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Is the Cold War Over?

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.



FOUNDED IN 1914
BY ANDREW CARNEGIE

Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs
Merrill House, 170 East 64th Street, New York, NY 10021



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Ninth Morgenthau Memorial Lecture
on Ethics & Foreign Policy

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Introduction

The Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs presents the annual Morgenthau Memorial Lecture to honor the memory of Hans J. Morgenthau, who died in 1980, and who was a trustee of our Council for over 20 years.

Hans Morgenthau is, if not the father, the chief architect of political "realism" in international affairs. This was a reaction against Wilsonianism and the interwar period, which featured the failure of the League of Nations and, after World War II, the rise of U.N. "idealism." The politicians failed to deal with the realities of political power and were leading the world toward more trouble.

Hans Morgenthau developed a philosophy of international relations that made his classic book, *Politics Among Nations*, published in 1948, unique. Before then, international relations was largely diplomatic history and international law.

Morgenthau's philosophy included four main points: one, politics is rooted in human nature and therefore limited in wisdom; two, interest defined as power is the objective; three, politics has an autonomous sphere and judges economics and culture in terms of its own image; and four, the recognition of the moral significance of political action, that the use of political power has unintended results, that high-minded actions can produce evil results, and that statesmen do not, even under stress, do all that they might do because of moral restraint.

To those skeptical of the role of ethics in international affairs, one can make the following observation: Foreign policy not arising from the best of America's ethical traditions has no support at home and little respect abroad. Such a policy is empirically not successful. "Realism" recognizes limits. The richness of Hans Morgenthau's writing guarantees a future audience to ponder his principles and insights in international affairs.

The ninth Morgenthau Memorial Lecturer is the outstanding historian of our day. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., a two-time Pulitzer Prize

winner, is Albert Schweitzer Professor of the Humanities at The City University of New York. Like Morgenthau's, his works speak from generation to generation. Like Morgenthau, he concerns himself with the wide and enduring themes in politics and human nature. I mention particularly the book that won him his first Pulitzer Prize, *The Age of Jackson*, over 40 years ago. In a recent *New York Review of Books* article, he reconsiders this book in the light of his critics and his own intellectual journey in an article entitled "The Ages of Jackson." The argument in Jackson's time (I inadequately summarize) was over who controlled the U.S. government and for what purpose, Nicholas Biddle and the Second Bank of the U.S. or the working men and farmers, special interests or the common good. This battle continues in a remarkably similar form, for example, in the current S & L crisis and the Keating Five. The relevance of this work is attested by its reissuance this year by the Book-of-the-Month Club. But with or without the BOMC, its place in American historical literature is secure.

It is a great pleasure for me to introduce Professor Schlesinger, who has been of assistance in a number of our programs at Merrill House, as well as at a particularly memorable conference in South Korea in the summer of 1987. In his lecture he answers the question much on all our minds, "Is the Cold War Over?"

Robert J. Myers
President
Carnegie Council





Is the Cold War Over?*

by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.

I am greatly honored by the invitation to give this lecture. Hans Morgenthau was a cherished friend; and, far more than that, he was a great teacher who had decisive influence on the way Americans think about foreign affairs—who, indeed, helped bring us back to the realistic insights of the men who established this republic. They were hard-headed fellows, the founding fathers, creating a vulnerable new nation in a hostile world; and they thought naturally in terms of power and national interest. But during the century from the battles of Waterloo and New Orleans to the outbreak of the First World War, the United States receded from world politics. The long withdrawal nurtured an irrepressible American tendency to forget about power and interest and to conceive foreign policy along sentimental, idealistic, ethnocentric and, often, messianic lines.

Hans Morgenthau led the way after the Second World War in recovering the language of power and interest. The philosophical debate continued—it continues today—between those who see the United States as a nation lifted above all the rest, especially appointed by the Almighty to redeem suffering humanity, and those who see the United States as founded on high principles but nonetheless subject to the same temptations and infirmities as other nations. Morgenthau would have agreed with William James: “Angelic impulses and predatory lusts divide our heart exactly as they divide the hearts of other

* This lecture was originally delivered on November 29, 1989. Minor changes have been made to allow for subsequent developments.

countries.”* At any rate, his conception of world politics as a struggle for power based on national interest gave both scholars and policy-makers a keen analytical weapon with which to interpret and, within limits, to affect the turbulent rush of danger and opportunity around the planet.

Hans Morgenthau’s realism did not imply the expulsion of morality from foreign policy. He was intensely aware of the moral significance of political action, but he doubted that abstract moral absolutes could usefully determine the conduct of foreign affairs. Principles, he believed, had to be filtered through concrete circumstances, and prudence—the weighing of the consequences of alternative actions—seemed to him “the supreme virtue in politics.”† For this reason, though he abhorred communism, he steadfastly warned against the perils of the anti-communist crusade. I have no doubt that he would have regarded the dramatic developments of the last years, months, weeks, days, hours, as a vindication of the policy of prudence.

“A specter is haunting Europe,” Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels wrote in 1848, “—the specter of communism.” It has been a long haunt; and today, nearly a century and a half after the *Communist Manifesto*, the ghostly visitation is at last coming to an end. When I was invited some months ago to deliver this lecture, the title I proposed still required a question mark. Now, I believe, that question mark can be safely expunged.

Of course to say that the specter of communism has haunted the world, or even Europe, since 1848 is an exaggeration. Communism was a very pale specter indeed for 70 years, a shadow, until the Bolshevik Revolution gave it substance—and thereby the cold war began. Soviet Russia was the first state erected on the dogmas of Marxist communism. According to those dogmas, at least as reinterpreted by Lenin, any capitalist state was by definition an enemy of the Soviet Union, for capitalist governments were compelled by the nature of their being to do everything they could to extirpate communism.

From the start the Soviet Union thus lived in a state of theological hostility toward the Western democracies—a hostility returned in full

* Address before the New England Anti-Imperialist League, December 1903, William James, *Writings 1902–1910* (Library of America, 1987), pp. 1134–35.

† Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations* (3rd edition, New York, 1960), p. 10.

measure, it should be added, by the more fearful in the possessing classes in the West. But the Soviet Union was not only an ideological construct. It was also a national state, with national interests to be advanced and national security to be threatened. Then, 20 years after the Bolshevik Revolution, both Soviet Russia and the Western democracies found themselves faced by a danger more urgent than either seemed to pose to the other—the rise of fascism and its sinister embodiment in a resurgent Germany. Just 50 years ago Stalin sought to escape the Nazi threat by making a pact with Hitler. But this did not avail; and, by attacking the Soviet Union in June 1941, Hitler created the wartime coalition that in four more years defeated and destroyed the thousand-year *Reich*.

The success of wartime collaboration in pursuit of victory raised for a season the hope of postwar collaboration in pursuit of peace. The hope was understandable but illusory. Much argumentation has subsequently been expended on fixing the responsibility for the cold war. But the more one broods about the cold war, the more irrelevant the assessment of blame appears.

In retrospect, the cold war seems almost a geopolitical inevitability. The Second World War had left the international order in a condition of acute derangement. With the Axis states vanquished, the European Allies exhausted, the colonial empires in tumult and dissolution, great gaping holes appeared in the structure of world power. The war left only two nations with the military strength, the ideological conviction, and the political will to flow into these vacuums.

The two nations were founded, moreover, on opposite and deeply antagonistic principles. They were divided by profound disagreements over human rights, civil liberties, the direction of history, and the destiny of man. No one should have been much surprised by what ensued. The real surprise would have been if there had been no cold war.

The antagonism developed a cumulative momentum. It became an intricate, interlocking, reciprocal process, involving authentic differences in values, real and supposed clashes of interest, and a wide range of misunderstanding, misperception, and demagoguery. Each side adopted policies that it considered defensive but the other side saw as aggressive and threatening. Each camp thus persevered in corroborating the fears of the other. Together they marched in fatal lockstep to the brink of the abyss.

Ironically it was the bomb and the very threat of nuclear holocaust

that kept the superpowers from going over the brink. The cold war became a precarious armed truce, behind which each system could test its principles and work out its destiny. "We will bury you," an exuberant Khrushchev predicted, meaning not "we will kill you" but "our system will outlive yours." The Western policy of containment, George Kennan predicted, would lead to "either the break-up or the gradual mellowing of Soviet power."* Both of Kennan's predictions are now coming true at the same time, and he may be deemed to have won that particular debate.

And so we arrive at our present condition—a time that for a historian is indescribably exciting. Each morning's newspaper, each evening's telecast brings new astonishments. We become all too quickly inured to the fantastic rush of change and thereby lose a vivid sense of the incredible transformations taking place before our eyes. But let's consider how far we have gone. Carry yourself back nine years to the beginning of this decade. Imagine that this is the winter of 1980, a year after the Soviet Union had sent the Red Army into Afghanistan. And suppose that a clairvoyant appeared in our mist and uttered the following prophecy:

"Before this decade is over, the Soviet Union will pull its troops out of Afghanistan and officially pronounce that war a mistake. The Soviet leadership will also admit that its system of economic planning has failed and will begin to adopt the incentives and disciplines of the free market. Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*, Orwell's *1984*, even Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* will be translated into Russian and published in Moscow. Soviet historians will freely expose the crimes of Stalin and condemn his pact with Hitler. There will be debate on Soviet television and investigative reporting in the press. A new Congress of People's Deputies will challenge and reject recommendations from the top leadership. My friends, you will be able to turn on your television in America and watch political rallies in Russia in which speakers denounce the regime."

The clairvoyant continues: "In Eastern Europe the Brezhnev Doctrine of Soviet supremacy will be replaced by what a Soviet spokesman himself will call the Sinatra Doctrine—"I'll do it my way." A once illegal opposition group will be governing Poland. The Berlin Wall will

* [George F. Kennan], "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," *Foreign Affairs*, July 1947.

be down, Erich Honecker will be awaiting trial, and East Germany will be moving toward a liberated press and a multiparty system. Hungary will no longer call itself a people's democracy, its Communist Party will profess democratic socialism, and free elections will be on the way. Bulgarians will dethrone Todor Zhivkov after 35 years and promise free elections. Czechoslovakia will have thrown off old-line communist rule and started down the path to democracy. The Warsaw Pact countries will have formally condemned the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, and Dubček will be a national hero. And, believe me, my friends, all these changes will take place not just without Soviet opposition but with positive Soviet encouragement."

No one, including this speaker, would have given the time of day to such ravings. But events that I for one never thought would take place in my lifetime are now happening every hour. The suddenness and speed of the collapse of communism remind one of Oliver Wendell Holmes's famous poem about the equally total collapse of New England Calvinism:

Have you heard of the wonderful one-hoss shay
That was built in such a logical way . . .
First a shiver, and then a thrill.
Then something decidedly like a spill . . .
You see, of course, if you're not a dunce,
How it went to pieces all at once,—
All at once and nothing first,—
Just as bubbles do when they burst.
End of the wonderful one-hoss shay.
Logic is logic. That's all I say.

Communism, by the confession of the communist states themselves, is today finished, kaput, a burnt-out case. Democracy has won the political argument. The market has won the economic argument. Can anyone doubt that the cold war, as we have known it for the last 40 years, is over?

What brought about these inconceivable changes? The fundamental cause is the drastic and indisputable failure—economic, political, and moral—of communism as a system of government. Seventy years after the glorious Bolshevik Revolution, communism still could not feed or house its people, could not supply them with the most elemental consumer goods, could not hold the loyalty of its intellectuals and artists; it could not even provide soap for its miners. The Soviet Union

had become a shambles of stagnation, corruption, cynicism, and despair. The internal contradictions of communism proved far more destructive than those internal contradictions that Marx predicted would infallibly overthrow capitalism.

With our amiable inclination to attribute all benign changes in the world to ourselves, we like to claim credit for these unforeseen developments. No doubt President Carter's human rights campaign kindled new hope behind the Iron Curtain. No doubt President Reagan's rearmament effort intensified pressure on the decrepit Soviet economy. But, had President Carter never mentioned human rights, had President Reagan never thrown \$2 trillion at the Pentagon, Soviet communism would still be perishing from self-inflicted wounds.

