. I think I am hard line and will never appease. But I do want to try to let them see there is a better world if they'll show by deed that they want to get along with the free world."⁴

Even though Reagan was eager for a personal meeting with the Soviet leader, that proved to be impossible until Gorbachev was named General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in March, 1985. Reagan immediately sent a letter to Gorbachev suggesting a meeting, which was delivered by Vice President Bush when he attended Konstantin Chernenko's funeral in Moscow. Gorbachev accepted in principle, and by summer it was agreed that the two would meet in Geneva in November.

Meanwhile, U.S. policy had been revamped, articulated in greater detail, and—most important—shifted to concentration on cooperation to achieve a mutually beneficial outcome and to private consultation before proposals were publicized. In other words, U.S. policymakers tried to replace a "zero-sum" game, when one party loses all that the other side gains, with one that was potentially "win-win," with both sides coming out better off.

This was done by describing a more accommodating posture in a series of speeches President Reagan delivered in 1984. In the first, delivered on January 16, Reagan set forth a policy that later became a four-part agenda: cooperation to reduce arms, particularly nuclear weapons; to end fueling conflict in third countries; to better protect human rights, and to build a better working relationship (euphemism for raising the Iron Curtain).⁵ A second speech, delivered in June 1984, described the need for freer contacts across the East-West divide and the fact that both sides would benefit from it.⁶ A third, delivered to the United Nations General Assembly on September 24, 1984, proposed regular

⁴ Ronald Reagan, *op. cit.*, p. 572.

⁵ *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, Vol. 20, No. 3, pp. 40-45. Also available on the internet at <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/address-nation-and-other-countries-united-states-soviet-relations>

⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. 26, p. 945.

consultations between senior U.S. and Soviet officials on all topics on the broad agenda he had described in his earlier speeches: .

I will suggest to the Soviet Union that we institutionalize regular ministerial or cabinet-level meetings between our two countries on the whole agenda of issues before us, including the problem of needless obstacles to understanding.⁷

As we defined goals and cooperative methods to achieve them, we also defined—for internal U.S. government use—three topics or objectives that were not in our agenda: (1) challenging legitimacy of the Soviet system; (2) military superiority; (3) forcing collapse of the Soviet system.⁸

These policies were in place before Reagan's first meeting with Gorbachev. Once we started preparing for the Reagan-Gorbachev meeting in November, 1985, we began to put them into effect. We would propose a list of possible cooperative projects in diplomatic channels and request Soviet comment before describing them in public. We also invited our Soviet interlocutors to suggest projects of particular interest to them. Reagan's staff set aside extensive time to brief him on the main issues and also on relevant history; we put together the equivalent of a college course with the help of specialists in the State Department and Central Intelligence Agency.⁹ We also turned to many specialists outside the government to write papers on important topics and sometimes come and discuss them personally with the president.

Reagan read the reports avidly, and often commented on the margins. What interested him most was not so much the details of the political and military issues, but the Soviet leader's mode of thinking.

Just before he left Washington to meet Gorbachev, Reagan wrote out his thoughts on a yellow legal pad, had them typed, made a few corrections, and sent them to me with a request to discuss them during the briefings in Geneva. They gave valuable clues to his approach. First, he recognized that Gorbachev was not a dictator but had to justify any concessions to the Politburo at home. Second, Reagan considered protection of human rights to be one of the most important issues, but recognized that public condemnation could do more harm than good.

⁷ <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/address-39th-session-united-nations-general-assembly-new-york-new-york>

⁸ See "U.S. Policy Guidance," Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, p. 76.

⁹ Documents 60 and 74, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)*, Vol. V, *Soviet Union, March 1985-October 1986*. (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 2020), p.214-220 and 298-305 are examples of papers prepared for the president.

(As he put it, “Front page stories that we are banging away at them on their human rights abuses will get us some cheers from the bleachers but it won’t help those who are being abused.”) He resolved to deal with those issues privately rather than by shouting demands in public. He made the development of trust one of his most important goals. Finally, he observed, “Whatever we achieve, we must not call it victory.”¹⁰ He understood that claiming to triumph in a negotiation would undermine the possibility of solving other problems.

I have described in detail how U.S.-Soviet relations developed during the 1980s in my *Reagan and Gorbachev: How the Cold War Ended*. Despite occasional setbacks, relations moved from what seemed to be a total stalemate in the fall of 1983 when Andropov announced that it was impossible to deal with the Reagan administration to the sense of partnership Reagan described in his diary when he and Gorbachev parted in December, 1988. After some hesitation, President George H.W. Bush and his Secretary of State, James A. Baker, III, adopted key elements of the Reagan approach, though without attribution and without the help of important members of Reagan’s support team.

In short, from 1983 the U.S. shifted its approach to the USSR from challenges and accusations to proposals for cooperation to achieve mutually beneficial aims. Ending the arms race was in the interest of both countries, but it had to be done in a way that neither would feel that the agreement was a defeat. It was in the interest of both countries to withdraw from proxy conflicts in third countries; regular meetings by the U.S. and Soviet officials who dealt with policy in these areas resolved most of the confrontations by the late 1980s. Gorbachev’s reform initiatives, *glasnost* (openness in the media) and *perestroika* (reform, or reconstruction) of the political and economic system gained momentum in the late 1980s and facilitated expanding contacts and communication across borders that had been blocked by what Winston Churchill called an “Iron Curtain” in his 1946 speech in Fulton, Missouri.

Secretary of State Shultz made a special effort to develop a personal relationship with Gorbachev’s foreign minister, Eduard Shevardnadze. The first time Shevardnadze visited Washington, Shultz invited him and his wife, Nanuli, to a private dinner at the Shultz residence in Washington. The Shevardnadzes reciprocated the next time Shultz and his wife came to Moscow. Soon, they were dealing with each other on a first name basis. Of course, both knew that personal

¹⁰ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, pp. 150-154.

friendship did not automatically solve problems. However, they were increasingly able to deal with each other with confidence and without rancor. When he replaced Secretary Shultz, Secretary of State Baker and his wife continued a warm personal relationship with their Soviet counterparts.

Personal relations matter. International relations are not comparable to billiard balls colliding on a pool table, as some theories hold. Nation states are led by people and international diplomacy is heavily influenced by the personal relations of those who exercise power in their respective countries. U.S. policy sought to achieve ends compatible with the long-term interests of both countries; these could be defined in practice only if the political leaders and their diplomats were able to communicate with each other privately, with candor and confidence that they would not be confronted with embarrassing disclosures to the public. By defining all of U.S. goals as cooperation to achieve ends beneficial to both, as President Reagan did in his January, 1984, speech, and then pursuing these goals increasingly by private diplomacy when that became possible with Gorbachev's assumption of power, we ended the Cold War to the benefit of all.

Exclusion of certain goals was an essential part of the Reagan approach. As noted above, from 1983 Reagan's policy excluded denying the legitimacy of the Soviet system, seeking military advantage, or trying to replace the communist system in the Soviet Union with something else. The first would have made real negotiation impossible; as for the second, defining a military balance would be difficult, but any overt effort to retain a military edge would undermine the possibility of agreement; as for the third, trying to achieve what later was called "regime change" would actually strengthen the police state system and make any attempt at reform impossible.

Another feature of U.S. policy was a commitment to dialogue and negotiation. In the past, the leaders of both countries had tended to break off negotiations if the other side did something they objected to. The Carter Administration, for example withdrew from cultural exchanges and cooperative agreements when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. When the U.S. began to deploy missiles in Europe in response to the Soviet SS-20s, Andropov terminated all arms control negotiations. Reagan's instincts told him that dialog and consultations were particularly important when something happened to increase tensions and distrust. He pledged never to withdraw from negotiations.

The ideological cold war, which underlay the arms race and the geopolitical divide, ended in December, 1988, when Gorbachev, in a speech to the United Nations, announced that Soviet policy would be based on “the common interests of mankind,” rather than the traditional Soviet aim of supporting the “proletariat” in an international class struggle. Events of 1989 and 1990, when the countries of Eastern Europe asserted their independence and the Berlin Wall came down, proved that he meant it. The Cold War was over. At the same time, resistance to reform was growing in the Soviet Union, many non-Russian nationalities were pressing, first for autonomy and then for independence, and the country was experiencing a erratic supply of food and consumer goods as Gorbachev tried to introduce more elements of a market economy into a state-controlled system.

In August, 1991, a cabal of senior officials tried to take power from Gorbachev. They failed, but their attempt so weakened Gorbachev’s authority that Boris Yeltsin, who had been elected president of the RSFSR, was able to enlist the cooperation of the leaders of Ukraine and Belorus to abolish the USSR altogether. The Commonwealth of Independent States, which replaced it, was a loose association lacking sovereign authority to govern. A country that had been seen as a superpower, a military match for the United States, simply collapsed. In its stead there were fifteen sovereign states, all struggling to solidify their independence, restructure their economies and develop independent bureaucracies rather than branches of USSR ministries. The Russian Federation, by far the largest, had only half the population of the Soviet Union. The huge Soviet military establishment was in total disarray.¹¹

The United States had an opportunity at the beginning of 1992 to help build a post-Cold-War order based on shared responsibility for security and development. Military deployments and military spending could be sharply reduced and strong encouragement given to building inclusive security arrangements. This did not occur. In fact, thirty years after the Soviet Union collapsed and ceased to be a military threat to the United States, we now find ourselves involved in multiple conflicts and in confrontations reminiscent of the Cold War with two major powers: China, whose economy is now growing faster than the American, and Russia, whose nuclear capability is adequate to demolish the United States (and to invite its own destruction) if ever used.

¹¹ William E. Odom, *The Collapse of the Soviet Military*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1998.

How has this come about? Doubtless for many reasons, but it seems to me that a misunderstanding—or in some instances, willful misrepresentation—of the way the Cold War ended has been a major contributing factor, maybe even the principal one. Instead of continuing to practice the sort of diplomacy that ended the Cold War, the United States has too often done the opposite. The prevailing idea that the United States “won” the Cold War in the sense that it defeated the Soviet Union is flat-out wrong. As Professor Beth Fischer observed in her detailed study, *The Myth of Triumphalism: Rethinking President Reagan’s Cold War Legacy*:

The Cold War was resolved through diplomacy. President Reagan focused on the superpowers’ mutual interest in reducing nuclear arms and engaged in meaningful dialogue so as to ease security concerns and build trust. It was this policy of reassurance and engagement that led to the peaceful conclusion of the Cold War.¹²

Looking at the end of the Cold War as a victory of one country over the other rather than an outcome that served the vital interests of both led to the unfounded conclusion that an American-style political system suited the entire world and that in fact it was the inevitable future of mankind. As Francis Fukuyama put it, “What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.”¹³ This statement, the philosophical basis for the attempt to use America’s military and economic power to create in other countries clones of “Western liberal democracy,” had not the slightest confirmation in historical experience.¹⁴ Even the definition of what constituted a “liberal world order” was subject to constant change.

The break-up of the Soviet Union also fed another unfounded myth, that of a “unipolar world.” The idea was that the world of the Cold War had been run by two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, but now that the Soviet Union had collapsed the United States

¹² Beth A. Fischer, *The Myth of Triumphalism: Rethinking President Reagan’s Cold War Legacy*. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2020.

¹³ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: Free Press, 1992.

¹⁴ For a fuller discussion of the implications of Fukuyama’s thesis see John Gray, *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia*. New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007; also the discussion in Jack F. Matlock, Jr., *Superpower Illusions; How Myths and False Ideologies Led America Astray—and How to Return to Reality*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010, pp. 115-116.

stood astride the globe with power to change it in its own (largely imagined) image. Few commentators questioned the absurdity of the proposition. They mainly argued over whether this was a permanent characteristic of global politics or a temporary one (“the unipolar moment”).

