

THE COLD WAR: A SHORT HISTORY

Vladimir Moss

© Copyright, all rights reserved: Vladimir Moss, 2017

OPENING MOVES (1945-1949)	4
I. KOREA, HUNGARY AND THE GREAT LEAP FORWARD (1949-1961)	22
II. CUBA, VIETNAM AND THE BOMB (1961-1973)	37
III. CAMBODIA, AFRICA AND DÉTENTE (1973-1979)	69
IV. POLAND, AFGHANISTAN AND PERESTROIKA (1979-1989)	96
ENDGAME (1989-1991)	114

OPENING MOVES (1945-1949)

The Cold War was the longest military conflict of modern times, and probably the bloodiest if we take into account all the battlefields across the world on which it was fought. According to conventional wisdom, it began almost immediately after the end of the world war in 1945 and continued until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. However, according to another theory that commands respect, the war resumed in 2007 with Putin's Munich speech, and 1991-2007 was only a hiatus in a long war that is not yet over. This little book covers the war in the period 1945-1991...

Yuval Noah Harari has summarized it thus: "The Soviet Union entered the [Second World] war as an isolated communist pariah. It emerged as one of the two global superpowers and the leader of an expanding international bloc. By 1949 eastern Europe became a Soviet satellite, the Chinese communist party had won the Chinese Civil War, and the United States was gripped by anti-communist hysteria. Revolutionary and anti-colonial movements throughout the world looked longingly towards Moscow and Beijing, while liberalism became identified with the racist European empires. As these empires collapsed they were usually replaced by either military dictatorships or socialist regimes, not liberal democracies. In 1956 the Soviet premier, Nikita Khrushchev, confidently boasted to the liberal West that 'Whether you like it or not, history is on our side. We will bury you!'

"Khrushchev sincerely believed this, as did increasing numbers of Third World leaders and First World intellectuals. In the 1960s and 1970s the word 'liberal' became a term of abuse in many Western universities. North America and western Europe experienced growing social unrest as radical left-wing movements strove to undermine the liberal order. Students in Cambridge, the Sorbonne and the People's Republic of Berkeley thumbed through Chairman Mao's Little Red Book and hung Che Guevara's heroic portrait over their beds. In 1968 the wave crested with the outbreak of protests and riots all over the Western world. Mexican security forces killed dozens of students in the notorious Tlatelolco Massacre, the students in Rome fought the Italian police in the so-called Battle of Valle Giulia, and the assassination of Martin Luther King sparked days of riots and protests in more than a hundred American cities. In May students took over the streets of Paris, President de Gaulle fled to a French military base in Germany, and well-to-do French citizens trembled in their beds, having guillotine nightmares.

"By 1970 the world contained 130 independent countries, but only thirty of these were liberal democracies, most of which were crammed into the north-western corner of Europe. India was the only important Third World country that committed to the liberal path after securing its independence, but even India distanced itself from the Western bloc and leaned towards the Soviets.

"In 1975 the liberal camp suffered its most humiliating defeat of all: the Vietnam War ended with the North Vietnamese David overcoming the

American Goliath. In quick succession communism took over South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. On 17 April 1975 the Cambodian capital, Phnom Penh, fell to the Khmer Rouge. Two weeks later people all over the world watched on TV as helicopters evacuated the last Yankees from the rooftop of the American Embassy in Saigon. Many were certain that the American Empire was falling. Before anyone could say 'domino theory', in June Indira Gandhi proclaimed the Emergency in India, and it seemed that the world's largest democracy was on its way to becoming yet another socialist dictatorship.

"Liberal democracy increasingly looked like an exclusive club for ageing white imperialists who had little to offer the rest of the world or even to their own youth. Washington hailed itself as the leader of the free world, but most of its allies were either authoritarian kings (such as King Khaled of Saudi Arabia, King Hassan of Morocco and the Persian shah) or military dictators (such as the Greek colonels, General Pinochet in Chile, General Franco in Spain, General Park in South Korea, General Geisel in Brazil and Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek in Taiwan).

"Despite the support of all these kings and generals, militarily the Warsaw Pact had a huge numerical superiority over NATO. In order to reach parity in conventional armaments, Western countries would probably have had to scrap liberal democracy and the free market, and become totalitarian states on a permanent war footing. Liberal democracy was saved only by nuclear weapons. NATO adopted the MAD doctrine (Mutual Assured Destruction), according to which even conventional Soviet attacks would be answered by an all-out nuclear strike. 'If you attack us,' threatened the liberals, 'we will make sure nobody comes out alive.' Behind this monstrous shield liberal democracy and the free market managed to hold out in their last bastions, and Westerners got to enjoy sex, drugs and rock and roll, as well as washing machines, refrigerators and televisions. Without nukes there would have been no Beatles, no Woodstock and no overflowing supermarkets. But in the mid-1970s it seemed that nuclear weapons notwithstanding, the future belonged to socialism...

"And then everything changed. Liberal democracy crawled out of history's dustbin, cleaned itself up and conquered the world. The supermarket proved to be far stronger than the gulag. The blitz-krieg began in southern Europe where the authoritarian regimes in Greece, Spain and Portugal collapsed, giving way to democratic governments. In 1977 Indira Gandhi ended the Emergency, re-establishing democracy in India. During the 1980s military dictatorships in East Asia and Latin America were replaced by democratic governments in countries such as Brazil, Argentina, Taiwan and South Korea. In the late 1980s and early 1990s the liberal wave turned into a veritable tsunami, sweeping away the mighty Soviet empire and raising expectations of the coming end of history. After decades of defeats and setbacks, liberalism won a decisive victory in the Cold War..."¹

¹ Harari, *Homo Deus*, London: Vintage, 2017, pp. 307-311.

The new American President in 1945, Harry S. Truman, represented both the strengths and the weaknesses of the American state and people. After a hesitant start at Potsdam at which he displayed his predecessor's underestimation of Stalin², and an unnecessarily passive acceptance of the decision to drop the atom bomb on the Japanese, he acted decisively to stop Soviet expansion in Western Europe, Iran, Turkey and Greece, where he took the place of the exhausted and bankrupt British, thereby winning "the war of the British succession".³ Displaying imagination and generosity, he approved the Marshall Plan for Europe, which was almost as important as American troops in saving the West from Soviet tyranny. Again, he displayed firmness and courage in defending South Korea from invasion from the North. By the Providence of God, he played the decisive role in shoring up the Western world against Stalin, the most evil and powerful dictator in history, fulfilling the vital function, if not of "him who restrains" the coming of the Antichrist (for such a role could be played only by an Orthodox Autocrat), at any rate of "world policeman". For that, the whole world should be grateful to him and to the American people. Indeed, there can be no doubt that in a secular sense America saved humanity in the immediate post-war era. It is sufficient to imagine what the world would have been like if Stalin had not had had in the Americans a powerful and determined opponent, or how many millions would have starved to death if America had not "fed the world" in accordance with the 1911 prophecy of St. Aristocles of Moscow. Indeed, the Bretton Woods system, the Marshall Plan and other American-sponsored initiatives, formed the basis for the greatest rise in prosperity in the whole of world history.

However, two flaws were to become increasingly evident in America's behaviour in the following decades. The first was her Rousseauist tendency to force people to be free by means that betrayed her own liberal ideals. And the second was the tendency to choose corrupt allies – Masonic businessmen, oil-rich kings, the kingdom of Mammon in general – to help her attain her generally well-intentioned ends...

This second tendency was reflected in the life of America's chief executive, President... Truman owed his rise in politics before the war to "Boss" Tom Pendergast, who, as Victor Sebestyen writes, "controlled Kansas City business and the State of Missouri's elected offices. The Pendergast 'machine' was sophisticated. It went beyond stuffing ballot boxes and other vote-rigging tactics. It turned politics, prohibition, prostitution and gambling into thriving

² "In 1948, talking about the Potsdam conference, he told a reporter that he knew Stalin well and that 'I like old Joe'; the dictator, he maintained, was a decent sort who could not do as he wished because he was the Politburo's prisoner. Here we are, back to the hawks and doves, a notion that the Soviets would always know how to play on to extort one-way concessions" (Jean-François Revel, *How Democracies Perish*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1985, p. 220).

³ Norman Stone, *The Atlantic and its Enemies*, London: Penguin, 2010, p. 1.

enterprises, the profits of which could be invested into more legitimate areas. Truman never took cash for favours, thus squaring his conscience, but he depended on the Pendergast machine to deliver, by hook or by crook, large lopsided majorities for 'his' candidates. Typically, Truman stayed loyal to Pendergast well after it was politically expedient to do so, and even after Pendergast was convicted of tax evasion and sent to Leavenworth jail Truman defended him. 'He has been a friend to me when I needed it,' he said. 'I am not one to desert a ship when it is about to go down, Besides, Truman admired Pendergast, '... even if he did own a bawdy house, a saloon and a gambling establishment, because he was a man of his word.'..."⁴

We see here the besetting sin of American politics and politicians, which got worse over time: a tendency to justify evil means by good ends, to choose sleazy and corrupt friends and allies to carry out well-intentioned goals. "The path to hell is paved with good intentions", and this could be said particularly of American politics in the post-war era. So often good intentions such as freedom from oppression and prosperity for all were undermined by ill-chosen methods and allies, leading inevitably to charges of inconsistency and hypocrisy.

Truman is not singled out here because he was any worse than very many before and after him. On the contrary, he was one of the best of American presidents, who did much to save western civilization at a particularly critical time of anarchy and chaos. But the deal he struck, and stuck to, with the unsavoury Pendergast is symbolic...

Thus the struggle against communism was (and is) a sacred and utterly necessary struggle. And after the war it seemed to be a struggle of good against evil as Christian democrats in America and Europe struggled - successfully, in this period - to save their societies from a truly mortal threat. But the trouble with "Christian democracy", as more and more people came to see as the century wore on, was that it was not really Christian at all...

Truman is again a good example. He was a regular church-goer. But at the same time he was a Freemason - and a very high ranking one. Thus "In 1959, he was given a 50-year award by the Masons, recognizing his longstanding involvement: he was initiated on February 9, 1909 into the Belton Freemasonry Lodge in Missouri. In 1911, he helped establish the Grandview Lodge, and he served as its first Worshipful Master. In September 1940, during his Senate re-election campaign, Truman was elected Grand Master of the Missouri Grand Lodge of Freemasonry; Truman said later that the Masonic election assured his victory in the general election. In 1945, he was made a 33° Sovereign Grand Inspector General and an Honorary Member of the supreme council at the Supreme Council A.A.S.R. Southern Jurisdiction Headquarters in Washington D.C."⁵

⁴ Sebestyen, 1946: *The Making of the Modern World*, London: Pan, 2014, p. 20.

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry_S._Truman.

*

If America was the democratic state par excellence, the other, communist super-power, the Soviet Union, was usually described as “totalitarian” – the same term that Mussolini had applied to his own regime in the 1920s. Of course, the use of this term pointed – correctly – to the close kinship between Communism and Fascism. As Anne Applebaum writes, it was “Hannah Arendt, who defined totalitarianism in her 1949 book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, as a ‘novel form of government’ made possible by the onset of modernity. The destruction of traditional societies and ways of life had, she argued, created the conditions for the evolution of the ‘totalitarian personality’, men and women whose identities were entirely dependent on the state. Famously, Arendt argued that Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union were both totalitarian regimes, and as such were more similar than different. Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski pushed that argument further in *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, published in 1946, and also sought a more operational definition. Totalitarian regimes, they declared, all had at least five things in common: a dominant ideology, a single ruling party, a secret police force prepared to use terror, a monopoly on information and a planned economy. By those criteria, the Soviet and Nazi regimes were not the only totalitarian states. Others – Mao’s China, for example – qualified too.”⁶

However, the definitions of anti-communist intellectuals like Arendt or Koestler made little impact on the prevailing tendency in Western European intellectual life, which was pro-Communist – or at any rate, anti-fascist and therefore, in the twisted logic of the time, necessarily anti-anti-communist. This was especially the case in France, whose communist party was second in size only to Italy’s, and where the beginning of the shameful Stalinist show-trials elicited only the denial of obvious facts and frantic defence of the totalitarian dictator. This pro-Communism went with a despising of all things American, in spite of the fact that the Americans had liberated France and her survival as an independent country depended entirely on them.

As Tony Judt writes, “Communism excited intellectuals in a way that neither Hitler nor (especially) liberal democracy could hope to match. Communism was exotic in locale and heroic in scale. Raymond Aron in 1950 remarked upon ‘the ludicrous surprise – that the European Left has taken a pyramid-builder for its God.’ But was it really so surprising? Jean-Paul Sartre, for one, was most attracted to the Communists at precisely the moment when the ‘pyramid-builder’ was embarking upon his final, crazed projects. The idea that the Soviet was engaged upon a momentous quest whose very ambition justified and excused its shortcomings was uniquely attractive to rationalist intellectuals. The besetting sin of Fascism had been its parochial objectives. But Communism was directed towards impeccably universal and

⁶ Applebaum, *Iron Curtain*, London: Penguin, 2013, pp. xxiii-xxiv.

transcendent goals. *Its* crimes were excused by many non-Communist observers as the cost, so to speak, of doing business with History.

“But even so, in the early years of the Cold War there were many in Western Europe who might have been more openly critical of Stalin, of the Soviet Union and of their local Communists had they not been inhibited by the fear of giving aid and comfort to their political opponents. This, too, was a legacy of ‘anti-Fascism’, the insistence that there were ‘no enemies on the Left’ (a rule to which Stalin himself, it must be said, paid little attention). As the progressive Abbé Boulier explained to François Fejto, when trying to prevent him from writing about the Rajk trial: drawing attention to Communist sins is ‘to play the imperialists’ game’.

“This fear of serving anti-Soviet interests was not new. But by the early fifties it was a major calculation in European intellectual debates, above all in France. Even after the East European show trials finally led Emmanuel Mounier and many in his *Esprit* group to distance themselves from the French Communist Party, they took special care to deny any suggestion that they had become ‘anti-Communist’ – or worse, that they had ceased to be ‘anti-American’. Anti-anti-Communism was becoming a political and cultural end in itself...”⁷

*

There is little evidence that Stalin was planning to extend his conquests westwards in 1945; he was not ready for world war, especially while he did not have his own atomic bomb, and needed time to digest his newly-acquired empire in Central and Eastern Europe. His only sign of renewed aggression outside the Far East was in creating an Azerbaijani puppet state in Iran, which the West vigorously – and successfully – resisted. Stalin even hesitated to impose communism fully and immediately on his European conquests – although it was already clear that he had no intention of fulfilling the promises he had made at Yalta to introduce democracy there.

However, this was only a transitional phase; Stalin’s ultimate aim of destroying the West remained unchanged, as was made clear in a speech by Beria’s deputy, Minister of State Security Victor Abakumov, to an audience of SMERSH officers at NKVD Headquarters in occupied Europe near Vienna in the summer of 1945: “Comrade Stalin once said that if we don’t manage to do all these things very quickly the British and Americans will crush us. After all they have the atom bomb, and an enormous technical and industrial advantage over us. They are rich countries, which not been destroyed by the war. But we will rebuild everything, with our army and our industry, regardless of the cost. We Chekists are not to be frightened by problems and sacrifices. It is our good fortune... that the British and Americans in their attitudes towards us, have still not emerged from the post-war state of calf-

⁷ Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945*, London: Pimlico, 2007, pp. 216-217.

love. They dream of lasting peace and building a democratic world for all men. They don't seem to realize that we are the ones who are going to build a new world, and that we shall do it without their liberal-democratic recipes. All their slobber plays right into our hands, and we shall thank them for this, in the next world, with coals of fire. We shall drive them into such dead ends as they've never dreamed of. We shall disrupt them and corrupt them from within. We shall lull them to sleep, sap their will to fight. The whole 'free western' world will burst apart like a fat squashed toad. This won't happen tomorrow. To achieve it will require great efforts on our part, great sacrifices, and total renunciation of all that is trivial and personal. Our aim justifies all this. Our aim is a grand one, the destruction of the old, vile world."⁸

This speech demonstrates two things. On the one hand, the old satanic hatred of the Leninist-Bakuninite revolution for the whole of "the old, vile world" continued unabated. That meant that no "normal" relations would be possible with the Soviet Union; for it was in fact an anti-state determined to destroy all normal statehood throughout the world. Two possibilities were therefore open to the West: war, or "containment", to use the phrase of the venerable American diplomat John Kennan in his famous "Long Telegram" of February 22, 1946. The West contemplated war, but in the end chose containment; that is, the Soviets were to be contained within the boundaries of their WWII conquests, as sanctioned at Yalta and Potsdam.

On the other hand, Stalin was not yet ready for further military expansion. Denis Healy asserted that "all that the Red Army needed in order to reach the North Sea was boots." But it was not quite as simple as that. As the Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm writes, "Except in the Balkan guerilla strongholds, the communists made no attempt to establish revolutionary regimes. It is true that they were in no position to do so anywhere west of Trieste even had they wanted to make a bid for power, but also that the USSR, to which their parties were utterly loyal, strongly discouraged such unilateral bids for power. The communist revolutions actually made (Yugoslavia, Albania, later China) were made *against* Stalin's advice. The Soviet view was that, both internationally and within each country, post-war politics should continue within the framework of the all-embracing anti-fascist alliance, i.e. it looked forward to a long-term coexistence, or rather symbiosis, of capitalist and communist systems, and further social and political change, presumably occurring by shifts within the 'democracies of a new type' which would emerge out of the wartime coalitions. This optimistic scenario soon disappeared into the night of the Cold War, so completely that few remember that Stalin urged the Yugoslav communists to keep the monarchy or that in 1945 British communists were opposed to the break-up of the Churchill wartime coalition, i.e. to the electoral campaign which was to bring the Labour government in power. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that Stalin meant all this seriously, and tried to prove it by dissolving the Comintern in 1943, and the Communist Party of the USA in 1944.

⁸ Abakumov, in Nikolai Tolstoy, *Stalin's Secret War*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1981, p. 329.

“Stalin’s decision, expressed in the words of an American communist leader ‘that we will not raise the issue of socialism in such a form and manner as to endanger or weaken... unity’ made his intentions clear. For practical purposes, as dissident revolutionaries recognized, it was a permanent goodbye to world revolution. Socialism would be confined to the USSR and the area assigned by diplomatic negotiation as its zone of influence, i.e. basically that occupied by the Red Army at the end of the war...”⁹

Why this abdication from Lenin’s dream? Because, for all its massive power, the Soviet Union was vulnerable in many ways. Indeed, western over-estimation of Soviet strength is one of the causes of the war’s length...

“In the West,” as Nikolai Tolstoy writes, “Russian heroism and wartime propaganda had combined to exaggerate the formidable strength of the Red Army. A prescient few already saw it as a potent threat to Western Europe. To Stalin matters appeared in a rather different light. True, his armies had, with unheard-of gallantry and sacrifices, hunted down ‘the Nazi beast in his lair’. But he also knew better than most how very near at times they had been to defeat, and also how much his conquests had owed to lend-lease supplies and American and British strategic bombing. Now the United States, with an industrial capacity and military resources dwarfing those of Germany at the height of her power, faced him in the heart of Europe....”

“In 1945 the USSR still possessed no strategic air force, and there can be no doubt that Stalin regarded the awesome striking power under Eisenhower’s command with apprehension. In April 1944 he had warned his Chiefs of Staff against any idea that the defeat of Germany would be the end of their problems. There would be other dangers, equally great; notably the exposure of the Red Army to populations hostile to Communism, and stiffening relations with the Allies in the West. Meanwhile, in the Ukraine, Byelorussia and the Baltic States, nationalist partisans were fighting the Red Army and NKVD units on a scale recalling the bitterest days of the Civil War. Stalin was clearly fearful that the Western Allies would have the wit to play that card the purblind Germans had thrown away: the opposition of the Russian people to the regime. The extent of his fear may be gauged by his absolute refusal to consent to British arming of Russian sentries in prisoner-of-war camps or even enrolling them in a purely nominal ‘armed Allied unit’. He feared this might provide cover for the levying of a new ‘Vlasov’ army.

“Fear of military confrontation with the Anglo-Americans, revolt inside the Soviet Union, or contamination of the Red Army in occupied Europe effectively inhibited Stalin from any rash ventures in 1945. There were points on which he would not give way, but they were points on which the Anglo-Americans had no effective means of bringing pressure to bear. The new

⁹ Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century (1914-1991)*, London: Abacus, 1994, pp. 168-169.

Soviet-Polish frontier, the annexation of the Baltic States, the refusal to implement Churchill's illusory 'percentages' agreement: all these moves took place safely behind Red Army lines, and the worst the democracies could do was affect not to recognize their legitimacy.

"Caution was everything.¹⁰ It was still hard to believe that the West was sincere in its belief in the possibility of genuine post-war cooperation between the two irreconcilable systems. The results of the Teheran Conference had seemed almost too good to be true (Stalin returned to the Kremlin 'in a particularly good frame of mind') and after Potsdam a Soviet official noted that 'the Soviet diplomats won concessions from the Western Allies to an extent that even the diplomats themselves had not expected'. After the defeat of Germany Stalin had been fearful that the Americans might not pull back to the demarcation line, and remained convinced that Eisenhower could, had he chosen, have taken Berlin. Still, the Allies were co-operating, for whatever reason, and as Roosevelt had irresponsibly announced at Yalta that the United States forces would withdraw from Europe within two years of victory, there was every incentive for a policy of 'softly, softly, catchee monkey'.

"Despite the overwhelming Soviet military presence in Eastern Europe, Stalin was careful for some time to maintain the pretence and even, to a limited, fast diminishing extent, the reality of tolerating non-Communist institutions and political parties. In Romania it was announced that there was no intention of altering the country's frontiers or social system. It was more than two years before King Michael was obliged to leave the country. Similarly, in Poland, Bulgaria and Hungary the shades of independent institutions were permitted to linger on until election results proved that the most extreme efforts of intimidation and propaganda could not induce populations voluntarily to accept Communist domination. Czechoslovak 'independence' survived a little longer, as a result of Stalin's confidence in the pliability of Dr. Beneš and his colleagues.

"Postponement of the full establishment of the Soviet 'New Order' in Eastern Europe was clearly due to several factors. If the new regimes could gain power by constitutional and legal means, this would facilitate the task of Communist Parties in Western Europe, and it was essential, too, not to jettison chances of securing a settlement in Germany favourable to Soviet expansion.

"In any case, Stalin was by no means so confident as hindsight would suggest. In Poland the carefully-planned abduction and trial of sixteen leaders of the Home Army resistance movement in March 1945 suggest that in his

¹⁰ In 1948 Boris Souvarin wrote: "Stalin's policy is made up of caution, patience, intrigue, infiltration, corruption, terrorism, exploitation of human weaknesses. It only moves to frontal attack when it cannot lose, against an adversary of its choice who is defeated in advance". (V.M.)

view effective Polish armed resistance to the imposition of Soviet rule posed sufficient threat to make it worth risking the inevitable outcry that would arise in the West.

“All over Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the NKVD and SMERSH stretched their enormous resources to cauterize resistance. Soviet propaganda had tended for ideological reasons to exaggerate the role played by partisan and ‘people’s’ armies in defeating Nazism, and they clearly were now taking no chances. Suspect elements of occupied countries were dispatched in an unceasing shuttle of trainloads to the GULAG camps, which continued to underpin Soviet economic production until after Stalin’s death.

“About five and a quarter million Soviet citizens were recovered from Western and Central Europe. All had to be elaborately screened, after which the majority were assigned to forced labour in GULAG camps and elsewhere. At the same time deportations from the Caucasus, the Crimea, the Ukraine, the Baltic States and other regions of the USSR continued unabated. As if this were not enough, the hard-pressed NKVD apparatus had to absorb millions of Germans, Japanese, Romanian and Hungarian prisoners-of-war.

“The eight years between VE Day and Stalin’s death saw the dictator become increasingly jealous, vengeful and vindictive. Fear of the Soviet and Soviet-dominated people, mistrust of the power of the United States, apprehension at the onset of old age with all its dangerous frailties, and recurring bouts of paranoid suspicion concurred to cause him to double and redouble precautions deemed necessary for his survival and that of the regime.

“Danger loomed everywhere. The USSR was sealed in a quarantine more hermetic even than before the war. The tentacles of the NKVD uncoiled to crush incipient dissent even before its practitioners were aware of their own intentions. Jews, heretical biologists, bourgeois composers, critics of Lysenko’s eccentric genetic theories, supporters of Marr’s still odder philological speculations... all, all were engaged in conspiracies so dark that only the Leader could penetrate the Arcanum... But Stalin was not mad, not even at the end when death interrupted the unfolding of the notorious ‘doctors’ plot’. As Adam Ulam writes, ‘the madness lay in the system that gave absolute power to one man and allowed him to appease every suspicion and whim with blood.’ His formative years had been spent in an entirely conspiratorial atmosphere. Roman Malinovsky, one of Lenin’s ablest colleagues, had proved to be a Tsarist spy. And now NKVD records contained the names of innumerable highly-placed men and women in capitalist countries who had outwitted the formidable British and American security services in order to betray their class and country. As Stalin chuckled at the blindness of his enemies, the uncomfortable corollary must have recurred as frequently: how many of *his* people were secreted leagued with ‘the gentlemen from the Thames’? What if one of his closest cronies –

Molotov, Mikoyan or Voroshilov – for example – were an English spy or assassin?

“It is clear that the Soviet Union for internal reasons sought to put a distance between itself and the West. The absurd and cruel policy of refusing to allow Soviet war brides of US and British servicemen to leave the country betrayed the extent of Stalin’s fears. War had stretched the resources of the police-state to their limits – limits now being tested further by the herculean task of re-imposing totalitarian controls within the USSR, and extending them to the conquered territories beyond. The military power of the Western Allies was daunting enough, but the danger to Soviet morale seemed still greater.”¹¹

Even without the western threat (although in truth, the West’s stance was defensive), Soviet morale was low enough. In spite of stripping Eastern and Central Europe of vast resources – reparations far greater than had been agreed at Yalta – the country was still desperately poor. As John Darwin writes, “Harvest failure in 1946 brought large-scale famine. Economic recovery was the final achievement of Stalin’s industrial order. Ferocious work discipline, conscripted labour, and the heavy reliance on slave or semi-slave labour were used even more widely than before the war against a cowed, ill-fed and exhausted population. Perhaps 10 per cent of industrial output came from the Gulag...”¹² Kirill Alexandrov writes: “The famine of 1947 and the armed struggle with the rebels in the western provinces of the USSR took away no less than one million lives.”¹³

What resources there were were spent on the army, the secret services and building the atom bomb, while millions starved – quietly and without protest. Only in the concentration camps was there a measure of protest! There Christians of many kinds together with writers like Alexander Solzhenitsyn (who was imprisoned for criticizing Stalin in 1945) nurtured their internal freedom in conditions of total slavery, where they had nothing but their chains to lose.

After a short period in which the Americans followed Roosevelt’s policy of showing “respect” and some indulgence towards their Soviet wartime allies, an important change of policy took place. In June, 1946 President Truman declared his determination not to “baby” the Soviets, as he put it, and to prevent their expansion into Western Europe. And so in September his Secretary of State James Byrnes declared in Germany that American troops would stay there as long as they were needed – an implicit reversal of Roosevelt’s promise that they would be recalled home within two years.

¹¹ Tolstoy, *op. cit.*, pp. 351, 352-355.

¹² Darwin, *After Tamerlane. The Rise & Fall of Global Empires, 1400-2000*, London: Penguin, 2007, p. 473.

¹³ Alexandrov, “Stalin i sovremennaiia Rossia: vybor istoricheskikh otsenok ili vybor budushego?” (Stalin and contemporary Russia: a choice of historical estimates or a choice of the future?), report read at the Russian Centre, San Francisco, February 3, 2017.

At the beginning of his time in office Truman had not understood the truly desperate plight of the Europeans. Lend-lease was halted after VE Day, and even the Americans' closest allies, the British, were almost denied a desperately needed loan. Loans were provided to some nations – but only as stop-gaps to save the starving, not as the basis for a real revival of the European economy. The Bretton Woods agreement in 1944 had envisaged such a revival of the European economies as part of a new system of convertible currencies and international free trade. But in the beginning America, the world's only economic super-power, which “by the spring of 1945 accounted for half the world's manufacturing capacity, most of its food surpluses and virtually all international financial reserves”¹⁴, was not willing to provide the cash that alone could kick-start such a revival.

However, the president was persuaded to change course by a variety of factors: the withdrawal of the British from Greece for mainly financial reasons, the terrible winter of 1946-47 and the real threat of starvation and anarchy hanging over large areas of Western Europe – which in turn threatened the coming to power of communist regimes in France and Italy. In March, 1947, in a speech that came to be called “the Truman doctrine”, he put the case for helping Greece and Turkey: “Totalitarian regimes imposed upon free peoples, by direct or indirect aggression, undermine the foundations of international peace and hence the security of the United States... At the present moment in world history nearly every nation must choose between alternative ways of life. The choice is too often not a free one. One way of life is based upon the will of the majority, and is distinguished by free institutions, representative government, free elections, guarantees of individual liberty, freedom of speech and religion, and freedom from political oppression. The second way of life is based upon the will of a minority forcibly imposed upon the majority. It relies upon terror and oppression, a controlled press and radio, fixed elections, and the suppression of personal freedom. I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.”¹⁵

In June, Secretary of State Marshall put forward a European Recovery Program. “In four years from 1948,” as David Reynolds writes, “the United States provided \$13 billion [\$210 billion in early twenty-first-century prices] of aid to Western Europe. During that same period the Soviet Union took out roughly the same amount from eastern Europe.”¹⁶ Marshall Aid was also offered to Eastern Europe – all the European countries, in fact, except Franco's Spain (for even mild Fascism was considered less worthy of aid than communism). This unprecedented act of enlightened self-interest did the trick; the Western European economy spluttered into life.

¹⁴ Judt, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

¹⁵ Truman, in David Reynolds, *America. Empire of Liberty*, London: Penguin, 2010, pp. 379-380.

¹⁶ Reynolds, *op. cit.*, pp. 381-382.

“At first,” writes Revel, “... the USSR showed great interest in the offer. Stalin even sent Vyacheslav M. Molotov to Paris to discuss it with the British and French Foreign Ministers. But he quickly realized that acceptance of Marshall Plan aid would hamper the process of absorption and consolidation then nearing fulfillment in satellite Europe and might even shake the totalitarian Soviet system. For an American condition to granting credits was that the beneficiary countries coordinate their reconstruction and harmonize their economies. This was the embryo of the future Common Market. To the Communist leadership, this meant creation of a pan-European network of consultation and exchanges, an imbrication of economies and interpenetration of societies that would in any case have shattered totalitarian power in the satellites and put even Moscow’s on shaky ground. How could Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, East Germany have resisted the attraction of a Western Europe that, in 1950, was about to embark on the most vigorous economic expansion in its history? To force them to remain in the Soviet orbit, to put up with the pervasive beggary of daily life that marks socialist economies, Moscow had to separate them forcibly and totally from the West. So the Soviet Union refused Marshall Plan aid for itself and obliged its satellites to do the same. An ultimatum from Stalin barred Czechoslovakia, which maintained its hopes until the last minute, from accepting American assistance.”¹⁷

In spite of this rebuff, the Americans succeeded in keeping Western Europe in their sphere when the Communists came critically close to victory there. “Truman showed great dexterity in determining which of the Western European leftist parties could become U.S. allies. He correctly concluded that Italy’s Communists and Socialists were monolithic: they were united in supporting the Soviet Union and opposing the U.S.-sponsored Marshall Plan. Truman instead cultivated the Christian Democrats, helping them win a crucial election in 1948. In France, however, Truman recognized that the Socialists opposed communism and struck a deal with them, allowing France to become an ornery but genuine U.S. partner.”¹⁸ And so the West was saved; for the time being the threat of Communism receded...

The main problem for those trying to kick-start the European economy was Germany. As Europe’s industrial power-house, Germany held the key to her economic recovery. However, being occupied by the armies of the four Great Powers, she could not be treated like any other European country. Both France and the Soviet Union feared German revanchism. France wanted reparations and control of the coal-producing regions of the Ruhr, while the Soviets wanted a restoration of reparations from the Western zone (they had already grabbed what they wanted from the East) and the single administrative system and economy over the whole of Germany which would enable them to obtain that.

¹⁷ Revel, *How Democracies Perish*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1985, p. 102.

¹⁸ John M. Owen IV, “From Calvin to the Caliphate”, *Foreign Affairs*, May/June, 2015, vol. 94, no. 3, p. 84.

However, the Anglo-Americans (who had merged their two military districts into a “Bizon”) no longer feared German revanchism, and in general wanted, instead of reparations, a swift recovery of the German economy that would benefit all. The critical change in thinking was manifested, as Yanis Varoufakis writes, on September 6, 1946, “when James F. Byrnes, the US secretary of state, travelled to Stuttgart to deliver his Speech of Hope – a significant restatement of America’s policy on Germany... Byrnes’s speech was the first postwar sign the German people were given of an end to the revanchist deindustrialization drive that, by the end of the 1940s, had destroyed 706 industrial plants. Byrnes heralded a major policy reversal with the statement that ‘the German people [should] not... be denied to use... [such] savings as they might be able to accumulate by hard work and frugal living to build up their industries for peaceful purposes.’ ...

“A speech on 18 March 1947 made by Herbert J. Hoover, President Roosevelt’s predecessor, flagged up America’s new policy on Europe. ‘There is an illusion,’ Hoover said, ‘that the New Germany... can be reduced to a pastoral state. It cannot be done unless we exterminate or remove 25 million people out of it.’”¹⁹

And so in August, 1947 the West “unilaterally increased output in the Bizone (to a chorus of Soviet and French criticism). The Joint Chiefs of Staff directive ICS 1067 (the ‘Morgenthau plan’) was replaced by JCS 1779 which formally acknowledged the new American goals: economic unification of the western zone of Germany and the encouragement of German self-government. For the Americans especially, Germans were rapidly ceasing to be the enemy...”²⁰

The French, and especially General de Gaulle, were always very wary of any increase in German power. However, they finally came round to the idea provided Germany could be “hooked” up into a European framework that would neutralize her militarily, and in which “French administrators would run a unified Central Europe (from Paris and from Brussels), while French banks would handle the flow of capital and German profits within and outside this entity.”²¹ Only De Gaulle among the leading Europeans rejected this plan offered them by the Americans, and so he went into the political wilderness for another ten years...

By March, 1948 the joint Allied occupation of Germany had collapsed, being superseded by a Communist East Germany and a Capitalist West Germany. On April 1, the Soviets cut off all transport links from the West to West Berlin, offering to lift the ban if the West withdrew the newly-introduced Deutschmark from West Berlin. The West refused – “we stay in

¹⁹ Varoufakis, *And the Weak Suffer What They Must?*, London: Vintage, 2017, pp. 47, 49.

²⁰ Judt, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

²¹ Varoufakis, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

Berlin,” said Truman. “We will supply the city by air as a beleaguered garrison...”

However, as David Reynolds writes, “this seemed a very tall order. Many pundits believed it impossible to keep 2 million people supplied by air but the Americans and British mounted ‘Operation Vittles’, as the Americans called it (the RAF code-name was ‘Operation Plain Fare’). Against all the odds the airlift continued all through the winter; at its height a plane landed every thirty seconds, carrying essentials such as food, coal and clothing.”²² Over 200,000 flights in one year led to a Soviet climb-down on May 12, 1949.