The system was at dead end. The downward slide of the economy left the Soviet leadership the choice between slow decay and swift reform. In another unforeseen development, Mikhail Gorbachev materialized mysteriously out of the stagnant Soviet despotism, perceived the problem, unfurled the banners of *perestroika* and *glasnost*, and launched the drive for modernization. In so doing, he released and legitimized the energies that are (thus far) peacefully transforming Eastern Europe.

One is bound, especially after the tragedy of Tiananmen Square, to wonder whether the changes are irreversible. For the downward economic slide continues. The transition from a command to a market economy is difficult and painful. Living standards will fall before they begin to rise. In time the free market will increase production, but it is also capable of increasing inflation, corruption, inequality, and insecurity. One must not underestimate the appeal to weary and harassed people of economic security, even security on the levels of drabness that prevail in communist states. Choice can be threatening to people who have known nothing in their lives but command. The reformers may find themselves ahead of the masses.

This is why it is important to understand what the victory of the market economy means. It does not mean the victory of the Reaganite, Thatcherite, laissez-faire, dog-eat-dog, devil-take-the-hindmost creed. It was the callous laissez-faire economy of the nineteenth century that produced and made plausible Marx's dark predictions of class warfare and communist revolution. Capitalism has not refuted Marx by fidelity to laissez-faire and *sauve qui peut*. Capitalism has survived and prospered because it rejected laissez-faire—because democracy summoned government to mitigate the impact of unrestrained competi-

tion, to regulate finance and industry, to combine individual opportunity with social responsibility. Capitalism has triumphed because of the long campaign, conducted by liberals often against angry capitalist resistance, to reduce the suffering, and thereby the resentment and revolutionary bitterness, of those to whom accidents of birth or fortune deny an equal chance in life.

The market currently sought by countries groping their way out of communism is emphatically not the laissez-faire market beloved of American conservatism—the market that gave us sweatshops, child labor, unemployment, pollution, and the Great Depression; the market that produces the exploitation, corruption, and awful inequality that we find today, for example, in Latin America. The newly liberated countries aspire to the social market, the New Deal market—the market that, while retaining competition and the price mechanism, humanized capitalism, rescued it from its own contradictions, and disproved Marx's apocalyptic prophecies.

The transition to a social market will not, I have noted, be easy. Even more threatening to Gorbachev's bold undertaking will be the ethnic and nationalist emotions unleashed across the Soviet Union by his dash for change. Unless economic conditions soon improve, it is not inconceivable that dread of chaos may produce a rage for order, and that darkness may return to Soviet Russia, as it has already returned to China. One cannot be sure therefore that these exhilarating changes are irreversible. But, even should reaction displace reform for a season in the Kremlin, memories of better times will remain—as memories of Khrushchev's earlier and cruder experiments in reform made Gorbachev possible. Russian history has its cycles too.

I have no doubt that it is in the interest of the United States and of democracy in general that Gorbachev should succeed. Some among us disagree and fear Gorbachev's success. They see the Soviet Union as a state forever "bent on world conquest"—a state that *perestroika* will only make more efficient and dangerous than ever before.

This seems to me a hopelessly mechanical assessment, devoid of any comprehension of the dynamics of history. Gorbachev's reforms have already brought deep-running changes in their wake—changes that reverberate through Soviet society and remold the Soviet mind. If *perestroika* and *glasnost* work, the Soviet Union will no doubt be a stronger country. But it will also be a very different country—and a communist country in name only; maybe not even that. *Glasnost*, to

put it simply, means the end of Soviet totalitarianism. The West has far more to fear from Gorbachev's failure than from Gorbachev's success.

I was glad to hear President Bush say, "America wants President Gorbachev's reforms . . . to succeed."* The secretary of state has been saying this for some time. I hope they can convert their national security bureaucracy to this sensible view. Not all have agreed that this should be an objective of American policy. "We are hearing it said," the deputy secretary of state observed as late as September 1989, "that we need to take measures to ensure the success of Gorbachev's reforms. This, however, is not the task of American foreign policy, nor should it be that of our Western partners."[†]

Such attitudes are the dreary residue of the institutionalization of the cold war that has taken place in both superpowers over the last 40 years. Now I speak as one who wholeheartedly supported the containment policy. I am what used to be invidiously called a cold war liberal—and an unrepentant one at that. I saw nothing in common between liberalism and Stalinism either as to means or as to ends. The cold war, in my view, expressed an unavoidable clash between two profoundly antipathetic philosophies of government and life.

But the cold war is over. It is time to move on. Unfortunately ideas once crystallized in institutions become hard to change. Over these 40 years government agencies on both sides developed a bureaucratic stake in the cold war. The power, prestige, budgets of military establishments and intelligence services depended on the cold war. Cold war agencies routinely exaggerated the strength of the other side in order to get even larger budgets and more power for themselves. Government officials invested their careers and lives in the cold war. And today agencies and officials (not to mention commentators and pontificators) retain a heavy vested interest in the prolongation of the cold war. Consider the recent disclosure that our Pentagon warriors are solemnly debating—in November 1989!—whether they would now have two weeks' or a month's warning before a full-scale Soviet attack in Europe. One can only wonder what these guardians of our national safety are smoking.

Like stuck whistles, the unreconstructed cold warriors continue to

* *The New York Times*, November 23, 1989.

[†] Lawrence S. Eagleburger, "Foreign Policy in a Time of Transition," speech at Center for Strategic and International Studies, reprinted in *Newsday*, September 24, 1989.

proclaim, with that great alleged foreign policy savant Richard M. Nixon, that "under Gorbachev, the Soviet Union's foreign policy . . . has been more aggressive, not less. . . . Even if he has been sounding to some hopeful ears like a dove, his bristling talons still make him look like a hawk"; with Professor Pipes, that "the Russians are still coming" and that Moscow is spreading "its influence and power abroad more effectively than when it has pursued an overtly hard line"; and with our ineffable vice president, that the Russians "still have expansionary attitudes in Central America, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Cambodia and elsewhere; so the reforms have not taken place."^{**}

For such people the cold war is the story of their lives. They fear the uncharted seas of a world without the cold war. In the revealing words of the deputy secretary of state, "For all its risks and uncertainties, the cold war was characterized by a remarkably stable and predictable set of relations among the great powers." Remarkably stable? That is hardly the way one saw it at the time. My memory is rather one of scary crisis after scary crisis. Still the nostalgia for the good old days is real enough—and the cultural lag a major obstacle in the way of new policies for a new world.