Now, of course, both the United States and the Soviet Union had in their control weapons that, if used, could destroy the other, and in so doing render the planet uninhabitable for anybody. Call it superpower if you wish, but it is power to destroy and not create. Even with reduced numbers, both the United States and Russia still have enough nuclear weapons on station to wipe out civilization on earth. So if possession of nuclear weapons by the thousands is the qualification for superpower status, the United States and Russia still qualify.

Power to destroy is not power to change other societies. The idea that outsiders can “build” a nation or create a government in a different country of, by, and for its people (to use Lincoln’s definition of democracy) is a self-contradictory oxymoron. Yet it has been an essential element of the foreign policy of all of our post-Cold War presidents. Even our spectacular and costly failure in Afghanistan has not yet led to a fundamental rethinking of impossible goals.

The idea that “Western liberal democracy” is “the final form of human government” and that it can be achieved by the application of U.S. power reminds me of the Soviet Union’s Brezhnev Doctrine. Based on the Marxist-Leninist theory of world revolution—that the proletariat (working class) would take power by revolution and create first a “socialist,” and then a “communist” society—it held that once a country was declared “socialist,” it was the duty of other “socialist” countries to defend “socialism” and prevent backsliding into the control of “imperialists.” That was the official rationale for the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 and of Czechoslovakia in 1968.

One of its assumptions was that socialist countries would always be allies of the Soviet Union. It assumed that the form of government determined a country’s geopolitical orientation. But this assumption was contradicted by Marshal Tito’s Yugoslavia, which broke with Stalin’s Soviet Union, and Mao Zedong’s China, which became for a time a virtual enemy. The same form of government did not guarantee a willing alliance. Gorbachev’s renunciation of the Brezhnev Doctrine, which permitted “a Europe whole and free” was a key factor in bringing the Cold War to an end.

Despite the evidence that the Brezhnev doctrine had been an expensive burden to the Soviet Union and that its motivating tenets were proven falsehoods, the United States in effect adopted a version of it when it set out to create a “liberal world order” based on the presumption that the United States can build nations and create democratic governments in other countries. This implied a diplomacy *based on* the three approaches President Reagan *excluded* when he negotiated the end of the Cold War.

The fact is that the United States, since the end of the Cold War, has more often than not replaced the techniques of effective diplomacy—settling disputes peacefully by negotiation — with hypocritical moralizing,¹⁵ direct interference in the domestic politics of other countries,¹⁶ censoring others for behavior it itself has indulged in,¹⁷ and outright bullying less affluent countries with financial and economic sanctions.¹⁸ It has asserted the goal of a monopoly of military power (“full spectrum dominance” in the words of one Pentagon document during the second Bush administration) and assumed the right to enforce rules without itself abiding by them.¹⁹

The ability to conduct effective diplomacy with Russia suffered further damage when the Obama administration, along with the leaders of both parties in the U.S. Congress, began systematically to blame Russian president Vladimir Putin alone for the rising tensions.

¹⁵ For example, the passage of the so-called Magnitsky Act during the Obama administration. Based on allegations—never proved—of a single miscarriage of justice—prominent Russians were “sanctioned” for alleged human rights violations. It would seem that members of Congress should have more properly turned their attention to numerous miscarriages of justice in the United States rather than unproven allegations regarding acts under foreign jurisdiction. At the same time the Obama administration covered up the tortures committed by the second Bush Administration and actually prosecuted the whistle blowers who revealed the abuses of human rights by the United States.

¹⁶ For example, overt support for Yeltsin in the 1996 Russian election, the “color revolutions” in Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan, plus direct support for “regime change” in Russia itself.

¹⁷ For example, accusing Russia of “aggression” against Ukraine when the United States had illegally made war against Iraq, with far greater casualties and had illegally attempted to remove the president of Syria, the head of a government the U.S. recognized.

¹⁸ Economic sanctions have become a favored tool of coercion; when they involve issues the government of the other country considers vital to its national security, they normally fail. For example, the various sanctions against Russia in response to its actions in Ukraine make solution of the issues more difficult.

¹⁹ For a more expansive discussion of events in the 1990s and the first decade of the twentieth century, see Matlock, *Superpower Illusions*, pp. 131-265.

Prominent U.S. newspapers and television networks joined in what, to suspicious Russian eyes, had all the appearance of a coordinated campaign of vilification.

In fact, Putin was reacting to what he viewed as U.S. efforts to isolate Russia and build a military cordon along its borders, and even—he suspected—encourage “regime change” in Russia, as it had in Ukraine and Georgia. President Obama extended the hostile rhetoric to insult the Russian nation as a whole when he made public statements about Russia not producing anything anybody wanted and ridiculed the idea that Russia was a Great Power. (At that time, the only way the U.S. could take astronauts to the International Space Station was by Russian rockets and the U.S. was trying to prevent Iran and Turkey from purchasing Russian anti-aircraft missiles! Obama’s comment that Russia was not a Great Power but only a regional power seemed to imply, first, that might makes right, that Great Powers have rights denied less powerful nations, and second, that Russia had no business protecting its interests even in its own region. After all, the two areas most in contention, Ukraine and Syria, are much closer to Russia than they are to the United States.)

On top of this, the United States, from January, 2017, started expelling large numbers of Russian diplomats on one pretext or another. Russia, predictably, reciprocated tit for tat with the result that by the summer of 2021 the staffs of diplomatic and consular missions of both countries had been slashed to the point that basic services such as visa issuance had to be suspended at the American embassy in Moscow. The result was a campaign against the very instruments of international diplomacy. The governments of both countries seem bent on crippling their capacity to cooperate in dealing with common problems.

The U.S. attempt to police and remake the world diverts it from dealing most effectively with the most serious threats it and the world as a whole face. We are still in the midst of a pandemic which will not be ended or controlled in the United States until it is elsewhere. Nuclear weapons are still a potential threat to mankind yet we seem to be on the brink of another nuclear arms race, having withdrawn from the key agreements that helped us end the Cold War. Global warming and environmental degradation threaten all countries. Failed states and mass migrations will stress even the most affluent.

None of these problems can be alleviated without cooperation of all major powers. None can be solved or even ameliorated by military action. The current rise in geopolitical competition and the replacement of diplomacy with threats, sanctions, and attempts to mind other

countries' business can only divert us from dealing effectively with our problems at home and the more serious dangers that now threaten to engulf mankind as a whole.

Embassy Moscow, 1987-1991: Watching an Empire Self-Destruct

One of the many unfounded myths about the collapse of the Soviet Union has it that the American government was taken by surprise. Not so! The American embassy in Moscow advised Washington eighteen months before the Russian tricolor was raised over the Kremlin that contingency plans should be laid for that eventuality. And in the year and a half that followed that report, the embassy carefully reported the stages of unraveling, based upon extensive contacts with government officials and opposition leaders on the one hand, and the insights derived from deepening involvement with the broader public, Russian and non-Russian alike, in and out of the capital. It was even able to provide, weeks in advance of their fateful action, the names of the people who led the attempt to remove Gorbachev in August, 1991.

Though it conflicted with prevailing opinion in Washington, the July, 1990, message was not a bolt out of the blue, for the Embassy had been reporting the rise of nationalist movements in many Soviet republics, the growing problems in the economy, the weakening of Communist-party control over the country, and competition and disarray among supporters of reform and within the Communist Party itself.

Before 1985, when Mikhail Gorbachev came to power as General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Soviet authorities had, for decades, attempted to isolate the American Embassy in Moscow from normal contact with Soviet citizens and also with Soviet officials other than those specifically delegated to deal with the embassy. Some American administrations, particularly those of Presidents Nixon, Ford, and Carter, unwisely facilitated Soviet efforts to isolate the American embassy in Moscow by doing most of its business through the Soviet ambassador in Washington. In his fascinating *Tchaikovsky 19, A Diplomatic Life Behind the Iron Curtain*, retired FSO Robert Ober described the atmosphere in the Embassy in the mid-1980s and previously. If these conditions had persisted, the embassy's ability to follow and interpret developments in a vast empire convulsed by change would have been crippled.

Fortunately, developments encouraged by U.S. policy and supported by Gorbachev altered the environment in which Embassy

Moscow operated. From 1987, Soviet society was gradually but rapidly opened to contacts with the outside world. Equally important, Presidents Reagan and Bush and Secretaries of State George Shultz and James A. Baker, III managed to establish trusted personal relationships with Gorbachev and Foreign Ministers Eduard Shevardnadze and Alexander Bessmertnykh. Both American and Soviet leaders encouraged their subordinates to follow suit and work out the problems brought on by the Cold War. In the late 1980s, a win-win spirit rapidly replaced the destructive “zero-sum” attitude that had burdened negotiations during most of the Cold War.

In the summer of 1989, separate groups of Lithuanians, Estonians, and Latvians made appointments with me to explain their plans for a restoration of the independence Stalin had extinguished as World War II began. The fact that they could do so with impunity was clear evidence that the Soviet authorities had greatly eased restrictions on contact with foreign diplomats. Before Gorbachev’s reforms began, such behavior would have been considered tantamount to treason and punished accordingly. When the Soviet government refused their demands for more autonomy, the newly elected Baltic leaders intensified the pressure for their own independence and began to support independence movements in the other non-Russian union republics.

Resistance to Communist rule from Moscow was not dependent on Baltic inspiration, however, but arose spontaneously, particularly in those areas in Western Ukraine and Moldova seized by Stalin following the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939, and in the South Caucasus.

By 1990, Consul General Richard Miles in Leningrad (as Saint Petersburg was then known) maintained an almost continuous presence in Tallinn, Riga, and Vilnius, aided by help from Moscow and nearby embassies in Scandinavia. (One of the key officers in this effort, Latvian-speaking FSO Ints Silins, subsequently became American ambassador to post-Soviet independent Latvia.) An advance party to open a consulate general was sent to Kiev and thus able to keep abreast of developments there and to visit Moscow frequently to file reports. Embassy Moscow’s political and economic reporting officers were given assignments to follow developments in specific non-Russian republics. Opposition leaders usually knew who on the Embassy staff had responsibility for their republic and would frequently alert our diplomats to planned demonstrations and other significant events.

All reporting officers in Moscow, Leningrad and Kiev spoke and understood Russian. Some were competent in a second language used

in the Soviet Union, such as Latvian, Ukrainian, Armenian, Uzbek, and Tajik. This was an invaluable asset in developing rapport with persons of those nationalities even though most were fluent in Russian.

The decision of the Lithuanian parliament to declare a restoration of the country's independence in March, 1990, brought the USSR close to crisis. Foreign Minister Shevardnadze met with me privately on the eve of that decision in an effort to persuade the Lithuanians to delay their decision until Gorbachev was secure in the newly created office of President. He did not seek an abandonment of the declaration, but only a delay of ten days or so. When I informed him the following day that the Lithuanians were determined to proceed immediately, he remarked, as he saw me out of his office, "If I see a dictatorship coming, I will resign. I will not be part of a government with blood on its hands."

That was March, 1990, and the Lithuanian declaration proceeded, as did Gorbachev's appointment to the post of president. In December, however, Shevardnadze did just what he had advised me he would do: declaring "a dictatorship is coming," he announced his resignation in a televised speech to the Soviet Congress of People's Deputies, the quasi-elected parliament, a fruit of Gorbachev's reform effort.