Forty years later, Henry Kissinger asked the Soviet Foreign Minister at the time, Andrei Gromyko, “how, in light of the vast casualties and devastation it had suffered in the war, the Soviet Union could have dealt with an American military response to the Berlin blockade. Gromyko replied that Stalin had answered similar questions from subordinates to this effect: he doubted the United States would use nuclear weapons on so local an issue. If the Western allies undertook a conventional ground force probe along the access routes to Berlin, Soviet forces were ordered to resist without referring the decision to Stalin. If America were mobilizing along the entire front, Stalin said, ‘Come to me’. In other words, Stalin felt strong enough for a local war but would not risk general war with the United States...”²³

We may wonder whether the Soviets would have dared any kind of war at that point. Revel argues that if the Americans had made a determined effort to enforce their agreements with the Soviets over Berlin, it is possible that they could have achieved, not just the relief of West Berlin, but the reunification of Germany: “It was not only in 1952 [when Stalin dangled the prospect of the reunification of Germany before the West] that the West let a chance go by to negotiate a German reunification treaty, which would have eliminated one of the most glaring weaknesses in the democratic camp and one of Moscow’s most effective means of blackmail. Truman fumbled a first opportunity during the 1948 Berlin blockade when he refused to send an armored train from West Germany to Berlin to see if the Soviets would dare to attack it. Whether they did or not, they were beaten and the United States could have capitalized on their blunder to demand clarification of the German situation. Instead, the American airlift eluded the blockade, in a sense, without really breaking it. Washington was unable to follow up its prestige victory with a diplomatic victory. When the blockade was lifted in 1949, the Allies, as usual, returned to their old stances, as shaky militarily as they were confused juridically. Under the elementary rules of diplomacy, the Allies should have demanded that, in reparation for the Soviet treaty violation, Moscow negotiate an immediate German peace treaty. Their failure to do so is proof of their diplomatic incompetence. That the Allies failed to press the advantage granted them by the Soviet setback during that brief period when

²² Reynolds, *op. cit.*, p. 383.

²³ Kissinger, *World Order*, London: Penguin, 2015, pp. 281-282.

the United States had a monopoly on the atomic bomb, which gave it an absolute superiority unprecedented in history, has no rational explanation, however blind we may think Western leaders were at the time – an estimate we need not be tender about. There certainly would have been nothing immoral about using our atomic monopoly to force Stalin to agree to a German peace treaty, since we would have been using our military superiority not to make war but to eliminate a cause of future war or, at least, of permanent friction and of fundamental Western weakness.”²⁴

*

Forty years later, Henry Kissinger asked the Soviet Foreign Minister at the time, Andrei Gromyko, “how, in light of the vast casualties and devastation it had suffered in the war, the Soviet Union could have dealt with an American military response to the Berlin blockade. Gromyko replied that Stalin had answered similar questions from subordinates to this effect: he doubted the United States would use nuclear weapons on so local an issue. If the Western allies undertook a conventional ground force probe along the access routes to Berlin, Soviet forces were ordered to resist without referring the decision to Stalin. If America were mobilizing along the entire front, Stalin said, ‘Come to me’. In other words, Stalin felt strong enough for a local war but would not risk general war with the United States...”²⁵

We may wonder whether the Soviets would have dared any kind of war at that point. Revel argues that if the Americans had made a determined effort to enforce their agreements with the Soviets over Berlin, it is possible that they could have achieved, not just the relief of West Berlin, but the reunification of Germany: “It was not only in 1952 [when Stalin dangled the prospect of the reunification of Germany before the West] that the West let a chance go by to negotiate a German reunification treaty, which would have eliminated one of the most glaring weaknesses in the democratic camp and one of Moscow’s most effective means of blackmail. Truman fumbled a first opportunity during the 1948 Berlin blockade when he refused to send an armored train from West Germany to Berlin to see if the Soviets would dare to attack it. Whether they did or not, they were beaten and the United States could have capitalized on their blunder to demand clarification of the German situation. Instead, the American airlift eluded the blockade, in a sense, without really breaking it. Washington was unable to follow up its prestige victory with a diplomatic victory. When the blockade was lifted in 1949, the Allies, as usual, returned to their old stances, as shaky militarily as they were confused juridically. Under the elementary rules of diplomacy, the Allies should have demanded that, in reparation for the Soviet treaty violation, Moscow negotiate an immediate German peace treaty. Their failure to do so is proof of their diplomatic incompetence. That the Allies failed to press the advantage granted them by the Soviet setback during that brief period when

²⁴ Revel, *op. cit.*, pp. 251-252.

²⁵ Kissinger, *World Order*, London: Penguin, 2015, pp. 281-282.

the United States had a monopoly on the atomic bomb, which gave it an absolute superiority unprecedented in history, has no rational explanation, however blind we may think Western leaders were at the time – an estimate we need not be tender about. There certainly would have been nothing immoral about using our atomic monopoly to force Stalin to agree to a German peace treaty, since we would have been using our military superiority not to make war but to eliminate a cause of future war or, at least, of permanent friction and of fundamental Western weakness.”²⁶

The Berlin blockade spurred the West into creating the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which came into existence on April 4, 1949. Its aim was to defend its members – Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom and the United States – against Soviet aggression. The defensive nature of the alliance was underlined by its doctrine of “containment”; the aim was not to destroy the Soviet Union but to contain it within certain limits. The most critical part of its constitution was Article 5, which began with the words: “The parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all.” The Cold War had begun...

“NATO,” writes Kissinger, “was a new departure in the establishment of European security. The international order no longer was characterized by the traditional European balance of power distilled from shifting coalitions of multiple states. Rather, whatever equilibrium prevailed had been reduced to that existing between the two nuclear superpowers. If either disappeared or failed to engage, the equilibrium would be lost, and its opponent would become dominant. The first was what happened in 1990 with the collapse of the Soviet Union; the second was the perennial fear of America’s allies during the Cold War that America might lose interest in the defence of Europe. The nations joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization provided some military forces but more in the nature of an admission ticket for a shelter under America’s nuclear umbrella than as an instrument of local defense. What America was constructing in the Truman era was a unilateral guarantee in the form of a traditional alliance...”²⁷

In retrospect, we can see that the two decisive events that elicited this war were Stalin’s rejection of Marshall Aid for Eastern Europe and the communist coup in Czechoslovakia in February, 1948, which put paid to the last hopes of a peaceful evolution to a non-communist system in the East. In reality, however, a cold war had existed between the Communist East and the Capitalist West since the early 1920s, interrupted only briefly during the war years 1941-45. Such a war had been declared on all “normal” governments by Lenin, and Stalin had faithfully followed the Leninist line except for the short period of the Popular Fronts in the late 1930s and the wartime alliance of

²⁶ Revel, *op. cit.*, pp. 251-252.

²⁷ Kissinger, *op. cit.*, pp. 282-283.

1941-45. So 1948-49 simply marked a return to the norm with regard to the relationship of normal governments to the profoundly abnormal anti-state of the Soviet Union. Only now, thanks to the firmness and imagination of the American leaders, Western Europe was on the road to economic recovery without the temptations of communism and fascism that had so weakened it in the 1930s, while Eastern Europe, more firmly enslaved than ever, was falling further and further behind economically. Thus the advantage gained by Stalin after his victory in the Second World War was being whittled away.

But not for long... As we shall see, the pendulum swung violently from one side to the other until the to many unexpected final victory of America in 1991. Even then, America's victory proved to be more pyrrhic and short-lived than expected - but that is another story...

I. KOREA, HUNGARY AND THE GREAT LEAP FORWARD (1949-1961)

The Cold War involved not a single shot fired in anger between the United States and the Soviet Union. It was conducted entirely in other countries through proxy armies. As such, it recalls the imperialist wars between European countries such as Britain and France in the nineteenth century.

There are indeed similarities, but the differences are more important. It is not inaccurate to call the Western and Soviet spheres of influence empires. But commercial exploitation was not the main aim on either side, as it was in the nineteenth-century empires. Not only did both twentieth-century empires hotly and sincerely disavow any kind of old-fashioned imperialism on the nineteenth-century model: their aim was far more ideological. The British and the French may have believed in “the White Man’s Burden” or the glories of French civilization – but these civilizational benefits to the colonies were secondary to the commercial gains to themselves. The Americans and the Soviets, on the other hand, were truly fighting for the liberal and socialist varieties of humanism respectively.

But the dynamics of the two anti-imperialist empires were very different. The old European empires, with the blessing of America, proceeded to free their former colonies, hoping to install in their place the ideology of liberal democracy – with varied success, as we have seen. The Soviets, on the other hand, not only did not liberate any part of the former Russian empire, but imposed a yoke far harsher than that of the nineteenth century empires on vast areas of the world, taking care that the same totalitarian cruelty should reign there as in the “mother country”.

As Revel wrote in 1985, “Since 1945 the two imperialisms have moved in exactly the opposite directions. Since the Second World War, the major ex-colonial powers that make up today’s capitalist world have abandoned, willingly or not, the territory they had annexed over the centuries. Spain long ago lost its vast American possessions. Since then, the former overseas holdings of Britain, Holland, France, Belgium and Portugal have become a crowd of independent nations. In some cases, decolonization went ahead with speed and intelligence, in others slowly and stupidly, with terrible carnage, but in the end it was done everywhere. It is interesting to note that the colonial powers that tried to resist the trend were disapproved of by the other capitalist countries; they were isolated even among their allies and forced to give in. Just how much real independence many of these new Third World states have is a matter of considerable debate. The fact remains, however, that aspiration and accession to independence on the part of any group with even the slightest claim to statehood is one of the great postwar historical phenomena.

“At a time, then, when territorial annexation, once considered a legitimate reward for military superiority, has given way to peoples’ right to self-determination and national status, only the Soviet Union continues to grow by means of armed conquest. In the 1940-80 period of decolonization, when the old empires were restoring independence to or conferring it on the territories they had subjugated over the centuries, the Soviet Union was moving the other way, appropriating a number of foreign countries by trick or by force.

“I would hesitate to weary the reader with a list he should be able to find in the encyclopedias and history books if it were not that most of these reference books, reflecting Europe’s cultural Finlandization, shamelessly gloss over the brilliant achievements of Soviet expansionism.

“By what right, for example, did the USSR cling after the war to the countries Germany ceded to it as payment for its neutrality under the Hitler-Stalin treaty sharing out a dismembered Europe? This is how the Soviets acquired the Baltic states, eastern Poland, southern Finland and part of Romania (Bessarabia and southern Bukovina). I grant that it was Germany that later broke the treaty and invaded the Soviet Union, which, it is worth recalling, would have liked nothing better than to go on enjoying its fruitful cooperation with the Nazis. Involuntarily and oh how regrettably, Moscow had no choice but to switch camps. Indeed, it *was switched* by Hitler.

“Was this any reason for the democracies not to reconsider what Hitler had bestowed on Stalin? Fighting alongside the Allies in the second phase of the war of course gave USSR the right, as it did to all the victors, to recover its own territory intact. But this did not authorize it to expand, as it alone did, at the expense of other martyred countries and certainly not to keep the proceeds of its collusion with the Nazis. Yet not only did the Allies fail to challenge these ill-gotten acquisitions, but they even threw in a few gifts, such as East Prussia, Ruthenia (a part of Czechoslovakia), the Kurile Islands, and the southern part of Sakhalin Island (in the Sea of Okhotsk, north of Japan). No popular vote, no referendum or plebiscite was organized or even contemplated through which to ask all these Poles, Lithuanians, Estonians, Letts, Romanians, Slovaks, Germans and others if they wanted to become Soviet subjects. The Allies shut their eyes firmly to these annexations, a disconcerting application of the principles guiding their destruction of nazism. Absorption of these countries into Soviet territory, so prodigiously contrary to the principles of that period of decolonization, revived the practices of a monarchist Europe that died two centuries ago. It constituted what may be called the first wave of imperialism and the first zone of national annexation.

“The second wave led to the creation of a second imperial zone, that of the satellite countries.

“Just how Eastern and Central Europe were subjugated is too well known to need repeating here. The technique used in this form of colonialism is to set up the façade of an ostensibly independent state. Administration of this state is entrusted to loyal nationals who function as provincial governors and who are allowed only a few minor departures from the Soviet system, as long as they don’t tamper with its essentials. In practice, the democracies very quickly recognized the Soviet Union’s right to quell by force any disturbances arising out of demands for genuine independence in the European satellites. In other words, they soon agreed to view the European satellites as appendices to Soviet territory, a de facto situation that the Helsinki pact would legitimize in 1975.

“The third wave and third zone of Soviet territorial conquest covered more distant countries that have been annexed or subjected to Soviet control since 1960. Some of these countries, including Cuba and Vietnam, are satellites in the strict sense; another, South Yemen, has been working since 1982 to destabilize the neighboring state of North Yemen. For, driving by unflagging effort, the Soviet advance never stops.

“Then came the African satellites: Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Benin, Guinea, and other, lesser prey, often colonized by mercenaries from other satellites – Cubans or East Germans. These are more fragile protectorates, subject to the sort of accidents that caused the fall in Equatorial Guinea (the former Spanish Guinea) of dictator Francisco Macias Nguema, who, with the help of Soviet advisers, had exterminated or exiled a good third of his country’s population in only a few years.

“Fragile though they are, these distant protectorates must nevertheless be considered satellites insofar as their policies, armies, police, transport, and diplomacy are in the hands of Soviets or Soviet agents...”²⁸

What was America’s attitude to colonialism? Undoubtedly sharply negative at first, as Churchill experienced to his chagrin in his conversations with Roosevelt. This was most clearly seen in Indonesia, where the Dutch colonialists “hoped to exploit the fact that nationalism enjoyed only limited backing across much of the archipelago, where fear of Japanese domination and (in some cases) anti-Islamic feeling made Dutch colonial rule the lesser of two evils. But the reality was that overall Dutch control, even under a Netherlands-Indonesia ‘commonwealth’, could not be maintained without the backing of Java, the most developed part of the island complex, with five-eighths of the population. It was Dutch failure to achieve this, and the American refusal to back a prolonged guerrilla war in Sumatra and Java (which might have wrecked the Indonesian economy and widened support for Communism), that forced the Dutch out in 1949-50.”²⁹

²⁸ Revel, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-58.

²⁹ Darwin, *op. cit.*, pp. 450-451.

However, as the Cold War developed and the new colonial powers of the Soviet Union and China threatened in Europe and Asia respectively, the Americans came to see the need to keep the British and French in particular on side. So they softened their anti-colonial zeal and decided to help them in some regions – most fatefully, the French in Vietnam. But as the anti-colonialist tide grew stronger, their irritation (to put it no more strongly) with the British and French returned. This was particularly important in the Suez Crisis in 1956, where the American refusal to help them led to the destruction of British influence in the Middle East and increased difficulties for the French in Algeria.

*

“In 1945,” writes Henry Kissinger, “Korea, until then a Japanese colony, had been liberated by the victorious Allies. The northern half of the Korean Peninsula was occupied by the Soviet Union, the southern half by the United States. Each established its form of government in its zone before it withdrew, in 1948 and 1949, respectively.”³⁰

“Rival regimes then emerged,” writes Norman Stone. “A leathery Methodist, Syngman Fhee, was promoted in the South, while the Communist North Korea formally became independent in 1948 under Kim Il Sung, a figure (also with a Protestant background) who emerged from Chinese shadows and had trained for a time at Khabarovsk in Siberia. Kim had megalomaniac qualities (he eventually proclaimed himself ‘President for Eternity’) and went to Moscow in March 1949, as Mao was winning in China. He wanted help to seize the South, where consolidation, with a small American presence, was ramshackle (as happened in Japan, there was a considerable enough Communist element there). That was refused: Stalin’s hands were full with the Berlin blockade. However, Mao was less discouraging, though he wanted action only ‘in the first half of 1950’, by which time he would control the whole of China. He even said that Chinese soldiers might be sent in, because the Americans would not be able to tell them apart...”³¹

The North Koreans crossed the 38th parallel, their border with South Korea, on June 25, 1950. Their tanks were Soviet, as were their planes and some of their pilots. Why had the normally ultra-cautious Stalin allowed himself to be persuaded by the North Korean leader Kim-il-Sung into approving the invasion (in April, 1950)? Probably for two reasons: first because now the Soviets had the H-bomb, and secondly because, since October of that year, China had finally been conquered by the Chinese communists under Mao. World Communism was on the crest of a wave, and since Stalin believed that a Third World War was in any case inevitable, he probably reasoned that if risks had to be taken, now was the time to take them. Besides, he probably

³⁰ Kissinger, *World Order*, London: Penguin, 2015, p. 288.

³¹ Stone, *The Atlantic and its Enemies*, London: Penguin, 2011, p. 95.

knew from his British spies in London and Washington Philby, Burgess and Maclean, that the Americans had ruled out the use of nuclear weapons. "Maclean's deputy on the American desk, Robert Cecil, later concluded that the Kremlin must have found the documents provided by Maclean 'of inestimable value in advising the Chinese and the North Koreans on strategy and negotiating positions.'"³² So with Soviet weaponry, and vast numbers of Chinese soldiers to help them, the North Koreans probably had a good chance of beating the Americans, whose lines of supply were, of course, far longer than those of the communists.

Kissinger adds another reason: Stalin "had learned from the defection of Tito two years earlier that first-generation Communist leaders were especially difficult to fit into the Soviet satellite system that he thought imperative for Russia's national interest. Starting with Mao's visit to Moscow in later 1949 – less than three months after the People's Republic of China was proclaimed – Stalin had been uneasy about the looming potential of China led by a man of Mao's dominating attributes. An invasion of South Korea might divert China into a crisis on its borders, deflect America's attention from Europe to Asia, and, in any event, absorb some of America's resources in that effort. If achieved with Soviet support, Pyongyang's unification project might give the Soviet Union a dominant position in Korea and, in view of the historical suspicions of these countries for each other, create a kind of counterbalance to China in Asia. Mao followed Stalin's lead – conveyed to him by Kim Il-sung in almost certainly exaggerated terms – for the converse reason; he feared encirclement by the Soviet Union, whose acquisitive interest in Korea had been demonstrated over the centuries and was even then displayed in the demands for ideological subservience Stalin was making as a price for the Sino-Soviet alliance..."³³

But Stalin had miscalculated. He did not realize that the American president was in his own way a man of steel – and some cunning also. On hearing the news of the invasion, President Truman, who was in his home state of Missouri, thought that World War III was about to begin. But on reaching Washington, he "told one of those who met him at the airport, 'By God, I am going to let them have it.' The United Nations Security Council, meeting that day, passed a resolution by nine votes to nil demanding the withdrawal of North Korean forces. There was no Soviet veto, as the Soviet delegate, Yakov Malik, had walked out of the Security Council five months earlier in protest at his colleagues' refusal to give Communist China the Chinese Nationalist place on the Council..."³⁴

³² Christopher Andrew and Vasily Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive. The KGB in Europe and the West*, London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1999, p. 203.

³³ Kissinger, *op. cit.*, p. 289.

³⁴ Martin Gilbert, *A History of the Twentieth Century*, vol. 2: 1933-1951, London: HarperCollins, 1998, pp. 865-866. This blunder was Stalin's fault. As Robert Service writes, he had "repudiated the advice of his Ministry of External Affairs to drop the boycott so as to prevent the Americans and their allies from landing with the legitimacy conferred by the sanction of the United Nations" (*Stalin*, London: Pan, 2004, p. 554).

Since the invasion took place outside the North Atlantic area, it did not become the first test of the solidity of the NATO alliance. Instead, it was the United Nations that took on the responsibility of resisting Communist tyranny. And while, inevitably, the major burden of the war, both financial and military, fell on the United States, it has to be said that the international organization passed the test with flying colours as several nations gave troops in what was truly a war to defend freedom. Neither before nor since has the United Nations done so well in coordinating an effective resistance to totalitarian evil.

The fortunes of war swung wildly from one side to the other. In the early months, the UN forces were nearly forced to evacuate the whole peninsula. But then in a brilliant flanking movement at Inchon, the UN Commander General MacArthur drove the North Koreans up towards the border with China. Since the Chinese were now sending troops to help the North Koreans, MacArthur recommended carrying the war over the border and even dropping the hydrogen bomb on the Chinese. But President Truman, the man who had ordered the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, was not going to repeat the experience: firmly and wisely, he said no, and World War Three was averted. And he refused to panic when things started going badly some months later, but instead boldly sacked the very popular MacArthur³⁵ and appointed General Ridgway, who reversed the tide once more, recaptured Seoul and made it possible for the two front lines to stabilize more or less where they had begun, on the 38th parallel, with a very heavily fortified demilitarized zone separating them.

In hindsight, we may see the Korean War as the beginning of the decline of Soviet power. For the two communist super-powers had failed to dislodge the Americans from a clearly weaker position, even though the Americans forswore their huge advantage in nuclear weapons. (The Soviets had exploded their first nuclear device in August, 1949.) This was largely Stalin's fault. By throwing in his own troops and planes, he could almost certainly have swung the war in the communist direction. But he wanted to manipulate Mao and Kim-il-Sung just as he manipulated his own European and Russian satraps. And so he insisted that the Chinese help the North Koreans, while providing only military equipment on his part – not the air power that the Chinese so desperately needed. Nor did he agree to a peace treaty in the peninsula; he preferred a war of attrition in which the North Koreans would have to continue fighting indefinitely, because, as he told Chou-en-Lai, “they lose nothing *except for their men*”.³⁶

³⁵ As Winston Groom writes, “Truman relieved MacArthur for insubordination when he refused to follow Truman's doctrine seeking a limited [i.e. non-nuclear] war” (“The Making of MacArthur”, *National Geographic History*, January-February, 2016, p. 86).

³⁶ Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin. The Court of the Red Tsar*, London: Phoenix, 2004, p. 623.

In the event, as David Reynolds writes, “the Americans lost 33,000; the Chinese perhaps half a million, including one of Mao’s sons; and the overall Korean death toll was maybe 2.5 million, a 10th of the population...”³⁷

But in choosing a war of attrition, Stalin made another serious strategic error: it sowed seeds of distrust between the two communist super-powers. Already at their first meeting, during Stalin’s 70th birthday celebrations in Moscow in December, 1949, Stalin had snubbed Mao. It was not that Stalin did not appreciate Mao’s achievement in making the world’s most populous state communist. Nor did he deny that China would now have to take the lead in the communist movement in the Far East. But he demanded veneration as the high-priest of the movement, and – now already in his 70s – he could not abandon the cunning and manipulative ways of his youth, which might be effective against Capitalist foes such as Churchill or Roosevelt but were less so with Communist “allies” hardly less cunning than himself such as Tito or Mao.

The Lord said that since the kingdom of Satan is divided against itself, it must fall (Matthew 12.26) And already before the death of Stalin, the communist movement was divided against itself. The differences between Stalin and Mao during the Korean War presaged the more serious split between the two powers in the 1960s - and the complete reversal of roles that we see today, when in spite of its bluster and posturing Putin’s Russia is clearly the junior partner to the enormous and continually rising power of still-communist and only superficially pro-Russian China...

*

On March 5, 1953 Stalin was dying. “His face was discoloured,” wrote his daughter Svetlana, “his features becoming unrecognizable... He literally choked to death as we watched. The death agony was terrible... At the last minute, he opened his eyes. It was a terrible look, either mad or angry, and full of the fear of death.”

“Suddenly,” continues Simon Sebag Montefiore, “the rhythm of his breathing changed. A nurse thought it was ‘like a greeting’. He ‘seemed either to be pointing upwards somewhere or threatening us all...’ observed Svetlana. It was more likely he was simply clawing the air for oxygen [or pointing at the demons coming for his soul]. ‘Then the next moment, his spirit after one last effort tore itself from his body.’ A woman doctor burst into tears and threw her arms around the devastated Svetlana...”³⁸

And therein lay the tragedy for Russia and the world: that so many still loved this most evil of men. For in the days that followed millions poured into Moscow to mourn over the destroyer of their country and their Church.

³⁷ Reynolds, “Nuclear fall-out”, *BBC History Magazine*, July, 2016, p. 43.

³⁸ Montefiore, *Stalin. The Court of the Red Tsar*, London: Phoenix, 2004, pp. 663-664.

The hysteria was so great that hundreds were crushed to death. Their grief was genuine – and therefore their guilt, and its punishment, continued. To this day the wrath of God over the Russian land continues unassuaged...

One of the few who did not lament Stalin's death was Lavrenty Beria, the terrible Georgian executioner and head of the security services. It is possible that he killed Stalin. According to Molotov, Beria actually said: "I did away with him, I saved you all."³⁹ Certainly, he openly rejoiced in Stalin's death, while even Molotov, whose beloved wife Polina was still in prison when Stalin died, genuinely mourned him. Moreover, Beria was probably the one satrap who really did not believe in communism – after all, he wanted his grandchildren to go to Oxford University!

Jean-François Revel writes: "In their first communiqué, on March 6, 1953, Stalin's successors declared their support for a policy that could guarantee 'the prevention of any kind of disorder and panic.' Why those two words? A month and a half earlier, the Eisenhower-Dulles team had come to office in Washington brandishing the rollback policy they had proclaimed during the election campaign. Stalin's heirs did not know much about the 'imperialists' facing them, and they had forgotten Lenin's observations on the 'deaf-mutes' in the West. Except for Molotov, they had had almost no personal contact with Western political figures. But they did know how fragile the situation was within the Soviet system, including its satellites. They readily perceived how disadvantaged they were by the conjunction of three factors:

1. the overall balance of power favored the West;
2. the new team in the White House was calling for a rollback of communism;
3. Stalin's death had created a situation of weakness in the Communist sphere, both at the party summit (as witness the trial and execution of First Deputy Premier Lavrenty P. Beria) and among the subject peoples (the East German uprising in June 1953)."⁴⁰

In fact, there was one successor who, as KGB head, knew the fragility of the Soviet empire well – Beria. He it was who now took first place in the system – temporarily. And it was he who probably initiated the "tidal wave of reforms", in Robert Service's words, that "crashed over Stalin's policies in the USSR in the first week of March 1953. His successors were posthumously opposing him after decades of obedience. No member of the Party Presidium favoured the total conservation of his legacy; even communist conservatives like Molotov and Kaganovich approved some sort of innovation. Changes frustrated by Stalin at last became possible. Yet debate did not flood out into society. It was not allowed to. The last thing the ascendant party leaders wanted was to let ordinary Soviet citizens, or even the lower functionaries of the state, influence what was decided in the Kremlin.

³⁹ Stone, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

⁴⁰ Revel, *How Democracies Perish*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1985, p. 286.

“Molotov and Kaganovich could not prevent the reform projects of Malenkov, Beria and Khrushchev. Malenkov wanted to increase payments to collective farms so as to boost agricultural production [the peasants had starved since the war]; he also favoured giving priority to light-industrial investment. Khrushchev wished to plough up virgin lands in the USSR and end the decades-old uncertainty about supplies of bread. Malenkov and Beria were committed to making overtures to the USA for peaceful coexistence; they feared that the Cold War might turn into a disaster for humanity. Beria desired a rapprochement with Yugoslavia; he also aimed to withdraw privileges for Russians in the USSR and to widen the limits of cultural self-expression. Malenkov, Beria and Khrushchev agreed that public life should be conducted on a less violent and arbitrary basis than under Stalin. They supported the release of political convicts from the labour camps. Quietly they restrained the official media from delivering the customary grandiose eulogies to Stalin. If his policies were to be replaced, it no longer made sense to go on treating him as a demigod...”⁴¹

However, reversing the work of “the greatest genius of all times and all nations” is not so easy. In July, 1953 Malenkov proposed unmasking the cult of personality. But he was supported only by Khrushchev...⁴²

Certainly, ordinary citizens did not suddenly feel a noticeable access of kindness and mercy from their rulers. On May 16, 1954 there began the biggest rebellion of GULAG prisoners in the history of the Soviet concentration camps in Kengir, Kazakhstan. For forty days the prisoners – of all nationalities, but especially Ukrainians – held out. However, on June 26 the NKVD regained control of “Steplog” with the aid of the Red Army and T-34 tanks. Between 500 and 700 prisoners were killed.⁴³ Again, in September, 1954, during military exercises in Orenburg province under the direction of Marshal Zhukov, an atomic bomb was dropped, causing 43,000 military and 10,000 civilian deaths.⁴⁴ Of course, there were casualties also from western atomic tests. But the callousness of the Soviets – who kept this incident a strict secret for many years – was unequalled. Nor, in spite of references to “coexistence” with the capitalist world – a phrase neither Lenin nor Stalin would ever have used – did the successors of Stalin hint at a renunciation of their faith. “If someone believes,” said Khrushchev in 1955, “that our smiles involve abandonment of the teaching of Marx, Engels and Lenin, he deceives

⁴¹ Service, *Stalin*, London: Pan, 2004, p. 591.

⁴² Nikolai Nad, “Kto nizverg Stalina. Razvenchanie kul'ta lichnost nachal ne Khrushchev” (Who overthrew Stalin. The unmasking of the cult of personality was not initiated by Khrushchev), *Argumenty i Fakty*, 21 August, 2013. http://www.aif.ru/society/history/kto_nizverg_stalina_razvenchanie_kulta_lichnosti_nachal_ne_hrushev?utm_source=Surfingbird&utm_medium=click&utm_campaign=Surfingbird.

⁴³ For a detailed description of the Kengir uprising, see Anne Applebaum, *Gulag. A History*, London: Penguin, 2003, pp. 444-454.

⁴⁴ Oleg Leusenko, “Bolee poluveka nazad SSSR sbrosil atomnuu bombu na svoikh grazhdan: pogibli 43,000 sovietskikh soldat” (More than half a century ago the USSR threw an atomic bomb on its own citizens: 43,000 Soviet soldiers died), *Retrans24*, <http://retrans24.blogspot.co.uk/2015/09/43-000.html?m=1>.

himself poorly. Those who wait for that must wait until a shrimp learns to whistle..."⁴⁵

*

Nevertheless it was undeniable that a diminution of revolutionary ardour was taking place. And then the critical event took place: at the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in February, 1956, Khrushchev read his secret speech exposing Stalin: "We are concerned with a question which has immense importance for the party now and for the future - with how the cult of the person of Stalin has been gradually growing, the cult which became at a certain specific stage the source of a whole series of grave perversions of party principles, of party democracy, of revolutionary legality..."

Andrei Zubov writes that this event was "absolutely unprecedented, not only in the Soviet Union, but in the whole communist world movement. Because the main, axial figure of the whole communist movement supported by the Soviet Union (over there, there was another, Trotskyite movement), was, of course, Stalin. Stalin was its centre and essence. His methods of rule, his attitude to men, to the world - it was against all that this people with communist views throughout the world - in China, in Europe, and in Latin America, not to speak of the Soviet Union - measured themselves. And the condemnation of Stalin - for the first time, the demonstration of his crimes (almost exclusively with regard to members of the party - the repressions after 17th Congress of the Bolshevik Party, the "Leningrad Affair" of 1948) - this information completely blew people's minds. Very many did not believe it. Others said that it was a provocation. A third group condemned Khrushchev and said that he was a traitor to the cause of communism. And of course those who had previously had a negative attitude to Stalin or had suffered at his hands were in raptures.

"But to some degree clever people had noticed this process even earlier. In fact, the process of destalinization began with the death of Stalin - precisely in March, 1953. Because at first Beria, and then, after Beria's overthrow, Malenkov and Khrushchev began the process of the gradual release of people from the camps, the gradual improvement of the people's situation in agriculture, the peasant collective-farmers, a relaxation in censorship - and stopped inflating Stalin's cult of personality literally from the first days. Stalin had not yet been buried, but they already said: that's enough, we must not have all these improbable panegyrics, these incredible verses, and they passed to the day-to-day affairs of state construction. Clever people noticed that Stalin's closest colleagues absolutely were not intending to sing hosannas to Stalin as they themselves had sung them until the last day of his life. Naturally, the case of the Jewish doctors was cut short, as were many other

⁴⁵ Khrushchev, in M.J. Cohen and John Major, *History in Quotations*, London: Cassell, 2004, p. 881.

cases. 1956 was both unexpected and expected for those who had a good understanding of the Muscovite political kitchen.

“How was destalinization carried out, and was it superficial? Of course it was not superficial. Yes, monuments were pulled down – that was very important; Stalin was thrown out of the mausoleum – that also was important. But much more important was what they said: under Stalin terrible crimes were carried out. And many people were rehabilitated posthumously. Most of these people were condemned according to article 58 as having acted ‘in a hostile manner’ (as spies, conspirators, terrorists) against Soviet power. A huge number of people killed by Stalin were rehabilitated, and those few who survived were rehabilitated in their lifetime, and a mass of people returned. In spite of Khrushchev’s fantastic mistakes, in spite of the fact that he himself was just such a murderer and criminal as Stalin – both in the Ukraine and in Moscow, – a huge number of people of that generation were grateful to him for liberating, justifying and returning the repressed from exile. And in general the epoch of total repressions then came to an end...”⁴⁶

A sign of this was the publication, in Italy, of the poet Boris Pasternak’s great novel, *Doctor Zhivago*. This was significant not only because of its eloquent criticism of Sovietism, which earned him the Nobel Prize for literature, but also because its author was not sent to the Gulag, but died a natural death in freedom. At this funeral, whose place and date had been circulated by samizdat, a vast crowd of young intelligentsia assembled to celebrate the great poet – the age of dissidence had begun...

Moreover, there were physical rebellions... The most serious of them were in the Soviet satellites in Eastern Europe, where Soviet slavery was still a relatively new experience. “In June 1953,” writes Revel, “the people of East Germany rose against the occupying power, but the West failed to seize the opportunity to insist on peace-treaty negotiations that would have ended the dangerous division of Germany, still one of the Soviet Union’s principal means of blackmailing the United States and Europe. At the time, no Western government had yet officially recognized the East German Communist government.

“In the summer and fall of 1956, the Polish people rose; we let the Soviets arrange matters their way, by bouncing Bierut and replacing him with Wladyslaw Gomulka. Instead of acting like indifferent spectators, the West could have dusted off promises made at Yalta – the real ones – committing Stalin to organize free elections in Poland. The balance of power, then high favourable to the United States, would have made such a demand eminently realistic and, we must insist, in no way ‘imperialistic’; it would in fact have

⁴⁶ Zubov, “Stalin – eto os’, vokrug kotorogo vraschائيetsa vsia nyneshniaia vlast’” (Stalin is the axis on which the whole of the present regime revolves), *Open Russia*, February 25, 2016, <https://openrussia.org/post/view/13010>.

been the moral thing to do, in support of a people's right of self-determination and in the interests of that peace that the Polish tragedy in the heart of Europe has continually threatened in the twenty-five years since then.