Why do we take these people seriously any longer? Eric Alterman in a most useful piece on the *Times* Op Ed page recently reminded us of all the mispredictions made by self-appointed Soviet experts who misunderstood and underestimated Gorbachev from the start. One would think that these people, having been so badly wrong in the past, might have the grace to shut up in the future; but I don't suppose they will. In the meantime, the theory lingers of an unchanged, unchanging, unchangeable Soviet Russia, somehow immune to the permutations and vicissitudes of history. And, since the Soviet Union is by their definition incapable of change, there is no need for the United States to change its policy toward the Soviet Union.

To produce policies that rise to the historic occasion, President Bush will have to do as President Gorbachev has already done—get rid of his cold war hacks; those cliché-mongers still infesting the National

* Nixon quoted by Eric Alterman, "Wrong on the Wall, and Most Else," *The New York Times*, November 12, 1989; Nixon, "Should the U.S. Help Gorbachev?" *Time*, December 18, 1989; Richard Pipes, "The Russians Are Still Coming," *The New York Times*, October 9, 1989; Quayle quoted in *The Wall Street Journal*, November 6, 1989.

Security Council, the CIA, the Pentagon, and the State Department. Nostalgia for the cold war they knew and loved has made it harder for our government to give generous aid to the countries of Eastern Europe and to work out with the most reasonable regime in Soviet history arms control agreements that would institutionalize the cold war's end.

"The world is awaiting your signal," Lech Walesa told Congress at the end of November. "It is watching you. Do not let the world and us wait any longer."* We stand at a turning point in history, and we must not kick it away.

We have hardly seized the occasion; nor, for that matter, have the Western European democracies thus far shown much inclination to redress the deficit in democratic leadership, though this may be changing with the recent French proposal for an East European development bank. Perhaps we have all been too much in a state of shock after the tumultuous events of the autumn.

Yet time presses. Warsaw and Moscow face what is bound to be, despite the greenhouse effect, a very tough winter. The European Community and the United States buckle under agricultural surpluses—lakes of butter and all the rest. Why can we not organize emergency airlifts of food, fuel, clothing, and consumer goods to Polish and Russian cities to help Solidarity and Gorbachev get through the frigid months immediately ahead?

For the longer run, Poland and Hungary need a measure of relief on their external debts, and financial aid to Eastern Europe should be somewhat tied to basic reforms in economic structure. As for the Soviet Union, little would bring more relief, economic as well as psychological, than arms control agreements that would permit drastic reductions in military budgets and the release of scientists and engineers for civilian production.

In addition, immediate presidential waiver and eventual congressional repeal of the mischievous Jackson-Vanik amendment would permit the Soviet Union to acquire most-favored-nation status, prepare the way for a Soviet-American trade agreement, and strengthen Russian hopes for the success of *perestroika*. The Soviet Union is not seeking large-scale credits, nor would it accept the conditions that might well accompany such credits in Eastern Europe. But it does

need technical assistance in management and marketing, in the teaching of entrepreneurial skills and financial and statistical techniques, in the development of a flexible price system, in the arts of running a free economy. Such assistance would be most acceptable, and probably most effective, if tendered through international agencies, such as the World Bank.

I hope that someone somewhere is trying to figure out a strategy with the same creative genius that went into UNRRA, Bretton Woods, and the Marshall Plan in the 1940s. In the end, however, the Western role in the Soviet Union will be marginal. Success or failure rests on Soviet shoulders. In the meantime, the cold war passes into history.

The end of the cold war does not mean, however, plain sailing for the rest of our lives. When history turns a corner, new perplexities emerge; they always do. No greater piece of nonsense was perpetrated in this decade of nonsense than the "end of history" thesis that enjoyed a fleeting vogue in the dog days of last August. In an age when nationalism is the most potent of political emotions, when religious fanaticism is rising around the world, and when anguishing problems confront even the most civilized societies, one can be sure that history has a couple of more weeks to run. As Winston Churchill once grandly observed, defending the British dole during the Great Depression against conservatives who (then as now) claimed that government assistance would sap the virility and self-reliance of the race, "There will be quite enough grind-stone in life to keep us keen."*

One such grindstone will be the new shape of Europe. For the crumbling of the Berlin Wall greatly increases the imminence of a united Germany and inevitably revives fears of the German domination of Europe. Now one must not commit the historical fallacy of attributing to the German people an inherent and irrevocable drive to domination. One nation after another has aspired for a season to bestride the narrow world—Spain in the sixteenth century, France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Britain in the nineteenth century—and then in time settled down into innocuous desuetude. We may hope that Germany in the twentieth century is at last becoming housebroken too.

Certainly 40 years of working democracy in West Germany create a presumption in the German favor. West German leaders like Helmut

* *Time*, November 27, 1989.

* Winston S. Churchill, "The Dole," *Saturday Evening Post*, March 29, 1930.

Schmidt, Willy Brandt, Richard von Weizsacker, and even in his paternalistic way Konrad Adenauer have rightly earned the trust and admiration of the Western democracies. As for East Germany, its 40 years under communist despotism ought to have left behind a hunger for democratic ways.

But can we be absolutely sure about the German future? There are two salient differences between present-day Germany and those aggressive imperial powers of the European past. Spain, France, and Britain all in due course accumulated external political and military commitments that became too heavy for their domestic economies to sustain. They all suffered from what Professor Paul Kennedy has called "imperial overstretch." In each case, the erosion of the economic base was a key factor in cutting hegemonic aspirations down to size.