Important as the independence movements in the three Baltic republics were, it was not their activities, or the growing assertiveness by nationalists in other non-Russian republics, that persuaded us to advise Washington that the Soviet Union could collapse. The Soviet authorities still had the means to crush any opposition if there had been a decision at the top to do so. In 1989 the world had witnessed the slaughter of protesters in Tiananmen Square by the Chinese Communist leaders. The Soviet government still had the same capability if its leader had ordered repression. Although by 1990 we in the embassy were convinced that Gorbachev would make every effort to avoid violence—any widespread application would reverse his entire policy of *perestroika*—we could not be sure that he would not be suddenly removed from power, as one of his predecessors, Nikita Khrushchev, had been in 1964.

What convinced us to alert Washington to the possibility that the hitherto unthinkable might happen was the development of separatist opinion in the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic, the largest and most populous of the fifteen union republics. By the summer of 1990, we found more and more Russian leaders speaking of the non-Russian republics as a burden and of a future in which the Soviet Union would resemble the European Union, not a unitary state. In effect, many key Russian leaders viewed the Soviet Union as a *Communist* empire,

not a Russian empire. Without strong Russian political support for preservation of the Soviet Union, it was difficult to see how Gorbachev could continue his reforms and keep the country together.

FSO Raymond Smith, Embassy Moscow's political counselor, drafted the July, 1990, warning message, which carried the subject line: "Looking into the Abyss: The Possible Collapse of the Soviet Union and What We Should Be Doing About It."¹ We were never told directly what, if any, impact it had on thinking in Washington, but I noted that the CIA circulated it in an intelligence briefing to American ambassadors in key countries with a notation something like "You will be interested in Ambassador Matlock's view of the situation in the Soviet Union."

Actually, the last thing we wanted, then or later, was a formal CIA determination that a break-up of the Soviet Union was possible or likely. Such a determination would inevitably have leaked and could have precipitated a successful hard-line *coup* against Gorbachev. There would be a widespread assumption that we not only desired, but had engineered the Soviet collapse. In fact, while the U.S. government was steadfast in its support for the restoration of independence of the three Baltic countries, it was convinced that American interests, and those of the Soviet peoples themselves, would be better served by the sort of voluntary federation Gorbachev was trying to create than by the sudden independence of all union republics.

In the fall of 1990, Gorbachev made what seemed a sharp turn to the "right." (At the time, hard-line Communists were considered the "right wing," a reversal of the usual left-right paradigm.) The cabinet was re-shuffled to include ministers reputed to support repression and steps for economic reform stalled while the economy continued to deteriorate. There appeared to be preparations for a crack-down in the Baltic. Shevardnadze suddenly resigned.

The embassy was confronted with the question whether Gorbachev had altered his reformist agenda, and if not whether he could manage to keep power and resume his reforms. Would Gorbachev fend off efforts to remove him by acceding to demands to use force? Or, could his recent behavior be a feint to the right with a left hook to follow?

An attack on the television tower in Vilnius, Lithuania, in January 1991 left the question open. Gorbachev immediately denied that he had authorized it, but he did nothing to punish those who perpetrated the outrage. A few days later, when I met with him privately to deliver a message from President Bush, he asked me to explain to "my friend George" that he had not changed his objectives, but that the country was

on the brink of a civil war. As president, he had to do everything to avoid one, and that would require him to tack with the wind at times. And then he added that no matter what decisions President Bush might make—Bush had threatened to terminate some cooperative programs if violence continued in the Baltic area—he would faithfully carry out all his previous agreements.

It was already apparent to the embassy that the KGB was feeding Gorbachev distorted and sometimes totally fabricated reports about conditions in the USSR. In 1989 and 1990 he had been convinced that the independence movements in the Baltic countries represented small minorities, while it was obvious to us that they had overwhelming support. Then, in 1991, we could see that the KGB was fabricating “evidence” that Boris Yeltsin and the democratic leaders were planning to seize power “unconstitutionally.” Absurd as such claims were, Gorbachev seems to have taken them seriously. When specific false reports came to our attention and we informed Gorbachev that they were baseless, he would believe us rather than the KGB. Unfortunately, most of these reports did not come to our attention.

Events in the spring and summer of 1991 moved with kaleidoscopic rapidity and complexity. In April, there were attempts to remove Gorbachev as General Secretary of the Communist Party, but he managed to repulse them. The Cable News Network at one point reported that Gorbachev had resigned as CPSU General Secretary; Secretary of State Baker telephoned me directly for clarification and I was able, within minutes, to correct the false information because the embassy’s political section had sources within the closed meeting.

Negotiations between Gorbachev and republic leaders would make some apparent progress, then stall. The KGB Chairman, prime minister and minister of defense thought Gorbachev was conceding too much to the republics, but key republic leaders became more and more demanding. Underneath it all a *de facto* independence of all the union republics was developing rapidly, most importantly in the RSFSR. By summer, the RSFSR had an elected president, Boris Yeltsin, while the USSR had a president who had been selected by the legislature, not the people as a whole. To make matters worse, Gorbachev and Yeltsin were acting more like sworn enemies than political leaders who understood the need to cooperate for the good of the country.

When President Bush visited Moscow at the end of July, it appeared that Gorbachev had the agreement of at least eight of the fifteen Soviet union republics to adhere to a new union treaty, and a date for

signing was set for August 21, 1991. President Bush tried to support Gorbachev with a speech in Kiev August 1, in which he urged the non-Russian republics to accept Gorbachev's proposals, but whatever prospect that draft treaty might have had was shattered when a cabal of Gorbachev's most senior associates attempted to seize power while he was vacationing in the Crimea.

The identity of the conspirators should not have been a surprise to President Bush or Secretary of State Baker for I had sent them a message in June reporting that the mayor of Moscow, Gavriil Popov, asked us to inform Boris Yeltsin, then visiting Washington, that KGB Chairman Kryuchkov, Prime Minister Pavlov, Defense Minister Yazov, and parliament Chairman Lukyanov, were conspiring to take power from Gorbachev. I had been instructed to warn Gorbachev, which I tried to do without naming the individuals since we could not confirm the information, but Gorbachev failed to grasp the seriousness of his position.

The first three persons Mayor Popov named led the junta that tried to take power August 19, 1991. Lukyanov seems to have supported their efforts but to have tried to cover his tracks by not becoming a formal member of the junta.

The attempted coup failed in less than three days. The country was no longer the Soviet Union of old. Boris Yeltsin, elected president of Russia, was able to rally Muscovites to come to his protection and key military units refused to attack him. I left Moscow a week before this occurred, having told American journalists in Moscow, in reply to a direct question, that there could be an attempt to "reverse *perestroika*," but if so, I thought it would fail. To the best of my recollection, none of the several dozen journalists present reported my statement even though it was on the record.

When the coup occurred, DCM (later Ambassador) James Collins was in charge of Embassy Moscow. Under his guidance, American diplomats kept constant contact with Russian President Yeltsin, who was barricaded in the Russian parliament building not far from our embassy. This access provided unique insight into the Yeltsin government's reaction to the spectacular events taking place outside that building, events that were well and thoroughly reported by Western journalists.

My successor, Robert Strauss, arrived in Moscow just after the coup attempt failed. He inherited an experienced DCM and an Embassy staff that had successfully imbedded itself in Moscow's political and

intellectual elite and had developed contacts throughout the vast empire. This proved to be an irreplaceable asset for the first Bush administration as it struggled, successfully, to cope with the fallout from the disintegration of a previously hostile but by then friendly superpower.

So far in this account, the reader might infer that Embassy Moscow had little to do in the late Soviet period but report on the unprecedented and—for most specialists—unexpected developments in the USSR. Nothing could be further from the truth. Every section of the embassy was inundated with what seemed an exponential enlargement of its workload. Scores of U.S.-Soviet negotiations were underway. At one point we counted eighty six being conducted simultaneously, ranging from strategic arms reduction, to safety of nuclear power plants, to intellectual property rights, to sale of grain, to civil airline routes, to defining the maritime boundary in the Bering Sea, to human rights abuses.

Although many negotiations were conducted by special delegations, all had to be supported by the embassy. The work of the defense attaché's office evolved from mainly intelligence collection to genuine liaison with the Soviet military and support of round-the-clock monitoring of Soviet missile facilities. The consular section was faced with a sudden flood of applications for visas of all types. Waiting lists for immigrant or refugee status reached half a million by late 1990. The number of visas issued, all of which had to be explicitly approved by Washington, went within the space of months from a few thousand a year to more than a hundred thousand.

The embassy was involved in negotiating the final touches on the Soviet agreement to withdraw from Afghanistan and on settlements regarding Cambodia, Nicaragua, and Angola, on German unification, and on the diplomacy that preceded the first Gulf War. For the first time, the Soviet Union was persuaded to vote in the United Nations Security Council to authorize military action against an erstwhile ally.

With the opening of the Soviet media, Embassy public affairs took on a new dimension: television appearances of Russian-speaking embassy officers and visiting Americans became almost a daily occurrence. By 1990, Spaso House, the ambassador's residence, was the locus of some twelve to sixteen official functions *a week*. Some days included as many as four functions: working breakfasts, lunches, a press conference or briefing, then an evening reception or seated dinner.

In 1989 we initiated a series of "Spaso seminars" involving American specialists discussing, in Russian or with interpretation, Soviet

domestic issues, ranging from demographic problems to the operation of the black market, to unanswered questions about Stalin. Russian academic specialists and legislators were invited to a lecture following by dinner and a discussion. Dr. Condoleeza Rice, then a staffer at the National Security Council, gave a well-attended lecture in Russian on the Soviet military. When the Soviet legislature was considering a law on press freedoms, we had an American lawyer specializing on first amendment rights lecture a group including the members of the relevant Supreme Soviet committee. Subsequently, they used in their debates—without attribution, of course—the arguments they had heard at Spaso House to strengthen press freedoms in the Soviet law under consideration.

The number of official and important unofficial delegations also increased rapidly so that most embassy officers had to spend much of their time accompanying or briefing visitors. This had the advantage of bringing them into contact with Soviet officials and Soviet society, but left little time for reflective reporting. Nevertheless, the embassy's reporting officers managed not only to keep Washington promptly and accurately informed of events, but to place the reports in an interpretive context with key judgments that have stood the test of time. Sixty- and seventy-hour workweeks were common, not the exception.

This work would have stressed to the utmost diplomats working in a totally supportive environment, but the staff of Embassy Moscow had to operate under conditions that would have incapacitated persons less capable and dedicated. In the fall of 1986, Soviet authorities withdrew from the embassy all local employees, who had performed service functions not available on the local economy. It took the Department more than a year to replace the "locals" with a much smaller number of Americans, and in the meantime the embassy staff struggled without maintenance, repair, and cleaning personnel, as well as assistance in unclassified clerical functions. Once the Americans arrived, however, support functions much improved.

Simultaneously, the embassy was prevented from completing construction of a new chancery by charges that it had been made unusable by Soviet bugging. The charges were grossly exaggerated—in fact, the plans for finishing construction would have provided a secure facility—but the issue became a political football between the House and Senate in Washington, with the result that most embassy officers had to work in overcrowded conditions in a firetrap. In March, 1991, a fire broke out in the old chancery which made much of it uninhabitable for

months. Key embassy operations moved into what had been planned for the garage and consular section of the new chancery, areas that one assumed had not been priority targets for hostile listening devices.

After the March 1991 fire, the embassy did not even have space for a desk for every reporting officer, so we tried to make virtue out of necessity by keeping the majority of officers traveling outside Moscow at any given time, at least to the degree our limited travel funds permitted. Increased in-country travel enhanced our ability to follow the rapidly deteriorating conditions throughout the country.