"Shortly after the Polish October came a new explosion, the even more widespread and more violent uprising of the Hungarian people, directly challenging the Soviet presence there and communism itself, without prompting from the West. With Moscow's agent, the Stalinist Erno Gero, swept out of power, the most popular man in the country, the only one available in that time of disintegrating power structure, was old Communist Imre Nagy, a former Premier who had been ousted a year earlier. The only program he could come up with was a sort of neutralization of Hungary on the Austrian model approved the year before, which would have taken the country out of the Soviet bloc. A mere flip of the finger by the West could have been decisive then. Caught off balance, with their guard down, the Soviets were being condemned throughout the world, and they were at a strategic disadvantage. Had the West overcome its irresolution and formulated its demands, it would not even have had to use its military power. Why, after all, was Khrushchev so frightened? Why did he feel a need to cover himself with Mao Tse-tung's 'authorization', and why did he consult secretly with Tito? Why did he hesitate so long before moving, sending in his tanks only when he was sure the West would merely boo the play without interrupting the performance?"⁴⁷

Unfortunately, however, the West was distracted by the Suez crisis... The Hungarian revolution under Imre Nagy in 1956, and its ruthless suppression by the Soviets, showed that the relaxation of total repression introduced by Stalin's successors by no means meant freedom. There was a red line that could not be crossed; and when Nagy's government tried to withdraw Hungary from the Warsaw Pact, the line had been crossed and Soviet tanks bloodily restored the status quo ante. However, Hungary was important in that it brought to an end the illusion entertained by many Western and Eastern European intellectuals that there could be a "good" Marxism that was not Stalinist. Among these were the historian François Furet in France and Leszek Kołakowski in Poland.⁴⁸ This beginning of a shift in intellectual opinion would bear fruit in the Prague Spring of 1968 and the Solidarity Movement in Poland in the 1980s.

*

While Soviet Communism proceeded relatively peacefully in this period, it was a completely different story in the Far East, where new nation-converts to Communism such as China and Vietnam were in a state of almost constant revolutionary turmoil. This was in part owing to important differences

⁴⁷ Revel, *op. cit.*, pp. 285-286.

⁴⁸ See Tony Judt's articles on these two men in *When the Facts Change*, London: Vintage, 2015, chapters 26 and 28.

between Soviet and Far Eastern Communism. In particular, unlike Marx and Engels, but more like Lenin or Stalin in the 1930s, the Eastern Communist leaders did not believe that everything was determined by an economic base, but rather insisted on the primacy of a quasi-religious *faith* in the triumph of the revolution and sheer *willpower* over all material obstacles, in despite of all political and economic theory. And the results, if possible, were even more horrific than those of “orthodox communism”. Thus Mao’s “Great Leap Forward” (1958-62) claimed, by conservative estimates, 45 million lives, and quite possibly – between 50 and 60 million.⁴⁹

As Maria Hsia Chang writes, “By the late 1950s, bolstered by the results of the socialist transformation of China, Mao thought that the transition to communism was imminent. Between 1953 and 1957, the Chinese economy registered an annual real rate of growth of 6.2 percent, the gross value of industrial output increased by 128 percent and agriculture by 24.8 percent. Mao was convinced that what was needed was a concerted effort to mobilize China’s human resources to accelerate the pace of economic development, so that production itself doubled in a single five-year period. With that, China would leapfrog over the Soviet Union by making ‘a great leap forward’ from socialism into utopian communism.

“The leap forward would be effected through the sheer will and enthusiasm of the masses. Notwithstanding its unskilled populace and backward technology, Mao believed that China could conquer its poverty if only the people had sufficient faith and commitment. Industrial development would not be confined to the urban centers; instead, the peasants would produce steel in backyard furnaces. Impassioned by his vision, millions of Chinese were mobilized to undertake massive programs of excavation, construction, reforestation, and water control – a modern analogue of the *corvée* labor enterprises of dynastic China. To free men and women for this heroic purpose, peasant families were merged into gargantuan communes, each comprised of thousands of households. In anticipation of the imminent arrival of communism, private property ownership was totally abjured, including farm tools and draught animals.

“Rather than the realization of utopia, the Great Leap Forward ended in signal disaster. The ‘steel’ produced in backyard furnaces turned out to be entirely useless. To curry favor with Mao, commune cadres exaggerated their farm production figures, on the basis of which Beijing exacted its quote of grain harvest to feed China’s urban populace, leaving little for the peasants. The result was a famine that ended the 1950s in which at least 15 million starved to death – a direct consequence of misguided policies and wasted resources.

“In the cost accounting that followed, Mao relinquished his post as head of state to Lii Shaoqi (while retaining his chairmanship of the party) and

⁴⁹ Frank Dikötter, *Mao’s Great Famine*, London: Bloomsbury, 2011, pp. 325, 333.

retreated from active governing. Liu, with Deng Xiaoping as his assistant, took over the affairs of governance. The new leadership eschewed the more radical features of Maoism. Instead of ideological appeals, the party turned to capitalist measures to revive the economy: Peasants could own small private plots, and material incentives of differential wages were used to spur production.”⁵⁰

*

American power reached its peak in the 1950s. As John Darwin writes, “in dynamic sectors like air transport and mass entertainment, American products were almost unbeatable. The ‘soft power’ of economic and cultural influence underwrote the ‘hard power’ of strategic might. No country that relied on a trading currency could risk Washington’s displeasure, lest in moments of strain the support of the dollar might be withheld.

“The huge zone where America provided – or imposed – its strategic protection (by 1955 the United States had 450 bases in 36 countries) overlapped with the sphere of the new international economy of which America was the pivot. Together they formed the Pax Americana. In the 1950s it was consolidated rapidly, though not without friction. A critical year was 1956. Washington’s refusal to help the Hungarian revolt against Soviet hegemony marked a tacit acceptance of the European partition of 1945-8. Almost simultaneously, by forcing the British and French (through financial pressure⁰ to abandon their effort to destroy Nasser’s regime, Washington served notice that its European allies must manage what remained of their imperial space in ways that conformed with its grand design. The general return to convertibility among the Western currencies in 1958 signalled the end of ‘emergency economics’ and the normalization of the global trading economy. In the Middle East and South East Asia, it seemed that limited intervention was enough to forestall the expansion of Soviet influence and stabilize the frontier between the superpower spheres. With the line of ‘containment’ now tightly drawn across much of Eurasia, and the strategic means (by a nuclear onslaught) to deter a Soviet breakout into Western Europe, the global balance now looked firmly tilted towards American primacy...”⁵¹

However, continues Darwin, that American primacy would begin to look very shaky very soon. For “like the German empire before 1914, the Soviet Union sought a ‘place in the sun’ and the right to shape the emerging world order. By 1960 the signs of rivalry were coming thick and fast. When Washington tried to crush Castro’s revolution in Cuba by barring the import of sugar (is proven tactics), Khrushchev promised to buy it instead. When the Congo exploded, he denounced the failure to support Lumumba’s government and portrayed the UN as a tool of the West needing drastic

⁵⁰ Chang, *Return of the Dragon*, Oxford: Westview Press, 2001, pp. 145-148.

⁵¹ Darwin, *op. cit.*, pp. 471-472.

reform. In London and Washington there was deep alarm. In 1961 a new front opened in South East Asia when Ho Chi Minh launched the struggle against the Diem regime in south Vietnam. The Yemen revolution in 1962, and the civil war that followed, made it seem likely that Nasser (who intervened massively on the revolutionary side) would become much more dependent upon Soviet aid and that the Yemeni war would unsettle South Arabia. With great reluctance, the Americans promised their help against any attack on the Saudi state by Nasser's Yemeni clients. Most dramatic of all, was the dispatch of Soviet missiles to Khrushchev's new ally in Latin America..."⁵²

⁵² Darwin, *op. cit.*, p. 474.

II. CUBA, VIETNAM AND THE BOMB (1961-1973)

The Cuban crisis was notable for bringing about a nuclear confrontation, and the imminent possibility of nuclear war between the superpowers for the first time...

By the late 1950s, not only the United States (in 1952), but also the Soviet Union (in 1953) and Britain (1957) had acquired, not only the atomic bomb, but also the far more powerful thermonuclear weapons capable of inflicting hitherto unimaginable destruction and death.

“The race” writes David Reynolds, “was then to upgrade their ‘delivery systems’ from the era of air power into the missile age. This time the Soviets beat the Americans. Their launch of a man-made satellite, Sputnik, in November 1957 was both a technological humiliation for the USA and also a sign that the USSR had a sufficiently powerful rocket to launch a nuclear missile all the way to America. Eisenhower’s administration hastily accelerated its own missile programme and implemented a major scheme of civil defence.”⁵³

The two superpowers had adopted a system of deterrence called “Mutually Assured Destruction” (MAD). As Kevin Ruane writes, Churchill also embraced this mad system. By the time he retired as prime minister in April, 1955, “he had concluded that nuclear arms, especially the genocidal H-bomb, were a potentially stabilizing element in world affairs...

“The ‘annihilating character of these agencies may bring an utterly unforeseeable security to mankind,’ he predicted. If the nuclear arsenals of the superpowers could be balanced, then by a ‘sublime irony... safety will be the sturdy child of terror, and survival the twin brother of annihilation’.”⁵⁴

“The nuclear age,” writes Henry Kissinger, “posed the dilemma of how to bring the destructiveness of modern weapons into some moral or political relationship with the objectives that were being pursued. Prospects for any kind of international order – indeed, for human survival – now urgently required the amelioration, if not elimination, of major-power conflict. A theoretical limit was sought – short of the point of either superpower using the entirety of its military capabilities.

“Strategic stability was defined as a balance in which neither side would use its weapons of mass destruction because the adversary was always able to inflict an unacceptable level of destruction in retaliation. In a series of seminars at Harvard, Caltech, MIT, and the Rand Corporation among others in the 1950s and 1960s, a doctrine of ‘limited use’ explored confining nuclear

⁵³ Reynolds, “Nuclear Fall-Out”, *BBC History Magazine*, July, 2016, p. 43.

⁵⁴ Ruane, “Winston Churchill: Atomic Warrior, Nuclear Peacemaker”, *BBC History Magazine*, November, 2016, p. 23.

weapons to the battlefield or to military targets. All such theoretical efforts failed; whatever limits were imagined, once the threshold to nuclear warfare was crossed, modern technology overrode observable limits and always enabled the adversary to escalate. Ultimately, strategists on both sides coalesced, at least tacitly, on the concept of a mutually assured destruction as the mechanism of nuclear peace. Based on a premise that both sides possessed a nuclear arsenal capable of surviving an initial assault, the objective was to counterbalance threats sufficiently terrifying that neither side would conceive of actually invoking them.

“By the end of the 1960s, the prevailing strategic doctrine of each superpower relied on the ability to inflict an ‘unacceptable’ level of damage on the presumed adversary. What the adversary would consider unacceptable was, of course, unknowable; nor was this judgement communicated...

“Many efforts were undertaken to avoid the dilemma of possessing a huge arsenal that could not be used and whose use could not even plausibly be threatened. Complicated war scenarios were devised. But neither side, to the best of my knowledge – and for some of this period I was in a position to know – ever approached the point of actually using nuclear weapons in a specific crisis between the two superpowers. Except for the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, when a Soviet combat division was initially authorized to use its nuclear weapons to defend itself, neither side approached their use, either against each other or in wars against non-nuclear third countries...”⁵⁵

That the crisis which nearly led to MAD should have taken place in Cuba was a function both of that country’s geographical closeness to the United States and of its recent history, alternating between rightist and leftist governments.

Protopresbyter James Thornton writes: “In 1933, a leftist revolutionary uprising overthrew the administration of President Gerardo Machado and put Ramón Grau San Martín in power as the head of what came to be called the ‘One Hundred Days Government.’ Grau himself was a moderate reformer but was surrounded by radicals in his administration. That government was overthrown in January 1934 by Army Chief of Staff Colonel Fulgencio Batista, who installed a series of provisional governments throughout the remainder of the decade.

“In the election of 1940, which was reportedly open and fair, Batista won the presidency. He was succeeded in office by Grau, who was elected in 1944, and Carlos Prío Socarrás, elected in 1948. Prío’s period in office was marred by a substantial increase in government corruption and political violence. Consequently, in March 1952, Batista, in concert with leaders of the military and police, seized power to prevent the country from sinking into complete

⁵⁵ Kissinger, *World Order*, London: Penguin, 2015, pp. 332-333, 334.

chaos. The outcome of free elections in 1953, which made Batista legally the president, seemed to signal the approval of most Cubans of the coup of the previous year, since the country had grown impatient with the seemingly endless disorder.

“About Batista’s administration one can say both bad things and good. On the bad side, corruption was not eliminated and organized crime, which had gained a considerable toehold in Cuba immediately after the Second World War, continued to thrive. On the good side, the nation enjoyed tremendous prosperity in the 1950s. Wages in Cuba were the eighth highest in the world. The country was blessed by a large and growing middle class, which constituted approximately one-third of the population. Social mobility (the ability of members of one class in the social strata to rise to higher levels) became a genuine reality. Of the working class, more than 20 percent were classified as skilled. During the Batista years, Cuba enjoyed the third-highest per-capita income in Latin America and possessed an excellent network of highways and railroads, along with many modern ports. Cubans had the highest per-capita consumption in Latin America of meat, vegetables, cereals, automobiles, telephones, and radios, and was fifth highest in the number of television sets in the world.

“Cuba’s healthcare system was outstanding, with one of the highest numbers of medical doctors per capita in the world, the third-lowest adult mortality rate in the world, and the lowest infant mortality rate in Latin America. Cuba during the 1950s spent more on education than any other Latin American country and had the fourth-highest literacy rate in Latin America.

“President Batista built part of his following through an alliance with organized labor. As a result, workers by law worked an eight-hour day, 44 hours per week. They received a month’s paid vacation, plus four additional paid holidays per year. They were also entitled to nine days of sick leave with pay per year. In short, while things were not perfect in all of the areas just noted, they were nevertheless remarkably advanced and were gradually improving. Yet, much work remained to be done in rural regions, where poverty and the lack of a complete modern infrastructure remained a problem...

“In July 1953, a little-known revolutionary named Fidel Castro, his brother Raúl, and a small group of rebels attacked a military barracks in the southeast of the country hoping to spark a revolution, but were defeated. The Castro brothers were captured and sentenced to 15 years in prison. Unfortunately for Cuba and its people, President Batista declared a general amnesty in 1955, which set the Castros free. The two then travelled to Mexico where they, in conjunction with Argentinian Marxist terrorist Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara, organized a revolutionary group known as the ‘26th of July Movement,’ the aim of which was to overthrow the Cuban government and seize power. In December 1956, the group of some 82 fighters boarded a yacht and sailed to Cuba, where they were confronted by elements of Batista’s armed forces. In

the ensuing clash, most of the insurgents were either killed or captured. However, the Castro brothers, Guevara, and a small group of about 12 others escaped and fled into the Sierra Maestra mountains, where they launched the beginnings of the revolution that would bring Fidel Castro to power.

“Castro portrayed himself at that time as a devotee of democratic rule, contrasting that with Batista’s non-democratic authoritarianism, and promised American-style freedoms and an end to dictatorship. Some members of his 26th of July Movement, and even a few members of the leadership corps of that organization, were actually anti-communists, misled by Castro as to the true nature of his ultimate goals. The propaganda about a return to a representative and just government was widely believed, particularly among the poorer classes, students, and some intellectuals. Consequently, Castro’s movement grew as people hoped for an end to corruption, political upheaval, and revolutionary violence. Those people were soon to be sorely disappointed.

“During the late 1950s, after Castro had begun his revolutionary activities in the mountains of southeastern Cuba and up until Castro grabbed the reins of power, two men served as U.S. ambassadors to Cuba: Arthur Gardner, who served from 1953 to 1957, and Earl T. Smith, who served from 1957 to 1959. In testimony before the U.S. Senate Internal Security Subcommittee, Ambassador Gardner declared on August 27, 1960 that ‘U.S. Government agencies and the U.S. press played a major role in bringing Castro to power.’ He also testified that Castro was receiving illegal arms shipments from the United States, about which our government was aware, while, at the same time, the U.S. government halted arms sales to Batista, even halting shipments of arms for which the Cuban government had already paid. Senator Thomas J. Dodd asked if Gardner believed that the U.S. State Department ‘was anxious to replace Batista with Castro,’ to which he answered, ‘I think they were.’

“Ambassador Earl T. Smith testified before the same committee on August 30, 1960. He declared in his testimony that, ‘Without the United States, Castro would not be in power today.’ Smith wrote a letter to the editor of the *New York Times* in September 1979 in connection with the communist revolution in Nicaragua that put the Sandinista regime in power. Smith wished to illustrate how forces within the U.S. government brought both ultra-leftist governments to power. He wrote: ‘After a few months as chief of mission [that is, as Ambassador to Cuba], it became obvious to me that the Castro-led 26th of July movement embraced every element of radical political thought and terrorist inclination in Cuba. The State Department consistently intervened ... to bring about the downfall of President Fulgencio Batista, thereby making it possible for Fidel Castro to take over the Government of Cuba. The final coup in favor of Castro came on Dec. 17, 1958. On that date, in accordance with my instructions from the State Department, I personally conveyed to President Batista that the Department of State would view with skepticism any plan on his part, or any intention on his part, to remain in Cuba indefinitely. I had dealt him a mortal blow. He said in substance: “You

have intervened in behalf of the Castros, but I know it is not your doing and that you are only following out your instructions." Fourteen days later, on Jan. 1, 1959, the Government of Cuba fell.'

"In Ambassador Smith's book, *The Fourth Floor*, he lists the many actions by the United States that led to the fall of the Batista government. Among these were suspending arms sales, halting the sale of replacement parts for military equipment, persuading other governments not to sell arms to Batista, and public statements that assisted Castro and sabotaged Batista. These actions and many others, he wrote, 'had a devastating psychological effect upon those supporting the [pro-American, anti-Communist] government of Cuba.'

"Left-leaning journalists were as ubiquitous in the 1950s as they are today. One of these, *New York Times* reporter Herbert Matthews, interviewed Castro in February 1957, reporting that Castro 'has strong ideas of liberty, democracy, social justice, the need to restore the Constitution, to hold elections.' Matthews went on to say that Castro was not only *not* a communist, but was definitely an anti-communist. That story, and other similar stories, created a myth that Fidel Castro was actually a friend of the United States and its way of life, that he was the 'George Washington of Cuba' (as television entertainer and columnist Ed Sullivan called him), and that what he fought for was a program of mild agrarian reform, an end to corruption, and constitutional representative government. The myth also claimed that after his victory in January 1959, he was driven into the arms of the USSR by the uncooperative and even hostile attitude of the United States. Curiously, that myth is still repeated to this day. However, the truth about Castro is as far from that myth as possible, as we shall now see.

"Cuba officially established diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union in 1943, during the Second World War. Among the functionaries of the Soviet staff sent to Cuba was one Gumar W. Bashirov, an official of the NKVD, the Soviet secret police (later known as the KGB). Bashirov's job was to recruit a group of Cuban youths who, over time, could be used to subvert Cuban society and thereby advance the cause of world communism. Among those almost immediately recruited was the young Fidel Castro.

"Castro himself admitted in an interview with leftist journalist Saul Landau that he had become a Marxist when, as a student, he first read the *Communist Manifesto*. For that reason he willingly became a Soviet agent in 1943, when he was only 17 years of age. After the Soviet conquest of Eastern Europe in 1944-45, some of Bashirov's young recruits were sent to Czechoslovakia for training. But the Soviets forbade Castro himself from joining the Communist Party or any communist front organizations so that he would remain untainted by such associations. Instead, they placed him in reserve, saving him for future eventualities. We see, therefore, that Fidel

Castro was a Communist and a Soviet agent long before he took power in 1959.”⁵⁶

In April, 1961 President John F. Kennedy made a bungled attempt to topple Castro in the Bay of Pigs invasion. This was followed by farcical attempts to assassinate Castro. Encouraged by the President’s mistakes, and also by false intelligence reports that the Pentagon was planning to initiate a war with the Soviet Union “as soon as possible”, Khrushchev decided in May, 1962 to construct nuclear missile bases in Cuba.

The crisis came to a head at the end of October, when Khrushchev backed down and accepted Kennedy’s terms: Cuban territorial integrity in exchange for the withdrawal of “all Soviet offensive arms” from Cuba.⁵⁷

The Cuban missile crisis very nearly brought the world to nuclear war and MAD. As American secretary of state Dean Rusk put it, the two superpowers had been “eyeball to eyeball” and in the end it was the Soviets who “blinked”.⁵⁸ Some have attributed the escape to Kennedy’s coolness, others – to a principled refusal of a Soviet submarine officer to follow orders.⁵⁹

However, there is another more probable cause of the world’s salvation: the mercy of God in response to the intercession of His saints on earth – specifically, one of the great confessors of the Catacomb Church, Bishop Michael (Yershov) of Kazan. Stories about him began to seep out to the West towards the end of his life and after his death in 1974. But it was not until a full (739-page) biography of him appeared recently that his full stature and importance became apparent.

Michael Vasilyevich Yershov was born in 1911 into a poor family. His father became a Bolshevik and beat his son, but was later converted by him

⁵⁶ Thornton, “Castro’s Cuba”, *The New American*, 6 April 2016, <http://www.thenewamerican.com/world-news/north-america/item/22899-castros-cuba>.

However, the intelligence experts Christopher Andrew and Vasily Mitrokhin write that “the word ‘socialism’ did not appear in any of Castro’s speeches until 1961. Castro had a privileged upbringing in an affluent Cuban landowning family, and drew his early political inspiration not from Lenin but from the radical nationalist Partido del Pueblo Cubano and the ideals of its anti-Marxist founder, Eduardo Chibas.” (*The KGB and the World*, London: Penguin, 2006, p. 33)

⁵⁷ Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive: The KGB in Europe and the West*, London: Allen Press, 1999, pp. 235-240.

⁵⁸ Reynolds, *op. cit.*

⁵⁹ According to the PBS documentary, “The Man Who Saved the World” (<http://video.pbs.org/video/2295274962>), at the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis, second-in-command Vasili Arkhipov of the Soviet submarine B-59 refused to agree with his Captain’s order to launch nuclear torpedos against US warships and beginning a nuclear war between the superpowers. The US had been dropping depth charges near the submarine in an attempt to force it to surface, unaware it was carrying nuclear arms. The Soviet officers, who had lost radio contact with Moscow, concluded that World War 3 had begun, and 2 of the officers agreed to ‘blast the warships out of the water’. Arkhipov refused to agree - unanimous consent of 3 officers was required - and thanks to him, we are here to talk about it.

and repented. In 1931, Michael was imprisoned for the first time for his rejection of the Sovietized Moscow Patriarchate. Apart from a short period in the early 1940s, he remained in the camps for the rest of his life, being transported from one end of the GULAG to the other and dying, still in prison, on June 4, 1974. He presented an astounding image of patience that converted many to the Faith. He was a wonderworker and had the gifts of healing and prophecy. But perhaps his most astounding miracle was worked in the Mordovian camps together with his fellow inmate and secret bishop, Basil Vasilyevich Kalinin.

“It was August, 1962. The Cuban crisis! The attention of the world was glued to it, and it affected even the special section hidden in the Mordovian forests. ‘It has to be...! Khrushchev has penetrated into the bosom of the Americans!’ That was how the zeks [criminal inmates] interpreted it. People living beyond the barbed wire admitted the possibility that in time of war the local authorities would annihilate them, as the most dangerous politicals, first of all.”

“At the special section the zeks insisted that Moscow had issued an order that in time of war the politicals and recidivists would be annihilated first of all. The Cuban crisis was soon resolved, and our camp calmed down. Many years later I heard that the fears of the zeks in 1962 had not been without foundation. They had really been threatened with annihilation at that time.” “In 1964, soon after the fall of Khrushchev, a colonel from the Georgian KGB came to our camp. And he said, among other things: ‘Khrushchev adopted the policy of the complete physical annihilation of the politicals, and first of all the recidivists. During the Cuban crisis everything was prepared for your shooting - even a pit was dug.’” [Bishop] Basil Vasilyevich Kalinin remembered that the holy hierarch [Michael] once unexpectedly aroused him from sleep with the words: “Six minutes are remaining. Get up, Basil, and pray! The world is in danger!” And then he learned that this was the critical moment in the Cuban crisis...⁶⁰

Truly, “the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5.16). For “when Moses prayed to the Lord, the fire was quenched” (Numbers 11.2), and when Elijah prayed to the Lord the heavens were closed and again opened (James 5.17). And when the two bishops Michael and Basil prayed to the Lord, the world was saved from nuclear holocaust...

“Let the world mock us,” wrote Bishop Michael, “but we, poor people, must give all our strength and desire in prayer to God”. “We must strictly watch over ourselves, that we do not fall under the condemnation and wrath of God. We must pour out the balsam of our strength and purity of heart whatever happens, our simple, true and holy prayer to God, which is bound

⁶⁰ I.V. Ilichev, *Voin Khristov Vernij i Istinnij: Tajnij Episkop IPTs Mikhail (Yershov)* (Faithful and True Warrior of Christ: Secret Bishop Michael (Yershov), Moscow: Bratonezh, 2011, pp. 499-500.

by nothing except simplicity and belief in our eternal inheritance. For the Lord looks on the righteous and on their holy appeals, so that the prayer offered may be the earnest of our strength and the balsam of purification, by which the world might be preserved and the catastrophe which cannot even be expressed in words – God forbid! – might be averted.”

“You yourselves know that a city is preserved if a righteous man is praying in it. Once the righteous man has left the city, the elements rule in the city. And so, dear ones, remember this one thing, that now is not that day on which the universe was created, and everything was brought into being, but now is the day on which danger menaces the creation...”⁶¹

Besides this pure prayer of a righteous man, Bishop Michael insisted on the pure confession of the True Orthodox Faith. “Between the Church of the Tikhonite orientation [the True Orthodox Church] and the legal church [the Moscow Patriarchate] there is the following difference. The Church of the Tikhonite orientation zealously fulfils all the laws and rules that are prescribed by the Holy Fathers, while the legal church tolerates atheism, does not struggle against iniquity, but is reconciled with it. I recognize the One Apostolic Church. The legal church recognizes Lenin and Stalin, and serves Soviet power and carries out the orders of the atheist antichrists.”⁶²

“Do not believe any sects: this is a cunning contemporary politics that has come out from the West. There are even some that are like the Orthodox faith. But you, my brothers and dear ones, must not go anywhere – may the Lord keep you! There are also many enemies of our Orthodox Christian faith, we have many enemies. The first is Catholicism, our most cunning and evil enemy, and the Lutherans, and all the sects, which came out of America and now, like dirt, have spread through the whole earth. It is difficult for us poor people now, we have no defence from men, everyone wants to offend us. But we are faithful. We are the most true patriots of our Mother, the Holy Orthodox Christian Eastern Apostolic Church. We are patriots of Holy Rus’ and we know the tricks of all kinds of people, and we will not deviate in any direction: for Holy Rus’ is sanctified by the sufferings of her own people. Every foot is creeping into Russia and wanting to defile her. No, Russia will preserve all the holy mysteries, even if through small, simple people, but she will show the whole world light, and strength, and greatness. Dear ones, the Orthodox Church will conquer the whole universe. Fear not, my dear ones, the Lord will conquer evil. Amen.”⁶³

“In my lifetime,” said Bishop Michael, “I have not studied the sciences, but I have come to know the keys of the universe and have reached the depths of the abyss. It is hard and difficult without the Supreme Creator. With the

⁶¹ Ilichev, *op. cit.*, p. 506.

⁶² Ilichev, *op. cit.*, p. 410.

⁶³ Ilichev, *op. cit.*, p. 459.

Creator and His Life-giving Spirit and the righteousness of Christ I have passed through the arena of an indescribable life..."⁶⁴

After the Cuban crisis, the Cuban revolution developed on conventional Soviet lines. Thus "during the repressions of the 1960s", write Pascal Fontaine, Yves Santamaria and Sylvain Boulouque, "between 7,000 and 10,000 people were killed and 30,000 people imprisoned for political reasons."⁶⁵ Conditions in the prisons were appalling, torture was normal. Much of the economy was run on slave labour provided by prisoners.

Cuba also has its boatpeople on the Vietnamese model, called *balseros*. Although about one third of *balseros* have died at sea, "over thirty years, approximately 100,000 have attempted the journey. The result of this exodus is that out of 11 million inhabitants, 2 million now live in exile. Exile has scattered many families among Havana, Miami, Spain, and Puerto Rico."⁶⁶ For it is an inexorable law of all communist states, that very large numbers of those who have tasted of their delights try to flee from them if they can, becoming the most fervent anti-communists in the states that give them refuge...

*

The French had always had a snobbish attitude towards American Hollywood and Coca-Cola "culture", and a none-too-grateful attitude to the nation that had not only liberated them from the Nazis in the Second World War, but had also lifted the whole of Western Europe off its economic feet and created a wall of steel against the Soviet threat at very little cost to the Europeans themselves. In a sixties book called *Le Défi américain* Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber elaborated on various threats supposedly posed by the Americans, but, as Norman Stone points out, "failed to notice that French industry, far from languishing, was doing better than it had done since the 1890s, when the arrival of electrical energy had enabled it to bypass the coal in which France was poor. Quite soon France was going to overtake England, for the first time since the French Revolution itself.

"All of this allowed de Gaulle to appear as a world statesman, to put France back on the map. Now, he, many Frenchmen and many Europeans in general resented the American domination. There was not just the unreliability, the way in which the USA, every four years, became paralysed by a prospective presidential election. France's defence was largely dependent upon the USA, and, here, there were fears in Paris and Bonn. They did not find Washington easy. The more the Americans became bogged down in Vietnam, the more there was head-shaking in Europe. They alone had the

⁶⁴ Ilichev, *op. cit.*, p. 433.

⁶⁵ Fontaine, Santamaria and Boulouque, "Communism in Latin America", in Stéphane Courtois and others, *The Black Book of Communism*, London and Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999, p. 656.

⁶⁶ Fontaine, Santamaria and Boulouque, *op. cit.*, p. 663.

nuclear capacity to stop a Russian advance, but the Berlin crisis had already shown that the Americans' willingness to come to Germany's defence was quite limited, and they had not even stood up for their own treaty rights. Now, in 1964, they were involved in a guerrilla war in south-east Asia and were demonstrably making mess of it: would Europe have any priority? Perhaps, if West Germany had been allowed to have nuclear weapons, the Europeans could have built up a real deterrent of their own, but that was hardly in anyone's mind. The bomb was to be Anglo-American.

"At the turn of 1962-3 the British Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, had met Kennedy (at Nassau) and agreed to depend upon a little American technology [Polaris nuclear missiles] on condition that the French got even less. There would be no Franco-British nuclear link and as far as de Gaulle was concerned, France would have to make her own way forward. He got his own back. The Americans were trying to manoeuvre Great Britain into the EEC, and, conscious now of their comparative decline, the British reluctantly agreed to be manoeuvred. At a press conference in January 1963, de Gaulle showed them the door. Europe was to be a Franco-German affair, and de Gaulle was its leader. France could not go it alone. If she had seriously to offer a way forward between the world powers, she had to have allies, and Germany was the obvious candidate. Adenauer, too, needed the votes of what, in a more robust age, had been called 'the brutal rurals', and the Common Agricultural Policy bribed them. In return for protection and price support, they would vote for Adenauer, even if they only had some small plot that they worked at weekends.

"France, with a seat on the Security Council and the capacity to make trouble for the USA with the dollar and much else, mattered; the Communists were a useful tool, and they were told not to destabilize de Gaulle. He was being helpful to Moscow. In the first instance, starting in 1964, the French had made problems as regards support for the dollar. They built up gold reserves, and then sold dollars for more gold, on the grounds that the dollar was just paper, and inflationary paper at that. There was of course more to it, in that there was no financial centre in France to rival that of London, and the French lost because they had to use London for financial transactions; by 1966 they were formally refusing to support the dollar any more, and this (an equivalent of French behavior in the early stages of the great Slump of 1929-32) was a pillar knocked from under the entire Atlantic financial system.

"De Gaulle had persuaded himself that the Sino-Soviet split would make the USSR more amenable, that it might even become once more France's ideal eastern partner. There were also signs, he could see, of a new independence in eastern Europe. The new Romanian leader, Ceaușescu, looked with envy on next-door neighbour Tito, cultivated and admired by everybody. Romania had been set up by France a century before, and French had been the second, or even, for the upper classes, the first language until recently. Now, de Gaulle took up links with her, and also revisited a Poland that he had not seen since 1920, as a young officer. In March 1966 he announced that France

would leave the NATO joint command structure, and the body's headquarters were shifted to Brussels, among much irritation at French ingratitude. In June the General visited the USSR itself, and unfolded his schemes to Brezhnev: there should be a new European security system, a nuclear France and a nuclear USSR in partnership, the Americans removed, and a French-dominated Europe balancing between the two sides. He had already made sure of Europe's not having an American component, in that he had vetoed British membership of the Community. Now he would try to persuade Brezhnev that the time had come to get rid of East Germany, to loosen the iron bonds that kept the satellite countries tied to Moscow, and to prepare for serious change in the post-war arrangements. Brezhnev was not particularly interested, and certainly not in the disappearance of East Germany; in any case, although France was unquestionably of interest, it was West Germany that chiefly concerned Moscow, and there were constant problems over Berlin. De Gaulle was useful because, as Brezhnev said, 'thanks to him we have made a breach, without the slightest risk, in American capitalism. De Gaulle is of course an enemy, we know, and the French Party, narrow-minded and seeing only its own interests, has been trying to work us up against him. But look at what we have achieved: the American position in Europe has been weakened, and we have not finished yet.'"⁶⁷

France had indeed acted ungratefully and treacherously, and a serious breach in the Western alliance could well have emerged. But her behavior was more the result of De Gaulle's ever-prickly personality and national pride than any deeper shift in interests; Brezhnev was right to see in him more a useful, but still essentially *Capitalist* idiot than a real convert to the Communist International. In any case, hubris was soon to be followed by humiliation...

For, as Stone continues, in 1968 "de Gaulle received, out of the blue, a vast humiliation. In a moment that summed up the sixties, the students of Paris rebelled against him, and would have brought him down if the Communist Party had not, for Moscow's sake, saved him. The episode in itself was farcical, but it was a farce with a sinister side, edging into terrorism; it also did great damage to education in general, and particularly in European universities, which since then have declined..."⁶⁸

"It is worth insisting," writes Tony Judt, "upon the parochial and distinctly self-regarding issues that sparked the May Events, lest the ideologically charged language and ambitious programs of the following weeks mislead us. The student occupation of the Sorbonne and subsequent street barricades and clashes with the police, notably on the nights of May 10th-11th and May 24th-25th, were led by representatives of the (Trotskyist) *Jeunesse Communiste Révolutionnaire*, as well as officials from established student and junior lecturer unions. But the accompanying Marxist rhetoric, while familiar

⁶⁷ Stone, *The Atlantic and its Enemies*, London: Penguin, 2011, pp. 249-251.

⁶⁸ Stone, *op. cit.*, p. 271.

enough, masked an essentially anarchist spirit whose immediate objective was the removal and humiliation of authority.

“In this sense, as the disdainful French Communist Party leadership rightly insisted, this was a party, not a revolution. It had all the symbolism of a traditional French revolt – armed demonstrators, street barricades, the occupation of strategic buildings and intersections, political demands and counter-demands – but none of the substance. The young men and women in the student crowds were overwhelmingly middle-class – indeed, many of them were from the Parisian bourgeoisie itself: *‘fils à papa’* (‘daddy’s boys’), as the PCF leader Georges Marchais derisively called them. It was their own parents, aunts and grandmothers who looked down upon them from the windows of comfortable bourgeois apartment buildings as they lined up in the streets to challenge the armed power of the French state.