But German economic vitality has never been greater than it is today. Germany is already the world's fourth largest economy, the world's largest exporter, and the world's largest holder of foreign currency reserves. Unification will produce a nation of 80 million—the most populous European country west of Russia—with a gross national product of more than \$1 trillion and without those external commitments that produce imperial overstretch.

In the meantime, the withdrawal of the Soviet Union from Eastern Europe will create economic, and political, vacuums that Germany is ideally positioned to fill. Indeed, West Germany has been busy for some years in reviving historic trade patterns with East Germany, with Eastern Europe, and with Russia itself. A unified Germany will be the dominating economic power in Europe, and political influence will not lag far behind.

The second salient difference between the earlier imperial powers and Germany is in cultural traditions and self-image. In the earlier cases, imperial pretensions had antidotes. Spain had the satire of Cervantes, France the rationalism of Descartes, Britain the skeptical empiricism of Locke and Hume: all self-critical and even self-limiting attitudes toward power and empire. But Germany has always had an ominously mystical, portentous, bureaucratic, and humorless sense of itself—a tradition well calculated to shuck off the lessons taught the earlier nations by history, poorly calculated to encourage restraint. One would feel better about the future if Germans had ever acquired the habit of laughing at themselves. (Berliners are the great exception.)

German nationalism is still ardently alive; indeed has become more

assertive and extensive in recent years. German historians are trying to dodge German responsibility for Nazism by blaming it all on Stalin. New German generations, feeling no personal guilt about Nazism, may well nurse a desire for vindication. One can sympathize with the European peoples who suffered so grievously from German aggression half a century ago if they flinch when they see the heavy German hand once again poised over Europe.

It is true that in the missile age Germany is too vulnerable geographically to become a military threat. Still, if unification should also unite the existing military forces, Germany would have by far the largest army in Europe west of Russia. With its technological skills and base, it has the capacity to acquire nuclear weapons. Overwhelming military power would be bound to reinforce both the will and the ability to dominate Europe by diplomatic, political, and economic means.

Who can be absolutely sure? By the turn of the century a united Germany, the most powerful and dynamic state in Europe, may be demanding *Lebensraum*—a revision of its eastern borders, a new *Anschluss* with Austria, a new outreach to German-speaking minorities in neighboring countries.

The odds are doubtless against any of this happening. Still it is conceivable that the combination of mystical national traditions with a thrusting and expansive economy may overpower the democratic habits laboriously built up within Germany (only) in the last 40 years. Sensible Western policy must take this possibility into account.

Some think that the dismal prospect can be averted through a four-power peace treaty that would impose restrictions on a unified Germany. But it may well be naive to suppose that a powerful and dynamic German state would long respect restrictions imposed from outside, whether designed to guarantee existing frontiers or to limit rearmament or to forbid the acquisition of nuclear weapons or to assure neutralization. Attempts by other states to enforce such restrictions would only exacerbate German hypernationalism, irredentism, and revanchisme.

The best solution, as everyone is saying, would be to strengthen the European context. A united Europe would obviously be the best way to contain a united Germany. One must hope that the European Community will press its 1992 goal of greater unification and that Great Britain, despite Mrs. Thatcher, will throw its still considerable weight behind this effort.

But how would the Soviet Union take the incorporation of a united Germany into the Community? Moscow would certainly object to the incorporation of a united Germany into NATO. And it would be a serious mistake to compel a West German government to choose between the Community or NATO and reunification. Popular demand for one Germany might force Bonn to make the wrong choice.

Perhaps the Community may be enlarged by progressive stages to include Eastern Europe, even one day the Soviet Union. Perhaps we should look forward, as Professor John Mueller interestingly argues in *Foreign Policy*,* to a new concert of Europe through the merger of those still useful structures of management, NATO and the Warsaw Pact. But no one at this point can prescribe the stages by which Europeans, West and East, will evolve trans-European institutions.

The spirit of Jean Monnet is often invoked these days, and rightly so. But where is the new Jean Monnet? Should the present generation of democratic leaders not be able to figure out a way of synchronizing German reunification and European integration, the alternative means of preserving the balance of power in Europe can only be a revival of the wartime alliance—the United States, the Soviet Union, and Britain.

What a posterous historical irony it is that, 45 years after the Second World War, the two defeated powers should be where they are today: Germany poised to dominate Europe, Japan poised to dominate the Pacific. The international monetary system, where the pound held sway in the nineteenth century and the dollar in the mid-twentieth century, is now dominated by the yen and the deutsche mark.

The Japanese are no more irrevocably aggressive than the Germans. But, like the Germans, they have a dynamic economic base; and, where Germany concentrates its economic expansion on the European continent, Japan exports its capital surplus and extends its influence around the planet.

Japan, moreover, is even more mystical, portentous, and humorless in its hypernationalist traditions than Germany. Japan is also considerably less repentant than Germany about its aggressions and atrocities of half a century ago and very likely more driven by the desire for vindication and even perhaps for revenge. Japanese school textbooks portray the invasion of China in terms so affectionate as to provoke

* John Mueller, "A New Concert of Europe," *Foreign Policy*, Winter 1989–90.

official protests from Beijing. Honest historians like Professor Saburo Ienaga, who try, as he writes in the preface to the English edition of his notable book, "to show the Japanese people the naked realities of the Pacific War,"* are subject to official persecution.

Like Germany, Japan is geographically too vulnerable in the missile age to become again a global military threat. Still one cannot underestimate the military potential of a country that already, alas, with American encouragement, is diluting its constitutional restraints on rearmament and developing technologies that have powerful military as well as civilian application. A militarily strong Japan will gain new impetus in pursuit of its old objective, at last largely attained, of the Greater East Asia Coprosperity Sphere.

Nor can one rely on Japanese democracy as a force for restraint. Though individual Japanese writers, professors, and politicians are authentic democrats, the Japanese experience with democracy since the war has been a good deal less convincing than the German. Instead of serious multiparty competition, as in Germany, Japan has had the single-party rule of the scandal-ridden Liberal Democrats. No Japanese political leader has attained the world stature of Willy Brandt or Helmut Schmidt.