Although the President and Secretary of State had, as early as the spring of 1989 approved establishing a network of small consulates in the Soviet republics, State Department management delayed implementing the decision.¹ Among the capitals of union republics, only Kiev, where plans for a consulate general had been under way for more than a decade, had American diplomats in place (still as an “advance party”) when the Soviet Union collapsed. At the end of December 1991 there was a sudden requirement, not for a few additional consulates, but for fourteen new embassies.

Although it seemed to us that Washington (especially Congress, but at times the State Department) was not as supportive as it might have been, all agencies and officials were operating under novel conditions, with many events unpredictable and the stakes about as high as stakes can get. In the end, American policy coped well with the problems and opportunities stemming from the Soviet collapse.

As for Embassy Moscow, Congen Leningrad, and our diplomats in Kiev, we can be proud of the job they did. They supported negotiations that ended the Cold War, established productive contacts in all the fifteen successor states, encouraged democratic changes in the Soviet Union, and kept the U.S. government well informed about developments and their implications. It seems clear that the American government was better informed about conditions in the Soviet Union than was President Gorbachev, the victim of tendentious and misleading intelligence about conditions in his own country.

When the Soviet Union collapsed, the United States was by far the most respected and liked foreign country among the people of the entire former Soviet Union. In Russia alone, approval ratings of the United States in opinion polls ran above eighty percent. Many events and factors contributed to this, but Embassy Moscow’s outreach was not the least of them.

One final note: Embassy Moscow and its associated posts covered political and economic developments in the Soviet Union during the period I have described without the assistance of a single clandestine source. By 1987, every “humint” source in the Soviet Union had been exposed to the KGB, not by lack of security at Embassy Moscow, as many in Washington once suspected, but—as learned years later—by moles in the CIA (Aldrich Ames) and the FBI (Robert Hanssen). The most serious security lapses by far occurred in Washington, not in Moscow. As for the embassy, we got our information the old-fashioned way, going out on the street, to people’s offices, and into society, traveling as much as possible out of the capital, talking and listening to people, using our eyes, ears, voices, and—not least—our wits.

IV

UKRAINE

THE WAR IN UKRAINE is still raging with the involvement of the United States and its NATO allies growing. Russia revises its nuclear doctrine at the prospect of NATO weapons being used for attacks far into the Russian interior.

This is a war that did not have to happen and would not have happened if the United States had led the countries of Europe to develop a security structure for all instead of expanding NATO right up to Russia's borders in Eastern Europe and placing military bases there, then promising that Ukraine and Georgia would eventually be members.

The first article below, written nearly a quarter century ago, describes Ukraine's growing pains after it became independent in 1991. Differences between its eastern and western provinces were considered a greater security threat than Russia.

The second was written shortly before the Russian invasion and describes how the violence in 2014 started in the West and overthrew the elected president.

The third, written nearly two years ago, sees no easy end to the war since all the parties have unrealistic goals.

Ukraine: Stalled on the Road to a Better Life

NYRB January 25, 2000

1.

On November 14, 1999, President Leonid Kuchma of Ukraine won re-election to a second term in a runoff vote against his Communist opponent, Petro Symonenko, a former apparatchik who was opposed to a market economy and in favor of a confederation with Russia and Belarus. Official results showed Kuchma, who promised to continue economic liberalization, including privatization, by reducing government controls, and to preserve Ukrainian independence, winning by a large margin: 56 percent to 38 percent (6 percent of the voters having opposed both candidates).

The campaign, however, was the dirtiest and most scandal-ridden in Ukraine's eight years of independence. In 1994 Kuchma, a sixty-one-year-old former director of a Soviet missile factory, had upset Ukraine's first president, Leonid Kravchuk, in a hard-fought but remarkably peaceful campaign. To many, the transfer of power at that time demonstrated that Ukraine had passed an important test of its democratic credentials.

The 1999 campaign suggests that the praise Ukraine's acceptance of democratic fair play received in 1994 was premature. After the first round of voting, on October 31, election observers from the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) commented that the campaign had been "highly questionable," even though the voting was conducted in an orderly fashion. The observers stopped short of charging that the election returns misrepresented "the will of the Ukrainian people," but Simon Osborne, the British head of the OSCE monitors, spoke of "serious violations," during the campaign, including forged ballots, confiscation of campaign materials, improper

influence by public officials, and biased coverage by newspapers and television, the latter largely under government control.

Conditions became even worse after the first round. President Kuchma fired the governors of the three provinces in which he had done poorly, presumably to make sure local officials there would produce more favorable results during the second vote. According to foreign monitors, some voters were given more than one ballot, and officials put pressure on voters in prisons, hospitals, and educational institutions to vote for Kuchma.

Kuchma's strategy seemed modeled on Boris Yeltsin's 1996 reelection campaign in Russia. Yeltsin started that campaign when his popularity was below 10 percent but ultimately defeated Gennady Zyuganov, his Communist rival, by a small margin. Kuchma's popularity never sank quite as low as Yeltsin's; in the months preceding the campaign it hovered around 20 percent. Copying the tactics Yeltsin had used in Russia, Kuchma first tried to divide the opposition—there were sixteen candidates in the first round—and then turned the runoff into a referendum on a return to the Communist past.

There were also differences between Russia in 1996 and Ukraine in 1999. The Communists and other “left-wing” parties in Russia—i.e., those supporting a return to “socialism” in 1996—did not receive a majority of Russian votes; this year, during the first round of votes, their Ukrainian counterparts did. If Kuchma's opponents had been able to unite behind a single candidate who was smart enough not to raise the specter of a return to Soviet conditions, they might well have won a fair election.

As it turned out, Ukrainian Communists and socialists failed to unite. Moreover, their endorsement of the Soviet past frightened many voters, and the election, though reasonably free, was anything but fair. The monitors from the OSCE refused to stigmatize the results as invalid since they could not assess the effect of the violations on the outcome. Nevertheless, it seemed clear that Kuchma's majority, even if genuine, was given him by the voters only with great reluctance. Ukraine is, in fact,

a deeply troubled country, and most Ukrainians are dissatisfied with the country's political leadership.

In 1995, when Ukraine was in its fourth year of independence, I traveled to Kiev with several other former members of the US National Security Council staff to discuss with Ukrainian officials and scholars the process of decision-making on questions of national security. We had prepared papers on how the NSC operates in Washington, describing its relationship to the various departments and agencies, its dealings with Congress and the press, and the way it manages the “paper flow” within the government so the president will have the information necessary to make thoughtful decisions.

When we had finished our presentation, the Ukrainian chairman observed that in the United States “national security” meant defense and foreign policy. “Here, however,” he continued, “our problem is different.” He then unfolded a large map with each province in Ukraine shaded from light to dark. The westernmost provinces—some bordering on Poland—were white, those in the center gray, and those in the east—bordering on Russia—and south a solid black. “These are shaded to indicate the degree of dissatisfaction with the Ukrainian government,” he explained. “As you can see, for us national security is not about foreign policy, or even about defense. Our problem is how to create a nation when most people in some regions don't feel themselves part of it.”

The differences in attitude that the chairman pointed out were rooted in Ukraine's history, the composition of its population of some 50 million people, its regional economic differences, and—underlying it all—its ambiguous, sometimes vacillating attitudes toward Russia and Russians. With borders defined only since World War II, Ukraine is the second-largest country in Europe, twice the size of Italy (though slightly smaller than Texas), with more people than Spain and almost as many as either France or Italy. Long a primarily agricultural region, it experienced rapid urbanization and industrial growth in the twentieth century, so that when it became independent in 1991 some 70 percent of its population lived in cities. By 1996, agriculture yielded only 13 percent of its gross national

product, although it employed 24 percent of its labor force to produce the grain, sugar beets, meat, and dairy products that not only feed its citizens but are exported in large quantities to Russia and other neighboring countries. Light industry—textiles, clothing manufacture, food processing—is well developed throughout the country.

Heavy industry, however, is disproportionately concentrated in the east, toward the Russian border, where, by the 1980s, the inefficient and poorly maintained coal mines in the Donets Basin and the smoke-belching steel mills close by—still operating blast and open-hearth furnaces designed in the 1920s—had become financial and environmental disasters for the Soviet regime. The region also had more modern plants, producing aircraft, ships, automobiles, and farm equipment; but many of them, like the missile factory Kuchma once ran, belonged to the Soviet military-industrial complex.

As industry developed in the eastern provinces of present-day Ukraine, ethnic Russians moved in to work in the mines and factories. Many Ukrainian farmers in the region were deported to Siberia when Stalin ordered the collectivization of agriculture in the 1930s, and subsequently, during Khrushchev's time, some left to settle on the steppes of northern Kazakhstan. Those who moved to the cities gradually came to speak Russian more often than Ukrainian, for proficiency in Russian was essential for professional advancement.

Western Ukraine, the provinces bordering on Poland, Slovakia, and Romania, has a distinct history and a character all its own. It was never a part of the Russian Empire, but was part of Lithuania and Poland in medieval and early modern times, of the Austro-Hungarian Empire after the partition of Poland in the eighteenth century, and of independent Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Romania between the two world wars. Lviv, the capital of Galicia, the best-known of the western Ukrainian provinces, whose name is sometimes applied to the whole region, became a center of Ukrainian cultural life under complacent Austrian rule in the nineteenth century, when Russian tsars banned publications in Ukrainian. Ukrainian nationalism in Galicia, however, was directed

primarily at Poles; it was only after Stalin brought the region into the Soviet Union after World War II and expelled most of its Polish population that Russia became, for Ukrainian nationalists in the west, the main enemy.

The Ukrainian south bears few resemblances either to the west or to the east. Odessa was the major port for both the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. Like other major commercial ports, it was cosmopolitan, with a population made up much more of Jews, Russians, Greeks, and others from the Black Sea and Mediterranean littoral than of Ukrainians. The Crimean peninsula, conquered by Russia in the eighteenth century, became by the twentieth primarily Russian, with a large naval base at Sevastopol and a string of holiday resorts stretching along the coast around Yalta—the Florida or Southern California for the Russian nobility, gentry, intelligentsia, and navy.

This regional diversity lay behind the differences in attitude that our host in Kiev noted. Ukrainian independence had naturally been more popular in western Ukraine than in the east and south. People in the west had never been part of Russia and they never wanted to be part of the Soviet Union. In the east the population was mixed Russian and Ukrainian and the economy more integrated with Russia; in the Crimea most residents considered themselves Russian rather than Ukrainian. Independent Ukraine had a state but was not yet fully a nation.

2.

That was four years ago, when independent Ukraine was only half as old as it is now. Have things changed, and if so, how?

If anything, they have gotten worse. A poll conducted in December 1998 by the Kiev International Institute of Sociology suggested that the Ukrainian government was even less popular then than it was in 1995. From 80 percent to over 90 percent felt that the government was doing a bad job in such central matters as protecting the needy, combating corruption, and ensuring civil liberties.

Another survey indicated that three out of five Ukrainians were strongly or somewhat in favor of Ukraine entering a confederation with Russia and Belarus. “Confederation” was not precisely defined, but most respondents in the east and south favored closer ties with Russia than existed at that time. In the west, “strong support” dropped to 14 percent.

This was doubtless a factor in western Ukraine’s heavy vote for President Kuchma in 1999. In 1994 its vote had gone to his opponent, Leonid Kravchuk, but Kuchma was sufficiently firm in dealing with Russia during his first term to satisfy the independence-minded western Ukrainians.