“Georges Pompidou, the Gaullist Prime Minister, rapidly took the measure of the troubles. After the initial confrontations he withdrew the police, despite criticism from within his own party and government, leaving the students of Paris in *de facto* control of their university and the surrounding *quartier Pompidou* – and his President, De Gaulle – were embarrassed by the well-publicized activities of the students. But, except very briefly at the outset when they were taken by surprise, they did not feel threatened by them. When the time came the police, especially the riot police – recruited from the sons of poor provincial peasants and never reluctant to crack the heads of privileged Parisian youth – could be counted on to restore order. What troubled Pompidou was something far more serious.

“The student riots and occupations had set the spark to a nationwide series of strikes and workplace occupations that brought France to a near-standstill by the end of May. Some of the first protests – by reporters at French Television and Radio, for example – were directed at their political chiefs for censoring coverage of the student movement and, in particular, the excessive brutality of some riot policemen. But as the general strike spread, through the aircraft manufacturing plants of Toulouse and the electricity and petrochemical industries and, most ominously, to the huge Renault factories on the edge of Paris itself, it became clear that something more than a few thousand agitated students was at stake.

“The strikes, sit-ins, office occupations and accompanying demonstrations and marches were the greatest movement of social protest in modern France, far more extensive than those of June 1936. Even in retrospect it is difficult to say with confidence exactly what they were about. The Communist-led trade union organization, the *Confédération du Travail* (CGT) was at first at a loss: when union agreement reached between government, unions and employers was decisively rejected by the Renault workers, despite its promise of improved wages, shorter hours and more consultation.

“The millions of men and women who had stopped work had one thing at least in common with the students. Whatever their particular local grievances, they were above all frustrated with their conditions of existence. They did not so much want to get a better deal at work as to change something about their way of life; pamphlets and manifestos and speeches explicitly said as much. This was good news for the public authorities in that it diluted the mood of the strikers and directed their attention away from political targets; but it suggested a general malaise that would be hard to address.

“France was prosperous and secure and some conservative commentators concluded that the wave of protests was thus driven not by discontent but by simple boredom...”⁶⁹

Boredom, *anomie*, frustration with nobody knew exactly what – this was the existential crisis of comfortable Western Social Democracy in the 1960s. It suggested that the West’s problems were not primarily political or economic, but “existential” – the result of the expulsion of religion from the Social Democratic project. The young perhaps felt it most acutely, but they were simply expressing a general malaise that went deeper as one went further down the scale of class and up the ladder of age. The very *frivolity* and sheer ignorance of their attachments – their passion for Mao and Che Guevara, for example, without knowing anything about the mind-boggling evil that such men were accomplishing, or their mindless slogan, ‘It is forbidden to forbid’ – paradoxically highlighted the *seriousness* of the malaise.

*

The Prague Spring – the brief but highly significant semi-democratization of Czechoslovakia – came to a country that had suffered more than other East European nations from post-war Soviet repression.

“As late as 1954,” writes Norman Stone, “several months after the USSR had started to release Stalin’s victims, there was a minor purge trial, and a commission in 1957 even reaffirmed the guilt of the 1950-51 victims, though some were released. A huge Stalin statue even went up in 1955, demolished only when Khrushchev insisted, along with the removal of Klement Gottwald from his mausoleum. In an obscure place, much later, there was still a little ‘Stalin Square’. In Czechoslovakia there was nothing like the Polish peasantry, stubbornly stuck in subsistence agriculture; nor was there anything like the Polish Church, the Czechs having inherited a powerful anti-clerical tradition. Opposition to the Communists was enfeebled from the outset because it was itself largely Communist.

“Still, there were signs of trouble in the woodwork, and a Party congress was postponed for several months in 1962. The 1951 purge trials continued to be a cause of unease, and there was a new commission to investigate them. In

⁶⁹ Judt, *Postwar*, pp. 409-411.

1963 it pinned the blame on Gottwald, and by implication his close colleagues, still in high places. A Slovak journalist – Miroslav Hysko – publicly denounced them, and was not himself arrested: the old trial verdicts were, instead, cancelled. All of this was evidence of much deeper currents. Further evidence came when a report late in 1963 stated that the campaign against Slovak nationalism in 1951 had been unjustified...⁷⁰

The calls of Slovak Communists for federalization of the country was an important stimulus to what followed. Another was a student demonstration for “More Light!” (both physical and spiritual) in the Strahov district of Prague. But the critical event was the election, on January 5, 1968, of a new First Secretary of the Party after Novotný, Alexander Dubček.

“The new man,” writes Judt, “was young (at 47 he was sixteen years Novotný’s junior), from the reform wing of the Party and, above all, a Slovak. As leader of the Slovak Communist Party for the past three years he appeared to many to be a credible compromise candidate: a longstanding Communist *apparatchik* who would nevertheless support reforms and appease Slovak resentments. Dubček’s early moves seemed to confirm this reading: a month after his appointment the Party leadership gave its unstinting approval to the stalled economic reform program. Dubček’s rather artless manner appealed to the young in particular, while his indisputable loyalty to the Party and to ‘Socialism’ reassured for the time being the Kremlin and other foreign Communist leaders looking anxiously on.

“If Dubček’s intentions were obscure to observers, this is probably because he himself was far from sure just where to go. At first this ambiguity worked in his favour, as different factions competed for his support and offered to strengthen his hand. Public rallies in Prague in the weeks following his election demanded an end to censorship, greater press freedom and a genuine inquiry into the purges of the fifties and the responsibilities of the old guard around Novotný (who remained President of the country even after being ousted from the Party leadership). Carried on this wave of popular enthusiasm, Dubček endorsed the call for a relaxation of censorship and initiated a purge of Novotnýites from the Party and from the Czech army.

“In March 22nd Novotný reluctantly resigned the presidency and was replaced a week later by General Ludvík Svoboda. Five days after that, the Central Committee adopted an ‘Action Program’ calling for equal status and autonomy for Slovakia, the rehabilitation of past victims and ‘democratisation’ of the political and economic system. The Party was now officially endorsing what the Program called ‘a unique experiment in democratic Communism’: ‘Socialism with a human face’ as it became colloquially known. Over a period of time (the document spoke of a ten-year transition) the Czechoslovak Communist Party would allow the emergence of other parties with whom it would compete in genuine elections. These were

⁷⁰ Stone, *op. cit.*, pp. 359-360.

hardly original ideas, but publicly pronounced from the official organs of a ruling Communist Party they triggered a political earthquake. The Prague Spring had begun.

“The events of the spring and summer of 1968 in Czechoslovakia hinged on three contemporary illusions. The first, widespread in the country after Dubček’s rise and especially following publication of the Action Program, was that the freedoms and reforms now being discussed could be folded into the ‘Socialist’ (i.e. Communist) project. It would be wrong to suppose, in retrospect, that what the students and writers and Party reformers of 1968 were ‘really’ seeking was to replace Communism with liberal capitalism or that their enthusiasm for ‘Socialism with a human face’ was mere rhetorical compromise or habit. On the contrary: the idea that there existed a ‘third way’, a Democratic Socialism compatible with free institutions, respecting individual freedoms *and* collective goals, had captured the imagination of Czech students no less than Hungarian economists.

“The distinction that was now drawn between the discredited Stalinism of Novotný’s generation and the renewed idealism of the Dubček era, was widely accepted – even, indeed especially, by Party members. As Jiří Pelikán asserted, in his preface to yet a third report on the Czech political trials (commissioned in 1968 by Dubček but suppressed after his fall) ‘the Communist Party had won tremendous popularity and prestige, the people had spontaneously declared themselves for socialism’. That is perhaps a little hyperbolic, but it was not wildly out of line with contemporary opinion. And this, in turn, nourished a second illusion.

“If the people believed the Party could save Socialism from its history, so the Party leadership came to suppose that they could manage this without losing control of the country. A new government headed by Oldřich Černík was installed on April 18th and, encouraged by huge public demonstrations of affection and support (notably in the traditionally May Day celebrations), it relaxed virtually all formal controls on public expressions of opinion. On June 26th censorship of press and media was formally abolished. The same day it was announced that Czechoslovakia was to become a genuine federal state, comprising a Czech Socialist republic and a Slovak Socialist republic (that was the *only* one of Dubček’s reforms to survive the subsequent repression, becoming law on October 28th 1968).

“But having relaxed all control on opinion, the Communist leadership was now pressed from every side to pursue the logic of its actions. Why wait ten years for free and open elections? Now that censorship had been abolished, why retain formal control and ownership of the media? On June 27th *Literární Listy* and other Czech publications carried a manifesto by Ludvík Vaculík, ‘Two Thousand Words’, addressed to ‘workers, farmers, officials, artists, scholars, scientists and technicians’. It called for the re-establishment of political parties, the formation of citizens’ committees to defend and advance the cause of reform, and other proposals to take the initiative for further

change out of the control of the Party. The battle was not yet won, Vaculík warned: the reactionaries in the Party would fight to preserve their privileges and there was even talk of 'foreign forces intervening in our development'. The people needed to strengthen the arm of the Communists' own reformers by pressing them to move forward even faster.

"Dubček rejected Vaculík's manifesto and its implication that the Communists should abandon their monopoly of power. As a lifelong Communist he would not countenance this crucial qualitative shift ('bourgeois pluralism') and anyway saw no need to do so. For Dubček the Party itself was the only appropriate vehicle for radical change if the vital attributes of a Socialist system were to be preserved. But as Vaculík's manifesto made cruelly clear, the Party's popularity and its credibility would increasingly rest upon its willingness to pursue changes that might ultimately drive it from power. The fault line between a Communist state and an open society was now fully exposed.

"And this, in turn, directed national attention in the summer of 1968 to the third illusion, the most dangerous of all: Dubček's conviction that he could keep Moscow at bay, that he would succeed in assuring his Soviet comrades that they had nothing to fear from events in Czechoslovakia - indeed, that they had everything to gain from the newfound popularity of the Czechoslovak Communist Party and the renewed faith in a rejuvenated socialist project. If Dubček made this mortal miscalculation it was above all because the Czech reformers had crucially misinterpreted the lesson of 1956. Imre Nagy's mistake, they thought, had been his departure from the Warsaw Pact and declaration of Hungarian neutrality. So long as Czechoslovakia stayed firmly in the Pact and unambiguously allied to Moscow, Leonid Brezhnev and his colleagues would surely leave them alone.

"But by 1968, the Soviet Union was worried less about military security than the Party's loss of monopoly control..."⁷¹

Brezhnev hesitated, knowing the unpopularity this would bring to his regime. Finally, however, on August 21, Soviet tanks invaded the country, restoring "normality" - that is, unreformed Communism - at the barrel of a gun.

"The Kremlin had made its point - that fraternal socialist states had only limited sovereignty and that any lapse in the Party's monopoly of power might trigger military intervention. Unpopularity at home or abroad was a small price to pay for the stability that this would henceforth ensure. After 1968, the security of the Soviet zone was firmly underwritten by a renewed appreciation of Moscow's willingness to resort to force if necessary. But never again - and this was the true lesson of 1968, first for the Czechs but in due course for everyone else - never again would it be possible to maintain that

⁷¹ Judt, *Postwar*, pp. 440-442.

Communism rested on popular consent, or the legitimacy of a reformed Party, or even the lessons of history...

“The illusion that Communism was reformable, that Stalinism had been a wrong turning, a mistake that could still be corrected, that the core ideals of democratic pluralism might somehow still be compatible with the structures of Marxist collectivism, that illusion was crushed under the tanks on August 21st 1968 and it never recovered. Alexander Dubček and his Action Program were not a beginning but an end. Never again would radicals or reformers look to the ruling Party to carry their aspirations or adopt their projects. Communism in Eastern Europe staggered on, sustained by an unlikely alliance of foreign loans and Russian bayonets: the rotting carcass was finally carried away only in 1989. But the soul of Communism had died twenty years before: in Prague, in August 1968...”⁷²

“The Soviet tanks rolling into Czechoslovakia,” writes Revel, “failed to open De Gaulle’s eyes to the nature of communism and the Soviet system. He attributed that ‘accident en route’ to the ‘policy of blocs’ and the damage done by the ‘Yalta agreements’, thus again displaying his ignorance of just what those agreements were, since the Czech question was not touched on at Yalta. His dream of a Europe in harmony ‘from the Atlantic to the Urals’ seemed no more unlikely to him after the Red Army occupied Prague than it had before. ‘Let us guard against excessive language,’ the general said at a French cabinet meeting on August 24. ‘Sooner or later, Russian will return [to its old ways].... We must build Europe. We can construct something with the Six [of the original Common Market], even build a political organization. We cannot build Europe without Warsaw, without Budapest, and without Moscow.’

“All the future illusions and surrenders in détente are contained in that statement: De Gaulle’s acceptance of Moscow’s *fait accompli*, his unwillingness to consider sanctions to punish a crime against freedom, his de facto alliance with Soviet imperialism, which he forgave all sins. Add to this his lack of understanding of Communist reality, in short, his incompetence and his blind trust in the Soviet Government’s desire and ability to become part of a harmonious and homogeneous Europe – which, be it noted, General de Gaulle thought Britain had no right to join!”⁷³

De Gaulle died in 1970. He had built his career on rudeness and treachery to Anglo-Saxons who had helped him, and friendship to Soviets who wanted to destroy his nation. In the end he had no answer to the Maoist youth who humiliated him, or to the tanks that rolled into Prague for the second time in thirty years...

*

⁷² Judt, *Postwar*, pp. 446, 447.

⁷³ Revel, *op. cit.*, pp. 262-263.

If the history of Communism could be counted as anything but profoundly abhorrent and evil, then we would have to accord some honour to the Vietnamese Communist movement. For it defeated not one, but two Capitalist enemies. Under its leader, Ho Chi Minh, a founder of the French Communist Party and then founder of the Vietnamese Party, they first defeated the French colonial masters of the country in 1954, and then repeated the trick against the Americans in 1973...

An important cause of Ho's success was his exploitation of the West's hypocrisy in relation to its own ideals. Thus after conquering Hanoi in August, 1945, he quoted the American Declaration of Independence and the French Declaration of Human Rights as "undeniable truths". "Nevertheless," he went on, "the French imperialists, abusing the standard of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, have violated our Fatherland and oppressed our fellow citizens. They have acted contrary to the ideals of humanity and justice. In the field of politics, they have deprived our people of every democratic liberty..."⁷⁴

Of course, democratic ideals of liberty were far more harshly violated by Communist leaders such as Ho than by any western leader. For, as Revel writes, "the Communists excel in converting ingrained feelings, such as nationalism, and such humanitarian causes as combating racism into instruments for furthering totalitarian expansion, although when they are in power they respect neither the national independence of the countries they control, nor human rights."⁷⁵ Nevertheless, so long as the western powers clung on to colonies which they had stolen from the native peoples, the Communists retained an important propaganda advantage.

Another striking aspect of Ho's success was that it was achieved independently of the great Communist super-power in the region, China, which traditionally had seen Indo-China as a tributary region. "After the Korean War," writes J.M. Roberts, "the Chinese began to supply arms to the communist guerilla forces in Vietnam for what was less a struggle against colonialism - that was decided already - than about what should follow it. In 1953 the French had given up both Cambodia and Laos. In 1954 they lost at a base called Dien Bien Phu a battle decisive both for French prestige and for the French electorate's will to fight. After this, it was impossible for the French to maintain themselves in the Red River delta. A conference at Geneva agreed to partition Vietnam between a South Vietnamese government and the communists who had come to dominate the north, pending elections opened in Indo-China what was to become the fiercest phase since 1945 of the Asian war against the West begun in 1941.

"The western contenders were no longer the former colonial powers but the Americans. The French had gone home and the British had problems

⁷⁴ Gilbert, *op. cit.*, pp. 715-716.

⁷⁵ Revel, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

enough elsewhere. On the other side was a mixture of Indo-Chinese communists, nationalists and reformers supported by the Chinese and Russians. American anti-colonialism and the belief that the United States should support indigenous governments led it to back the South Vietnamese as it backed South Koreans and Filipinos. Unfortunately neither in Laos nor South Vietnam, nor, in the end, in Cambodia, did there emerge regimes of unquestioned legitimacy in the eyes of those they ruled. American patronage merely identified them with the western enemy so disliked in east Asia. American support also tended to remove the incentive to carry out reforms which would have united people behind these regimes, above all in Vietnam, where de facto partition did not produce good or stable governments in the south. While Buddhists and Roman Catholics quarreled bitterly and the peasants were more and more alienated from the regime by the failure of land reform, an apparently corrupt ruling class seemed able to survive government after government. This benefited the communists. They sought reunification on their own terms and maintained from the north support for the communist underground movement in the south, the Vietcong.

“By 1960 the Vietcong had won control of much of the south. This was the background to a momentous decisions taken by the American president, John Kennedy, in 1962, to send not only financial and material help, but also 4,000 American ‘advisers’ to help the South Vietnam government put its military house in order. It was the first step towards what Truman had been determined to avoid, the involvement of the United States in a major war on the mainland of Asia (and, in the end, the loss of more than 50,000 American lives).”⁷⁶

*

While the Communists were gaining ground in Vietnam, they were losing it in another important and populous part of South-East Asia – Indonesia. “Since the Second World War,” writes Naomi Klein, “the country had been led by President Sukarno, the Hugo Chavez of his day (though minus Chavez’s appetite for elections). Sukarno enraged the rich countries by protecting Indonesia’s economy, redistributing wealth and throwing out the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, which he accused of being facades for the interests of Western multinationals. While Sukarno was a nationalist, not a Communist, he worked closely with the Communist Party, which had 3 million active members. The U.S. and British governments were determined to end Sukarno’s rule, and declassified documents show that the CIA had received high-level directions to ‘liquidate President Sukarno, depending upon the situation and available opportunities’.

“After several false starts, the opportunity came in October 1965, when General Suharto, backed by the CIA, began the process of seizing power and eradicating the left. The CIA had been quietly compiling a list of the country’s

⁷⁶ Roberts, *History of the World*, Oxford: Helicon, 1992, p. 845.

leading leftists, a document that fell into Suharto's hands, while the Pentagon helped out by supplying extra weapons and field radios so Indonesian forces could communicate in the remotest parts of the archipelago. Suharto then sent out his soldiers to hunt down the four to five thousand leftists on his 'shooting list' as the CIA referred to them; the U.S. embassy received regular reports on their progress. As the information came in, the CIA crossed names off their lists until they were satisfied that the Indonesian left had been annihilated. One of the people involved in the operation was Robert J. Martens, who worked for the U.S. embassy in Jakarta. 'It really was a big help to the army,' he told the journalist Kathy Kadane twenty-five years later. 'The probably killed a lot of people, and I probably have a lot of blood on my hands, but that's not all bad. There's a time when you have to strike hard at a decisive moment.'

"The shooting lists covered the targeted killings; the more indiscriminate massacres for which Suharto is infamous were, for the most part, delegated to religious students. They were quickly trained by the military and then sent into villages on instructions from the chief of the navy to 'sweep' the countryside of Communists. 'With relish,' wrote one reporter, 'they called out their followers, stuck their knives and pistols in their waistbands, swung their clubs over their shoulders, and embarked on the assignment for which they had been hoping. In just over a month, at least half a million and possibly as many as 1 million people were killed, 'massacred by the thousands', according to *Time*."⁷⁷

The events in Indonesia were a timely reminder that the war against Communism, while necessary, was no simple conflict between good and evil, but stained the hands and consciences of the anti-Communists as well.

*

Meanwhile, President Kennedy was thinking of withdrawing all American help from the South Vietnamese by the end of 1965. But from the time Lyndon Johnson became president after Kennedy's assassination in 1963, the American commitment inexorably increased. However, the results were poor – for several reasons: the incompetence of the South Vietnamese government, its hostility to the Buddhist minority, the advantages enjoyed by guerillas that could retreat into safe-havens in neighbouring Laos and Cambodia, the failure to have the struggle blessed by the United Nations or persuade other western nations (besides Australia and New Zealand) to join it, the fact that the war in all its horrors was broadcast by television into the homes of millions of Americans, eliciting disgust and disillusion, but above all the fanatical determination and courage of the Vietcong and North Vietnamese.

For the first time, many people in the West began to have doubts whether the worldwide war against Communism was really worth fighting.

⁷⁷ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, London: Penguin, 2007, p. 67.

Paradoxically, leftist and neo- or Euro-communist ideas were becoming popular in the West just as disillusion with Communism was setting in in the East. When Solzhenitsyn emigrated to America in the 1970s, he speculated that there were more true believers in Marxism in the West than in the East, and that the West would never understand the reality of Communism until they had experienced it on their own backs...

True, economic growth in the Soviet bloc had been reasonable in the 50s and 60s, and technological achievements such as inter-ballistic missiles and sputniks were impressive. But these only served to hide the major advantages that the West still enjoyed over the Communist East in terms of vastly superior economic performance and technological creativity of the West. This forced the Communists to pour proportionately far greater resources into the military and space. In spite of this disadvantage, the East did achieve something like parity in the 1960s – much to the alarm of the Americans – and even began to pull ahead in some spheres in the Brezhnev years. In the long term, however, and in spite of high world prices for Soviet gas and oil in the 1970s, the effort exhausted them: by the time Gorbachev came to power in 1985, Soviet Communism was on its last legs.

Moreover, the ever-increasing disparity in living standards between East and West could not be hidden and eventually undermined the resistance of all but the most isolated and fanatical Communist societies (like North Korea). Stalin had been right (from his point of view) in punishing his soldiers who had caught a glimpse of prosperous Germany in 1944-45 (in case they began to ask why “advanced socialism” was so much poorer); and his successors continued to allow only the most “reliable” of their citizens out to the West. The point where the contrast could be seen most glaringly was Berlin, which is why the Berlin wall was built in 1961 to stop the constant flow of émigrés from East to West. For until its final completion on January 5, 1964, “an astonishing 1,283,918 East Berliners and East Germans had crossed to the West. With the wall in place, the East German police showed no compunction in shooting dead anyone who attempted to scale the wall.”⁷⁸

The appeal of the West was not only economic, but also cultural. Although the Soviets held their own in the performing arts, such as ballet and classical music, this did not prevent leading performers such as Nureyev and Rostropovich from emigrating to the West, while in popular culture the appeal of blue jeans and the Beatles (and even, in restricted showings for the KGB, the ultra-capitalist and decadent James Bond films) was very wide, especially on the younger generation. The main direction of influence was from West to East. There was some influence in the opposite direction, as in the fashion for new revolutionary idols such as Mao and Che Guevara. However, as we have seen, this fashion was not really *serious*, but was rather a

⁷⁸ Martin Gilbert, *Challenge to Civilization. A History of the 20th Century 1952-1999*, London: HarperCollins, 1999, p. 308.

manifestation of the deeper cult of youth and general denigration of authority and all received wisdom and morality.

That anti-authoritarianism began in America, with the student protests against the Vietnam War, the burning of draft cards, and the opening up of serious divisions between the media and the government, on the one hand, and between some senators, such as Senators Fulbright, McCarthy and Robert Kennedy, on the one hand, and President Johnson, on the other. This led to Johnson announcing that he would not be standing as a candidate at the next election. Meanwhile, as political protest descended into hippiedom, the drug culture and the practical (and sometimes public) expression of the slogan "Make love, not war", it could be seen that the seriousness of the events was not so much in any specific ideas or plans of the youthful "revolutionaries" as in a general sapping of authority in the western world. The new president, Richard Nixon, caught the essence of the situation well in his inaugural in 1969: "We are caught in war, wanting peace. We are torn by division, wanting unity. We see around us empty lives, wanting fulfillment..."⁷⁹

The Vietnam War was unique in that, perhaps for the first time in history, we see the *youth* of a country forcing its leaders to change course on a major issue of war and peace. For it was the prolonged demonstrations of American youth against the war that finally wore down the administration, first the Senate and then the presidency, leading to the final withdrawal of American involvement in 1975 and a serious undermining of the nation's unity and self-confidence worldwide. Nor was it only in America that revolutionary youth seemed to take control (if anarchy can be called control), but also in France (in the events of May, 1968), in Czechoslovakia (where students played an important part in the Prague Spring), in England (where the "Swinging Sixties" were largely led by young people) in China (in the rampaging young Red Guards of China's Cultural Revolution) and in Cambodia in the 1970s (where the majority of Pol Pot's soldiers were extraordinarily young).

Not coincidentally, the first generation to be born after the Second World War was coming of age at the same time; this was the first generation that had taken no direct part in that titanic struggle between Fascism, Communism and Democracy, who had not shared in the sufferings or the ideological enthusiasms of their parents. They did not have their own enthusiasms, but these were of a different kind - essentially anarchical, anti-authoritarian, anti-traditional, unfocussed and frivolous. Of course, youth have always played an important part in revolutions, being drawn by the whiff of violence and sexual licence. But earlier revolutions had an ideological content or vision of the future that supplied testosterone-fuelled zeal with a certain backbone, self-sacrificial discipline and quasi-justification. Not so with most of the revolutions of the Sixties. Whether in Mao's China or Johnson's America, the revolutionary young could think of no better ideology than Feminism or the

⁷⁹ Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 398.

Thoughts of Chairman Mao's Little Red Book to justify their sickening abuse of almost *everything* that previous generations had considered sacred.

The youth protests against the Vietnam War had the appearance of greater seriousness. For after all, young men were being sent to fight and die in a particularly bitter war on the other side of the world. But some of the same *frivolity* and adolescent anti-authoritarianism that we detected in the May Events in Paris could be seen – albeit with greater real passion, and over a longer period and with far greater long-term consequences – in the disturbances on the American campuses. Thus there was remarkably little real debate about the true evil of Communism, and the consequences of defeat, not only for the Vietnamese people, but also for the whole world. Too late, after the Americans had withdrawn, did the tragedy of the Vietnamese boat people, or the unbelievably brutal killing fields of Cambodia (one third of the whole population killed in the space of four years of Khmer Rouge rule!) register – or rather, failed to register – with an increasingly inward-looking, cynical and divided American and Western public.

In hindsight, of course, it is easy to assert that the Vietnam War was a foolish venture. Khrushchev had said to Dean Rusk in 1961: “If you want to, go ahead and fight in the jungles of Vietnam. The French fought there for seven years and still had to quit in the end. Perhaps the Americans will be able to stick out for a little longer, but eventually they will have to quit too.”⁸⁰

They quit on January 15, 1973, suspending all military action against North Vietnam as the Senate cut off all further funding for the war. “Twelve days later, in Paris, the long-awaited ceasefire agreement was signed by all the contending parties: the United States, North Vietnam, South Vietnam and the Provisional Revolutionary Council of South Vietnam (the Communist Vietcong's political arm). The United States had given up Vietnam, on behalf of whose government it had fought so long and suffered so much – including the disillusionment with the South Vietnamese leaders....

“The ceasefire agreement of January 27 enabled the Americans to begin to pull out their remaining forces, and to end their effective state of war – although there had never been a declaration of war – with North Vietnam, against which no further bombing raids were mounted. The United States Defence Department, at the time of the ceasefire agreement, published the statistics of the war, first and foremost the numbers of those killed in Vietnam since the United States became involved in the war on 8 March 1965. In order of magnitude the highest death toll was that of the North Vietnamese civilians and soldier, and Vietcong, 922,290 in all. The South Vietnamese armed forces lost 181,483 men, in addition to whom 50,000 South Vietnamese civilians were killed. The United States war deaths were 55,337.

⁸⁰ Khrushchev, in Hobsbawm, *op. cit.*, p. 244, footnote.

“More than 150,000 American soldiers had been wounded, some terribly. As the American public turned against the war, it also seemed to turn against the search for adequate provision for the veterans, for adequate recognition of what they had been through. On their return to the United States, many of those who had fought felt spurned and scorned, their suffering of no interest to those among whom they lived and worked. The war had been lost; for millions of Americans it had become a source of shame. Those who had fought it felt that they had been cast as villains and pariahs. It took a decade and more before there was a change. At the turn of the century, at the Vietnam War memorial in Washington, visitors walk in shocked silence along the long list of names. That memorial was not created until 1982...”⁸¹

However, in 1975, “with the consent of Congress, 132,000 Vietnamese refugees were offered sanctuary in the United States. Some faced cries of ‘Go home!’ when they reached the town of their destination – especially if it was an area of high unemployment. But many more were met by town bands that marched in parade to welcome them.”⁸²

The loss of Indo-China in 1973 has been compared to the loss of China in 1949. But its impact on the American psyche was much more profound; it could be said to have marked the beginning of the end of American democracy. At the time of writing America is still with us and still powerful; but the freshness, the faith and the idealism had gone by the time helicopters lifted the American ambassador off the roof of his embassy in Saigon in April, 1975...

*

“As the 1970s began,” writes Maria Chang, “China seemed beset by external and internal crises. Domestic politics took a bizarre turn in 1971 when it was revealed that Mao’s designated heir, Lin Biao, had perished in a plane crash in Outer Mongolia after twice attempting to assassinate the Chairman himself. At the same time, the Soviet Union was threatening to use its most ‘modern and devastating weapons’... and target specific nuclear strikes against China. Mao’s foreign policies had created a threat environment that jeopardized the very continuity of the People’s Republic. Clearly, China’s foreign posture required reassessment...”

“That reassessment was undertaken under the direction of Zhou Enlai. The Manichaeian notion that the world was divided into a capitalist and a socialist camp gave way to a conviction that reality was complex, where socialist China could be threatened by socialist Russia in league with socialist Vietnam. Suggestions began to be bruited that appeals be made to the capitalist powers for capital, technology transfers, and security assistance. Finally, Beijing announced that it no longer considered the United States to be

⁸¹ Gilbert, *op. cit.*, pp. 453-454.

⁸² Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 488.

China's 'number one enemy'. With that, China's rapprochement with the West began - a process that spanned Mao's remaining years, culminating in the normalization of relations between the United States and the People's Republic of China on January 1, 1979."⁸³

The United States under Nixon and his crafty Secretary of State Henry Kissinger were quick to exploit the Sino-Soviet quarrel. After the clash on the Ussuri river in March, 1969, writes Norman Stone, "Moscow asked Nixon to condemn the Chinese nuclear tests; there were hints at a nuclear strike to destroy the Chinese 'facilities'; and the Chinese were refusing the Russians the right to fly supplies to Vietnam or to use their airfields. The Chinese needed America against Russia. There was room, here, for clevercleverness, and in April 1971 the world was surprised when an American table tennis team went to Peking. It was even more taken aback a year later, when Nixon followed, on 21 February 1972..."⁸⁴

This moment of détente between the US and China was no less important than the other détente taking place between the US and the USSR. The latter was expressed mainly in open and business-like arms-control agreements and some loans from western banks to the Soviets. In the Chinese-American negotiations, however, everything was conducted in secret; neither side wanted to appear too eager to get together with the other. After all, Nixon had built his political career since the time of McCarthy on his anti-Communism, while Mao could not afford not to appear anti-American. In the event, both sides - but especially the United States - made unprecedented concessions they would not have dreamed of only a few years before.

Kissinger himself pointed out the importance of these events. "While I was on the way to China on the so-called secret trip in July 1971, [Nixon], addressing an audience in Kansas City,... argued that 'Chinese domestic travail' - that is, the Cultural Revolution - should not confer 'any sense of satisfaction that it will always be that way. Because when we see the Chinese as people - and I have seen them all over the world... - they are creative, they are productive, they are one of the most capable people in the world. And 800 million Chinese are going to be, inevitably, an enormous economic power, with all that that means in terms of what they could be in other areas if they move in that direction.'

"These phrases, commonplace today, were revolutionary at that time. Because they were delivered extemporaneously - and I was out of communication with Washington - it was Zhou Enlai who brought them to my attention as I started the first dialogue with Beijing in more than twenty years. Nixon, inveterate anti-Communist, had decided that the imperatives of

⁸³ Chang, *Return of the Dragon*, Oxford: Westview Press, 2001, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

⁸⁴ Stone, *The Atlantic and its Enemies*, London: Penguin, 2010, p. 236.

geopolitical equilibrium overrode the demands of ideological purity – as, fortuitously, had his counterparts in China...”⁸⁵

The winner, unquestionably, was Mao. For the Chinese-American détente followed the pattern observed that in all negotiations between the Capitalist West and the Communist East at least until the Reagan-Gorbachev summits, of the West conceding more than it gained. As Jung Chang and Jon Halliday write, “Mao’s change of mind [about relations with America] changed his fortunes. The invitation [to the American table-tennis team], the first ever from Red China to an American group, caused a sensation. The fact that it was a sports team helped capture the world’s imagination. Chou En-lai switched on his charm, and his totalitarian regime’s meticulously orchestrated theatre, to produce what Kissinger called ‘a dazzling welcome’ for the ping-pong team. Glowing and fascinated reports littered the American and major Western press day after day. Mao the old newspaperman had hit exactly the right button. ‘Nixon’, wrote one commentator, ‘was truly amazed at how the story jumped off the sports pages and onto the front page.’ With one move, Mao had created the climate in which a visit to China would be a political asset for Nixon in the run-up to the 1972 presidential election.

“‘Nixon was excited to the point of euphoria,’ Kissinger wrote, and now wanted to skip the emissary state lest it take the glow off his own journey. By the end of May it was settled, in secret, that Nixon was going.

“Mao had not only got Nixon, he had managed to conceal that this had been his objective. Nixon was coming thinking that he was the keener of the two. So when Kissinger made his first, secret, visit in July 1971 to pave the way for the president, he bore many and weighty gifts, and asked for nothing in return. The most startling offer concerned Taiwan, to which the US was bound by a mutual defence treaty. Nixon offered to abandon Washington’s old ally, promising to accord full diplomatic recognition to Peking by January 1975, provided he was re-elected in 1972.

“Nixon was accepting Peking’s position wholesale and cutting Taiwan loose. By the end of the trip Chou was talking as if pocketing Taiwan was a matter of course. It was only at this point that Kissinger made a feeble gesture: ‘We hope very much that the Taiwan issue will be solved peacefully.’ But he did not press Chou for a promise not to use force.

“As part of the recognition package, Nixon offered to get Peking into the UN straight away: ‘you could get the China seat now’, Kissinger told Chou when proposing the behind-the-scenes fix, adding that ‘the President wanted me to discuss this matter with you before we adopted a position.’

“And there was more, including an offer to tell the Chinese everything about America’s dealings with Russia. Kissinger: ‘Specially, I am prepared to

⁸⁵ Kissinger, *World Order*, London: Penguin, 2015, pp. 304-305.

give you any information you may wish to know regarding any bilateral negotiations we are having with the Soviet Union on such issues as SALT [Strategic Arms Limitation Talks]. A few months later Kissinger told the Chinese: 'we tell you about our conversations with the Soviets; we do not tell the Soviets about our conversations with you'...

"Kissinger also made two huge commitments on Indochina: to pull out all US forces, mentioning a twelve-month deadline; and to abandon the South Vietnamese regime, promising to withdraw 'unilaterally' even if there were no negotiations - and that US troops would not return. 'After a peace is made,' said Kissinger, 'we will be 10,000 miles away, and [Hanoi] will still be there.' Kissinger even made a promise that 'most, if not all, American troops' would be out of *Korea* before the end of Nixon's next term, without even trying to extract any guarantee that Mao would not support another Communist invasion of South Korea.