One detects both *Schadenfreude* and arrogance in the lectures the Japanese are now addressing, officially as well as unofficially, to the United States—however well merited these lectures may be. If the Japanese retain their historic disdain for lesser breeds, it must be admitted that the people who made American economic, fiscal, and business policy in the Reagan years have done a lot to earn their contempt.

We are now confronting Japanese inroads on the American economy. Japanese direct investment has been growing at more than 30 percent a year, at which rate it has already surpassed the Netherlands and will soon overtake Great Britain. If you add in portfolio investment, Japan is very likely the top foreign investor already.[†] In order to finance our own deficits, we are holding a national fire sale for the omnipotent yen. Mitsubishi has even dared buy a controlling interest in that sacred American temple Rockefeller Center, and any day now

* Saburo Ienaga, *The Pacific War: World War II and the Japanese, 1931–1945* (New York, 1978), p. xi.

[†] Kenneth J. Dillon, "Japanese Investment in the United States," Foreign Service Institute, U.S. Department of State, October 1989.

one expects to hear that the Japanese have bought Pearl Harbor (joak, as Artemus Ward would say).

Total foreign claims on American assets have more than tripled during this careless decade. Of course, foreigners buying up the United States today are only doing what Americans have been doing around the world—and claiming the divine right to do—ever since John Hay promulgated the Open Door policy. We are hardly in a position to object to the Open Door at home.

Some of us, looking only at the economics of the situation, remain foolishly complacent about the transformation of the United States in the eight Reagan years from the world's largest creditor nation to the world's largest debtor. After all, they say, what else will the Japanese, the British, the Dutch do with their surplus capital? Investment in the United States, they say, is a vote of confidence in our economy. Foreign money, they say, generates jobs, enlarges the tax base, finances the deficit, gives our creditors such a stake in the American economy that they cannot afford to let it collapse. Anyway Japan's capital surplus will decline as Japan becomes a consumer society. So why worry?

The sell-America crowd fails to grasp, I fear, the political and strategic consequences of debtor status. Consider the implications for our national security of the imminent sale to the Japanese of silicon chips for semiconductors. As Shintaro Ishihara boasts in *The Japan That Can Say No*, the Americans are reaching the point where, "if Japan stopped selling them the chips, there would be nothing more they could do. If, for example, Japan sold chips to the Soviet Union and stopped selling them to the U.S., that would upset the entire military balance."^{*}

Consider too the implications for our national security if our creditors should register disapproval of government policies by dumping treasury securities and other holdings on the market. As Senator Moynihan puts it, "It is an iron law of history that power passes from debtor to creditor." Never before in American history has the United States been so much at the mercy of decisions taken by foreigners.

^{*} Representative Sander M. Levin inserted the entire text of Akio Morita and Shintaro Ishihara, *The Japan That Can Say No* in the *Congressional Record*, November 14, 1989, pp. E3783-E3798 (daily edition).

As a creditor nation in the nineteenth century, Britain ruled the waves; as a debtor nation in the twentieth century, it began to sink beneath them. Recall Suez in 1956. The United States had the economic whiphand then and was able to force Britain to call off her ill-advised war. Now we ourselves are approaching Britain's condition of economic vulnerability, and Japan may soon have the whiphand.

"It would be very difficult," Professor Robert Gilpin has already written, "for the United States to fight another war on the same scale as the Korean or Vietnamese conflicts without Japanese permission and financial support of the dollar."^{*} Felix Rohatyn hardly exaggerated when he observed recently that, two centuries after the Declaration of Independence, "the United States has lost its position as an independent power."[†]

As we enter the world beyond the cold war, we must begin by recovering our independence. Dean Acheson once said, "Great Britain has lost an empire but has not yet found a role." After years in which anti-communism was the focus of American policy, we have lost not an empire but an enemy—and now must search for a role. The answer is certainly not to install new enemies. Germany and Japan may present real problems, but in this interdependent planet they are not enemies; and Germany-bashing or Japan-bashing is a formula for escaping our difficulties, not for solving them.

Our problem is not Japan or Germany. Our problem is America. Our role is self-evident: it is to set our own house in order. The failure of Russian communism does not guarantee the success of American capitalism. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* had a splendid cartoon the other day: Uncle Sam perched upon a ladder watching the communist world through field-glasses and exclaiming "Imagine! Communism just self-destructing like that!"—while behind him are homeless people, dilapidated schools, soup lines, drug sales, and hold-ups.

The republic is in a state of bad disrepair. The national needs cry out: investment in research and development and in other means of increasing our productivity; investment in education for a high-technology age; investment in the rehabilitation of our collapsing bridges and dams and roadways and waterways; investment in the

^{*} Robert Gilpin, "American Policy in the Post-Reagan Era," *Daedalus*, Summer 1987, p. 49.

[†] Felix Rohatyn, "Restoring American Independence," *New York Review of Books*, February 18, 1988.

protection of this once green planet against toxic wastes, acid rain, ozone depletion, global warming, and other environmental scourges; investment in the struggle for racial justice, in the rescue of our cities, and in the redemption of the underclass; investment in the war against crime and the war against drugs—not to mention investment in the democratization of Eastern Europe, in the termination of the cold war, and in the development of the Third World.

We need not despair about the future of the republic. There has been much recent talk about the decline of America. Professor Paul Kennedy has warned that the United States, like other world powers before it, may well have succumbed to imperial overstretch. Now imperial overstretch is a real problem. But it is a remediable problem. It need not be an inexorable cause of national decay. After all, Japan and Germany have succeeded in recovering all too well not only from imperial overstretch but from devastating military defeat.