Ukrainian independence has not only produced dilemmas of statehood for that country, but also attracted an unprecedented degree of attention from scholars eager to study the transition from communism to something else. **But most of the hundreds of studies of contemporary Ukraine produced over the past few years either have dealt with only a fragment of the picture or have been distorted by doctrinaire preconceptions.**

By contrast, Anatol Lieven’s *Ukraine and Russia: A Fraternal Rivalry* is concise and clear. It is full of insight and its judgments are well balanced. By all odds it is the place to start if you are confused about what is going on in today’s Ukraine, or are inclined to blame its problems on Russia. Lieven, the author of an excellent book on the Baltic campaign for independence and the best single study of the 1994-1996 war in Chechnya, provides a clear introduction to the fundamental question of the relations between Ukraine and Ukrainians and Russia and Russians.

Lieven discusses the main features of Ukraine’s regional diversity, the ties that connect some regions with Russia more closely than others, and the features that have given rise to rivalry and animosity. He describes the importance of language, of history, and of the common experience of Soviet Communist society and its impact on the people of both countries. He is unquestionably right when he points out that the seventy years of communism (forty-odd years in western Ukraine) created more similar features in Russia and Ukraine than legitimate reasons for hostility. As for the disputed questions of pre-Soviet history, passionately

debated by Ukrainian and Russian nationalist historians (but ignored by most people in both countries), Lieven shows that both sides are wrong. Neither Russia nor Ukraine can properly be considered the exclusive heir of medieval Kievan Rus. Religion has normally been a unifying force, since both countries are predominately Orthodox. (In western Ukraine, however, the Eastern-rite Uniate Church, a product of the Counter-Reformation, predominates.)

Language has been an important issue in independent Ukraine. Ukrainian is closely related to Russian, much as, say, Spanish is to Portuguese, and Russians living in a Ukrainian milieu quickly pick it up, just as Ukrainians find it relatively easy to learn Russian. The current literary language is based on that used by Taras Shevchenko, considered Ukraine's national poet, who wrote in the mid-nineteenth century. It was further developed by writers in Austrian Galicia in the late 1800s and early 1900s. At that time, Ukrainian culture was predominately rural, and most literature had rural and "folk" themes. During the Soviet period, Ukrainian was a state language, along with Russian, in Ukraine, but it was rarely used for scientific and technical subjects, and most higher education was in Russian.

Consequently, the Ukrainian language is not as widely used in Ukraine as one might suppose. The last census, taken in 1989 when Ukraine was still part of the Soviet Union, is probably misleading. It indicated that 64 percent of the population spoke Ukrainian as their "native language," while 9 percent were Ukrainians who considered Russian their native tongue and 22 percent were Russian, both ethnically and linguistically.

"Native language," however, is not necessarily the language a person normally uses. When Ukrainian citizens are polled on the language they prefer, the picture changes. Recent studies have found that about 40 percent of the population are Ukrainians who prefer to speak Ukrainian, some 33 percent are ethnic Ukrainians who prefer Russian, and about 20 percent are ethnic Russians who prefer Russian. If these results are accurate, a majority of Ukrainian citizens prefer to speak Russian.

Nevertheless, even before independence, in 1989 Ukrainian was legally designated the sole state language in Ukraine, and Ukraine's first independent government put into effect a vigorous policy of Ukrainianization. The law required local authorities to establish schools with instruction in Ukrainian in the same proportion as that of ethnic Ukrainians in the local population. In some eastern provinces, and in the Crimea, this stipulation was simply ignored; in others, such as the eastern province of Dnipropetrovsk, it was carried out literally, whether or not it reflected the wishes of the people. The superintendent of public education there told Lieven, "It is not my job as a state official to study local national proportions or local opinions. I have been told to make 72 percent of schools Ukrainian-language, and that's what I'll do." With President Kuchma, however, pressures to "Ukrainianize" all public discourse have abated. Still, educational opportunities in Ukrainian are steadily expanding, and state support for publication and broadcasting in the Ukrainian language continues.

Ukraine's continued independence, however, does not depend upon universal use of the Ukrainian language any more than the future of the Irish Republic depends on the revival of Gaelic or that of Belgium on the willingness of Walloons to speak Flemish. National unity and civic loyalty are not invariably based on language or ethnicity but on a sense of shared values and a shared fate, usually coupled with attachment to a given territory. A shared language, as Yugoslavs found in Croatia, Bosnia, and Serbia, does not prevent separatism. Since 1995, Ukrainian governments have chosen to build the nation on the basis of a common citizenship and attachment to the territory, not on ethnic factors. That policy has reinforced the Ukrainian state, notwithstanding public dissatisfaction with successive governments.

Lying behind the language issue, of course, is Ukraine's perception of its proper relation to Russia. Some of its politicians, mostly from western Ukraine, who led the initial drive for independence from the Soviet Union have insisted that Ukraine, to assert its identity, must accentuate its differences with Russia. At one time, most politicians of this persuasion were united in the nationalist political movement called

Rukh, but it has since split into several factions and was not a significant force in the most recent election. The assumption held by nationalists from western Ukraine that the current Russian Federation is essentially the same as the Soviet Union and the Russian Empire that preceded it is no longer a strong current of thinking in Ukraine, but it lives on in foreign scholarship and journalism. According to what might be termed the radical nationalist view, Ukraine's problems were created by malign Russian policy and are being perpetuated by imperialistic forces that persist in Moscow to this day.

As Lieven demonstrates, this view is mistaken in many particulars. The Russian Federation today is not the same as the Soviet Union—its leaders in fact joined Ukraine's in abolishing the Soviet Union. Russia and Ukraine shared essentially the same fate under communism. Economic ties in a world of global markets will not be a matter of political choice but economic consequence. Equally important, the ethnic-nationalist view misrepresents the character of today's Ukraine. Most citizens of Ukraine do not view Russians as enemies; nor do most Russian speakers in Ukraine, aside from those in Sevastopol, feel any political allegiance to Moscow. (For that matter, Russians inside the Russian Federation feel no great loyalty to their current government.)

3.

As troublesome as these questions of ethnicity and nationalism have been for the fledgling Ukrainian state, the more important question for most of the population has been the economy. Among the Soviet republics, Ukraine had one of the strongest and most balanced economies; in many parts of the country, people lived better than they did in most parts of Russia.

The imports Ukraine needs most are oil, which it traditionally obtained from Russia and Azerbaijan, and natural gas, obtained previously from Russia and Turkmenistan. It is not, however, without its own energy resources since it is a major coal producer and also produces electricity for export, much of it from nuclear power plants. While the 1986 nuclear accident at Chernobyl had a major impact on Ukraine, and indeed

hastened its estrangement from the Soviet government in Moscow, the Ukrainian government still operates a reactor at the outmoded plant.

It is true that some of Ukraine's factories are outdated while few, if any, are efficient by international standards. But the root of its economic malaise lies in the structure of the command economy developed in the Soviet Union since the 1930s. One feature of that economy was a policy to ensure that no republic could be self-sufficient. Every major industry was planned so that enterprises in one republic would be dependent on suppliers and customers in others. Thus, Ukrainian industry, transport, and power grids were integrated with those in Russia and other former Soviet republics. A plant in Kiev produced a camera of that name (copied from the Swedish Hasselblad), but the lenses for it were manufactured in Leningrad. The optical glass, however, might well have come from Lviv or Lithuania.

Ukraine's first president, Leonid Kravchuk, misled by economic reports he interpreted to mean that Ukraine was capable of economic self-sufficiency, promised that prosperity would inevitably follow independence and that Ukraine would rapidly outpace Russia. On the strength of that assumption, the people of Ukraine, including its ethnic Russians, voted overwhelmingly for independence in December 1991. That independence, however, was from the Soviet Union, not from Russia. Ukrainian citizens in the Crimea and the border regions with Russia were never asked whether they would prefer to be part of an independent Russia or part of an independent Ukraine.

Prosperity, it turned out, was not just around the corner. Instead of outpacing Russia, Ukraine, with even more inefficient leadership and administration, quickly fell behind. Inflation was more severe; government services deteriorated more rapidly; crime and corruption were even worse than in Russia. A poll in December 1998 indicated that 60 percent of Ukrainians now felt that "it is a great misfortune that the Soviet Union no longer exists." This is largely nostalgia and does not represent an active desire to re-create the Soviet Union. But it is a measure of the degree to which the successive governments of

independent Ukraine have failed to meet the expectation that independence would bring a better life.

For the political developments that led to Ukrainian independence and followed it, one should turn to Bohdan Nahaylo's *The Ukrainian Resurgence*. It is, for the most part, a straightforward account of the political forces that brought independence to Ukraine, and of what Ukrainians have done with it since. Nahaylo's point of view is that of a moderate Ukrainian nationalist who understands western Ukraine better than the eastern part, and Ukraine better than Russia. His book thus provides a fitting complement to Lieven's, which will doubtless seem Russocentric to many Ukrainians.

Nahaylo's book is weak, however, in dealing with Ukraine's history. He gives only the barest outline of events before Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985, but he spends the better part of two paragraphs describing Nazi atrocities against Ukrainians during World War II. The Holocaust is dealt with in a single sentence: "As elsewhere, Ukraine's Jews were targeted for extermination and about 850,000 of them were killed." The implication is that both Ukrainians and Jews were killed by the Nazis, but he doesn't say just who killed whom. The Ukrainian role in the Holocaust obviously deserves more attention than this. Were the Nazis solely responsible, with Ukrainians only innocent bystanders, subjected to much the same treatment themselves? Or—as some would have it—were Ukrainians among Hitler's most willing and enthusiastic executioners?

For light on this central question, we must thank Martin Dean for the original research in his *Collaboration in the Holocaust: Crimes of the Local Police in Belorussia and Ukraine, 1941-44*. On this, as on most other topics regarding Ukraine, the complexity of the facts defies simplistic generalization. So far as responsibility for the Holocaust in Ukraine, Dean is unequivocal. He writes that "it is fair to say that without the presence of the Nazis with their radical ideology, a systematic programme of genocide would have been unthinkable." But he then adds: "Nevertheless, it was relatively easy for the Nazis to recruit people

locally [for the local police, or *Schutzmannschaft*] who were prepared to carry out their terrible policies for a variety of different motives.”

Anti-Semitism was obviously one of the motives of local Ukrainian police who rounded up their Jewish neighbors to be sent to extermination camps, but it was mixed with several others, including, Dean writes, “personal greed, alcoholism, anti-Communism, careerism, and peer pressure.” The brutality with which these collaborators treated their Jewish neighbors was also applied to members of other groups that the Nazis identified as “hostile elements”: Gypsies, prisoners of war, partisan families, and even Russians.

The Ukrainian government, at least rhetorically, has done more to confront this aspect of Ukrainian history than have Ukrainian nationalist historians. When President Kuchma visited New York shortly after his election in 1994, he met with a group of Holocaust survivors from Ukraine and pledged to prosecute remaining war criminals. Some of the survivors present testified that they had been saved by Ukrainian families, who risked their own lives to help.

Certainly, there were fewer Ukrainians who tried to save their Jewish neighbors than there were those who were frightened, indifferent, or downright sympathetic to the Nazis. Still, that such brave people existed at all should caution against the sort of reckless ethnic stereotyping that would class all Ukrainians as pathological anti-Semites. But the fact is that anti-Semitic attitudes have been widespread in Ukraine, as they have been in Russia and in most countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Official statistics indicate that some half-million Jews still live in Ukraine, and though emigration—high since the 1890s—continues, it is now largely for economic reasons rather than fears of anti-Semitism. Nevertheless, Ukrainian historians will have to do more to examine the damage anti-Semitism has done to Ukraine if their work is to command the respect of objective historians.