"Mao was being given a lot, and on a platter. Kissinger specifically said that he was not asking China to stop giving aid to Vietnam, and Mao was not even requested to soften his bellicose anti-American tone, either in the world at large or during the meetings. The minutes show that Chou was hectoring ('you should answer that question... you must answer that question'), and constantly referring to 'your oppression, your subversion, and your intervention'. He in effect suggested that Nixon must make more and more concessions for the privilege of coming to China, and being allowed to recognise Peking. Kissinger did not ask for reciprocal concessions. Chou's outlandish claim that China was not 'aggressive' - 'because of our new [Communist] system, no less - went unchallenged. And Chou's reference to American 'cruelties' in Vietnam earned no reproof about Mao's cruelties in China. On a different occasion, when North Vietnam's negotiator had obliquely criticized the Nixon administration, Kissinger had shot back: 'You are the representative of one of the most tyrannical governments on this planet...' Now, Kissinger described Chou's presentation as 'very moving'.

"When Mao heard the report of the first day's talks, his ego soared, and he remarked to his top diplomats that America was 'changing from monkey to man, not quite man yet, the tail is still there... but it is no longer a monkey, it's a chimpanzee, and its tail is not very long.' 'American should start its life anew,' he proclaimed, expanding on his Darwinian approach, viewing America as a slowly evolving lower primate. 'This is evolution!' Chou, for his part, compared Nixon to a loose woman 'tarting herself up and offering herself at the door'. It was now, during this first Kissinger visit, that Mao drew the conclusion that Nixon could be manipulated, and that Peking could get a lot out of America without having to modify its tyranny, or its anti-American ranting..."⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Chang and Halliday, *Mao. The Unknown Story*, London: Jonathan Cape, 2005, pp. 603-605.

The taunts were deserved. America had betrayed all its Far Eastern allies for a mess of Chinese pottage. The undignified and hypocritical grovelling of the world's most powerful nation and the supposed number one champion of human rights in the world before one of the most evil and murderous regimes in history was worthy of scorn and boded badly for the situation of Capitalism in the coming decade.

“Immediately after Kissinger’s secret visit,” continue Chang and Halliday, “it was announced that Nixon had been invited to China and had accepted. Kissinger returned to Peking in October 1971 to prepare for the president’s visit. His second trip coincided with the annual UN vote on China’s seat, which Taiwan held, and the public presence in Peking of the president’s top adviser turned the tide. On 25 October, Peking displaced Taipei in the UN, giving Mao a seat, and a veto, on the Security Council.

“This was just over a month after the flight and death of Lin Biao. The news that there had been a plot to kill him had left Mao in a state of deep depression. Taiwan’s defeat and Nixon’s coming visit lifted his spirits immeasurably. Laughing broadly and joking, he talked for nearly three hours in full flow to his top diplomats. Looking at the UN vote, he declared that: ‘Britain, France, Holland, Belgium, Canada, Italy – they have all become Red Guards...’

“Before China’s delegates left for the UN, Mao made a point of reminding them that they must continue to treat the USA as Public Enemy no. 1, and fiercely denounce it ‘by name, an absolute must’. He wanted to make his debut on the world stage as the anti-American champion, using the UN as a new platform.

“Nine days before Nixon was scheduled to arrive in China on 21 February 1972, Mao passed out, and came very close to death. The prospect of Nixon’s imminent arrival helped to restore him...”⁸⁷

And indeed, it could be argued that America’s support for China brought the evil dragon back from the dead...

“During the relatively brief 65-minute (the only one between Nixon and Mao on this trip), Mao parried every attempt to engage him in serious issues. This was not because he had been ill, but because he did not want to leave a record of his positions in the hands of the Americans. Nothing must damage his claim to be the global anti-American leader. He had invited Nixon to Peking to promote that claim, not to waive it. So when Nixon proposed discussing ‘current issues like Taiwan, Vietnam and Korea’, Mao acted as if he were above such lesser chores. ‘These questions are not questions to be discussed in my place,’ he said, conveying an impression of lofty detachment. ‘They should be discussed with the Premier,’ adding that: ‘All those

⁸⁷ Chang and Halliday, *op. cit.*, pp. 605-606.

troublesome problems I don't want to get into very much.' Then he cut the Americans short by saying: 'As a suggestion, may I suggest you do a little less briefing?' When Nixon persisted in talking about 'common ground' and building a 'world structure', Mao ignored him, turned to Chou to ask what it was, and said: 'Haven't we talked enough now?'

"Mao was especially careful not to pay Nixon any compliments, while Nixon and Kissinger both flattered Mao fulsomely. Nixon told Mao: 'The Chairman's writings moved a nation and have changed the world.' Mao returned no thanks, and made only one, condescending comment on Nixon: 'Your book, *Six Crises*, is not a bad book.' ...

"Mao clearly felt he could push Nixon quite far. At the end of the visit there was to be a joint communiqué. Mao dictated one in which he could denounce America. 'Aren't they talking peace, security... and what not?' he said to Chou. 'We will do the opposite and talk revolution, talk liberating the oppressed nations and people all over the world...' So the communiqué took the form of each side stating its own position. The Chinese used their space for a tirade against America (though not by name). The American side did not say one word critical of Mao's regime, going no further than a vague and much qualified platitude about supporting 'individual freedom'."⁸⁸

But in a world turned truly upside down, while the powerful Americans grovelled to the starving Chinese who so feared a Soviet invasion (which was their real reason for seeking relations with the Americans), the Chinese themselves were vulnerable to some of their lowly satraps - like Albania...

"In spite of all his efforts to come across as the champion of anti-Americanism, Mao caught a lot of flak from his old allies. The fiercest came from Albania, which mattered to Mao because it was the only East European regime he had detached from Russia's orbit. Albania's dictator, Hoxha, penned Mao a nineteen-page letter expressing his fury over what he called 'this shitty business'. Actually, Hoxha cunningly used rhetoric to extract colossal amounts of extra aid, basically saying: You are consorting with the enemy, but you can buy our silence for more money. Mao paid up.

"The biggest problem was Vietnam, which counted far more than Albania internationally. The Vietnamese were worried that Mao was trying to use them as a bargaining chip with the US. [They needn't have worried: the Americans had given everything to the Chinese already.] When Chou went to Hanoi immediately after Kissinger's first visit, to explain Peking's move, he got an earful from North Vietnam's leader. 'Vietnam is our country.' Le Duan protested; 'you have no right to discuss the question of Vietnam with the United States.'... Mao tried to salvage some influence by pouring in even more aid, which rose to unprecedented levels from 1971, peaking in 1974.

⁸⁸ Chang and Halliday, *op. cit.*, pp. 606-607.

“All these bribes to keep old allies quiet meant a tighter squeeze on the Chinese population. Nor did its extra burdens stop there. As more and more countries recognized Peking in the wake of Nixon’s visit, the number of states to which China sent aid jumped from 31 prior to 1970 to 66. On tiny and immeasurably more prosperous Malta (pop. c. 300,000), Mao lavished no less than \$25 million in April 1972. Its prime minister, Dom Mintoff, returned from China sporting a Mao badge.

“Mao often had to pay over the odds to buy himself back into favour with states he had earlier tried to subvert. One former target, President Mobutu of Zaire, told us how generously he was funded by Mao, who – unlike the IMF and the World Bank – let him defer loans indefinitely, or repay them in worthless Zairean currency. In the years 1971-5, foreign aid took up a staggering average of 5.88 per cent of China’s entire expenditure, peaking at 6.92 per cent in 1973 – by far the highest percentage in the world, and at least seventy times the US level.

“While Mao dished out money and food, and built expensive underground railway systems, shipyards and infrastructure for countries far richer than China, most of the 900 million Chinese hovered just above survival levels. In many areas, peasants recall that the hungriest years after the Great Famine of 1958-61 were those from 1973 to Mao’s death in 1976 – the years immediately after Nixon’s visit.

“Nixon had often been credited with opening the door to China. Inasmuch as a number of Western statesmen and businessmen, plus some press and tourists, were able to enter China, he did increase the Western presence in China. But he did not open the door *of* – much less *from* – China, and the increased Western presence did not have any appreciable impact on Chinese society while Mao was alive. Mao made sure that for the vast majority of the population, China remained a tightly sealed prison. The only people who benefited at all from the rapprochement were a small elite. Some of these were allowed to see relatives from abroad – under heavy supervision. And a tiny number could lay hands on the half-dozen or so contemporary Western books translated in classified editions, one of which was Nixon’s own *Six Crises*. From 1973 some foreign-language students were sent abroad, but the very few who were lucky enough to be allowed out had to be politically ultra-reliable, and lived and worked under the closest surveillance, forbidden even to step out of their residence unescorted.

“The population as a whole remained rigidly quarantined from the few foreigners allowed into China, who were subject to rigorous control. Any unauthorized conversation with them could bring catastrophe to the locals involved. The lengths to which the regime would go were extraordinary. For Nixon’s one-day visit to Shanghai, which coincided with Chinese New Year, the traditional occasion for family reunions (like Christmas), thousands of rusticated youths who were visiting their families were expelled back to their

villages of exile, as a precaution against the extremely remote possibility of any of them trying to complain to the president.

“The real beneficiaries of Nixon’s visit were Mao himself, and his regime. For his own electoral ends, Nixon de-demonised Mao for mainstream opinion in the West. Briefing White House staff on his return, Nixon spoke of the ‘dedication’ of Mao’s cynical coterie, whom Kissinger called ‘a group of monks... who... kept their revolutionary purity’. Nixon’s men asserted, falsely, that ‘under Mao the lives of the Chinese masses have been greatly improved’. Nixon’s favourite evangelist, Billy Graham, lauded Mao’s virtues to British businessmen. Kissinger suggested that Mao’s callous crew would ‘challenge us in a moral way’. The result was an image of Mao a whole lot further from the truth than the one that Nixon himself had helped purvey as a fierce anti-Communist in the 1950s.

“Mao became not merely a credible international figure, but one with incomparable allure. World statesmen beat a path to his door. A meeting with Mao was, and sometimes still is, regarded as the highlight of many a career, and life...”⁸⁹

“Nixon’s visit also opened up for Mao the possibility of laying his hands on American nuclear weapons.

“Obtaining nuclear secrets had always been central to Mao’s American policy. ‘The only objective of these relations,’ he told the North Korean dictator Kim, ‘is to obtain developed technology.’ Mao knew that he could only achieve his goal if America considered him an ally...

“The Russians were alarmed by Mao’s overtures towards the Americans. In June 1973 Brezhnev warned Nixon and Kissinger that (as Kissinger paraphrased it to China’s liaison): ‘if military arrangements were made between the US and the PRC [People’s Republic of China], this would have the most serious consequences and would lead the Soviets to take drastic measures.’ This conversation with Brezhnev, which concerned US national security, was promptly related to Mao’s envoy, who was present at the Western White House during Nixon’s talks with Brezhnev, but not to America’s allies – or to the US government itself. ‘We have told no one in our government of this conversation,’ Kissinger confided to Mao’s envoy. ‘It must be kept totally secret.’

“One ostensible purpose of Nixon’s journey to Peking had been to lessen the danger of war with Russia. Thanks to Mao, this danger had if anything increased...”⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Chang and Halliday, *op. cit.*, pp. 607-609.

⁹⁰ Chang and Halliday, *op. cit.*, pp. 610, 613.

At the same time, both China and the Soviet Union continued to supply arms and food to the North Vietnamese in the Vietnam War. So while international politics was becoming more complex and multi-polar, the Communist-Capitalist struggle remained primary.

III. CAMBODIA, AFRICA AND DÉTENTE (1973-1979)

In October, 1973, in what came to be known as the Yom Kippur war, the Soviet clients Egypt and Syria again attacked Israel and were again soundly defeated. Soviet influence never really recovered in Egypt, although under the cruel regime of Assad Bashar it did in Syria. "Following the ceasefire," as Gilbert writes, "the Soviet Union lost its enthusiasm for the Egyptian and Syrian cause (at one point Brezhnev had urged the Algerians to 'take all necessary steps' to help Egypt and Syria). On October 26, speaking in Moscow to the Communist-sponsored and -inspired World Peace Conference, Brezhnev avoided any praise for the Egyptian and Syrian armies, which were being much applauded by the fraternal delegates."⁹¹ That delegates at a conference for World Peace should applaud the aggressors in this (and other) wars shows the real nature of these Soviet front organizations - completely hypocritical attempts to promote Soviet aggression and conquest by pretending to be peace-makers.

However, there was better news for the Communists in Indo-China. Jean-Louis Margolin writes that the fall of the South Vietnamese regime on April 30, 1975 "was not in fact followed by the bloodbath that so many feared and that did take place in neighbouring Cambodia. But the Vietnamese prisoners of the Communist forces - including 'traitors' from their own ranks - were severely abused and often simply liquidated rather than moved...

"For a few brief weeks, the approximately 1 million officials and soldiers in the Saigon regime could even believe that the much-vaunted 'policy of clemency' of President Ho was more than simple political rhetoric. As a result, these officials began to cooperate and register with the new authorities. Then, in early June, people were suddenly called in for re-education, which officially lasted three days for simple foot-soldiers and an entire month for officers and civil servants. In fact three days often became three years, and the month became seven or eight years. The last survivors of the re-education programs did not return home until 1986. Pham Van Dong, the prime minister at the time, admitted in 1980 that 200,000 had been re-educated in the South. Serious estimates range from 500,000 to 1 million out of a population of 20 million. The victims included a large number of students, intellectuals, monks (both Buddhist and Catholic), and political militants (including Communists). Many of these people had been in sympathy with the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam, which revealed itself to be no more than a cover for Northern Communists and which almost immediately broke all its promises to respect the wishes of the people of the South. As in 1954-56, onetime comrades-in-arms were soon suffering in the rectification campaigns. To the number of prisoners who were trapped in special camps must be added an indeterminate but large number of 'minor' re-education cases who were locked up for several weeks in their place of work or study. By comparison, during the worst periods of the anti-Communist regime in the

⁹¹ Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 462.

South, enemies on the left claimed that some 200,000 people were locked up in camps.

“Conditions of detention under Communist rule varied considerably. Some camps near towns did not even have barbed-wire fences, and the regime there was more one of constraint than of actual punishment. The more difficult cases were sent further north, to the more unhealthy, distant areas, to camps originally built for French prisoners. Isolation was total, and there was almost no medical care. Survival in these camps [as in the Soviet Gulag] often depended on parcels sent by the families of prisoners. Undernourishment was as bad as it was in the prisons; detainees were fed only 200 grams of poor-quality rice filled with stones per day. As elsewhere, hunger was often used as a weapon by the authorities against those awaiting trial. Doan Van Toai has left a gripping account of life in one such prison, which shows that this universe shared many of the characteristics of the Chinese prison camps, but was somewhat worse in terms of overcrowding, sanitary conditions, the prevalence of violent and often fatal punishments such as whipping, and long delays before trial. There were sometimes seventy to eighty prisoners in a cell built for twenty, and walks were often impossible because of construction inside the prison yard. The cells of this colonial period were seen as havens of peace and tranquillity in comparison. The tropical climate and the lack of air made breathing very difficult. All day long, people took turns standing by the one small airhole. The smells were unbearable, and skin complaints were rife. Even water was severely rationed. The hardest punishment was undoubtedly solitary confinement, sometimes for years on end, with no contact allowed with family. Torture was hidden but ever-present, as were executions. In prison, the tiniest infringement of regulations was punished harshly, and rations were so small that death often came within weeks...

“To this strange tableau of ‘liberation’ should be added the spectacle of hundreds of thousands of boat people, who fled misery and repression, many of whom drowned or were killed by pirates. The first real sign of relaxation in repression came only in 1986, when the new secretary general of the Vietnamese Communist Party, Nguyen Van Linh, freed a large number of political prisoners and closed the killing camps of the northern region. A new penal code is at last going to be promulgated...”⁹²

We have dwelt on Vietnam *after* the American War to show, not only that the end of the war did not bring an end to suffering, but also that the war was indeed *just and necessary* from a Christian and humanitarian point of view – which is why the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad always supported it.

The Communist victory in Vietnam War exposed neighbouring countries to Communist takeover. Thus in Laos, the king in favour of the Laotian

⁹² Margolin, “Vietnam and Laos: The Impasse of War Communism”, in Stéphane Courtois and others, *The Black Book of Communism*, London and Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999, pp. 571, 572-573, 574.

Communists on December 3, 1975. As a direct result, hundreds of thousands of refugees fled, many thousands were killed, and some 30,000 were forcibly “re-educated”.⁹³

Worst of all was the situation in Cambodia, where the regime of the Khmer Rouge under Pol Pot presented perhaps the most evil and murderous “government” in history, relatively speaking, if we take into account the relative smallness of the country and the shortness of the time (1975-1979) that it had in which to carry out its atrocities. Margolin writes: “The lineage from Mao Zedong to Pol Pot is obvious. This is one of the paradoxes that make the Khmer Rouge revolution so difficult to analyse and understand. The Cambodian tyrant was incontestably mediocre and a pale copy of the imaginative and cultivated Beijing autocrat who with no outside help established a regime that continues to thrive in the world’s most populous country. Yet despite Pol Pot’s limitations, it is the Cultural Revolution and the Great Leap Forward that look like mere trial runs or preparatory sketches for what was perhaps the most radical social transformation of all: the attempt to implement total Communism in one fell swoop, without the long transitional period that seemed to be one of the tenets of Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy. Money was abolished in a week; total collectivization was achieved in less than two years; social distinctions were suppressed by the elimination of entire classes of property owners, intellectuals, and businessmen; and the ancient antagonism between urban and rural areas was solved by emptying the cities in a single week. It seemed that the only thing needed was sufficient willpower, and heaven would be found on Earth, Pol Pot believed that he would be enthroned higher than his glorious ancestors – Marx, Lenin, Stalin, Mao Zedong – and that the revolution of the twenty-first century would be conducted in Khmer, just as the revolution of the twentieth century had been in Russian and then Chinese...

“The Khmer kingdom, which had been a French protectorate since 1863, escaped the Indochinese war of 1946-54 more or less unharmed. At the moment when resistance groups linked to the Viet Minh began to form in 1953, Prince Sihanouk began a peaceful ‘crusade for independence’. Facilitated by excellent diplomatic relations between Sihanouk and Paris, this ‘crusade’ met with considerable success and undercut his adversaries on the left. But in the face of the ensuing confrontation between the Vietnamese Communists and the United States, the subtle balancing act by which he attempted to preserve Cambodian neutrality earned him only the mistrust of all parties and growing incomprehension inside the country.

“In March 1970 the prince was ousted by his own government and by the Assembly, with the blessing (but apparently not the active participation) of the US Central Intelligence Agency. The country was thrown into disarray, and terrible pogroms against the Vietnamese minority began. Of the roughly 450,000 Vietnamese in the country, two-thirds were forced to flee to South

⁹³ Margolin, *op. cit.*, pp. 575-576.

Vietnam. Communist Vietnamese embassy buildings were burned down, and an ultimatum was issued for all foreign troops to leave the country immediately. The ultimatum was of course ignored. Hanoi, which found itself with no ally except the Khmer Rouge inside the country, decided to back them to the hilt, applying arms and military advisers and providing access to training camps inside Vietnam. Vietnam eventually occupied the greater part of the country in the name of the Khmer Rouge, or rather in the name of Sihanouk, who was so furious at his earlier humiliation that he joined with the local Communists, until then his worst enemies. On the advice of Beijing and Hanoi, the Communists rolled out the red carpet for him but gave him no actual political power. Thus the internal conflict became one of royalist Communists versus the Khmer Republic, with the latter led by General (soon Marshal) Lon Nol. The forces of the Khmer Republic were considerably weaker than those of the North Vietnamese and seemed unable to capitalize on Sihanouk's unpopularity among intellectuals and the middle classes in the cities and towns. They were soon forced to ask for American aid in the form of bombing raids, arms, and military advisers; they also accepted a futile intervention from the South Vietnamese.

“After the catastrophic failure of operation Chenla-II in early 1972, when the best republican troops were decimated, the war became a long agony as the Khmer Rouge tightened the screws around the main urban areas, which eventually could be supplied only by air. But this rear-guard action was murderously destructive, and it destabilized the population, who, unlike the Vietnamese, had never experienced anything like it. American bombing raids were massive: more than 540,000 tons of explosives were dropped on the combat zones, mostly in the six months before the US Congress cut off funding for such raids in August 1973. The bombing slowed the progress of the Khmer Rouge, but it also ensured that there would never be a shortage of recruits in a countryside now filled with hatred for the Americans. It also further destabilized the republic by causing a tremendous influx of refugees into the cities, probably one-third of a total population of 8 million. This build-up of refugees facilitated the evacuation of urban areas after the Khmer Rouge's victory and enabled the Khmers to claim repeatedly in their propaganda: ‘We have defeated the world's greatest superpower and will therefore triumph over all opposition - nature, the Vietnamese, and all others.’”⁹⁴

Phnom Penh fell on April 17, 1975. Then the whole of the city's population of between 2 and 3 million was forced to evacuate into the countryside within twenty-four hours, where millions died from starvation, beating, torture and shooting. An official slogan of the time in “Democratic Kampuchea” read: “Losing you is not a loss, and keeping you is no specific gain.”

⁹⁴ Margolin, “Cambodia”, in Stéphane Courtois and others, *The Black Book of Communism*, London and Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999, pp. 577, 580-581.

Martin Gilbert writes: "In the Tuol Sleng prison registry, in Phnom Penh, the notation 'smashed' appears against the names of 107 prisoners during the two days March 17 and 18 [1977]. Such numbers were an almost daily occurrence. The registry for July 1 records the execution of 114 women: their sole 'crime' was to have been the wives of prisoners who had been executed earlier. On the following day thirty-one sons and forty-three daughters of prisoners were executed. Four days after the killing of these children, the prison registry records a further 126 prisoners 'smashed'. By the end of the year, 6,330 prisoners had been 'smashed' in Tuol Sleng. A chilling indication of the scale of the killings is found in the words of the historian Ben Kiernan. 'I first visited Cambodia in early 1975,' he writes. 'None of the Cambodians I knew then survived the next four years.'"⁹⁵

"Marek Sliwinski, in a recent innovative study using demographic techniques (rendered less reliable by the lack of any census from the late 1960s to 1993), speaks of a little more than 2 million dead, or 26 per cent of the population, not including deaths from natural causes, which he estimates at 7 percent. Sliwinski's is the only study that tries to break down the 1975-1979 figures by age and gender. He concludes that 33.9 percent of men and 15.7 percent of women died. A difference of that size is strong evidence that most of the deaths were from assassinations. The death rate is horrendous for all ages, but especially high for young males (24 percent of men aged twenty to thirty, 40 percent of men aged thirty to forty, and 54 percent of people of both sexes over age sixty)... No other country in the world seems to have suffered so much since 1945..."⁹⁶

One contender for that honour is North Korea, where the worst kind of Stalinist repression and torture has continued to this day. Massive famines are frequent in a country that cannot feed itself but which prides itself on its nuclear weapons. As Jieun Baek writes, "the power of *juche*, North Korean's official ideology,... emphasizes the country's self-sufficiency and venerates the rulers of the Kim dynasty as quasi deities whose judgment and wisdom may never be questioned. In 1974, Kim Jong Il sought to systematize *juche* by issuing a list called 'Ten Principles for the Establishment of the One-Ideology System'; most of the principles involved acknowledging the absolute authority of the supreme leader and pledging total obedience to the state. Kim demanded that all North Korean citizens memorize the principles and adhere to them in their daily lives, an order enforced through weekly "self-criticism" sessions and peer surveillance. This practice continues today. During weekly meetings in classrooms, offices, and factories, citizens recite the ten principles and are called on to criticize themselves and one another for failing to live in perfect accord with *juche*. North Koreans begin participating in these sessions around the time they enter first grade.

⁹⁵ Gilbert, *op. cit.*, pp. 513-514.

⁹⁶ Margolin, "Cambodia", pp. 589-590.

“Having inculcated *juche* into its citizens from a very young age, the state does everything it can to ensure that as they grow older, they are exposed to as little contradictory information as possible. One of the most serious crimes that a North Korean can commit is to consume banned media. According to Freedom House, ‘listening to unauthorized foreign broadcasts and possessing dissident publications are considered “crimes against the state” in North Korea and ‘carry serious punishments, including hard labor, prison sentences, and the death penalty.’ On a single day in 2013, according to *JoongAng Ilbo*, a major South Korean newspaper, the government executed 80 people in seven cities for violating such laws...”⁹⁷

“North Korea continues to be one of the most repressive governments in the world with the world’s lowest human rights record. Over 200,000 people are interned in concentration camps for either being political dissidents or being related to political dissidents;... they are subject to slavery, torture, starvation, shootings, gassing, and human experimentation. Estimates of the death toll go up from 710,000 to 3,500,000.”⁹⁸

*

The other main location of Communist activity at this time was Africa, the poorest continent, which was already suffering particularly from drought conditions and the steep rise in the price of oil.

On April 25, 1974, in the “Carnatian Revolution” (so called because it was almost without violence), the authoritarian government of Portugal was overthrown and a left-wing regime came to power in its place. The new government was opposed to Portugal’s colonial inheritance, and soon all Portugal’s African colonies, especially Portuguese Guinea, Angola and Mozambique, together with East Timor in Indonesia, were liberated. The result for most of them was anything but real liberation...

Angola, writes Martin Gilbert, “had become independent from Portugal on November 11, 1975. It did so in the midst of a civil war between the factions that had hitherto focused their struggle against the Portuguese. The victorious group, the Marxist-Leninist Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) was given military help by both the Soviet Union, which sent arms and military advisers, and Cuba, which sent five thousand combat troops. The rival group, the National Union for Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), fought on, but the Soviet weaponry of the MPLA was decisive. On November 24 President Ford warned the Soviet Union that the dispatch of weapons, and also of Soviet military advisers, had introduced the rivalry of

⁹⁷ Baek, “The Opening of the North Korean Mind”, *Foreign Affairs*, November 28, 2016.

⁹⁸ *About History*, July 10, 2017, <http://about-history.com/list-of-dictatorships-by-death-toll-the-top-10-biggest-killers-in-history/>

Great Powers to Africa for the first time since the collapse of European colonial rule fifteen years earlier.”⁹⁹

In March, 1976, the communists triumphed in the civil war. But in June, at the UN Security Council, the US “vetoed the admission of Angola [into the UN] for as long as Cuban troops remained there. Only after the United States agreed, five months later, to abstain rather than cast its veto, was Angola admitted. The Cuban troops – 20,000 in all by the summer – had by then completed their mission of helping secure, together with Soviet arms, the victory of the Marxist-led Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola. That the civil war would cease became clear when the United States Senate banned any further American aid to the anti-Marxist groupings.”¹⁰⁰

UNITA continued to fight. However, most of their ideas were derived from Maoism; so the Angolans truly found themselves between the devil and the deep blue sea...¹⁰¹ The MPLA state produced the anticipated tragic results for the Angolan population: a crumbling economy, famine (tens of thousands of children died in 1986), forced conscription and massive population transfer.

An indigenous force that contended with the Marxists in Southern Africa was the white supremacist movement in South Africa and Rhodesia, which had proclaimed its independence from Britain some years ago. In Rhodesia in 1977, writes Gilbert, “even as the White government of Ian Smith was being pressed strongly by the United States and Britain to honour its pledge of majority rule, a ‘war of liberation’ was being fought by those who preferred to seize power rather than wait for it to be transferred. It was the thirteenth year of illegal independence, and the two main guerilla groups, the Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU), under Joshua Nkomo, and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), under Robert Mugabe, had united to form a single political and fighting force, the Patriotic Front. Rejecting negotiations, it carried out continual attacks on Rhodesian military installations, operating from bases in both Mozambique and Zambia. AZPU was able to call upon arms and ammunition from the Soviet Union; ZANU from China...

“The Smith regime carried out a series of military raids into the countries in which the Rhodesian guerillas were based. In May, President Kaunda of Zambia declared that this country was ‘in a state of war’ with Rhodesia. During a Rhodesian army attack into Mozambique in November, 1,200 members of the Patriotic Front were killed. There was widespread international condemnation of this cross-border raid. Inside Rhodesia the killings mounted. In February three Jesuit priests and four Dominican nuns

⁹⁹ Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 490. “By 1975,” according to Lawrence James, “some 36,000 Cuban reservists with artillery, tanks and missile systems were serving in Angola, while Cuban doctors, teachers and technicians replaced their Portuguese counterparts who had returned home.” (“Africa’s Proxy Cold War”, *BBC World Histories*, N 3, April/May, 2017, p. 82)

¹⁰⁰ Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 499.

¹⁰¹ Yves Santamaria, “Afrocommunism”, in *The Black Book of Communism*, p. 700.

were murdered at the Musanu mission station forty-three miles east of the capital, Salisbury, bringing the number of murdered missionaries to thirteen in nine months. The death toll during the year was 1,759 ZANU and ZAPU guerillas killed, a thousand Black Rhodesians, 244 members of the Rhodesian security forces and fifty-six White Rhodesians. In measures designed to cut off the guerillas from local support, the Smith government resettled more than a quarter of a million Africans in 'protected villages'."¹⁰²

Under American and British pressure, Rhodesia finally accepted black majority rule in 1979. The next year, the Marxist government of ZANU under Robert Mugabe came to power in what was now called Zimbabwe. Today, in 2017, Mugabe is still in power, demonstrating the tenacity of most Communist regimes.

On December 25, 1974 the Portuguese entrusted Mozambique to Frelimo, a Marxist-Leninist party founded in 1962 by Eduardo Chivambo Mondlane, who managed to get the support both of the West and of the Soviet Union. On receiving power, Frelimo decided to extend a process called "villagization" throughout the country.

As Yves Santamaria writes, "All peasants (80 percent of the population) were expected to abandon their traditional homes and to regroup in new villages. In the initial enthusiasm of independence, the population responded quite favorably to the government's requests, creating collective farms and sometimes cooperating in the construction of communal buildings, although they generally refused to inhabit them and soon abandoned the communal fields. On paper it appear that the country was under the careful control of a hierarchical administration through a network of Communist cells.

"In 1977 the Frelimo leaders had openly proclaimed their allegiance to the Bolshevik ideal, calling for extended collectivization and closer links with the international Communist movement. Various treaties were signed with the countries of the Soviet bloc, which provided arms and military instructors in exchange for close support of the Rhodesian nationalists of the Zimbabwe African National Front (ZANU)."¹⁰³

An opposition movement called Renamo arose; it was supported at first by the Rhodesian secret services until the foundation of Marxist Zimbabwe in 1980, and then by South Africa. "To the surprise of numerous observers, the population of the villages rallied to the resistance movement despite the barbarism of Renamo's methods... [However,] the actions of Renamo, on the whole, were considerably less systematic than the state violence perpetrated by Frelimo, and the support that Renamo received demonstrated just how hated the regime had become. Frelimo justified its actions in terms of a struggle against tribalism, against antiquated and outdated religious

¹⁰² Gilbert, *op. cit.*, pp. 514-515.

¹⁰³ Santamaria, *op. cit.*, pp. 701-702.

practices, and against the deep-seated belief in lineage and ancestral fiefdom, which the Front had rejected at independence, disparaging it as 'feudalism'...

"According to Human Rights Watch, in the period 1975-1985 food shortages caused more deaths than did armed violence. This view is shared by UNICEF, which calculated that 600,000 died of hunger in this period, a loss of life comparable to that caused by famine in Ethiopia..."¹⁰⁴

Ethiopia's Emperor Haile Selassie was overthrown on September 12, 1974 by a Provisional Military Administrative Committee, or Dergue, led by Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam. "The ensuing regime suffered several coups, uprisings, wide-scale drought, and a huge refugee problem. In 1977, Somalia, which had been receiving assistance and arms from the USSR invaded Ethiopia in the Ogaden War, capturing part of the Ogaden region. Ethiopia recovered it after it began receiving massive military aid from the USSR, Cuba, Yemen, East Germany and North Korea. This included around 15,000 Cuban combat troops. Up to 500,000 were killed as a result of the Red Terror, from forced deportations, or from the use of hunger as a weapon under Mengistu's rule. The Red Terror was carried out in response to what the government termed the "White Terror", a supposed chain of violent events, assassinations and killings attributed to the opposition."¹⁰⁵

Another kind of communism - Chinese Maoism - wrought havoc in East Africa. In the 1960s stories filtered through that China's "Great Leap Forward" had been a great success - although in fact it had led to the worst famine in history and the deaths of tens of millions of Chinese. However, writes Yuval Noah Harari, "Julius Nyerere, the idealistic president of Tanzania, was deeply impressed by the Chinese success. In order to modernise Tanzanian agriculture, Nyerere resolved to establish collective farms on the Chinese model. When peasants objected to the plan, Nyerere sent the army and police to destroy traditional villages and forcibly relocate hundreds of thousands of peasants onto the new collective farms.

"Government propaganda depicted the farms as miniature paradises, but many of them existed only in government documents. The protocols and reports written in the capital Dar-es-Salaam said that on such-and-such date the inhabitants of such-and-such villages were relocated to such-and-such farm. In reality, when the villagers reached their destination they found absolutely nothing there. No houses, no fields, no tools. Officials nevertheless reported great successes to themselves and to President Nyerere. In fact, within less than ten years Tanzania was transformed from Africa's biggest food exporter into a net food importer that could not feed itself without external assistance. In 1979, 90 per cent of Tanzanian farmers lived on

¹⁰⁴ Santamaria, *op. cit.*, pp. 702, 704.

¹⁰⁵ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethiopia>.

collective farms, but they generated only 5 per cent of the country's agricultural output..."¹⁰⁶

Idi Amin, who came to power through a military coup in Uganda in 1971, was one of the few African leaders who was not permanently attached to either side in the Cold War. "During his years in power, Amin shifted from being a pro-western ruler, enjoying considerable Israeli support to being backed by Libya's Muammar Gaddafi, Zaire's Mobutu Sese Seko, the Soviet Union, and East Germany. In 1975, Amin became the chairman of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), a Pan-Africanist group designed to promote solidarity among African states. During the 1977-1979 period, Uganda was a member of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. Amin did, however, have the support of the US Central Intelligence Agency, which helped deliver bombs and other military equipment to Amin's army and took part in military operations with Amin's forces in Uganda... Amin's rule was characterized by rampant human rights abuses, political repression, ethnic persecution, extrajudicial killings, nepotism, corruption, and gross economic mismanagement. The number of people killed as a result of his regime is estimated by international observers and human rights groups to range from 100,000 to 500,000."¹⁰⁷

Spanish Guinea became independent in 1968 as the Equatorial Republic of Guinea. "In July 1970, Macias Nguema created a single-party state and made himself president for life in 1972. He broke off ties with Spain and the West. In spite of his condemnation of Marxism, which he deemed "neo-colonialist", Equatorial Guinea maintained very special relations with socialist countries, notably China, Cuba, and the USSR. He signed a preferential trade agreement and a shipping treaty with the Soviet Union. The Soviets also granted loans to Equatorial Guinea.

"The shipping agreement granted the Soviets permission to establish a pilot project of fishery development and a naval base at Luba. The USSR was in return to supply fish to Equatorial Guinea. China and Cuba also gave different forms on financial, military, and technical assistance to Equatorial Guinea, which gave them a measure of influence in Equatorial Guinea. For the USSR, despite the unsavoury background of Macias Nguema, there was an advantage to be gained in the War in Angola by having access to Luba base and later on to Malabo International Airport.

"Towards the middle 1970s the Macias regime came under grave accusations of being guilty of mass killings. In 1974 the World Council of Churches affirmed that large numbers of people had been murdered since 1968 in a 'reign of terror' which continued. The same body claimed that a quarter of the whole population had fled abroad, while 'the prisons are overflowing and to all intents and purposes form one vast concentration

¹⁰⁶ Harari, *Homo Deus*, London: Vintage, 2017, pp. 193-194.