We can surely do as well. The United States still has the political and economic resilience, ideological, scientific, and technological dynamism, the diverse and resourceful population, the robust national ideals that, joined to creative statesmanship, can make it a world leader for generations to come. But we cannot arrest our national decay unless we mobilize national resources in support of critical national objectives. "The unfortunate legacy of Ronald Reagan," as Felix Rohatyn put it the other day, "is firstly his brilliant success at convincing the people of this country that they're overtaxed with a top rate of 28 percent, which is ludicrous, and secondly the notion that government is the enemy. You can't function in an advanced industrial society with these two notions."*

The present administration's rash read-my-lips, no-new-taxes pledge threatens to condemn us to something like impotence in meeting urgent needs, both foreign and domestic. We can't help Eastern Europe very much; we can't repair our infrastructure; we can't protect our environment; we can't help our cities or conduct an effective war against drugs—because we refuse to mobilize the resources available in what is still the richest country in the world.

Worse: legislators are convinced that to advocate tax increases is to commit political suicide; so we can't even have a national debate on the question. Yet, without more revenues, it is hard to see how we can

begin the task of national renovation, regain American competitiveness in world markets, and restore American independence. After all, as Justice Holmes said, "Taxes are what we pay for civilized society."*

If I have any plea to make today, it is that those of us outside politics do everything we can to create an atmosphere in which the discussion of higher taxes can again become not only analytically necessary but politically possible.

Americans are the most lightly taxed people among the industrialized nations. A modest increase of ten points or so in the marginal tax rates would greatly increase revenues and still leave the income tax far below what it was before the disastrous tax law of 1981. Americans pay less for gasoline than any other people in the world. A modest increase in the gasoline tax would not only raise a sizable amount in new revenues but would also promote the cause of energy conservation. These actions, combined with the drastic cutbacks in the military budget made possible by the end of the cold war, would permit a reduction in interest rates, encourage new domestic investment, and release funds for the great tasks of national renovation. If we can achieve our own home-grown *perestroika*, we can face world problems with new confidence in the strength of our economy and in the power of our ideals.

Let us not underrate those ideals. There is a certain felicity that the collapse of communism, the victory of free society, and the new challenge to democracy should come in the year that marks the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution. That revolution had boldly proclaimed the rights of man as universal aspirations for all humanity. But in the course of the twentieth century, people, even in the democracies, began to wonder whether human rights might not be a local, possibly ephemeral, ideal confined to a few lucky Caucasian societies bordering the North Atlantic. Was not the very concept of individual human rights a Western prejudice, ethnocentric and culture-bound? Was not the effort to impose human rights and democracy on an indifferent world an arrogant exercise in cultural imperialism? Did democracy after all express universal human needs?

The year 1789 had posed the question of the universality of the rights of man—and 1989, it would seem, is finally providing an answer. Look at Eastern Europe. Look at Russia. Look at China. The masses in

* Interview in New York *Newsday*, June 28, 1989.

* *Compania de Tabacos v. Collector*, 275 U.S. 87, 100 (1904).

Russia and China, once presumed to have been indoctrinated in communism beyond recall and in any case lacking historical experience with democracy, are showing a brave and unexpected appetite for politics based on participation and consent, a brave and unexpected passion for the rights of man.

Nineteen eighty-nine authorizes us, I believe, to rewrite the first sentence of the *Communist Manifesto*. The specter that is haunting Europe—haunting the great planet—is not communism but democracy, not the dictatorship of a totalitarian party but the rights of humanity. The challenge now rests with democracy to prove its capacity to construct a world that will be at once fair, compassionate, and free—which means that the challenge rests with us, with you and me; the buck stops here.

“America,” Woodrow Wilson wrote exactly a century ago, “is now sauntering through her resources and through the mazes of her politics with easy nonchalance; but presently there will come a time when she will be surprised to find herself grown old,—a country crowded, strained, perplexed,—when she will be . . . obliged to pull herself together, adopt a new regimen of life, husband her resources, concentrate her strength, steady her methods, sober her views, restrict her vagaries, trust her best, not her average, members. That will be the time of change.”*

The time of change foreseen by Woodrow Wilson is now upon us.

* Woodrow Wilson, “Bryce’s *American Commonwealth*: A Review,” *Political Science Quarterly*, March 1889.

Discussion

QUESTION: In light of recent events, specifically the talk about German reunification, what do you foresee for the future of the American presence in Europe? Do you favor the immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops in Europe and around the world, in places such as South Korea and the Philippines?

PROFESSOR SCHLESINGER: I doubt very much whether President Gorbachev will propose to President Bush in Malta that NATO and the Warsaw Pact be dissolved. That will come eventually. But in a time of rapid change, institutions like NATO and the Warsaw Pact may play a useful role in the management of the transition in Europe. In the long run the number of American troops in Europe will be drastically reduced. And in the Far East also, I think the expense of maintaining American troops will be increasingly assumed by countries like Germany and Japan who are doing much better economically than the United States. Given the uncertainty of events I wouldn’t favor immediate withdrawal of American troops.

QUESTION: What do you foresee for China? Do you expect to see them go the same path that Russia has gone; that a Gorbachev will rise up and offer reform? And what kind of prospects for success do you see for such a reformer?

PROFESSOR SCHLESINGER: One can’t help feeling that the present regression in China will not be permanent. There was enough new thinking released in the period before Tiananmen Square to make the crackdown incomplete and imperfect, if reports from China can be believed. The hopes released in that earlier period are evidently still alive.

It is partly a generational matter in China. You’ve got an older generation that has, to a very intense degree, the old Confucian fear of disorder and chaos. The younger generation is more attuned with the

technological age, more aware of the needs and problems of economic modernization.

What Gorbachev understands better than Deng is that economic modernization in the high-technology age requires a high degree of liberated intelligence and analytical application. Slaves can operate an industrial system, but it's much harder to recruit the people you need to operate a high-technology society if you expect them to surrender their intellectual freedom.

QUESTION: Professor Schlesinger, taking a long view of the events that are proceeding now, long in terms of, say, centuries, to what degree do you think we are witnessing a long-term movement toward world peace, and to what degree are we just witnessing another short-term swing of the pendulum.

PROFESSOR SCHLESINGER: To what degree are we approaching the millennium? I think that a paradoxical consequence of the invention of nuclear weapons is the reduced chance of a superpower conflict. So I would not expect any more world wars. However, I think we are condemned to a time of local wars, of conventional wars, especially in the Third World.