The studies collected in *State and Institution Building in Ukraine*, edited by Taras Kuzio and others, and the monograph by Paul J. D’Anieri, *Economic Interdependence in Ukrainian-Russian Relations*,

contain much information on two of the most crucial aspects of post-independence Ukraine, its institutions and its economy.

The essays in the Kuzio volume least affected by an eagerness to theorize, such as Sherman Garnett's "Like Oil and Water: Ukraine's External Westernization and Internal Stagnation," are far more useful than the half-baked speculations that abound in some of the others. D'Anieri, who documents the unsurprising conclusion that Ukraine's economy is heavily dependent on Russia's, accepts the mistaken view that Ukraine must choose between "satellite status" to Russia and a bristling, implicitly hostile "independence." But viewing external economic ties as an impediment to political independence ignores the current economic reality. Globalization has rendered full economic independence impossible for any nation.

Both Russia and Ukraine need to enter the world economy and allow economic ties between them to continue, weaken, or strengthen for economic rather than political reasons. Both Russia and Ukraine must overcome their common Soviet heritage of a command economy and allow companies to compete freely if they are to prosper. Neither can do so in the full sense if it pursues the goal of maximizing separation rather than that of increasing the economic benefits of foreign trade and investment.

4.

Even as they stumbled badly in efforts to reform the economy, Ukrainian governments have handled their relations with Russia with skill, as is demonstrated by the 1997 Russo-Ukrainian treaty that settled the most important issues in a manner satisfactory to Ukraine, including the status of Sevastopol and the division of the Black Sea Fleet. Ukraine has managed to achieve its fundamental foreign policy aims by retaining its independence, developing friendly relations with major powers and neighboring countries, and avoiding any hint of Russian control. That success would be difficult to discern from much of the foreign comment,

which postulates that “Russian imperialism” is the principal threat to Ukraine’s independence and statehood.

From several recent collections of essays on Ukraine’s foreign relations, we can conclude that much of the advice foreign “experts” have given Ukraine on “national security” would have done more to undermine the Ukrainian state than to strengthen it. A policy of unrelenting hostility to Russia (often the central theme of foreign policy advice) would only have divided the citizens of Ukraine and weakened its potential for independent statehood. Ukraine is fortunate that its governments, at least since 1994, have largely ignored such advice.

Those who see Russia as a predatory imperialist power usually rest their case on three claims: that Russians are not psychologically reconciled to Ukrainian independence; that Russia has used its economic power to “resubjugate” Ukraine (for example, by cutting off natural gas deliveries); and that Russia is making imperialist claims against the city of Sevastopol. As Anatol Lieven explains in detail, none of these allegations proves that Russia has imperialist intentions.

Most Russians do not understand why Ukrainians would want a separate state, and some fail to appreciate that Ukraine has a distinctive culture. Nevertheless, hardly anyone in Russia would attempt to force Ukraine into a union. So long as the people of Ukraine do not want to be in Russia, Russians understand that they are better off without them, however regrettable they may consider the Ukrainian attitude to be.

As for “economic pressure,” there is no evidence of a systematic campaign by Russia to use economic power to control Ukraine. Russia, of course, seeks trade on favorable terms, as does Ukraine. Problems in one country quickly become problems in the other; the Russian financial collapse in August 1998 led to a devaluation of the Ukrainian hryvnya and a surge of inflation. But most disputes have to do with the timely payment of bills, or poor quality products, or other commercial matters. The Russian natural gas monopoly and the electric power network have suspended service to Ukraine when unpaid arrears mounted, but any public utility in the West would have done the same, and probably

sooner. The only difference was that, for a time, Russia provided Ukraine with energy at below world market prices. There is something perverse about accusing Russia of imperialism for refusing to continue to subsidize Ukrainian energy consumption or the personal enrichment of those Ukrainians who control the gas distribution network. One of Ukraine's "energy barons" told a Russian interviewer last year, "All rich people in Ukraine made their money on Russian gas."

The city of Sevastopol, built around a naval base on the Black Sea coast of the Crimean peninsula, has been the subject of bitter debates between politicians in Ukraine and Russia since the Soviet Union collapsed. Historically, the Crimea was never considered part of Ukraine, but in 1954, Nikita Khrushchev, eager to strengthen his political base in Ukraine, ordered the peninsula transferred from the RSFSR (the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic) to the Ukrainian SSR. At the time, the transfer was a purely symbolic gesture. Both Ukraine and Russia were under the firm control of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union; "sovereignty" of the various union republics was a constitutional fiction. But while the Crimea was placed under Ukrainian jurisdiction, administrative control of Sevastopol was retained by the USSR government in Moscow, not transferred to Kiev. This is the basis for assertions in the Russian Duma that Sevastopol should not be considered a part of the 1954 territorial transfer.

Feelings run even higher in Sevastopol than in Moscow. It is a city of naval people, active and retired, who have intense feelings of Russian patriotism and pride in what they feel is a glorious tradition. Some of Russia's most important battles were fought in its defense, notably during the Crimean War when the Tsar's soldiers repelled the infamous charge of the Light Brigade, and during World War II when the city held out for months against a Nazi siege.

Nevertheless, the issue of Sevastopol's status has been exaggerated and distorted by both sides. Some Ukrainians consider the Russian Duma's resolutions that Sevastopol is properly Russian a grave threat to Ukrainian statehood; but the Russian government has never lodged a

claim to Sevastopol and has repeatedly reaffirmed its recognition of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity. Moscow has also refrained from encouraging Crimean separatism and from trying to use ethnic Russians in eastern Ukraine as a disloyal fifth column. In view of its own vulnerability to separatism in Chechnya and elsewhere, no rational Russian government is likely to try seriously to change the borders inherited from Soviet times.

For the Russian public as a whole, attachment to Sevastopol is not so much an irredentist claim as a question of simple justice. Why, they ask, should they consider the Soviet absorption of the Baltic states illegal and void, yet accept Khrushchev's opportunistic transfer of Crimean territory as legal and binding? Why, they ask, does the principle of self-determination apply only to people who are not Russian? How can territory that had never been considered part of Ukraine suddenly become "sacred and inalienable," just because of a pseudolegal act by an unrepresentative government?

There are answers to some of these objections—most residents of the Crimea (though not of Sevastopol) voted in favor of Ukrainian independence in December 1991—but the argument is one neither side will win since it is based on emotional, not legal, grounds. But it is also a dispute that neither side is going to fight over. It does not threaten Ukraine's independence.

Both Russia and Ukraine have now ratified a treaty that allows Russia to lease the naval base for twenty years while Ukraine retains sovereignty and will use part of the port for its portion of the Black Sea Fleet. In July, Ukraine joined Russia for the first time since the breakup of the Soviet Union in celebrating Black Sea Fleet Day. Both Ukrainian President Kuchma and Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov, a vocal advocate of "Russian Sevastopol," attended the ceremony. Luzhkov was quoted as saying that he believed that Sevastopol would eventually be returned to Russia, while Kuchma stated flatly, "Sevastopol is and remains Ukrainian." The dispute will thus continue, but with little if any effect on actual events.

5.

To my knowledge, no recently published book provides a comprehensive explanation of what has gone wrong with Ukraine's government and economy. But Anders Åslund of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington offered a convincing analysis at a conference in June.

He pointed out that the Ukrainian government initially concentrated on "nation-building"—which meant creating a bureaucracy as large as possible, provided it was "national"—rather than moving decisively to transform the Soviet-style planned economy into a market system. As a result, a self-perpetuating monster developed. Instead of encouraging production and efficient distribution, the system that emerged offered a few insiders—mainly managers and bureaucrats from the pre-independence Communist nomenklatura—fabulous profits based on government subsidies, official regulations, legal monopolies, and high-interest government debt available only to a favored few.

State intervention in the economy has been both ubiquitous and arbitrary. New businesses may require as many as twenty approvals to obtain a license, and none is easily available without paying bribes. Foreign trade has remained under state control, providing lucrative outside income for the bureaucrats who issue licenses and easy inside income for the businessmen permitted to export commodities acquired at subsidized prices.

The Ukrainian economic barons, furthermore, have themselves become part of the government, occupying seats in parliament or senior positions in ministries. The result is a system with a strong vested interest in blocking any liberalization that would favor productive economic activity over theft, corruption, and insider deals. As Åslund put it, "Ukraine is ruled by a trinity of the government, businessmen and parliament, all living off and for corruption and rent seeking."

Immediately after his reelection, President Kuchma gave few signs that he was prepared to break with the policies that led to what he

subsequently called Ukraine's economic and political stagnation. He nominated for another term the prime minister, Valery Pustovoytenko, a crony from Kuchma's earlier career in Dnipropetrovsk who, during his two and a half years in office, had done little to foster reform.

But then, in early December, Kuchma made a rapid tour of Moscow, Brussels, Paris, and Washington, and met with both President Clinton and Vice President Gore. While in the foreign capitals he made public pledges to embark on a "strict program" of reforms and to launch what he called a "true war against corruption."

When Kuchma returned to Kiev, his parliament refused to confirm Pustovoytenko as prime minister, and Kuchma promptly nominated Viktor Yushchenko, the chairman of the Ukrainian State Bank, to succeed Pustovoytenko. Yushchenko has been credited with astute management of the Ukrainian currency, and, of all the senior Ukrainian leaders, he has been considered the most capable executive and strongest supporter of market reforms. His nomination received an overwhelmingly favorable vote in the Ukrainian parliament.

Furthermore, before the end of the year, President Kuchma announced several other major steps to break with the past. These included a decree abolishing collective farms, one reducing ministries and other central executive bodies from eighty-nine to thirty-five, and one requiring the privatization of some 2,200 enterprises this year—more than four times the number privatized in 1999. Independently, the Ukrainian Constitutional Court ruled that capital punishment violated the Ukrainian constitution and ordered an immediate end to executions, thus meeting one of the demands made by the Council of Europe.

The moves to simplify government and privatize state enterprises were doubtless prompted by the International Monetary Fund, which has made a \$370 million loan conditional on a sharp reduction of government controls on the economy. Whether the announced changes prove to be abortive, as many declarations of intent have in the past, remains to be seen.

Following the Christmas and New Year's holidays, President Kuchma initiated moves designed to tame the recalcitrant Ukrainian parliament. On January 15, he issued a decree calling for a referendum April 16 on confidence in the current parliament, and to amend the constitution to reduce the parliament's size by a third and to grant the president authority to dissolve it under certain conditions.

The speaker, Oleksandr Tkachenko, denounced the referendum, as he had the earlier decree to abolish collective farms, and resisted an attempt by pro-Kuchma representatives to remove him as speaker. As a result, 241 of the 450 deputies left the parliament building and convened elsewhere, plunging Ukraine into a constitutional crisis. Tkachenko was deprived of a quorum, but refused to recognize the authority of the majority, arguing that only the speaker could legally convoke a parliamentary session.

This crisis was still unresolved at press time, but it seemed that President Kuchma, with the powers of the executive branch and the support of a majority of parliamentary deputies, held the upper hand and could prevail without resorting to the violent measures Yeltsin used against the Russian Supreme Soviet in 1993. But even if Kuchma defeats the pro-Communist "leftists" in parliament, reform will not come easily or automatically. Government policies since independence have not produced a middle class of entrepreneurs and managers who know how to work in a market environment and who would be natural supporters of economic liberalization. Therefore, even if President Kuchma seriously wants to encourage a market economy, he may not have the constituency to bring it about. Unless the Ukrainian authorities are able to reverse the steady deterioration of living standards and to deal more effectively with corruption and criminal activity, Ukraine's problems will continue to fester and could eventually threaten its independent statehood.