¹⁰⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Idi_Amin

camp'. On Christmas 1975, Macías Nguema had 150 alleged coup plotters executed. Out of a population of 300,000, an estimated 80,000 were killed. Apart from allegedly committing genocide against the ethnic minority Bubi people, he ordered the deaths of thousands of suspected opponents, closed down churches and presided over the economy's collapse as skilled citizens and foreigners left the country..."¹⁰⁸

Nguema was executed in 1979. Gilbert writes: "He was charged with 'genocide, treason, embezzlement and systematic violation of human rights'. He had reduced his country to little more than a prison camp, and ordered the deaths of thousands of people. He was found guilty and executed. The firing squad that carried out the execution had been brought specially from Morocco, because local people were afraid that Nguema's spirit was too strong for bullets, and that he would return as a tiger."¹⁰⁹

Communist (SWAPO) guerillas also invaded Namibia from bases in Zambia and Angola.¹¹⁰ (In 1979 the French "landed in Zaire to repel a Katangan attack organized by Cubans based in Angola."¹¹¹) There were also Soviet bases in Mozambique.¹¹²

"By 1980, then, South Africa - ruled by what Castro called a 'Fascist-Racist' regime - stood alone against the forces of African nationalism. For 40 years, the apartheid regime had presented itself as a bastion against communism - a stance that had secured it a steady flow of western arms. The Soviet Union and Cuba provided weapons and training camps for African National Congress guerillas fighting black oppression by the apartheid government. South Africa was also, as US President Ronald Reagan remarked in 1981, 'essential to the free world in its production of minerals we all must have.'

"In the event, Reagan did not need to commit his country to support South Africa's last stand; events inside the Soviet Union were now dictating the outcome of the Cold War in Africa. By the mid-1980s, the communist powerhouse was facing an economic crisis, losing a war in Afghanistan and overstretched in Africa. One Kremlin official, Anatoly Adamishin, spoke for many others when he asked: 'Why, with all our problems, did we have to get involved [in Africa]?... We could not afford it.' Angola alone owed the Soviet Union \$5bn, which it could not repay. In 1977 the Soviets attempted to unseat Neto, whom they now distrusted. Afterwards he made oblique approaches towards the US.

"It was left to the last leader of a communist Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, to disengage from Africa. In 1988 he salvaged what he could in agreement with the United States, by which all Soviet and Cuban forces

¹⁰⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Equatorial_Guinea#25273869.

¹⁰⁹ Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 551.

¹¹⁰ Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 536.

¹¹¹ Revel, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

¹¹² Revel, *op. cit.*, pp. 70-71.

would withdraw from the continent, and South Africa pulled out of Namibia, which was granted independence in 1990. Castro growled about 'betrayal', but acquiesced.

"The Cold War in Africa had ended. The United States had won on points. But Africa was left, traumatised, to pick up the pieces and face the problems caused by the corrupt dictatorships that were the Cold War's lasting legacy..."¹¹³

*

Outside the Third World the Communists made few seizures of territory in this decade. However, if we count terrorism as a form of war, then the Soviets must certainly be counted responsible for waging physical war against Europe even while it preached peace and détente.

Revel writes: "Because it is an old trick for governments to blame their internal difficulties on foreign plots, prudent commentators and political figures long made a habit of skepticism about the exact extent of Soviet responsibility for the spread of terrorism in Europe since 1970 and in Latin America since 1960 and earlier. As time went on, however, enough circumstantial evidence was amassed to narrow the gap between the opinions these observers expressed in private and those they voiced in public. In private, they had long believed Moscow was supporting terrorism, but they did not abandon their reserve in public until 1980. Then Italian President Alessandro Pertini openly linked the Soviet Union to the Red Brigades and, in Portugal, Socialist leader Mario Soares implicated the Soviets in the terrorist marauding of the Basque ETA in Spain. In 1977, *Le Monde* had opened its pages to defenders of the Baader-Meinhof group with a generosity that indicated some sympathy with terrorism in West Germany; in 1982, however, in reporting on the investigation into the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II on May 13, 1981, the paper almost unreservedly approved the charge that the shooting had been ordered by the Soviet Union through its Bulgarian vassals. And in a column in the French magazine *Le Point*, the very sober Olivier Chevrillon, discussing a series of terrorist killings in Paris, declared: 'The flood of comment... neglects one aspect of terrorism today that nevertheless seems ... glaringly obvious... Terrorism, of course, is still what it has always been - a form of madness - but hasn't it also become a reckless auxiliary to [one country's] diplomacy? By showering every kind of *pistolero* with arms and rubles, the Soviets are surely giving themselves an added means of pressure and blackmail against the European democracies.'...

"Terrorism must, however, have local roots to be exploitable. And there is no denying that the Soviet Union and Cuba, its agent in Latin America, have infiltrated *homegrown* terrorist movements, amplified their natural strength, supplied equipment and advisers; when necessary, terrorist leaders have been

¹¹³ James, *op. cit.*

trained in Eastern Europe camps that the West has known about for years. The range of possibilities offered has been vast, from Mideastern terrorism through Irish and Spanish separatism and the bloody paranoiacs in West Germany and Italy to the Latin American guerrilla movements. On their own manpower and resources, none of these movements except the Arab terrorists could have gone very far or lasted long. But with so many screens to hide behind, the Soviet Union and its vassals, without ever showing themselves, can maintain a permanent state of insecurity in the Western countries that admirably suits Communist purposes...

“... Terrorism has nothing do with the indignation and spontaneous insurrection of the masses. Its roots are elsewhere. It is based on psychological conditioning, indoctrination, and military organization into small, secret and fanaticized groups that have no need whatsoever of support from a general population whose hostility towards them, in Italy as in Germany, is ferocious and virtually unanimous.

“Terrorists in such countries are not fighting for freedom. The Communists are not fighting for the national independence of the people in the Third World or against neocolonialism. The proof of this is that they have grabbed power in countries that had long been independent and nonaligned: Ethiopia, for example, and Afghanistan. It is a lie that the Communists are fighting for democracy: the proof of this is that they have tried to overturn democratic regimes in such countries as Venezuela and Portugal, that they methodically try to topple democracy wherever it exists. It is true that in Cuba in 1959 and in Nicaragua in 1979 the *guerrilleros* overturned dictatorships, but only to replace fascist dictatorships with Communist dictatorships...”¹¹⁴

And so international Communism continued to make enormous strides while the West slept: China, North Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Yemen, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Guinea, Afghanistan, Angola, Cuba, Nicaragua all fell in the thirty-year period from 1949 to 1979... After the American defeat in Vietnam, the West's determination to fight Communism, already weak, collapsed almost entirely.

As Revel put it, with his usual acerbic clarity: “In 1975, the Vietnam debacle and the removal from office of President Richard M. Nixon left the United States cataleptic. Western Europe, sprawled on the sofa of détente, ecstatic over America's humiliation and over the Helsinki agreement, was determined to see nothing reprehensible in anything the Soviet Union might undertake. In less than five years, the USSR.... became a world superpower, spreading stout branches and promising shoots into Southeast Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Central America.”¹¹⁵

In spite of the overwhelming evidence that wherever Communism goes

¹¹⁴ Revel, *op. cit.*, pp. 204, 206, 209.

¹¹⁵ Revel, *op. cit.*, pp. 93-94.

rivers of blood flow, friendship between communists and capitalists flourished, just as George Orwell had prophesied in his novel *1984*. The Queen of England gave a state banquet for Ceausescu; the Soviets gained ideological control even over such bodies as the World Council of Churches; and at Red China's insistence democratic Taiwan was thrown out of the United Nations. As late as the early 1980s, when the Soviet Union was intensifying its repression of Christians and dissidents, President Reagan's accurate description of it as "the evil empire" was met with widespread scorn by western intellectuals.

Nor was this simply the result of a fear of nuclear war. Democratic socialism was, and is, deeply embedded in the ideological consciousness of the West, and had penetrated into the churches and political parties, the media, schools and institutes of higher education. In accordance with this ideology, the communist states were considered to be pursuing essentially the same humane ideals as the West. And if these ideals were not always attained, this was not considered the fault of socialism as such, but rather of the relics of Russia's pre-communist, Tsarist past - or to the innate servility of the Russian people.

It is important to understand the reasons for the western blindness to the full evil of communism - even now, long after its evils have been fully exposed. One reason undoubtedly lies in a besetting weakness of almost all men: even when we have seen through the falseness of our former beliefs, we nevertheless seek excuses for ourselves, excuses that make our errors "understandable" and perhaps not really that bad after all. And yet former Nazis or Nazi sympathizers are never given this grace: their views remain inexcusable and unforgiveable, and the hounding of Nazis, even minor ones, continues without mercy and without end.

On the other hand, it is an extraordinary fact that no equivalent of the Nuremberg trials has ever taken place in the East, and the Soviet Communist Party itself was "acquitted" in what was a new kind of "show trial" in 1992.¹¹⁶ And so, while nobody, in East or West, would ever boast of having been a Nazi, Vladimir Putin, for example, can boast of his membership of the KGB, saying that "once a chekist, always a chekist" - and still gets to have tea with the Queen of England, whose relative, Tsar Nicholas II, was murdered by the Cheka...

A deeper reason lies in the fact that Communism and Liberalism are closely related ideologies, being both derived, in their modern forms, from the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. They both offer a utopian vision for mankind based on rationalism, science and education, in which religious belief has no place. Liberalism is relatively more individualistic than Communism, gives more place to individual initiative in economic and social life, and is more tolerant of individual differences and idiosyncracies, such as

¹¹⁶ Vladimir Bukovsky, *Moskovskij Protsess* (Moscow Trial), Moscow, 1996.

religion. But the similarities between them are more striking than their differences. And from the point of view of traditional Christianity, the main difference is that while the one destroys faith slowly and painlessly, the other does it violently and relatively quickly. Thus Stuart Reed writes: "In the Cold War, an unworkable revolutionary creed, communism, yielded to a workable revolutionary creed, liberal capitalism. Now liberal capitalism has replaced communism as the chief threat to the customs, traditions and decencies of Christendom..."¹¹⁷

In view of the inner spiritual kinship between Liberalism and Communism, western liberal intellectuals feel compelled to be not too hard on the sister ideology - "no enemies to the left," as they used to say in the Russian Duma. It is a different matter with anti-Enlightenment political ideologies such as Nazism or Orthodox Christian Autocracy, in spite of the fact that, as Jonathan Glover writes, "opponents of the Enlightenment can seem to grasp truths which elude its followers, and repudiation of the Enlightenment is now fashionable among philosophers".¹¹⁸ And so Soviet Communism, whatever its horrors, is felt to be justified at any rate to this extent: that the "evil" autocracy of "Bloody" Nicholas had to be replaced - after all, as Lenin said, you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs. Of course, it was regrettable, they say, that the revolution could not have been stopped during its liberal phase, between February and October, 1917. But the intention was good: it was the execution that was poor.

Daniel Pipes confirms this analysis: "The Soviet Union appeared less bad than the Third Reich. The Nazis rose and fell in spectacular fashion; the communist trajectory was a more gentle one. The Third Reich lasted only twelve years and ended in a blaze of gunsmoke and fire; the Soviet Union endured for three-quarters of a century and expired with a whimper. These differences have important consequences. While the results of Nazi conspiracism are the subjects of innumerable studies and artistic works, the comparable Soviet actions remain relatively obscure. Auschwitz, Birkenau, and the other death camps are known by name, but who knows their Soviet equivalents? German archives were captured in a fell swoop. Soviet ones are slowly unveiled.

"The same distinction applies to the two dictators. Hitler left behind a far more terrible reputation than Stalin. One ranted; the other calculated. Hitler made no discernible attempt to disguise his wickedness. In contrast, Stalin hid his evil with such diligence and success that his crimes became known only

¹¹⁷ Reed, "Confessions of a Fellow-Traveller", *The Spectator*, 23 September, 2000, p. 45. Cf. Paul Dukes: "The USA and the USSR were the embodiments of two universal ideologies first formulated by Woodrow Wilson and Vladimir Lenin respectively under the dual pressure of the First World War and the Russian Revolution: a world made safe for democracy, and world Communism." (Dukes, "A Long View of the Cold War", *History Today*, vol. 51 (1), January, 2001, p. 29)

¹¹⁸ Glover, *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1999, p. 7.

three years after his death and were then widely received with shock. Because the facts about Stalin came out in so disjointed a way, his crimes to this day lack the notoriety of Hitler's murderousness. Hitler so discredited himself that to find any virtues in him implies a kind of insanity. Not so Stalin. If Hitler's apologists are beyond the pale, Stalin's remain within it...

"Analysts sympathize more with the Left. The liberal orientation of most scholars and journalists means that they treat comparable phenomena in different ways. They do not hide the Left's turpitude, but they present it less harshly, in isolation, and usually as the idiosyncracies of an individual rather than faults intrinsic to the system. Leninism would have been more humane if only Stalin had not highjacked the revolution..."¹¹⁹

*

The French had always seen themselves in the vanguard of the revolution. And they had indeed been the teachers of many revolutionaries, especially in their former colonies. Thus Ho Chi Minh had studied in Paris, and many of the Khmer Rouge leadership had studied under Jean Paul Sartre. Therefore it is not surprising that they should have been probably the West's most gullible absorbers of Soviet propaganda, fuelled by their visceral anti-Americanism. They were therefore especially vulnerable to what Garry Kasparov has called "whataboutism", "a term coined to describe how Soviet leaders would respond to criticism of Soviet massacres, forced deportations, and gulags with 'What about how you Americans treated the Native Americans and the slaves?' or something similar."¹²⁰ However, from the 1970s a philosophical change began to take place in the country's intelligentsia, who had always seen themselves as at the forefront of the Revolution.

Tony Judt sees this change as really beginning in 1973, when faith in the Marxist revolution, already shaken by the Soviet invasion of Prague in 1968, received a further blow in the publication in French of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*. "The Communist daily newspaper *L'Humanité* dismissed it, reminding readers that since 'everyone' already knows all about Stalin, anyone rehashing all *that* could only be motivated by 'anti-Sovietism'. But the accusation of 'anti-Sovietism' was losing its force. In the wake of the Soviet invasion of Prague and its repressive aftermath, and of reports filtering out of China about the Cultural Revolution, Solzhenitsyn's root and branch condemnation of the whole Communist project rang true - even and perhaps especially to erstwhile sympathizers.

"Communism, it was becoming clear, had defiled and despoiled its radical heritage. And was continuing to do so, as the genocide in Cambodia and the widely-publicized trauma of the Vietnamese 'boat people' would soon reveal. Even those in Western Europe - and there were many - who held the United

¹¹⁹ Daniel Pipes, *Conspiracy*, New York: The Free Press, 1997, pp. 164-165.

¹²⁰ Kasparov, *Winter is Coming*, London: Atlantic, 2015, p. 43.

States largely responsible for the disasters in Vietnam and Cambodia, and whose anti-Americanism was further fuelled by the [supposedly] American-engineered killing of Chile's Salvador Allende just three months before the publication of *The Gulag Archipelago*, were increasingly reluctant to conclude as they had once done that the Socialist camp had the moral upper hand. American imperialism was indeed bad – but the other side was worse, perhaps far worse.

“At this point the traditional ‘progressive’ insistence on treating attacks on Communism as implicit threats to *all* socially-ameliorative goals – i.e. the claim that Communism, Socialism, Social Democracy, nationalization, central planning and progressive social engineering were part of a common political project – began to work against itself. If Lenin and his heirs had poisoned the well of social justice, the argument ran, we are *all* damaged. In the light of twentieth-century history the state was beginning to look less like the solution than the problem, and not only or even primarily for economic reasons. What begins with centralized planning ends with centralized killing...

“France in the Seventies and Eighties was no longer Arthur Koestler's ‘burning lens of Western civilization’, but French thinkers were still unusually predisposed to engage universal questions. Writers and commentators in Spain or West Germany or Italy in these years were much taken up with local challenges – though the terrorist threat that preoccupied them carried implications of its own for the discrediting of radical utopianism. Intellectuals in the UK, never deeply touched by the appeal of Communism, were largely indifferent to its decline and thus kept their distance from the new continental mood. In France, by contrast, there had been widespread and longstanding local sympathy for the Communist project. As anti-Communism gathered pace in French public discussion, abetted by the steady decline in the Communist Party's vote and influence, it was thus fuelled by local recollection and example. A new generation of French intellectuals transited with striking alacrity out of Marxism, driven by a sometimes unseemly haste to adjure their own previous engagement...

“In 1978 Karl Popper's *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* appeared in French for the first time, the harbinger of a steady absorption into the French mainstream of a whole corpus of ‘Anglo-American’ scholarship in philosophy and the social sciences of which the local intellectual culture had for decades remained in near ignorance. In the same year the historian François Furet published his path-breaking *Penser la Révolution Française*, in which he systematically dismantled the ‘revolutionary catechism’ through which the French had for many decades been taught to understand their country and its past.

“In this ‘catechism’ as Furet dissected it, the French Revolution had been the ur-moment of modernity: the confrontation that triggered France's division into opposing political cultures of Left and Right, ostensibly determined by the class identities of the antagonists. That story, which rested

upon the twin pillars of early-nineteenth century liberal optimism and a Marxist vision of radical social transformation, had now, in Furet's account, run into the ground – not least because Soviet Communism, the revolutionary heir presumptive in this morality tale of purposeful radical transformation, had retroactively polluted the whole inheritance. The French Revolution, in Furet's words, was 'dead'.

"The political implications of Furet's thesis were momentous, as its author well understood. The failings of Marxism as a politics were one thing, which could always be excused under the category of misfortune or circumstance. But if Marxism was discredited as a Grand Narrative – if neither reason nor necessity were at work in History – then all Stalin's crimes, all the lives he lost and resources wasted in transforming societies under state direction, all the mistakes and failures of the twentieth century's radical experiments in introducing Utopia by *diktat*, ceased to be 'dialectically' explicable as false moves along a true path. They became instead just what their critics had always said they were: loss, waste, failure and crime

"Furet and his younger contemporaries rejected the resort to History that had so coloured intellectual engagement in Europe since the beginning of the 1930s. There is, they insisted, no 'Master Narrative' governing the course of human actions, and thus no way to justify public policies or actions that cause real suffering today in the name of speculative benefits tomorrow. Broken eggs make good omelettes. But you cannot build a better society on broken men...

"Intellectual self-abnegation before History was once described by Isaiah Berlin as 'the terrible German way out of the burden of moral choice'. This is a little hard on Germans, who were hardly the only Europeans to abase themselves on the altar of historical necessity, though it is true that the idea had its roots in German romantic philosophy. But it points to an emerging vacuum in European political ideas: if there was no 'great cause' left; if the progressive legacy had run into the ground; if History, or necessity, could no longer be credibly invoked in defense of an act, a policy or a programme; then how should men decide the great dilemmas of the age?

"This was not a problem for Thatcherite radicals, who treated public policy as an extension of private interests and for whom the marketplace was a necessity and sufficient adjudicator of values and outcomes. Nor were the times unusually troubling for Europe's traditional conservatives, for whom the measure of good and evil in human affairs remained anchored in religious norms and social conventions, bruised but not yet altogether displaced by the cultural *tsunami* of the Sixties. It was the progressive *Left*, still the dominant presence in European political and cultural exchanges, which was urgently in need of a different script.

"What it found, to its collective surprise, was a new political vernacular – or, rather, a very old one, freshly rediscovered. The language of rights, or

liberties, was firmly inscribed in every European constitution, not least those of the People's Democracies. But as a way of thinking about politics, 'rights talk' had been altogether unfashionable in Europe for many years. After the First World War rights – notably the right to self-determination – had played a pivotal role in international debate over a post-war settlement, and most of the interested parties at the Versailles Peace Conference had invoked their rights quite vociferously when pressing their case upon the Great Powers. But these were *collective* rights – the rights of nations, peoples, minorities.

“Moreover, the record of collectively-asserted rights was an unhappy one. Where the rights of more than one ethnic or religious community had clashed, usually over a conflicting territorial claim, it had been depressingly obvious that force, not law, was the only effective way to establish precedence. Minority rights could not be protected within states, nor the right of weak states secured against the claims of their more powerful neighbors. The victors of 1945, looking back on the dashed hopes of Versailles, concluded as we have seen that *collective* interests were better served by the painful but effective solution of territorial regrouping (ethnic cleansing as it would later be known). As for stateless persons, they would no longer be treated as a judicial anomaly in a world of states and nations, but as individual victims of persecution or injustice.

“Post-1945 rights talk thus concentrated on individuals. This too was a lesson of the war. Even though men and women were persecuted in the name of their common identity (Jews, gypsies, Poles, etc.) they suffered as individuals, and it was as individuals with individual rights that the new United Nations sought to protect them. The various Conventions on Human Rights, Genocide or Social and Economic Rights that were incorporated into international law and treaties had a cumulative impact upon public sensibilities: they combined an eighteenth-century, Anglo-American concern for individual liberties with a very mid-twentieth-century emphasis upon the obligations of the state to ensure that a growing spectrum of greater and lesser claims were met – from the right to life to the 'right' to 'truth in advertising' and beyond.

“What propelled this legal rhetoric of individual rights into the realm of real politics was the coincidence of the retreat of Marxism with the International Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, which had opened in Helsinki the same year that *The Gulag Archipelago* was published in Paris. Until then, talk of 'rights' had long been disfavored among left-leaning European intellectuals, echoing Marx's famous dismissal of 'the so-called rights of man' as egoistical and 'bourgeois'. In progressive circles, terms such as 'Freedoms' or 'Liberty' or 'Rights', and other abstractions associated with 'man in general', were taken seriously only when preceded by an adjectival modifier: 'bourgeois', or 'proletarian' or 'Socialist'...

“... From the mid-seventies it became increasingly common to find speeches and writings from all across the political spectrum in Western

Europe unrestrainedly invoking 'human rights' and 'personal liberties'. As one Italian observer remarked in 1977, the idea and ideal of 'undivided' freedom was being openly discussed on the Left 'without mystification or demagoguery' for the first time since the war. This did not necessarily translate immediately into politics – for much of the Eighties West European Labour and Socialist parties floundered quite helplessly, resorting in many cases to the illicit appropriation of their opponents' programmes to cover their own nakedness. But their new openness to the vocabulary of rights and liberties did give Western European scholars and intellectuals access to the changing language of political opposition in *Eastern Europe* and a way of communicating across the divide – just in time, for it was *east* of the Iron Curtain that truly original and significant change was now under way..."¹²¹

*

It is only natural to see the decay of Marxism, first in the East and then in the West, as an important historical advance. And of course the decline in influence of the most destructive ideology in modern history must be counted as a gain. However, it was not an *unqualified* gain, especially in the West, where its replacement, the philosophy of human rights, served rather as a double-edged sword which undermined the unity of western governments even more than communist ones. For, as Revel wrote: "The omnipotence based on consensus that Tocqueville forecast [in *Democracy in America*] is only one side of the coin of modern government. The other is an equally general impotence to deal with the conflicting daily claims made on it by constituents eager for aid but less and less willing to assume obligations. By invading every area of life, the democratic state has stuffed itself with more responsibilities than powers. The very contradictions among special interests that are as legitimate as they are incompatible, all expecting to be treated with equal goodwill, show that the state's duties are expanding faster than its means of performing them. There is no denying how burdensome a tutelary government is on society – provided we add that its expansion makes it vulnerable, often paralyzing it in its relations with client groups that are quicker to hurry it than to obey it.

"This sort of behavior splinters democratic societies into separate groups, each battling for advantage and caring little for the interests of others or society as a whole. Public opinion, instead of being united by uniform thinking, is fragmented into a variety of cultures that can be so different in tastes, ways of living, attitudes and language that they understand each other only dimly, if at all. They coexist but do not mingle. Public opinion in today's democracies forms an archipelago, not a continent. Each island in the chain ranks its own distinctiveness above membership in a national group and even higher than its association with a group of democratic nations.

¹²¹ Judt, *Postwar*, London: Pimlico, 2007, pp. 561, 562, 563, 564-565, 566.

“In one sense, we do live in a mass era as residents of a ‘planetary village’ where manners and fashions blend. But, paradoxically, we also live in an age of the triumph of minorities, of a juxtaposition of widely different attitudes. While it is obvious that the passion for equality, identified by Tocqueville as the drive wheel of democracy, generates uniformity, let’s not forget that democracy also rests on a passion for liberty, which fosters diversity, fragmentation, unorthodoxy. Plato, democracy’s shrewdest enemy, saw this when he compared it to a motley cloak splashed with many colors. In a democracy, he said, everyone claims the right to live as he chooses, so that ways of living multiply and jostle each other. To Aristotle, too, liberty was the basic principle of democracy. He broke this down into two tenets: ‘for all to rule and be ruled in turn’ and ‘a man should live as he likes’. To American democracy, the right to do one’s own thing is as much or more cherished than equality.

“The ideological and cultural wars among the islands in the archipelago now take precedence over defense of the archipelago itself. In Holland in 1981, a considerable share of public opinion, questioned about its feelings on Poland and Afghanistan, declared that the Dutch lacked a moral right to criticize Communist repression or Soviet imperialism ‘as long as housing conditions in Amsterdam fail to meet the highest standards of modern comfort, as long as women remain exploited and the legal rights of heterosexual married couples are denied to homosexual married couples.’”¹²²

This egoistic mentality translated into a lack of interest in, or compassion for, those living in the Gulag archipelago of the Soviet Union, and in an increasing willingness to ignore the sufferings even of those living much closer – in Communist Central and Eastern Europe. Hence the betrayal of the interests of the East Europeans in the Helsinki Accords. But more serious still in the long run was the undermining of the family and other social ties that no society can live without, whose devastating effects have become much clearer in the first decades of the twenty-first century.

*

The French had always seen themselves in the vanguard of the revolution. And they had indeed been the teachers of many revolutionaries, especially in their former colonies. Thus Ho Chi Minh had studied in Paris, and many of the Khmer Rouge leadership had studied under Jean Paul Sartre. Therefore it is not surprising that they should have been probably the West’s most gullible absorbers of Soviet propaganda, fuelled by their visceral anti-Americanism. They were therefore especially vulnerable to what Garry Kasparov has called “whataboutism”, “a term coined to describe how Soviet leaders would respond to criticism of Soviet massacres, forced deportations, and gulags with ‘What about how you Americans treated the Native Americans and the

¹²² Revel, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-15.

slaves?' or something similar."¹²³ However, from the 1970s a philosophical change began to take place in the country's intelligentsia, who had always seen themselves as at the forefront of the Revolution.

Tony Judt sees this change as really beginning in 1973, when faith in the Marxist revolution, already shaken by the Soviet invasion of Prague in 1968, received a further blow in the publication in French of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*. "The Communist daily newspaper *L'Humanité* dismissed it, reminding readers that since 'everyone' already knows all about Stalin, anyone rehashing all *that* could only be motivated by 'anti-Sovietism'. But the accusation of 'anti-Sovietism' was losing its force. In the wake of the Soviet invasion of Prague and its repressive aftermath, and of reports filtering out of China about the Cultural Revolution, Solzhenitsyn's root and branch condemnation of the whole Communist project rang true – even and perhaps especially to erstwhile sympathizers.

"Communism, it was becoming clear, had defiled and despoiled its radical heritage. And was continuing to do so, as the genocide in Cambodia and the widely-publicized trauma of the Vietnamese 'boat people' would soon reveal. Even those in Western Europe – and there were many – who held the United States largely responsible for the disasters in Vietnam and Cambodia, and whose anti-Americanism was further fuelled by the [supposedly] American-engineered killing of Chile's Salvador Allende just three months before the publication of *The Gulag Archipelago*, were increasingly reluctant to conclude as they had once done that the Socialist camp had the moral upper hand. American imperialism was indeed bad – but the other side was worse, perhaps far worse.

"At this point the traditional 'progressive' insistence on treating attacks on Communism as implicit threats to *all* socially-ameliorative goals – i.e. the claim that Communism, Socialism, Social Democracy, nationalization, central planning and progressive social engineering were part of a common political project – began to work against itself. If Lenin and his heirs had poisoned the well of social justice, the argument ran, we are *all* damaged. In the light of twentieth-century history the state was beginning to look less like the solution than the problem, and not only or even primarily for economic reasons. What begins with centralized planning ends with centralized killing...

"France in the Seventies and Eighties was no longer Arthur Koestler's 'burning lens of Western civilization', but French thinkers were still unusually predisposed to engage universal questions. Writers and commentators in Spain or West Germany or Italy in these years were much taken up with local challenges – though the terrorist threat that preoccupied them carried implications of its own for the discrediting of radical utopianism. Intellectuals in the UK, never deeply touched by the appeal of Communism, were largely indifferent to its decline and thus kept their distance from the new continental

¹²³ Kasparov, *Winter is Coming*, London: Atlantic, 2015, p. 43.

mood. In France, by contrast, there had been widespread and longstanding local sympathy for the Communist project. As anti-Communism gathered pace in French public discussion, abetted by the steady decline in the Communist Party's vote and influence, it was thus fuelled by local recollection and example. A new generation of French intellectuals transited with striking alacrity out of Marxism, driven by a sometimes unseemly haste to adjure their own previous engagement...

"In 1978 Karl Popper's *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* appeared in French for the first time, the harbinger of a steady absorption into the French mainstream of a whole corpus of 'Anglo-American' scholarship in philosophy and the social sciences of which the local intellectual culture had for decades remained in near ignorance. In the same year the historian François Furet published his path-breaking *Penser la Révolution Française*, in which he systematically dismantled the 'revolutionary catechism' through which the French had for many decades been taught to understand their country and its past.

"In this 'catechism' as Furet dissected it, the French Revolution had been the ur-moment of modernity: the confrontation that triggered France's division into opposing political cultures of Left and Right, ostensibly determined by the class identities of the antagonists. That story, which rested upon the twin pillars of early-nineteenth century liberal optimism and a Marxist vision of radical social transformation, had now, in Furet's account, run into the ground - not least because Soviet Communism, the revolutionary heir presumptive in this morality tale of purposeful radical transformation, had retroactively polluted the whole inheritance. The French Revolution, in Furet's words, was 'dead'.

"The political implications of Furet's thesis were momentous, as its author well understood. The failings of Marxism as a politics were one thing, which could always be excused under the category of misfortune or circumstance. But if Marxism was discredited as a Grand Narrative - if neither reason nor necessity were at work in History - then all Stalin's crimes, all the lives he lost and resources wasted in transforming societies under state direction, all the mistakes and failures of the twentieth century's radical experiments in introducing Utopia by *diktat*, ceased to be 'dialectically' explicable as false moves along a true path. They became instead just what their critics had always said they were: loss, waste, failure and crime

"Furet and his younger contemporaries rejected the resort to History that had so coloured intellectual engagement in Europe since the beginning of the 1930s. There is, they insisted, no 'Master Narrative' governing the course of human actions, and thus no way to justify public policies or actions that cause real suffering today in the name of speculative benefits tomorrow. Broken eggs make good omelettes. But you cannot build a better society on broken men...

“Intellectual self-abnegation before History was once described by Isaiah Berlin as ‘the terrible German way out of the burden of moral choice’. This is a little hard on Germans, who were hardly the only Europeans to abase themselves on the altar of historical necessity, though it is true that the idea had its roots in German romantic philosophy. But it points to an emerging vacuum in European political ideas: if there was no ‘great cause’ left; if the progressive legacy had run into the ground; if History, or necessity, could no longer be credibly invoked in defense of an act, a policy or a programme; then how should men decide the great dilemmas of the age?

“This was not a problem for Thatcherite radicals, who treated public policy as an extension of private interests and for whom the marketplace was a necessity and sufficient adjudicator of values and outcomes. Nor were the times unusually troubling for Europe’s traditional conservatives, for whom the measure of good and evil in human affairs remained anchored in religious norms and social conventions, bruised but not yet altogether displaced by the cultural *tsunami* of the Sixties. It was the progressive *Left*, still the dominant presence in European political and cultural exchanges, which was urgently in need of a different script.

“What it found, to its collective surprise, was a new political vernacular – or, rather, a very old one, freshly rediscovered. The language of rights, or liberties, was firmly inscribed in every European constitution, not least those of the People’s Democracies. But as a way of thinking about politics, ‘rights talk’ had been altogether unfashionable in Europe for many years. After the First World War rights – notably the right to self-determination – had played a pivotal role in international debate over a post-war settlement, and most of the interested parties at the Versailles Peace Conference had invoked their rights quite vociferously when pressing their case upon the Great Powers. But these were *collective* rights – the rights of nations, peoples, minorities.

“Moreover, the record of collectively-asserted rights was an unhappy one. Where the rights of more than one ethnic or religious community had clashed, usually over a conflicting territorial claim, it had been depressingly obvious that force, not law, was the only effective way to establish precedence. Minority rights could not be protected within states, nor the right of weak states secured against the claims of their more powerful neighbors. The victors of 1945, looking back on the dashed hopes of Versailles, concluded as we have seen that *collective* interests were better served by the painful but effective solution of territorial regrouping (ethnic cleansing as it would later be known). As for stateless persons, they would no longer be treated as a judicial anomaly in a world of states and nations, but as individual victims of persecution or injustice.

“Post-1945 rights talk thus concentrated on individuals. This too was a lesson of the war. Even though men and women were persecuted in the name of their common identity (Jews, gypsies, Poles, etc.) they suffered as individuals, and it was as individuals with individual rights that the new

United Nations sought to protect them. The various Conventions on Human Rights, Genocide or Social and Economic Rights that were incorporated into international law and treaties had a cumulative impact upon public sensibilities: they combined an eighteenth-century, Anglo-American concern for individual liberties with a very mid-twentieth-century emphasis upon the obligations of the state to ensure that a growing spectrum of greater and lesser claims were met – from the right to life to the ‘right’ to ‘truth in advertising’ and beyond.

“What propelled this legal rhetoric of individual rights into the realm of real politics was the coincidence of the retreat of Marxism with the International Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, which had opened in Helsinki the same year that *The Gulag Archipelago* was published in Paris. Until then, talk of ‘rights’ had long been disfavored among left-leaning European intellectuals, echoing Marx’s famous dismissal of ‘the so-called rights of man’ as egoistical and ‘bourgeois’. In progressive circles, terms such as ‘Freedoms’ or ‘Liberty’ or ‘Rights’, and other abstractions associated with ‘man in general’, were taken seriously only when preceded by an adjectival modifier: ‘bourgeois’, or ‘proletarian’ or ‘Socialist’...