François Mitterand said in an interview the other day that one thing that you have to watch very carefully at the end of the cold war will be the revival within Europe itself of national antagonisms—old feuds and rivalries that have been suppressed and repressed by the cold war. Hungary fighting Romania for Transylvania, for example.

I don't see much prospect of a wholly peaceful and harmonious world, so long as the human capacity for creation is matched by the human will to destruction. We have not yet abolished original sin.

QUESTION: Professor Schlesinger, I am very glad that you concluded on the note of democracy and the universalization of human rights, because while American eyes have been riveted on Europe and the end of the cold war, in the past week, two great events have taken place that affirm your concluding comments—successive elections in Brazil and India where democracy is alive and well under very adverse conditions. Those two events, involving 20 percent of the world's population, in a sense, have a greater long-term hope for us, and perhaps a more immediate focus on the end of the cold war.

PROFESSOR SCHLESINGER: I wholly endorse that comment. I think it's quite extraordinary what happened in India and Brazil; in India particularly. Here you have a great nation divided by languages, divided by castes, divided by religion and national states; half the population is illiterate, yet nonetheless you have relatively successful democratic elections. Elections filled with corruption no doubt, but that is something we in the United States can understand.

QUESTION: Professor, you were quite eloquent on the Reagan years, our debt, and our increasing indebtedness to Japan and Western Europe. But I would like a quick comment on the certitude that a tax increase would be spent in such a way as to address these problems, and not in a way that would simply continue our current course. President Bush is always talking about spending money. People love it. He's very comfortable with big government, and big government in the last ten years has done nothing to restrain itself. Can you comment on the current use of those revenues, and of what use more tax revenues would be?

PROFESSOR SCHLESINGER: If we have more tax revenues, would they be used wisely? Debt reduction will require an increase in our productivity and our efficiency as a nation. To achieve that, we will have to invest much more in education and in the infrastructure. We'll have to do a lot of things that cost a lot of money. In the long run, that will, we hope, tone up our economic machine, make America competitive in the world markets again, and eventually produce more revenues.

QUESTION: Professor, you outlined a number of continued potential conflicts. Given that indeed the cold war is coming to an end, would you like to comment on the role that the U.N. and other multilateral organizations might play, how they might be strengthened to prevent this continuation of conflict?

PROFESSOR SCHLESINGER: I should have said more about the United Nations. I think that the U.N. will play a larger and larger role in the resolution of conflict. The opportunity for multinational institutions is growing. One wishes, for example, that the Organization of American States could be far more effective in dealing with problems

in the hemisphere, and one is heartened by the recent Canadian decision to join.

The European Community's plans for 1992 will be of historic importance. The U.N. itself has an opportunity to play a role in trying to prevent different kinds of conflict.

One interesting development has been the transformation in the Soviet attitude toward the U.N. The Russians show a much greater willingness to use the U.N. than ever before. I think we ought to respond to that. Also it is foolish for us to refuse to pay the money we owe the U.N. because we think one U.N. agency is going to spend money on birth control or another U.N. agency is going to give the time of day to the PLO. These seem to me unworthy reasons for us to deny funds to the U.N. We're even in arrears to the OAS, so we have our own responsibility for the present weakness of that organization.

QUESTION: Professor, my question is also on the U.N. I'll just follow the previous question briefly by asking you, given the events of the past few days, do you see the U.S. becoming more steadfast in its support for the U.N., in the way that it was for the later years of the Reagan administration, and much earlier, before Reagan? And do you see the Soviet Union's interest continuing at the same level as it has?

PROFESSOR SCHLESINGER: The Soviet interest is very evident, and it represents a great change in the Soviet position. George Bush used to be ambassador to the U.N. He knows the U.N. He knows it's good to be working with the U.N. But like many moderate Republicans he has an exaggerated fear of the right wing of the Republican Party. For domestic political reasons, he is overreacting to the PLO and abortion at the expense of the U.N.

QUESTION: Regarding the distinction of the competition between the superpowers and the developing worlds: Will all of the attention on Europe—which is, after all, closer to the U.S. and the USSR culturally—lead to neglect of the Third World?

PROFESSOR SCHLESINGER: Will the demands and needs of Eastern Europe encourage neglect of the Third World? I suppose that is quite likely. There is also an increasing, and somewhat understandable, skepticism about our capacity to promote Third World development. We've tried one thing, we've tried another, but there is no foolproof

approach. Too many of our foreign aid programs have enriched local oligarchies without modernizing economies or distributing the fruits of labor.

Consider Latin America—the one part of the Western world that is predominantly underdeveloped; the one part of the underdeveloped world that is predominantly Western. If our external aid cannot be very effective there, how can we hope to be effective in parts of the world where cultural differences are acute? Perhaps the best thing we can do at present is to figure out ways of lifting the burden of debt from the shoulders of Third World countries.

An age of limited resources imposes hard choices: not only Eastern Europe versus the Third World; but how do we explain to Americans sending money to help people in Poland, Latin America, and Africa when homeless people wander through freezing nights on the streets of our great cities?

QUESTION: What problems do you see for the Democratic Party?

PROFESSOR SCHLESINGER: One great problem, not just for the Democratic Party but for us all, is caused by Reagan's success in making a tax increase a forbidden subject. Members of Congress say privately, "Of course we have to raise taxes; there is no other way we can deal with these problems." But to say that publicly, they feel, perhaps rightly, would be political suicide.

Still, polls show that while people are against a general tax increase, they are perfectly prepared to pay more taxes for specified purposes: to protect the environment, to press the war against drugs, to improve our schools, to help the homeless. It may be that we will have to work out a system of earmarked taxes in order to meet some of these needs.

What we can all help to bring about is a change in the political atmosphere so that members of Congress can say publicly what they say privately on the tax question. We can all help make this so strong an issue outside the political community that those who are in politics will be able to act. Quite a number of issues over the last 40 years have arisen in the grass roots and imposed themselves on the political community: civil rights, women's rights, environmentalism, the nuclear freeze, and so on. Something like that will have to happen if we are ever going to be able to mobilize our abundant resources to meet crucial national problems.

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