If this should happen, it is not likely to be a result of Russian machinations. Ukraine's national security does not depend on its foreign

or defense policies but on the ability of its leaders to create a nation with institutions worthy of its citizens' respect.

Ukraine: Tragedy of a Nation Divided

December 13, 2021

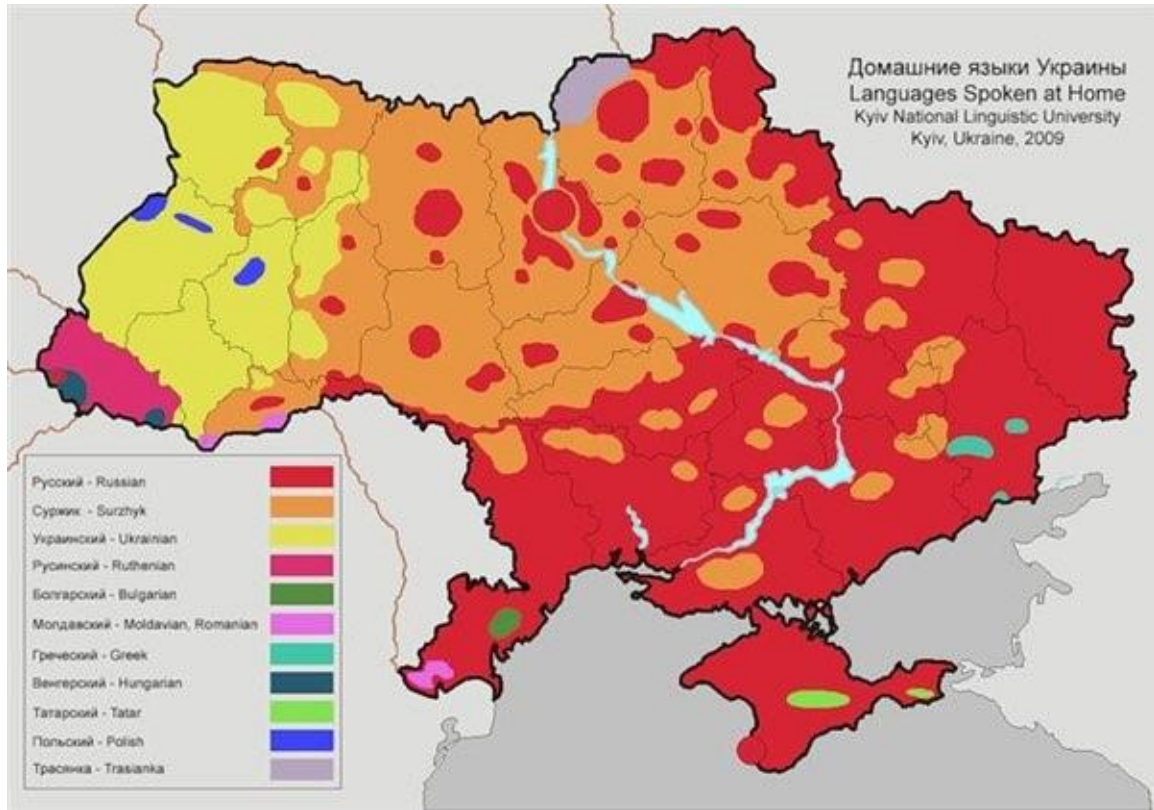
Interference by the United States and its NATO allies in Ukraine's civil struggle has exacerbated the crisis within Ukraine, undermined the possibility of bringing the two easternmost provinces back under Kyiv's control, and raised the specter of possible conflict between nuclear-armed powers. Furthermore, in denying that Russia has a "right" to oppose extension of a hostile military alliance to its national borders, the United States ignores its own history of declaring and enforcing for two centuries a sphere of influence in the Western hemisphere.

The fact is, Ukraine is a state but not yet a nation. In the thirty years of its independence, it has not yet found a leader who can unite its citizens in a shared concept of Ukrainian identity. Yes, Russia has interfered, but it is not Russian interference that created Ukrainian disunity but rather the haphazard way the country was assembled from parts that were not always mutually compatible.

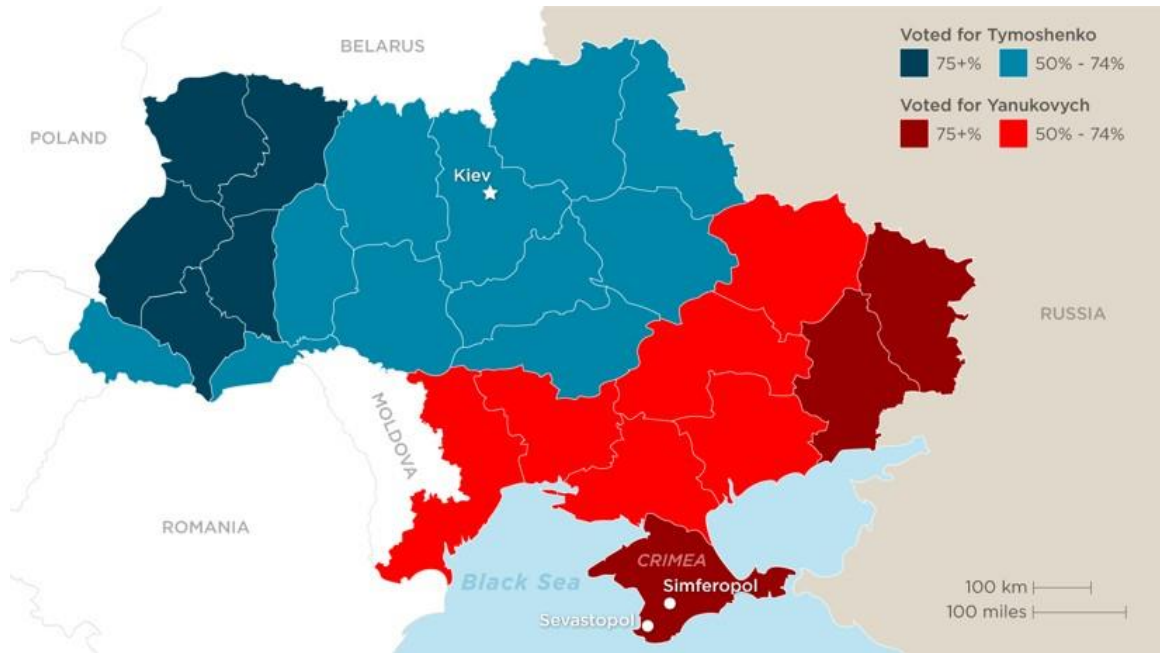
The territory of the Ukrainian state claimed by the government in Kyiv was assembled, not by Ukrainians themselves but by outsiders, and took its present form following the end of World War II. To think of it as a traditional or primordial whole is absurd. This applies a fortiori to the two most recent additions to Ukraine—that of some eastern portions of interwar Poland and Czechoslovakia, annexed by Stalin at the end of the war, and the largely Russian-speaking Crimea, which was transferred from the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic (RSFSR) well after the war, when Nikita Khrushchev controlled the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Since all constituent parts of the USSR were ruled from Moscow, it seemed at the time a paper transfer of no practical significance. (Even then, the city of Sevastopol, the headquarters of the Black Sea Fleet, was subordinated directly to Moscow, not Kyiv.) Up to then, the Crimea had been considered an integral part of Russia since Catherine II "the Great" conquered it in the 18th century.



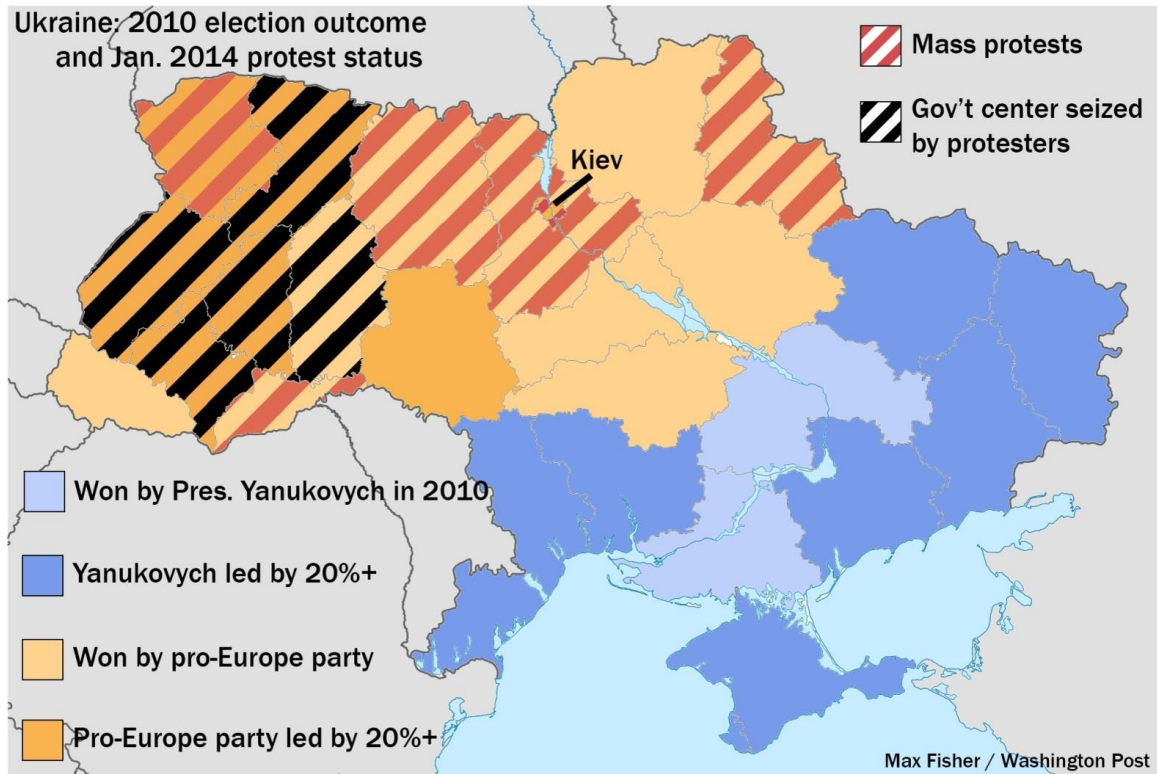
The lumping together of people with strikingly different historical experience and comfortable in different (though closely related) languages, underlies the current divisions. If one takes Galicia and adjoining provinces in the west on the one hand and the Donbas and Crimea in the east and south on the other as exemplars of the extremes, the areas in between are mixed, proportions gradually shifting from one tradition to the other. There is no clear dividing line, and Kyiv/Kiev would be claimed by both.



From its inception as an internationally recognized independent state, Ukraine has been deeply divided along linguistic and cultural lines. Nevertheless, it has maintained a unitary central government rather than a federal one that would permit a degree of local autonomy. The constitution gave the elected president the power to appoint the chief executives in the provinces (*oblasti*) rather than having them subject to election in each province—as is the case, for example—in the United States. Note in the following map of election results in 2010, how closely the political divide in Ukraine parallels the linguistic divide.



The Ukrainian revolution of 2014 started with protests over President Yanukovich's decision not to sign an agreement with the European Union. The United States and the EU openly supported the demonstrators and spoke of detaching Ukraine from what one might call the Russian (past Soviet) security sphere and attaching it to the West through EU and NATO membership. Never mind that Ukraine was unable at that time to meet the normal requirements for either EU or NATO membership. Violence started, first in the Ukrainian nationalist West, with irregular militias taking over the local offices headed by Yanukovich appointees.