“... From the mid-seventies it became increasingly common to find speeches and writings from all across the political spectrum in Western Europe unrestrainedly invoking ‘human rights’ and ‘personal liberties’. As one Italian observer remarked in 1977, the idea and ideal of ‘undivided’ freedom was being openly discussed on the Left ‘without mystification or demagoguery’ for the first time since the war. This did not necessarily translate immediately into politics – for much of the Eighties West European Labour and Socialist parties floundered quite helplessly, resorting in many cases to the illicit appropriation of their opponents’ programmes to cover their own nakedness. But their new openness to the vocabulary of rights and liberties did give Western European scholars and intellectuals access to the changing language of political opposition in *Eastern Europe* and a way of communicating across the divide – just in time, for it was *east* of the Iron Curtain that truly original and significant change was now under way...”¹²⁴

*

It is only natural to see the decay of Marxism, first in the East and then in the West, as an important historical advance. And of course the decline in influence of the most destructive ideology in modern history must be counted as a gain. However, it was not an *unqualified* gain, especially in the West, where its replacement, the philosophy of human rights, served rather as a double-edged sword which undermined the unity of western governments even more than communist ones. For, as Revel wrote: “The omnipotence based on consensus that Tocqueville forecast [in *Democracy in America*] is only one side of the coin of modern government. The other is an equally general

¹²⁴ Judt, *Postwar*, London: Pimlico, 2007, pp. 561, 562, 563, 564-565, 566.

impotence to deal with the conflicting daily claims made on it by constituents eager for aid but less and less willing to assume obligations. By invading every area of life, the democratic state has stuffed itself with more responsibilities than powers. The very contradictions among special interests that are as legitimate as they are incompatible, all expecting to be treated with equal goodwill, show that the state's duties are expanding faster than its means of performing them. There is no denying how burdensome a tutelary government is on society – provided we add that its expansion makes it vulnerable, often paralyzing it in its relations with client groups that are quicker to hurry it than to obey it.

“This sort of behavior splinters democratic societies into separate groups, each battling for advantage and caring little for the interests of others or society as a whole. Public opinion, instead of being united by uniform thinking, is fragmented into a variety of cultures that can be so different in tastes, ways of living, attitudes and language that they understand each other only dimly, if at all. They coexist but do not mingle. Public opinion in today's democracies forms an archipelago, not a continent. Each island in the chain ranks its own distinctiveness above membership in a national group and even higher than its association with a group of democratic nations.

“In one sense, we do live in a mass era as residents of a ‘planetary village’ where manners and fashions blend. But, paradoxically, we also live in an age of the triumph of minorities, of a juxtaposition of widely different attitudes. While it is obvious that the passion for equality, identified by Tocqueville as the drive wheel of democracy, generates uniformity, let's not forget that democracy also rests on a passion for liberty, which fosters diversity, fragmentation, unorthodoxy. Plato, democracy's shrewdest enemy, saw this when he compared it to a motley cloak splashed with many colors. In a democracy, he said, everyone claims the right to live as he chooses, so that ways of living multiply and jostle each other. To Aristotle, too, liberty was the basic principle of democracy. He broke this down into two tenets: ‘for all to rule and be ruled in turn’ and ‘a man should live as he likes’. To American democracy, the right to do one's own thing is as much or more cherished than equality.

“The ideological and cultural wars among the islands in the archipelago now take precedence over defense of the archipelago itself. In Holland in 1981, a considerable share of public opinion, questioned about its feelings on Poland and Afghanistan, declared that the Dutch lacked a moral right to criticize Communist repression or Soviet imperialism ‘as long as housing conditions in Amsterdam fail to meet the highest standards of modern comfort, as long as women remain exploited and the legal rights of heterosexual married couples are denied to homosexual married couples.’”¹²⁵

¹²⁵ Revel, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-15.

This egoistic mentality translated into a lack of interest in, or compassion for, those living in the Gulag archipelago of the Soviet Union, and in an increasing willingness to ignore the sufferings even of those living much closer - in Communist Central and Eastern Europe. Hence the betrayal of the interests of the East Europeans in the Helsinki Accords. But more serious still in the long run was the undermining of the family and other social ties that no society can live without, whose devastating effects have become much clearer in the first decades of the twenty-first century.

IV. POLAND, AFGHANISTAN AND PERESTROIKA (1979-1989)

The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 had spelled the end of Communism as a living faith in occupied Eastern Europe (even while it was becoming more popular in the Third World). This fact guaranteed that the Soviets would not use the same methods in suppressing dissent again. But could they really keep the tottering system upright?

“In Eastern Europe,” writes Martin Gilbert, “the attempt to assert human rights dominated the agenda. In Czechoslovakia the Communist authorities continued their attempts to destroy the influence of the Charter 77 human rights movement. Václav Havel and five other leaders were convicted of subversion and sentenced to five years in prison. Even the condemnation of the sentences by every Western European Communist Party had no effect. One result, however, was the even more rapid spread of underground pamphlets denouncing human rights abuses, and the proliferation of illegal lectures and theatrical performances. Hundreds of Czechs also found asylum in the West.”¹²⁶

However, the decisive events took place in Poland. Providentially, they coincided with the election in 1978 of the first Polish Pope, Karol Wojtyła, John-Paul II. “The new Pope’s Christian vision,” writes Tony Judt, “was rooted in the peculiarly messianic style of Polish Catholicism. In modern Poland he saw not only the embattled eastern frontier of the True Faith, but also a land and people chosen to serve as the example and sword of the Church in the struggle against Eastern atheism and Western materialism alike. Together with his long service in Craków, isolated from Western theological and political currents, this probably explained his tendency to embrace a parochial and sometimes troubling Polish-Christian vision.

“But it also explains the unprecedented enthusiasm for him in the country of his birth. From the outset, the pope broke with his predecessors’ cosmopolitan Roman acquiescence in modernity, secularism, and compromise. His campaign of international appearances – complete with carefully staged performances in huge open arenas, accompanied by oversized crucifixes and a paraphernalia of light, sound, and theatrical timing – was not undertaken without design. This was a Big Pope, taking himself and his Faith to the world: to Brazil, Mexico, the US, and the Philippines; to Italy, France, and Spain; but above all to Poland itself.

“Abandoning the cautious ‘Ostpolitik’ of his predecessors, John Paul II arrived in Warsaw on June 2nd 1979 for the first of three dramatic ‘pilgrimages’ to Communist Poland. He was met with huge, adoring crowds. His presence affirmed and reinforced the influence of the Catholic Church in

¹²⁶ Gilbert, *Challenge to Civilization. A History of the 20th Century 1952-1999*, London: HarperCollins, 1999, p. 552

Poland; but the Pope was not interested in merely endorsing Christianity's passive survival under Communism. To the occasional discomfort of his own bishops he began explicitly discouraging Catholics in Poland and everywhere else in Eastern Europe from any compromise with Marxism, and offered his Church not merely as a silent sanctuary but as an alternative pole of moral and social authority.

“As Poland's Communists well understood, such a change in the position of the Catholic Church – from compromise to resistance – could have a destabilizing local impact, posing an open challenge to the Party's monopoly of authority. In part this was because Poles remained overwhelmingly and enthusiastically Catholic; in large measure it was because of the man himself. But there was very little they could do – to forbid the Pope to visit Poland or to speak there would only have strengthened his appeal and further alienated millions of his admirers. Even after the imposition of martial law, when the Pope returned to Poland in June 1983 and spoke to his ‘compatriots’ in St. John's Cathedral in Warsaw of their ‘disappointment and humiliation, their suffering and loss of freedom’, the Communist leaders could only stand and listen. ‘Poland’, he told an uncomfortable General Jaruzelski in a televised speech, ‘must take her proper place among the nations of Europe, between East and West.’

“The Pope, as Stalin once observed, has no division. But God is not always on the side of the big battalions: what John Paul II lacked in soldiers he made up in visibility – and timing. Poland in 1978 was already on the edge of social upheaval. Ever since the workers' revolts of 1970, and again in 1976, both prompted by sharp increases in the price of food, First Secretary Edward Gierek had tried hard to avert domestic discontent – mostly by borrowing heavily abroad and using the loans to supply Poles with subsidized food and other consumer goods. But the strategy was failing.”¹²⁷

“In Poland, workers were demanding the right to strike. Catholic, peasant and students groups each called for an end to Communist rigidity. Fifty leading intellectuals, including several Party members, called in a public manifesto for ‘a radical change in the politico-social system’. When Pope John Paul paid his first visit to Poland as Pope, crowds estimated at a total of thirteen million turned out to see him. In a speech in Warsaw on June 2 [1979], he declared: ‘Christ cannot be kept out of the history of man in any part of the globe, certainly not in Poland.’ Another blow had been struck against the perpetuation of the system established in Eastern Europe with the arrival of the Soviet army – as liberators – in 1944 and 1945. In September a new opposition group, calling itself the Confederation of Independent Poland, was formed as a political Party, with a secret membership, pledged to secure ‘full freedom and independence’ for Poland...”

¹²⁷ Judt, *Postwar*, London: Pimlico, 2007, pp. 586-587.

But was such a goal possible while the Soviet Union still existed? Probably not – but who was to say that the Soviets would last forever? President Reagan didn't believe that: their "last few pages are even now being written", he said in 1981.¹²⁸ Moreover, it was precisely Poland that might be the catalyst of the final fall. For, as Gilbert continues the story: "Deeply embroiled militarily in Afghanistan, the Soviet Union watched with grave alarm the political developments inside Poland, its western neighbour and hitherto loyal – or largely loyal – Communist partner. The Catholic Church, buoyed up by the moral and personal support of the 'Polish Pope', criticized in January [1980] the divisiveness of Communism in the social structure of Poland, and stated that every society had a right to form independent organizations in search of economic development. There was mockery in the streets when, at the parliamentary elections in March, 99.52 per cent of the votes went to the single Communist-dominated list of candidates. In June, 151 Polish intellectuals – leading writers, scientists and university professors – warned of 'negative changes' that would grow and reach 'avalanche stage, which would threaten open social conflict' unless reforms were instituted. University students, turning their backs on the Party-controlled youth organization, demanded a student association that would not be 'imposing any ideology'.

"Strikes began on July 1, with workers demanding free trade unions and better wages. No day passed without a strike in one or other of the shipbuilding yards of the Baltic coast or the mining regions of Silesia. The strikes reached a climax in August, when half a million shipyard workers in Gdansk, Szczecin and other Polish Baltic ports downed tools. They were joined by 200,000 coalminers in Silesia. Catholicism was a strong force in the workers' movement, which had been as affected as a sector of Polish society by the Pope's visit. In Gdansk, open-air Masses were held under a large portrait of the Pope.

"On August 16 a strike committee linking all the striking factories was set up under the leadership of a shipyard worker, Lech Walesa. Quickly the strikers' demands, which at first had been limited to censorship, the release of political prisoners and the establishment of free, independent trade unions. Under the banner of Solidarity, these unions sprang up despite the frown of the authorities. Students and workers found themselves gathering under the same Solidarity banner. Factories declared themselves for Solidarity, and took over the management. In many cases they were helped in organizing their independent activities by Catholic intellectuals..."¹²⁹

Solidarity soon acquired 10 million members – an astonishing number. It now constituted a far greater threat to Moscow's empire than any it had encountered before. Nor was it just the numbers that terrified them; for these were not small groups of Jewish dissident intellectuals, but working men,

¹²⁸ Stone, *The Atlantic and its Enemies*, London: Penguin, 2010, p. 542.

¹²⁹ Gilbert, *op. cit.*, pp. 552, 561-

proletarians – precisely the kind of people who created the revolution and were supposed to be its prime beneficiaries.

Olga Chetverikova tells us more (albeit from a pro-Soviet and anti-western perspective) about how Catholics both inside and outside Poland prepared the counter-revolution: “In August, 1980 the notable ‘Gdansk Agreement’ was signed ratifying the creation of ‘Solidarity’, the first independent trade union behind the ‘iron curtain’, led by Lech Walesa, who became the main object of the attention of the Holy See. As John-Paul II said, ‘Walesa was sent by Divine Providence’. The Vatican thought that if the trade union triumphed, an explosive wave would roll towards the Ukraine, the Baltic region and the Balkans and, possibly, Czechoslovakia, which would finally result in the complete collapse of the socialist camp.

“In connection with this, the head of the Holy Alliance [the Vatican’s secret service] Poggi was ordered by the Pope to infiltrate his agents into ‘Solidarity’ and make the organization more open, so as to attract into it pro-Catholic representatives of the intelligentsia. The best agent of the HA was the Polish Jesuit priest Casimir Przydatek, who had a wide net of informers in the Polish unions. Among them there stood out Father Jankowski, who led the church of St. Brigitta in Gdansk, one of whose members was Lech Walesa. Under the influence of Przydatek, Walesa in the end brought into the leadership of the union the editor of the Catholic newspaper *Wież Mazowiecki* and the Catholic historian B. Geremek, after which *the strike movement in Poland passed under the control of the Church*. ‘Solidarity’, supported by the Vatican and having received financial resources via the HA through the ‘Ambrosiano’ bank, began to spread throughout the whole territory of the country... *In all, about 500 million dollars were transferred to ‘Solidarity’ illegally.*

“After the election of Ronald Reagan relations of a strategic nature were established between him and Pope John-Paul II. As the investigator E. Lebecq wrote, ‘In the first years of Reagan’s administration one could see the appearance of convinced Catholic in the top posts, which had never happened before in the history of the United States.’ Active roles in cooperation with the Vatican were played by the director of the CIA William Casey (Reagan’s former election campaign manager), his deputy Vernon Walter, the State Secretary Al Haig and the National Security adviser Richard Allen – all Catholics and (except for Allen) knights of the Maltese Order...

“On June 7, 1982 there took place in the Vatican the first meeting between John-Paul II and R. Reagan, as a result of which *an agreement was concluded on carrying out a joint campaign in Poland whose aim was the destruction of ‘the communist empire’*. This agreement, which was called a ‘holy alliance’, was made public by the journalist Carl Bernstein in *Time* magazine. He received his information from the higher reaches of the Vatican and leading people in the American establishment. As D. Kalaich writes, the revelation of this pact ‘to the whole world village’ was aimed at showing to all Catholics that the

Vatican was on the side of the new world order, and of suggesting that they follow the pontifex.

“As Richard Allen confirmed, ‘the relationship with the Vatican represented one of the biggest secret unions in the whole of history’. It was after this meeting that Reagan gave a policy statement in London in which he proclaimed a ‘crusade’ against ‘the empire of evil’. He declared 1983 to be ‘the year of the Bible’, which was confirmed on April 18 of the same year by the Pope in a meeting with members of the Trilateral Commission, which took place in the Vatican with almost all members present. *And in 1984 relations were established between the Vatican and Washington...*

“The actions of Reagan and the Pope in relation to Poland were completely coordinated. Reagan told Clark and Casey: ‘We must not invade the country and overthrow the government in the name of the people. The only thing we must do is use ‘Solidarity’ to achieve success.’ In sum, as the American journalist Carl Bernstein witnessed, ‘the American embassy in Warsaw was turned into the leading centre of the CIA in the socialist world, while Casey became the ‘chief architect’ in working out policy in Poland.’ Z. Brzezinski occupied the post of link between the White House and the Vatican’s Holy Alliance, acting as the main expert and coordinator of the actions of the western secret services in the countries of Eastern Europe in the carrying out of secret operations...”¹³⁰

In November, 50,000 Soviet troops were massed on the Polish border. During the following year, however, the Soviets hesitated over whether to invade or not, while Jaruzelski, the Polish leader, tried in vain to get assurances from them that they would invade if his plan to introduce martial law failed. Finally, on December 13, 1981, he imposed martial law – by this time it had become clear that the Soviets would not invade in any case.

Walesa, writes Norman Stone, “was put in a comfortable villa with his wife (seventh time pregnant) and apologetic generals. It had been Gomulka’s and he was there for seven months. There was no European reaction – quite the contrary, as Claude Cheysson even said, ‘socialist renewal’ was at stake. There were problems as soldiers took over the mines and the Sejm produced a huge reform package that meant decentralization, etc.; but it led nowhere. There were over 10,000 internments, and over 150,000 ‘prophylactic discussions’ but the overtones were farcical. If you lifted the hotel telephone, you were told ‘Rozmowa kontrolowana’, meaning that someone was listening. That the tape was old and wheezing did not inspire fear, and conversations with the Polish intelligentsia anyway consisted of funny stories.

¹³⁰ Chetverikova, *Izmena v Vatikane ili Zagovor Pap protiv Khristianstva* (Betrayal in the Vatican, or the Conspiracy of the Popes against Christianity), Moscow, 2011, pp. 88-90.

“At any rate, Moscow was having considerable difficulty in digesting Poland...”¹³¹

*

Towards the end of the 1970s Ronald Reagan became President of the United States, and Margaret Thatcher – the British Prime Minister. Their alliance was destined to bring the Cold War to a successful conclusion.

The two leaders did not immediately hit it off or agree on all matters. When Argentina invaded the Falklands in 1982, and Thatcher sent in a naval force to recapture them, Reagan hesitated, not wishing to break his ties with the important Latin American country (which was also supported by his ally the Pope, who sent exocet missiles to Argentina), but eventually provided important logistical and intelligence support. Again, in October, 1983, when Marxists overthrew the lawful government of the former British colony of Grenada, and the Americans, in response to an appeal from the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States, invaded the island in order to restore order, Thatcher protested: “If you are going to announce a new law, that wherever Communism reigns against the will of the people the United States shall enter, then we are going to have terrible war in the world.”¹³²

However, the essential identity of aims and ideology between the two leaders proved more important than initial disagreements. Thatcher was converted to a more aggressive stance against Communism, becoming “the Iron Lady”, as *Pravda* called her. Meanwhile Reagan, faced with numerous opponents in Congress and in the Vietnam-war-weary American public, came to appreciate her support.

On March 8, 1983 in a speech to the American Association of Evangelicals, Reagan “told the assembled clergymen that ‘simple-minded appeasement of wishful thinking about our adversaries is folly’. He went on to warn them to beware ‘the temptations of blithely declaring yourselves above it all and label both sides equally at fault, to ignore the facts of history and the aggressive impulses of an evil empire’. The Soviet Union, he added, was ‘the focus of evil in the modern world’ ...

“On March 23, fifteen days after his ‘evil empire’ speech, Reagan spoke on television to the American people. He illustrated his remarks with graphs showing the dimensions of the Soviet build-up, and with aerial photographs which had been classified as secret until a few days earlier. These showed Soviet fighter aircraft and a Soviet Intelligence headquarters in Cuba, Soviet aircraft in Nicaragua, and the building of an airfield with a ten-thousand-foot runway in Grenada.

¹³¹ Stone, *op. cit.*, p. 534.

¹³² Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 600.

“Reagan then spoke of the future defence of the United States by means of laser weaponry in space. This ‘Star Wars address’, as it was called, while appearing to be bellicose and war-enhancing, gave the Soviet leaders cause to hesitate. Their expensive, much-vaunted nuclear weaponry would, if this space-laser technology could be developed, become obsolete and useless. Yet the Soviet Union did not have the technology or the economic resources to challenge the United States in this innovative and expensive sphere.

“More than any single American initiative, ‘Star Wars’ – although it would clearly take up to a decade to develop – spelt the end of the Soviet-American balance of power, and would tilt it significantly to the American side. As a sign of its seriousness, the American Department of Defense, headed by Caspar Weinberger, announced their prototype laser weapons had already been tested against both incoming missiles and ‘attacking’ unmanned aircraft. Among those who understood the meaning of Star Wars, and the inevitable Soviet fall from Super Power equality as a result of it, was the recently appointed Communist Party Secretary responsible for Agriculture, Mikhail Gorbachev, a relatively young (fifty-two-year-old) political leader who was being spoken of in Moscow that year as a possible successor to the clearly ailing Andropov. Gorbachev had come to the attention of Western observers in March, when he encouraged small groups of peasants to take a more responsible attitude towards agricultural production by increasing their material self-interest through group contracts which gave them a direct stake in the profits of their collective labour. Under the contracts, they would be paid by results. Not pre-selected and rigidly enforced norms, but production targets profitable to the individual – through his group contract – would provide the incentive which collectivization, the Stalinist panacea so long adhered to, had failed to provide.”¹³³

Arms control talks now acquired a new relevance and urgency, as both countries, but especially the USSR, felt the financial strains of the arms race. In 1985 the Soviets had reached their peak in nuclear warheads, which was now considerably higher than the Americans’ stockpile. From then on, largely through the Gorbachev-Reagan talks, absolute numbers declined in both countries, especially in the USSR; approximate parity was reached in 2000.¹³⁴

“Speaking in New York on September 26, at the United Nations General Assembly, Reagan set out in public some of the strategic arms reduction proposals that the United States had made earlier in the year to the Soviet Union, at the talks in Geneva. The principal American proposal was that if the Soviet Union would agree to an equal number of Soviet and American nuclear warheads worldwide, and would reduce the number of its existing land-based medium-range nuclear weapons, then for its part the United States, while retaining the right to deploy its nuclear warheads anywhere in the world, would not in fact redeploy in Europe the nuclear warheads to

¹³³ Gilbert, *op. cit.*, pp. 596, 597-598.

¹³⁴ See chart in “Going Nuclear”, *The Economist*, October 8-14, 2016, p. 36.

which, under the equality scheme, it was entitled globally. Reagan also agreed, in his speech of September 26, to an earlier Soviet proposal that the NATO and Warsaw Pact intermediate-range bomber forces should be included in the calculations of the arms reduction talks.

“The arms reduction talks continued. The main Soviet counter-proposal was that NATO cancel its plans to deploy Pershing and Cruise missiles in Europe. Were NATO to do so, Andropov announced, the Soviet Union would reduce its number SS-20 missiles in Europe by one hundred, to 140. This the United States rejected on the ground that it would leave the Soviet Union with a monopoly of intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Europe. The United States then proposed that both sides should have an equal number of intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Europe. The Soviet Union rejected this because it would involve the United States introducing Pershing and Cruise missiles to Europe. On November 14, the day of the Soviet rejection, the first American Cruise missiles in Europe arrived at the United States air base at Greenham Common, in southern England. A week later the first Pershing missiles reached American air bases in West Germany. When the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks adjourned in December, the Soviet Union refused to agree to a date when they would be resumed...”¹³⁵

America eventually won the arms race, and the Soviets’ failure to keep up was one of the causes of the fall of the Union. However, the cost to America was also huge. The U.S. National Debt was already standing at \$2.3 trillion in April 1987, but in July 1992 it stood at \$4 trillion, which means that each American family in effect owes something like \$50,000. Just over 40% of all personal income tax goes into servicing this gigantic debt.

*

Jean-Francois Revel wrote in 1985: “The Soviet Union... is undoubtedly sick, very sick. It will die, that’s certain,... because it is in and of itself a society of and for death. But the prime question of our time is which of the two events will take place first: the destruction of democracy by communism or communism’s death of its own sickness? It seems to me that the second process is advancing less rapidly than the first...”¹³⁶

Indeed, a superficial view of the situation would have confirmed Revel’s judgement that the West would collapse before the Soviet Union. As John Darwin writes, “In the mid-1980s the scope of Soviet ambition seemed greater than ever. From a forward base at Camranh Bay in southern Vietnam, the Soviet navy could make its presence felt across the main sea lanes running through South East Asia and in the Indian Ocean, a ‘British lake’ until the 1950s. By laying down huge new aircraft carriers like the *Leonid Brezhnev*, Moscow now aimed to rival the Americans’ capacity to intervene around the globe. But then in less than half a

¹³⁵ Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 599.

¹³⁶ Revel, *How Democracies Perish*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985, p. 85.

decade this vast imperial structure – the ruling power across Northern Eurasia, the tenacious rival in Southern Asia, Africa and the Middle East – simply fell to pieces. By 1991 it was an empire in ruins. There was no ‘silver age’ or phase of decline: just a calamitous fall...”¹³⁷

However, in the same year of 1985, the Soviets propelled to power in the Kremlin a leader who was prepared to begin a partial democratisation of the country with the aim of modernizing and strengthening the Soviet State. For “the KGB, as Stone writes, unlike many of the geriatric leaders of the state, “knew how far things had gone wrong, and, with a view to shaking up the old men, saw that a degree of public criticism and respect for law would be helpful, quite apart from the good impression to be made abroad. The Party and the KGB had had a host-parasite relationship... Now the parasite was given responsibility.” And so the parasite now “came up with the last useful idiot, Mikhail Sergeyevitch Gorbachev, in himself an obviously decent man, whose task was to soft-soap the West...”¹³⁸

By the Providence of God, however, Gorbachev’s reforming efforts, though designed to strengthen Communism in the long term, led to its downfall and the resurgence of religion...

“In his first speech as leader,” writes Bernard Simms, “Gorbachev announced his intention to maintain ‘military-strategic parity with the aggressive NATO’. Like the tsarist modernizers of old, Gorbachev’s first concern was not economic liberalization, popular standards of living or democratization... What was innovative about his approach, however, was that it did not just conceive of internal change as a means to increasing external power through greater military mobilization. Instead, Gorbachev sought to expose and reform abuses in what he regarded as a basically just system. He also hoped that a more conciliatory attitude towards dissidents would reduce the terrible international battering the Soviet Union had received over human rights since the mid-1970s. Gorbachev now proclaimed a policy of reconstruction (*‘Perestroika’*) – a ‘revolution[ary]... acceleration of the socio-economic and cultural development of Soviet society’ – and openness (*‘Glasnost’*). Greater freedom of expression, Gorbachev believed, would mobilize the intelligentsia and reduce incompetence and corruption. Dissidents were released, police repression was greatly eased, civil rights groups emerged, there was a revival of the [official] Russian Orthodox Church and a vibrant public sphere moved from the underground into the open...”¹³⁹

As Vladimir Bukovsky and Pavel Stroilov write: “By the beginning of the 1980s, the Soviet leadership had finally woken up to the fact that their system had entered a period of profound structural crisis. On the one hand, their economic model, unproductive and wasteful by definition, like all socialist models, had

¹³⁷ Darwin. *After Tamerlane. The Rise & Fall of Global Empires, 1400-2000*, London: Penguin, 2007, p. 477.

¹³⁸ Stone, *op. cit.*, pp. 541, 536.

¹³⁹ Simms, *Europe: The Struggle for Supremacy*, London: Allen Lane, 2013, pp. 479-480.

brought them to the brink of bankruptcy. On the other, their very 'success' in exporting that model to other countries was becoming an unbearable burden to carry on their shoulders. With their troops bogged down in Afghanistan, and with the Polish crisis looming large on their doorstep, the 'cost of Empire' had become virtually unsustainable. Simply put, they had suddenly realised that their economic base was too small for their global ambitions. Added to that a new round of the arms race forced on them by Ronald Reagan, falling oil prices and a growing discontent at home, and one could understand their sudden urge for reforms. A final blow came with Reagan's obsession with the 'Star Wars' project. The Americans might have been bluffing, but the Soviets had to follow suit regardless, trying to compete in the very sphere where they were most behind the West – high-tech."¹⁴⁰

The worship of science in the Soviet Union had always been excessive – although this was a sin it shared with its rival, the United States. Thus the space race was more than simple technological rivalry... However, on May 7, 1984, the Day of the Physicist, it became idolatrous, even satanic. For on that day a satanic ball was staged by nuclear physicists that was captured in a 1988 documentary film called *Zvezda Polyn'* (the star of Chernobyl).¹⁴¹ The film-maker clearly saw a link between the ball and the terrible catastrophe that took place at Chernobyl only two years later...

However, Yuval Noah Harari argues that it was the Soviets' backwardness in technology that was the main cause in their country's collapse: "Socialism, which was very up to date a hundred years ago, failed to keep up with new technology. Leonid Brezhnev and Fidel Castro held on to ideas that Marx and Lenin formulated in the age of steam, and did not understand the power of computers and biotechnology. This partly explains why Khrushchev's 1956 ["we will bury you!"] never materialised, and why it was the liberal capitalist who eventually buried the Marxists. If Marx came back to life today, he would probably urge his few remaining disciples to devote less time to reading *Das Kapital* and more time to studying the Internet and the human genome."¹⁴²

The technological gap between the superpowers was indeed growing larger all the time. As David Reynolds writes, "Back in the 1970s the United States seemed to be floundering. Industrial growth had stagnated, inflation was out of control and the heavy industries on which the post-war boom had been based, like cars and textiles, were no longer competitive against Asian competition. Parts of urban America seemed like a rustbelt. In the 1980s, however, new service industries, spearheaded by IT and boosted by deregulation, seemed to signal a 'post-industrial' society. Meanwhile, however, the Soviet Union remained a 'heavy metal' society – locked in the smokestack industries of yesteryear. Behind the Iron Curtain deregulation and the IT revolution were inconceivable. The

¹⁴⁰ Bukovsky and Stroilov, *EUSSR: The Soviet Roots of European Integration*, Worcester Park: Sovereignty Publications, 2004, p. 4.

¹⁴¹ <https://4.bp.blogspot.com/-3TYAU3i221c/WHuWLLamaJI>.

¹⁴² Harari, *Homo Deus*, London:Vintage, 2017, p. 319.

Soviets had found it hard enough to keep up with mainframe computers; their anaemic consumer economy offered no stimulus to PC development; and the cell-phone explosion was totally impossible in a closed society. Information is power and, under communism, both were tightly controlled.

“In computers and electronics the Soviet Union lagged behind European clients like Czechoslovakia and East Germany, yet even then their pirated products did not compare with authentic Western versions that were now flooding into eastern Europe. ‘With these computers comes not only technology but also ideology,’ lamented one Czech computer designer. ‘Children might soon begin to believe that Western technology represents the peak and our technology is obsolete and bad.’ In ten years’ time, he warned, ‘it will be too late to change our children. By then they will want to change us.’

“So the PC and information revolution posed a double challenge to the Soviet bloc – both economic and ideological. Moscow’s Five-Year-Plan of 1985 envisaged 1.3 million PCs in Soviet schoolrooms by 1995, but the Americans already had 3 million in 1985 and in any case the main Soviet PC, the Agat, was an inferior version of the crude and now antiquated Apple II.

“Gorbachev was keenly aware of these problems...

“Becoming part of the American-led information age was a major reason why Gorbachev was so anxious to forge a new relationship with the United States. Otherwise the USSR would be consigned to obsolescence. By the 1980s, in fact, the whole Soviet bloc was in ‘a race between computers and collapse’.”¹⁴³

*

Gorbachev’s attempts to introduce a limited kind of market economy were not successful. For, as Tony Judt writes, “The reforming instinct was to compromise: to experiment with the creation – from above – of a few favored enterprises freed from bureaucratic encumbrances and assured a reliable supply of raw materials and skilled labor. These, it was reasoned, would serve as successful and even profitable models for other, similar, enterprises: the goal was controlled modernization and progressive adaptation to pricing and production in response to demand. But such an approach was foredoomed by its operating premise – that the authorities could create efficient businesses by administrative fiat.

“By pumping scarce resources into a few model farms, mills, factories or services the Party was indeed able to forge temporarily viable and even notionally profitable units – but only with heavy subsidies and by starving less-favored operations elsewhere. The result was even more distortion and frustration. Meanwhile farm managers and local directors, uncertain of the way the wind was blowing, hedged their bets against the return of planned norms and

¹⁴³ Reynolds, *America. Empire of Liberty*, London: Penguin, 2010, pp. 525, 526.

stockpiled anything they could lay their hands on lest centralized controls tighten up again.

“To Gorbachev’s conservative critics this was an old story. Every Soviet reform program since 1921 began the same way and ran out of steam for the same reasons, starting with Lenin’s New Economic Policy. Serious economic reforms implied the relaxation or abandonment of controls. Not only did this initially exacerbate the problems it was designed to solve, it meant just what it said: a loss of control. But Communism depended on control – indeed Communism *was* control: control of the economy, control of information, control of movement and opinion and people. Everything else was dialectics, and dialectics – as a veteran Communist explained to the young Jorge Semprún in Buchenwald – ‘is the art and technique of always landing on your feet’.

“It soon became obvious to Gorbachev that to land on his feet as he wrestled with the Soviet economy he must accept that the Soviet economic conundrum could not be addressed in isolation. It was but a symptom of a larger problem. The Soviet Union was run by men who had a vested interest in the political and institutional levers of a command economy: its endemic minor absurdities and quotidian corruption were the very source of their authority and power. In order for the Party to reform the economy it would first have to reform itself.

“This, too, was hardly a new idea – the periodic purges under Lenin and his successors had typically proclaimed similar objectives. But times had changed. The Soviet Union, however repressive and backward, was no longer a murderous totalitarian tyranny. Thanks to Khrushchev’s monumental housing projects most Soviet families now lived in their own apartments. Ugly and inefficient, these low-rent flats nonetheless afforded ordinary people a degree of privacy and security unknown to other generations: they were no longer so exposed to informers or likely to be betrayed to the authorities by their neighbors or their in-laws. The age of terror was over for most people and, for Gorbachev’s generation at least, a return to the time of mass arrests and party purges was unthinkable.

“In order to break the stranglehold of the Party *apparatus* and drive forward his plans for economic restructuring, then, the General Secretary resorted instead to ‘*glasnost*’ – ‘openness’: official encouragement for public discussion of a carefully restricted range of topics. By making people more aware of impending changes and heightening public expectation, Gorbachev would forge a lever with which he and his supporters might pry loose official opposition to his plans... But for Gorbachev the urgency of the need for official openness was brought home to him by the catastrophic events of April 26th 1986.

“On that day at 1.23 am, one of the four huge graphic reactors at the nuclear power plant at Chernobyl (Ukraine) exploded, releasing into the atmosphere 120 million curies of radioactive materiel – more than one hundred times the radiation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki *combined*. The plume of atomic fallout was carried north-west into Western Europe and Scandinavia, reaching as far as Wales and Sweden and exposing an estimated five million people to its effects. In

addition to the 30 emergency workers killed on the spot, some 30,000 people have since died from complications caused by exposure to radiation from Chernobyl, including more than 2,000 cases of thyroid cancer among residents in the immediate vicinity.

“Chernobyl was not the Soviet Union’s first environmental disaster. At Cheliabinsk-40, a secret research site near Ekaterinburg in the Ural Mountains, a nuclear waste tank exploded in 1957, severely polluting an area 8 km wide and 100 km long. 76 million cubic metres of radioactive waste poured into the Urals river system, contaminating it for decades. 10,000 people were eventually evacuated and 23 villages bulldozed. The reactor at Cheliabinsk was from the first generation of Soviet atomic constructions and had been built by slave labor in 1948-51.

“Other man-made environmental calamities on a comparable scale included the pollution of Lake Baikal; the destruction of the Aral Sea; the dumping in the Arctic Ocean and the Barents Sea of hundreds of thousands of tons of defunct atomic naval vessels and their radioactive contents; and the contamination by sulphur dioxide from nickel production of an area the size of Italy around Norilsk in Siberia. These and other ecological disasters were all the direct result of indifference, bad management and the Soviet ‘slash and burn’ approach to natural resources. They were born of a culture of secrecy. The Cheliabinsk-40 explosion was not officially acknowledged for many decades, even though it occurred within a few kilometres of a large city – the same city where, in 1979, several hundred people died of anthrax leaked from a biological weapons plant in the town centre.

“The problems with the USSR’s nuclear reactors were well known to insiders: two separate KGB reports dated 1982 and 1984 warned of ‘shoddy’ equipment (supplied from Yugoslavia) and serious deficiencies in Chernobyl’s reactors 3 and 4 (it was the latter that exploded in 1986). But just as this information had been kept secret (and no action taken) so the Party leadership’s first, instinctive response to the explosion on April 26th was to keep quiet about it – there were, after all, fourteen Chernobyl-type plants in operation by then all across the country. Moscow’s first acknowledgement that anything untoward had happened came fully four days after the event, and then in a two-sentence official communiqué.¹⁴⁴

“But Chernobyl could not be kept secret: international anxiety and the Soviets’ own inability to contain the damage forced Gorbachev first to make a public statement two weeks later, acknowledging some but not all of what had taken place, and then to call upon foreign aid and expertise. And just as his fellow citizens were then made publicly aware for the first time of the scale of official incompetence and indifference to life and health, so Gorbachev was forced to

¹⁴⁴ The author was a member of a group of Surrey University students in Russia at the time. The first they heard of the disaster was not from the Soviet authorities, but from parents phoning up from England. The authorities at first denied the news. (V.M.)

acknowledge the extent of his country's problems. The bungling, the mendacity and the cynicism of the men responsible both for the disaster and the attempt to cover it up could not be dismissed as a regrettable perversion of Soviet values: they *were* Soviet values, as the Soviet leader began to appreciate.