On February 20, 2014, demonstrations in Kyiv, which up to then had been largely peaceful, turned violent even though a compromise agreement had been reached to hold early elections. Many demonstrators were shot by sniper fire and President Yanukovich fled the country. Demonstration leaders claimed that the government's security force, the Berkut, was responsible for initiating the shooting, but subsequent trials failed to substantiate this. In fact, most of the sniper fire came from buildings controlled by the demonstrators.²⁰

The United States and most Western countries immediately recognized the successor government, but Russia and many Russian-speaking Ukrainians considered Yanukovich's ouster the result of an illegal coup d'état. A rebellion occurred in the Eastern provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk and Russia supported the rebels with military equipment and irregular forces.

In Crimea, local leaders declared independence and requested annexation by Russia. A referendum was conducted under the watchful

²⁰ See Ivan Katchanovski, "The Maidan Massacre in Ukraine: Revelations from Trials and Investigations," NYU Jordan Center News, <https://jordanrussiacenter.org/news/the-maidan-massacre-in-ukraine-revelations-from-trials-and-investigation/#.Ybesob3MKUk>

eye of “little green men” infiltrated from Russia. There was no resistance by Ukrainian military or police forces, and Russia officially annexed the peninsula when the referendum resulted in an overwhelming pro-Russian vote. There was no fighting and no casualties in Crimea.

In February 2015 an agreement was reached (“Minsk agreement”) to bring the Donbas back under Kiev’s control by allowing a degree of autonomy, including election of local officials, and amnesty for the secessionists. Unfortunately, the Ukrainian legislature (Verkhovna Rada) has refused to amend the constitution to provide for a federal system or to proclaim an amnesty for the secessionists.

Separate sets of U.S. and EU economic sanctions against Russia have been declared in respect to the Crimea and the Donbas, but most have seemed to stimulate hostile emotions rather than encourage solution of the problems. What needs to be understood is that Russia perceives these issues as matters of vital national security.

Russia is extremely sensitive about foreign military activity adjacent to its borders, as any other country would be and the United States always has been. It has signaled repeatedly that it will stop at nothing to prevent NATO membership for Ukraine. Nevertheless, eventual Ukrainian membership in NATO has been an avowed objective U.S. and NATO policy since the Bush-Cheney administration. This makes absolutely no sense. It is also dangerous to confront a nuclear-armed power with military threats on its border.

When I hear comments now such as, “Russia has no right to claim a ‘sphere of influence,’” I am puzzled. It is not a question of legal “rights,” but of probable consequences. It is as if someone announces, “We never passed a law of gravity so we can ignore it.” No one is saying that Ukraine does not have a “right” to apply for NATO membership. Of course it does. The question is whether the members of the alliance would serve their own interest if they agreed. In fact they would assume a very dangerous liability.

I point this out as a veteran of the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. At that time I was assigned to the American embassy in Moscow and it fell my lot to translate some of Khrushchev’s messages to President John Kennedy. Why is it relevant? Just this: in terms of international law, the Soviet Union had a “right” to place nuclear weapons on Cuba when the Cuban government requested them, the more so since the United States had deployed nuclear missiles of comparable range that could strike the USSR from Turkey. But it was an exceedingly dangerous move since the

United States had total military dominance of the Caribbean and under no circumstances would tolerate the deployment of nuclear missiles in its backyard. Fortunately for both countries and the rest of the world, Kennedy and Khrushchev were able to defuse the situation. **Only later did we learn how close we came to a nuclear exchange.**

As for the future, the only thing that will convince Moscow to withdraw its military support from the separatist regimes in the Donbas will be Kyiv's willingness to implement the Minsk agreement. As for the Crimea, it is likely to be a de facto part of Russia for the foreseeable future, whether or not the West recognizes that as "legal." For decades, the U.S. and most of its Western allies refused to recognize the incorporation of the three Baltic countries in the Soviet Union. This eventually was an important factor in their liberation. **However, the Crimea is quite different in one key respect: most of its people, being Russian, prefer to be in Russia. In fact, one can argue that it is in the political interest of Ukrainian nationalists to have Crimea in Russia.** Without the votes from Crimea, Viktor Yanukovich would never have been elected president.

One persistent U.S. demand is that Ukraine's territorial integrity be restored. Indeed, the U.S. is party to the Budapest Memorandum in which Russia guaranteed Ukraine's territorial integrity in return for Ukraine's transfer of Soviet nuclear weapons to Russia for destruction in accord with U.S.-Soviet arms control agreements. What the U.S. demand ignores is that, under traditional international law, agreements remain valid *rebus sic stantibus* (things remaining the same). **When the Budapest memorandum was signed in 1994 there was no plan to expand NATO to the east and Gorbachev had been assured in 1990 that the alliance would not expand. When in fact it did expand right up to Russia's borders, Russia was confronted with a radically different strategic situation than existed when the Budapest agreement was signed.**

Furthermore, **Russians would argue that the U.S. is interested in territorial integrity only when its interests are served.** American governments have a record of ignoring it when convenient, **as when it and its NATO allies violated Serbian territorial integrity by creating and then recognizing an independent Kosovo. Also, the United States violated the principle when it supported the separation of South Sudan from Sudan, Eritrea from Ethiopia, and East Timor from Indonesia.**

To the charge that **Russia is guilty of unprovoked aggression in Ukraine, Russia would point out that the U.S. invaded Panama to arrest Noriega, invaded Grenada to prevent American citizens from being**

taken hostage (even though they had not been taken hostage), invaded and occupied Iraq on spurious grounds, maintains military forces in Syria without the permission of the Syrian government, targets people in other countries with drones. In other words, for the U.S. government to preach about respect for sovereignty and preservation of territorial integrity to a Russian president can seem a claim to special rights not allowed others.

Ultimately, all these legal arguments and appeals to abstract concepts are beside the point. So far as Ukraine is concerned, it can never be a united, prosperous country unless it has reasonably close and civil relations with Russia. That means, inter alia, giving its Russian-speaking citizens equal rights to their language and culture. That is a fact determined by geography and history. Ukraine's friends in Europe and North America should help Ukrainians understand that rather than pursuing what could easily turn out to be a suicidal course.

Headed for Disaster

October 10, 2022

*The world is out of joint.
Oh, cursed fate:
Our leaders lack the wit to set it straight!*
(Apologies to Hamlet)

Four recent events have put the war in Ukraine on a distinctly more dangerous course.

- The Russian annexation of four additional Ukrainian provinces blocks compromise solutions that were feasible earlier.
- The disabling attacks on both North Stream pipelines make it impossible in the near term to restore Russia as the principal energy supplier to Germany even if the war in Ukraine should be miraculously ended.
- The Ukrainian attack on the bridge to Crimea gave Russia a pretext to escalate attacks on Ukrainian civilian targets.
- The Russian retaliatory attacks on civilian targets are certain to do more damage to Ukraine than Ukraine can do to Russia.

The leaders of both Russia and Ukraine have set impossible goals. In fact, **not a single participant in the war in Ukraine has espoused a goal that can restore peace in the area.** Russia's recent incorporation of four Ukrainian provinces into the Russian Federation will not be accepted by Russia's neighbors or by most European powers. Given the passions aroused by the war and its atrocities, Ukraine, even with NATO support, cannot create a stable, functioning state within all the borders it inherited in 1991. If Ukraine tries to regain these territories by force and is encouraged and empowered by the U.S. and NATO to do so, Russia (and not just President Putin) will very likely demolish Ukraine in retaliation. Reality trumps illusion whenever the two conflict.

And if war should stop with the destruction of Ukraine—Kyiv and Lviv leveled as Grozny once was-- that would assume that escalation does not involve the use of nuclear weapons. If the Russian leader feels convinced that the U.S. and “Western” goal is to take him out, what is to prevent his taking out others as he goes?

Effect on the World

This is occurring while the world is still struggling with the covid-19 pandemic and remains vulnerable to mutations and new pathogens, while global warming is producing ever more destructive effects, while migrations caused by famine, flood, war and misgovernment are overwhelming the capacity of even the richest countries to absorb the afflicted. And to all of that one must add the threat of Armageddon, a nuclear holocaust—something no rational leader would risk, but rationality cannot be assumed in either domestic or international politics today.

But let us assume for a moment that, by some sequence of miracles, Ukraine regains all its territories and Russia admits defeat. Would this result in a world order capable of dealing with the truly existential threats facing mankind? **Is a world in which Russia is weakened, cut off from the countries of NATO and the European Union, better able to help meet the challenges of global warming and environmental degradation? Will it help the more fortunate countries deal with the inevitable flood of refugees? Will it help contain pandemics? Of course not: Threats that are global in nature require global cooperation if human civilization is to survive, let alone prosper.**

Europe's position will be severely tested during the upcoming winter as the result of drastically curtailed trade with Russia, particularly the supply of energy. Increasingly European publics are likely to blame the United States for policies that seem to intensify inflation and bring on economic recession.

A new iron curtain is now being imposed on Russia—this time by Western policy—even as the United States announces more measures to confront and “contain” an assertive China. This will result, inevitably, in more cooperation between Russia and China. Also, the increasing use of economic sanctions to achieve political purposes will encounter push-back.

As Europe is weakened and more countries suffer from U.S. sanctions, coalitions to resist U.S. dominance will flourish. Geopolitical competition will take precedence over action to deal with common problems, even as international conflict intensifies them.

What all the parties to the conflict in Ukraine seem to have forgotten is that the future of mankind will not be determined by where international borders are drawn—these have never been static in history and doubtless will continue to change from time to time. The future of mankind will be determined by whether nations learn to settle their differences peacefully.

What Went Wrong

It did not have to happen. When the Cold War ended (by negotiation, not by victory), and then the USSR fragmented into fifteen separate countries (because of pressures from the inside, not from without), Europe was suddenly whole and free, the goal of U.S. and NATO policy during the Cold War. If the future stability and prosperity of Europe was to be ensured, the principal task was to build a security system covering all the countries of Europe. A succession of American presidents, from Clinton to Biden, chose rather to enlarge NATO, to trash arms control treaties that ended of the Cold War, and to enlist former Soviet republics in a military alliance that excluded Russia. Benjamin Abelow summarized the portentous events in his insightful *How the West Brought War to Ukraine*.

The war might have been prevented—probably would have been prevented—if Ukraine had been willing to abide by the Minsk agreement, recognize the Donbas as an autonomous entity within Ukraine, avoid NATO military advisors and pledge not to enter NATO. Nevertheless, what was possible even as late as January, 2022, may not be possible now. The Russian annexation of additional territory makes that clear. But the longer the war continues the harder it is going to be to avoid the utter destruction of Ukraine.

Is There a Way to Stop the War?

There may not be, given the passions aroused by the fighting. Both Ukraine and Russia have lost enough blood that their people are likely to oppose any effort to give the other side any portion of what it wants. Their presidents hate each other and see any concession as a personal defeat. Both run a serious risk of being deposed.

The first step toward peace would be to stop the actual fighting. There must be a cease-fire in place and negotiations, during which the United States must make clear what it would take to relieve Russia of the sanctions that have been imposed.

Given the positions taken by the various parties in public, the war in Ukraine still seems to be in an escalation mode. Until this is reversed, the fighting stopped, and serious negotiations underway, the world is headed for an outcome where all are losers.

NOTE: It is now October 10, 2024, two years after I wrote the above. The situation has not improved, but actually has deteriorated with Ukrainian demands for weapons to strike deep into Russia and Russia threatening retaliation.