"Beginning in the autumn of 1986 Gorbachev shifted gears. In December of that year Andrei Sakharov, the world's best-known dissident, was liberated from house arrest in Gorky (Nizhnij Novgorod), a harbinger of the large-scale release of Soviet political prisoners that began in the following year. Censorship was relaxed - 1987 saw the long-delayed publication of Vassily Grossman's *Life and Fate* (twenty-six years after M.S. Suslov, the Party's ideological commissar, had predicted that it could not be released for 'two or three centuries'). The police were instructed to cease jamming foreign radio broadcasts. And the Secretary General of the CPSU chose the occasion of his televised speech to the Party Central Committee in January 1987 to make the case for a more inclusive democracy, over the heads of the Party conservatives and directly to the nation at large.

"By 1987 more than nine out of ten Soviet households possessed a television, and Gorbachev's tactic was initially a striking success: by creating a *de facto* public speech for semi-open debate about the country's woes, and breaking the governing caste's monopoly of information, he was forcing the Party to follow suit - and making it safe for hitherto silent reformers within the system to speak out and give him their backing. In the course of 1987-88 the General Secretary was, almost despite himself, forging a national constituency for change.

"Informal organizations sprang up: notably 'Club Perestroika', formed in Moscow's Mathematical Institute in 1987, which in turn gave birth to 'Memorial', whose members devoted themselves to 'keeping alive the memory of the victims' of the Stalinist past. Initially taken aback at their own very existence - the Soviet Union, after all, was still a one-party dictatorship - they soon flourished and multiplied. By 1988 Gorbachev's support came increasingly from outside the Party, from the country's newly emerging public opinion.

"What had happened was that the logic of Gorbachev's reformist goal, and his decision, in practice, to appeal to the nation against his conservative critics within the apparatus, had transformed the dynamic of *perestroika*. Having begun as a reformer within the ruling Party, its General Secretary was now increasingly working against it, or at least trying to circumvent the Party's opposition to change. In October 1987 Gorbachev spoke publicly of Stalinist crimes for the first time and warned that if the Party did not champion reform it would lose its leading role in society.

"In the Party conference of June 1988 he reiterated his commitment to reform and to the relaxation of censorship, and called for the preparation of open (i.e. contested) elections to a Congress of People's Deputies for the following year. In October 1988 he demoted some of his leading opponents - notably Yegor Ligachev, a longstanding critics - and had himself elected President of the

Supreme Soviet (i.e. head of state), displacing Andrei Gromyko, last of the dinosaurs. Within the Party he still faced strong rearguard opposition; but in the country at large his popularity was at its peak, which was why he was able to press forward – and indeed had little option but to do so.

“The elections of May/June 1989 were the first more or less free vote in the Soviet Union since 1918. They were not multi-party elections – that would not happen until 1993, by which time the Soviet Union itself was long gone – and the outcome was largely pre-determined by restricting many seats to Party candidates and forbidding internal Party competition for them; but the Congress they elected included many independent and critical voices. Its proceedings were broadcast to an audience of some 100 million spectators, and demands by Sakharov and others for further change – notably the dethroning of the increasingly discredited Party from its privileged position – could not be swept aside, even by an initially reluctant Gorbachev. The Communists’ monopoly of power was slipping away, and with Gorbachev’s encouragement the Congress would duly vote the following February to remove from the Soviet constitution the key clause – Article Six – assigning the Communist Party a ‘leading role’.

“The course of Soviet domestic upheaval from 1985 to 1989 was facilitated by a major shift in Soviet foreign policy under Gorbachev and his new Foreign Minister Edvard Shevardnadze. From the outset Gorbachev made clear his determination to unburden the USSR at the very least of its more onerous military encumbrances. Within a month of coming to power he had halted Soviet missile deployments and gone on to offer unconditional negotiations on nuclear forces, starting with a proposal that both superpowers halve their strategic arsenals. By May 1986, after a surprisingly successful ‘summit’ meeting with Reagan in Geneva (the first of an unprecedented five such encounters), Gorbachev agreed to allow US ‘forward-based systems’ to be excluded from strategic arms talks, if that would help get these under way.

“There followed a second, Reykjavik summit in October 1986 where Reagan and Gorbachev, while failing to reach agreement on nuclear disarmament, nonetheless laid the basis for future success.¹⁴⁵ By late 1987 Shevardnadze and US Secretary of State George Schultz had drafted an Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, signed and ratified the following year. This Treaty, by endorsing Ronald Reagan’s earlier ‘zero option’ proposal, constituted Soviet acceptance that a nuclear war in Europe was un-winnable – and served as the prologue to an

¹⁴⁵ At Reykjavik, writes Serhii Plokhyy, “Reagan and Gorbachev all but agreed – to the horror of their advisers – to liquidate nuclear arms entirely. What stood in the way of the deal was Reagan’s insistence on continuing to develop his Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), a missile defense program. Gorbachev believed that SDI, if ever implemented by the Americans, would put the Soviets at a disadvantage. The summit ended in a deadlock, and the world seemed to be returning to the darkest days of the Cold War. But the dialogue was eventually resumed. Andrei Sakharov, the father of the Soviet hydrogen bomb and a prominent political dissident, helped convince Gorbachev that SDI was little more than a figment of Reagan’s imagination” (*The Last Empire*, London: Oneworld publications, 2015, p. 13). See also David Reynolds, “US-Soviet arms-control talks collapse in Iceland”, *BBC World Histories*, April/May, 2017, pp. 66-71. (V.M.)

even more important treaty, signed in 1990, strictly limiting the presence and operation of *conventional* forces on the European continent.

“Seen from Washington, Gorbachev’s concessions on arms naturally appeared as a victory for Reagan – and thus, in the zero-sum calculus of Cold War strategists, a defeat for Moscow. But for Gorbachev, whose priorities were domestic, securing a more stable international environment was a victory in itself. It bought him time and support for his reforms at home. The true significance of this sequence of meetings and accords lay in the Soviet recognition that military confrontation abroad was not only expensive but also dysfunctional: as Gorbachev expressed it in October 1986 in the course of a visit to France, ‘ideology’ was not an appropriate basis for foreign policy.

“These views reflected the advice he was beginning to get from a new generation of Soviet foreign affairs experts, notably his colleague Aleksandr Yakovlev, to whom it had become clear that the USSR could exercise more control over its foreign relations by well-calculated concessions than by fruitless confrontation. In contrast to the intractable problems he faced at home, foreign policy was an arena in which Gorbachev exercised direct control and could thus hope to effect immediate improvements. Moreover the strictly Great-Power dimension of Soviet foreign policy relations should not be exaggerated: Gorbachev placed at least as much importance on his relations with western Europe as on his dealings with the US – he made frequent visits there and established good relations with González, Kohl and Thatcher (who famously regarded him as a man with whom she ‘could do business’).

“Indeed, in important respects Gorbachev thought of himself above all as a *European* statesman with European priorities. His focus upon ending the arms race and the stockpiling of nuclear weapons was closely tied to a new approach to the Soviet Union’s role as a distinctively *European* power. ‘Armaments,’ he declared in 1987, ‘should be reduced to a level necessary for strictly defensive purposes. It is time for the two military alliances to amend their strategic concepts to gear them more to the aims of defense. Every apartment in the ‘European home’ has the right to protect itself against burglars, but it must do so without destroying its neighbors’ property.’

“In a similar spirit and for the same reasons, the Soviet leader understood from the outset the urgent need to extract the Soviet Union from Afghanistan, the ‘bleeding wound’ as he described it to a Party Congress in February 1986. Five months later he announced the withdrawal of some 6,000 Soviet troops, a redeployment completed in November of the same year. In May 1988, following an accord reached at Geneva with Afghanistan and Pakistan and guaranteed by both great powers, Soviet troops began to leave Afghanistan and Pakistan: the last remaining soldiers of the Red Army departed on February 15th 1989.

“Far from addressing the Soviet nationalities question, the Afghan adventure had, as was by now all too clear, exacerbated it. If the USSR faced an intractable set of national minorities, this was in part a problem of its own making: it was

Lenin and his successors, after all, who had invented the various subject 'nations' to whom they duly assigned regions and republics. In an echo of imperial practices elsewhere, Moscow had encouraged the emergence – in places where nationality and nationhood were unheard of fifty years earlier – of institutions and intelligentsias grouped around a national urban center of 'capital'. Communist Party First Secretaries in the Caucasus, or the central Asian republics, were typically chosen from the dominant local ethnic group. To secure their fiefdom these men were understandably drawn to identify with their 'own' people, particularly once fissures began to appear in the central apparatus. The Party was starting to fracture under the centrifugal pull of anxious local administrators protecting their own interests.

"Gorbachev seems not to have fully understood this process. 'Comrades,' he informed the Party in 1987, 'we can truly say that for our country the nationalities issue has been resolved.' Perhaps he did not altogether believe his own claims; but he certainly thought that some loosening of central control and addressing of long-standing grievances would suffice (in 1989 the Crimean Tatars, for example, were finally allowed to return home after many decades of Asian exile). In a continental empire of over one hundred ethnic groups from the Baltic to the Sea of Okhotsk, most of whom had long-standing grievances that *glasnost* now encouraged them to air, this was to prove a serious miscalculation. The idea that it was the Leninist project itself that might be at fault remained alien to the Soviet leader until very late – only in 1990 did he finally permit the domestic publication of overtly anti-Leninist writers such as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.

"The spirit of Gorbachev's early goals is exemplified in the inimitable tone of the new-found toleration for pop music, as expressed by *Pravda* in October 1986: 'Rock and roll has a right to exist but only if it is melodious, meaningful and well-performed.' That is precisely what Mikhail Gorbachev wanted: a melodious, meaningful and well-performed Communism. Necessary reforms would be undertaken and appropriate freedoms granted, but there was to be no unregulated licence – as late as February 1988 the government was still clamping down fiercely on independent publishing houses and printers.

"It is one of the curiosities of Communist reformers that they always set out with the quixotic goal of reforming some aspects of their system while keeping others unaffected – introducing market-oriented incentives while maintaining central planning controls, or allowing greater freedom of expression while retaining the Party's monopoly of truth. But partial reform or reform of one sector in isolation from others was inherently contradictory. 'Managed pluralism' or a 'socialist market' was doomed from the start. As for the idea that the 'leading role' of the Communist Party could be sustained while the Party itself shed merely the pathological excrescences of seven decades of absolute power, this suggests a certain political naiveté on Gorbachev's part. In an authoritarian [despotic] system power is indivisible – relinquish it in part and you must eventually lose it all. Nearly four centuries earlier, the Stuart monarch James I understood these things much better – as he put it in a succinct rebuff to Scottish Presbyterians protesting at the power vested in his bishops: 'No Bishop, no

King'."

"The inadequacy of Gorbachev's response to demands for autonomy at the Soviet empire's far-flung margins should not come as a surprise. Gorbachev was from the outset, as we have seen, a 'reform Communist', albeit a very unusual one: sympathetic to the need for change and renewal but reluctant to assault the core tenets of the system under which he had grown up. Like many in his generation in the Soviet Union and elsewhere he genuinely believed that the only path to improvement lay through a return to Leninist 'principles'." ¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶ Judt, *op. cit.*, pp. 596-603. In 1989 Zbigniew Brzezinski made a similar point in his book *The Grand Failure* - by which, of course, he meant the failure of Communism. A reviewer of the book writes: "As a practical matter, [Brzezinski] concludes, global communism has foundered, not prospered. In the USSR, the author notes, Gorbachev's renewal efforts have produced unintended consequences, including divisive debates over the Communist Party's stewardship and de facto subversion of the system's ideological foundations. Communism's 'fatal dilemma' in the Soviet Union, he asserts, is that 'its economic success can only be purchased at the cost of political stability, while its political stability can only be sustained at the cost of economic failure.' As a practical matter, he concludes, global communism has foundered, not prospered. In the USSR, the author notes, Gorbachev's renewal efforts have produced unintended consequences, including divisive debates over the Communist Party's stewardship and de facto subversion of the system's ideological foundations. Communism's 'fatal dilemma' in the Soviet Union, he asserts, is that 'its economic success can only be purchased at the cost of political stability, while its political stability can only be sustained at the cost of economic failure.'" (*Kirkus* review, 8 March, 1989, <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/zbigniew-brzezinski/the-grand-failure>)

ENDGAME (1989-1991)

Although the fall of Communism had begun in Poland in 1981, the process had stymied in a kind of stalemate for eight years. But then it gradually dawned on both sides in the stand-off that the process of *perestroika* in the USSR was irreversible, especially after Gorbachev's speech on December 7, 1988 at the United Nations. For, as Judt writes, "after announcing unilateral cuts in Soviet conventional forces in Europe, Gorbachev went on to advise his audience that 'Freedom of choice is a universal principle. There should be no exceptions.' This was more than just a renunciation of the 'Brezhnev Doctrine', an acknowledgement that Moscow would not use force to impose its version of 'Socialism' upon fraternal states. What Gorbachev was conceding - and was immediately understood to have conceded - was that the citizens of the satellite states were now at liberty to go their own way, Socialist or not. Eastern Europe was about to re-enter history..."¹⁴⁷

Garry Kasparov, the former world chess champion, has speculated that in letting Eastern Europe go its own way Gorbachev was motivated by self-interest and the desire to save his own skin: "It would have been foolish for Gorbachev to take risky military action in Hungary or Czechoslovakia when he had to worry about stability in the USSR. When your own house is on fire you don't send the firefighters to your neighbour's house."¹⁴⁸ However, it should be pointed out that the date of his speech at the United Nations - December, 1988 - preceded the beginning of real disturbances in any part of Europe by nearly a year. The Berlin Wall did not fall for another year, and the first blood was not shed in Eastern Europe until the Romanian dictator's fall in December, 1989. So we may concede to Gorbachev some genuine democratic idealism in this matter - although there can be no doubt that his aim was always the reform of Communism, not its final demise...

The Poles immediately seized the opportunity. At the beginning of 1989 the government accepted that Solidarity and other parties could join in the political process. Then, in April, writes Chetverikova, "Lech Walesa and the representatives of the Polish government finally signed an Agreement on political and economic reforms, and in May the Polish Catholic church received a status that has no analogy in other East European countries: they returned to it the property that had been confiscated in the 1950s and allowed it to create its own educational institutions. In June of the same year the representatives of 'Solidarity' were victorious at the parliamentary elections, and its candidate, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, was elected as prime minister."¹⁴⁹

"Soon," writes J.M. Roberts, "the new parliament denounced the German-Soviet agreement of August 1939, condemned the 1968 invasion of

¹⁴⁷ Judt, *op. cit.*, p. 604.

¹⁴⁸ Kasparov, *Winter is Coming*, London: Atlantic, 2015, p. 26.

¹⁴⁹ Chetverikova, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

Czechoslovakia, and set up investigations into political murders committed since 1981.

“In August Walesa announced that Solidarity would support a coalition government; the communist diehards were told by Mr Gorbachev that this would be justifiable (and some Soviet military units had already left the country). In September a coalition dominated by Solidarity and led by the first non-communist Prime Minister since 1945 took office as the government of Poland. Western economic aid was soon promised. By Christmas 1989 the Polish People’s Republic had passed from history and, once again, the historic Republic of Poland had risen from its grave.”¹⁵⁰

The Polish counter-revolution was completed in 1990, when “Lech Walesa became president of the country, and, characteristically wishing to be delivered from all signs of the socialist system, even on the symbolic level, he received his privileges, not from the lawful president Jaruzelski, but from the president of Poland in exile, Richard Kacharowski.”¹⁵¹

*

“Poland,” writes Roberts, “led eastern Europe to freedom. The importance of events there had quickly been perceived in other communist countries, whose leaders were much alarmed. In varying degrees, too, all eastern Europe was exposed to the new factor of a steadily increasing flow of information about non-communist countries, above all, through television (which was especially marked in the GDR). More freedom of movement, more access to foreign books and newspapers had imperceptibly advanced the process of criticism there as in Poland. In spite of some ludicrous attempts to go on controlling information (Romania still required that typewriters be registered with the state authorities), a change in consciousness was under way...”¹⁵²

Tiananmen had been a victory for the Communist Party (and Chicagoan economics); but it was to be the last before the end of the millennium. Moreover, it helped the anti-Communist revolutionaries of Central and Eastern Europe by teaching them some valuable lessons. First, it showed that Communism could not be overcome by violence alone. Hence the remarkable eschewal of violence – with the partial exception of Romania – in the East European revolutions that developed with such extraordinary speech in the later part of 1989. A second lesson learned by the East Europeans – again with the partial exception of the Romanians – was that victory was not assured until the Communist Party itself, together with its security apparatus, had been at least partially “turned”, either through the removal of the threat of external invasion from Moscow (this was a particular threat to Poland and

¹⁵⁰ Roberts, *History of the World*, Oxford: Helicon, 1992, p. 906.

¹⁵¹ Chetverikova, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

¹⁵² Roberts, *History of the World*, Oxford: Helicon, 1992, p. 906.

East Germany), or through shame at earlier betrayals of the nation (Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968). A third lesson was that the enslaved peoples of Communism were more likely to rise up against their enslavers if they had a flourishing example of a non-Communist state on their doorstep, to which they could be united. For the anti-Communists of Central and Eastern Europe in 1989 that alluring neighbouring state was the European Union...

But the remarkable thing about this process was how cautiously, not to say reluctantly, the EU took part in it. The ugly truth was that the EU had become so accustomed to appeasing Communist Eastern Europe through decades of *Ostpolitik* and détente, and so ready to turn its eyes away from the terrible reality of Communism for the sake of its own material comfort and security, that when it came to assisting in the process of finally destroying Communism and the Iron Curtain that separated East and West, they were unprepared and unwilling. The real movers here were the captive peoples themselves, assisted by the heads of the superpowers, Gorbachev, Reagan and Bush – and Germany's Helmut Kohl, who was determined to seize the opportunity to reunite his country.

Roberts writes that the Hungarians' "most important contribution to the dissolution of Communist Europe came in August 1989. Germans from the GDR were then allowed to enter Hungary freely as tourists, though their purpose was known to be to present themselves to the embassy and consulates of the Federal Republic for asylum. A complete opening of Hungary's frontiers came in September (when Czechoslovakia followed suit) and a flow became a flood. In three days 12,000 East Germans crossed from these countries to the west. The Soviet authorities remarked that this was 'unusual'. For the GDR it was the beginning of the end. On the eve of the carefully-planned and much-vaunted celebration of forty years' 'success' as a socialist country, and during a visit by Mr Gorbachev (who, to the dismay of the German communists, appeared to urge the east Germans to seize their chance), riot police had to battle with anti-government demonstrators on the streets of east Berlin. The government and party threw out their leader, but this was not enough. November opened with huge demonstrations in many cities against a regime whose corruption was becoming evident; on 9 November came the greatest symbolic act of all, the breaching of the Berlin Wall. The East German Politburo caved in and the demolition of the rest of the Wall followed.

"More than anywhere else, events in the GDR showed that even in the most advanced communist countries there had been a massive alienation of popular feeling from the regime. 1989 had brought it to a head. All over eastern Europe it was suddenly clear that communist governments had no legitimacy in the eyes of their subjects, who either rose against them or turned their backs and let them fall down. The institutional expression of this alienation was everywhere a demand for free elections, with opposition parties freely campaigning. The Poles had followed their own partially-free elections in which some seats were still reserved to supporters of the existing

regime, with the preparation of a new constitution; in 1990, Lech Walesa became President. A few months earlier, Hungary had elected a parliament from which emerged a non-communist government. Soviet soldiers began to withdraw from the country. In June 1990 Czechoslovakian elections produced a free government and it was soon agreed that the country was to be evacuated of Soviet forces by May 1991. In none of these countries did the former communist politicians get more than 16 per cent of the vote. Free election in Bulgaria was less decisive: there, the contest was won by the communist party members turned reformers and calling themselves socialists.

“In two countries, events turned out differently. Romania underwent a violent revolution (ending in the killing of its former communist dictator) after a rising in December 1989 which revealed uncertainties about the way ahead and internal divisions ominously foreboding further strife. By June 1990 a government some believed still to be heavily influenced by former communists had turned on some of its former supporters, now critics, and crushed student protest with the aid of vigilante squads of miners at some cost in [1100] lives and in disapproval abroad. The GDR was the other country where events took a special turn. It was bound to be a special case, because the question of political change was inescapably bound up with the question of German re-unification. The breaching of the Wall revealed that not only was there no political will to support communism, there was no will to support the GDR either. A general election there in March 1990 gave a majority of seats (and a 48 per cent vote) to a coalition dominated by the Christian Democrat party – the ruling part of the western German Federal Republic. Unity was no longer in doubt; only the procedure and timing remained to be settled.

“In July the two Germanies joined in a monetary, economic and social union. In October they united, the former territories of the GDR becoming provinces of the Federal Republic. The change was momentous, but no serious alarm was openly expressed, even in Moscow, and Mr. Gorbachev’s acquiescence was his second great service to the German nation. Yet alarm there must have been in the USSR. The new Germany would be the greatest European power to the west. Russian power was now in eclipse as it had not been since 1918. The reward for Mr. Gorbachev was a treaty with the new Germany promising economic help with Soviet modernization. It might also be said, by way of reassurance to those who remember 1941-45, that the new German state was not just an older Germany revived. Germany was now shorn of the old east German lands (had, indeed, formally renounced them) and was not dominated by Prussia as both Bismarck’s *Reich* and the Weimar republic had been. More reassuring still (and of importance to west Europeans who felt misgivings), the Federal Republic was a federal and constitutional state seemingly assured of economic success, with nearly forty years’ experience of democratic politics to build on, and embedded in the structures of the EC and NATO. She was given the benefit of the doubt by west Europeans with long memories, at least for the time being.

“At the end of 1990, the condition of what had once seemed the almost monolithic east European bloc already defied generalization or brief description. As former communist countries (Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary) applied to join the EC, or got ready to do so (Bulgaria), some observers speculated about a potentially wider degree of European unity than before. More cautious judgements were made by those who noted the virulent emergence of new - or re-emergence of old - national and communicable division to plague the new East. Above all, over the whole area there gathered the storm-clouds of economic failure and the turbulence they might bring. Liberation might have come, but it had come to peoples and societies of very different levels of sophistication and development, and with very different historical origins. Prediction was clearly unwise...”¹⁵³

One thing could be safely predicted: if Germany would be reunited, the Cold War would be over...

*

However, before that, let us look a little more closely at the Romanian revolution both because of its particularly dramatic character and because it demonstrates perhaps more clearly than any other how even small acts of defiance can overthrow long-standing regimes if the conditions are ripe and the timing is right.

Yuval Noah Harari writes: “On 21 December 1989 Nicolae Ceaușescu, the communist dictator of Romania, organised a mass demonstration of support in the centre of Bucharest. Over the previous months the Soviet Union had withdrawn its support from the eastern European communist regimes, the Berlin Wall had fallen, and revolutions had swept Poland, East Germany, Hungary, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia. Ceaușescu, who had ruled Romania since 1965, believed he could withstand the tsunami, even though riots against his rule had erupted in the Romanian city of Timișoara on 17 December. As one of his counter-measures, Ceaușescu arranged a massive rally in Bucharest to prove to Romanians and the rest of the world that the majority of the populace still loved him - or at least feared him. The creaking party apparatus mobilised 80,000 people to fill the city’s central square, and citizens throughout Romania were instructed to stop all their activities and tune in on their radios and televisions.

“To the cheering of the seemingly enthusiastic crowd, Ceaușescu mounted the balcony overlooking the square, as he had done scores of times in previous decades. Flanked by his wife Elena, leading party officials and a bevy of bodyguards, Ceaușescu began delivering one of his trademark dreary speeches. For eight minutes he praised the glories of Romanian socialism, looking very pleased with himself as the crowd clapped mechanically. And then something went wrong. You can see it for yourself on You-Tube. Just

¹⁵³ Roberts, *op. cit.*, pp. 908-909.

search for 'Ceaușescu's last speech', and watch history in action.

"The You-Tube clip shows Ceaușescu starting another long sentence, saying, 'I want to thank the initiators and organisers of this great event in Bucharest, considering it as a---', and then he falls silent, his eyes open wide, and he freezes in disbelief. He never finished the sentence. Somebody in the audience booed. People still argue today who was the first person who dared to boo. And then another person booed, and another, and another, and within a few seconds the masses began whistling, shouting abuse and calling out: 'Ti-mi-șoa-ra! Ti-mi-șoa-ra!'

"All this happened live on Romanian television, as three-quarters of the population sat glued to the screens, their hearts throbbing wildly. The notorious secret police – the Securitate – immediately ordered the broadcast to be stopped, but the television crews disobeyed. The cameraman pointed the camera towards the sky so that viewers couldn't see the panic among the party leaders on the balcony, but the soundman kept recording, and the technicians continued the transmission. The whole of Romania heard the crowd booing, while Ceaușescu yelled, 'Hello! Hello! Hello!' as if the problem was with the microphone. His wife Elena began scolding the audience: 'Be quiet! Be quiet!' until Ceaușescu turned and yelled at her – still live on television – 'You be quiet!' Ceaușescu then appeared to the excited crowds in the square, imploring them, 'Comrades! Comrades! Be quiet, comrades!'

"But the comrades were unwilling to be quiet. Communist Romania crumbled when 80,000 people in the Bucharest central square realised they were much stronger than the old man in the fur hat on the balcony..."¹⁵⁴

Harari goes on to describe how "moderate communists" Iliescu took the place of the dictator. Vali Crețu goes further: "This was not a small act of defiance at all, nor was it a spontaneous riot organised by 'the people'. It wasn't an anti-Communist revolution, but a coup d'etat planned in its smallest details by Ceaușescu's younger associates. Among others, Communist Party members like Ion Iliescu, Adrian Năstase, Petre Roman (son of Ernő Neuländer, the Jew who founded the Securitate - the Romanian equivalent of the KGB) etc. rebelled against Ceaușescu, organised the coup, overthrew his regime and assumed power. It was just younger Communists against older Communists, with no respect for the Romanian State or the Romanian people. Many Romanians died in vain thinking they were fighting some liberation war. This power struggle became clear when the Romanians actually tried to oppose Iliescu's new Communist regime and were crushed during the Mineriade, when Iliescu called the miners to come to Bucharest and create havoc in Piața Universității, where Romania's intellectual elite had gathered (back then we still had one). That was our last real cry for freedom and identity and we failed it..."¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ Harari, *Homo Deus*, London: Vintage, 2017, pp. 155-158.

¹⁵⁵ Crețu, Facebook, September 8, 2017.

*

Returning to Germany, Judt writes: “Credit for German re-unification – a unique case of fusion in a decade of fission – must go in the first place to Helmut Kohl. The West German Chancellor was initially as hesitant as everyone else – on November 28th 1989 he presented to the Bundestag a *five-year* program of cautious steps toward German unity. But after listening to East German crowds (and assuring himself of the support of Washington) Kohl calculated that unified Germany was now not merely possible but perhaps urgent. It was clear that the only way to staunch the flow west (2,000 people a day at one point) was to bring West Germany east. In order to keep East Germans from leaving their country, the West German leader set about abolishing it.

“As in the 19th century, German unification was in the first instance to be achieved by a currency union; but political union inevitably followed. Talk of a ‘confederation’, which the West Germans had initially encouraged and Hans Modrow’s GDR cabinet had eagerly pursued, was precipitately dropped and in the hastily called East German elections of March 1990 Christian Democrat candidates ran on a unification ticket. Their ‘Alliance for Germany’ won 48 percent of the vote: the Social Democrats, handicapped by their well-advertised ambivalence on the subject, won just 22 percent. The former Communists – now the Party of Democratic Socialism – secured a respectable 16 percent showing...

“The first act of the new majority in the GDR Volkskammer, represented by a CDU-SPD-Liberal coalition led by Lothar de Maizière, was to commit their country to German unity. On May 18th 1990 a ‘monetary, economic and social union’ was signed between the two Germanies, and on July 1st its crucial clause – the extension of the Deutschmark to East Germany – came into force. East Germans could now exchange their virtually useless East German marks – up to the equivalent of DM 40,000 – at a hugely advantageous rate of 1:1. Wages and salaries in the GDR would henceforth be paid in Deutschmarks at parity – a dramatically effective device for keeping East Germans where they were, but with grim long-term consequences for East German jobs and the West German budget.

“On August 23rd, by pre-agreement with Bonn, the Volkskammer voted to accede to the Federal Republic. A week later a Treaty of Unification was signed, by which the GDR was absorbed into the FRG – as approved by its voters in the March elections and permitted under Article 23 of the 1949 Basic Law. On October 3rd the Treaty entered into force: the GDR ‘acceded’ to the Federal Republic and ceased to exist.

“The division of Germany had been the work of the victors of World War Two and its reunification in 1990 would never have come about without their encouragement or consent. East Germany was a Soviet satellite state, with

360,000 Soviet troops still stationed there in 1989. West Germany, for all its independence, was not free to act autonomously on *this* matter. As for Berlin, until a final peace settlement was reached it remained a city whose fate formally depended upon the original occupying powers – France, Britain, the US and the Soviet Union.

“Neither the British nor the French were in any particular hurry to see Germany reunited. To the extent that West Europeans even thought about a unified Germany they assumed – reasonably enough – that it would come at the *end* of a long process of change in Eastern Europe, not right at the outset. As Douglas Hurd (the British foreign secretary) observed in December 1989, reflecting on the imminent conclusion of the Cold War: This was ‘a system... under which we’ve lived quite happily for forty years.’

“His Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, made no secret of her fears. In her memoirs she recalls a hastily convoked meeting with French President Mitterand: ‘I produced from my handbag a map showing the various configurations of Germany in the past, which were not altogether reassuring about the future... [Mitterand] said that at moments of great danger in the past France had always established special relations with Britain and he felt such a time had come again... It seemed to me that although we had not discovered the means, at least we both had the will to check the German juggernaut. That was a start.’

“Mrs. Thatcher – and she was not alone – was also worried that German unification might destabilize Mikhail Gorbachev, possibly even leading to the fall (by analogy with Nikita Khrushchev’s disgrace following his Cuban humiliation). But the British, for all their anxieties, had nothing to offer by way of an alternative to the course of events then unfolding in Germany and they duly acquiesced. Mitterand was not so easily appeased. More than anyone else, the French were truly disturbed by the collapse of the stable and familiar arrangements in Germany and in the Communist bloc as a whole.

“The first reaction from Paris was to try and block any move to German unification – Mitterand even going so far as to visit the GDR in December 1989 in a show of support for its sovereignty. He declined Helmut Kohl’s invitation to attend a ceremony to mark the re-opening of the Brandenburg Gate, and tried to convince Soviet leaders that, as traditional allies, France and Russia had a common interest in blocking German ambitions. Indeed, the French were banking on Gorbachev to veto German unity – as Mitterand explained to his advisers on November 28th 1989, ‘I don’t want to do anything to stop it, the Soviets will do it for me. They will never allow this greater Germany opposite them.’”¹⁵⁶

The French attitude to German reunification showed very clearly how old-style nationalism and balance-of-power politics were completely out of place

¹⁵⁶ Judt, *op. cit.*, pp. 638-640.

in this age. The chance to overthrow Communism, the most evil system in world history, had offered itself in East Germany, with vast consequences throughout Europe and the world; but the French wanted to stop it, using the Soviet bear to stamp on German freedom – all for the sake of preventing their closest ally in the European Union, West Germany, from becoming stronger than they! This showed how, at root, the thinking of leaders in Communist East and Capitalist West was not that different, but was similarly short-sighted and egoistical.

And so the remark of the British diplomat Robert Cooper is just: “What came to an end in 1989 was not just the Cold War or even, in a formal sense, the Second World War” but “the political systems of three centuries: the balance of power and the imperial urge.”¹⁵⁷ It was not that human nature or the essential patterns of politics had changed; the will to power still existed in both East and West. What had changed were the *stakes*, which were global, not national, which meant that it was now senseless – even from a nationalist point of view – to pursue purely national advantage in the nuclear age.

Fortunately, Gorbachev and Kohl thought more strategically than Mitterrand, more in accordance with the real benefits of all their peoples, - and the opportunity was seized.¹⁵⁸

In any case, after Kohl’s decisive victory in the East German election, “the French President adopted a different tack. The Germans could have their unity, but at a price. There must be no question of an enhanced Germany taking an independent path, much less reverting to its old middle-European priorities. Kohl must commit himself to pursuing the European project under a Franco-German condominium, and Germany was to be bound into an ‘ever-closer’ union – whose terms, notably a common European currency, would be enshrined in a new treaty (to be negotiated in the following year in Maastricht).

“The Germans,” continued Judt, “agreed readily enough to all the French conditions... Unification was well worth some appeasement of Germany’s nervous European neighbour. In any case, Kohl... was not troubled at the idea of tying Germany ever more closely in the European Union.”¹⁵⁹

*

¹⁵⁷ Cooper, in Ivan Krastev and Mark Leonard, “Europe’s Shattered Dream of Order”, *Foreign Affairs*, May-June, 2015.

¹⁵⁸ It was as the holy Hermitess Helena of Chin in the Caucasus had prophesied in 1955, saying: “The eighth leader [of the Soviet Union] is called Michael [i.e. Michael Gorbachev, the eighth Soviet leader since Lenin]. He will be young and good-looking. He will change the situation. However, then there will come great poverty...” (Antonios Markou, *I Osia Eleni tou Kavkasou* (St. Helena of the Caucasus), Koropi, Attica, 2001)

¹⁵⁹ Judt, *op. cit.*, p. 640.

The last domino to fall in the anti-communist revolutions of 1989-91 was the most important one, the Soviet Union. However, unlike the East European States, the USSR did not consist mainly of a single ethnic group, but was a true multinational empire. So its transition from a single communist state to a multitude of independent states was bound to be exceptionally complex and problematic... From 1988 the Soviet republics began to declare their independence from the centre, beginning with the Transcaucasian and Baltic republics. Gorbachev was willing to give them a lot, - their own parliaments, their own communist parties, etc. - but not complete independence, which would enable local legislation to override Soviet legislation. When it became clear that no satisfactory compromise between the centre and the republics could be attained, and that Gorbachev, unlike Milošević, was not prepared to use force to preserve the old Union, it peacefully died, going out, not with a bang, but with a whimper.

The leading catalyst of the Union's dissolution was Boris Yeltsin, a party apparatchik from Sverdlovsk who fell out with Gorbachev, and then took advantage of the possibility of political life outside the Party provided by Gorbachev himself to carve out a place for himself as the leader of the liberal opposition to him. In March, 1989 Muscovites elected him as their deputy in the Congress of People's Deputies, and a year later Sverdlovsk sent him to the parliament of the Russian Federation, where he became speaker. In July, 1990 in a public speech before the Russian parliament Yeltsin resigned from the Communist Party and called for a full multi-party democracy. Russia's laws were now declared by the parliament to take precedence over the Union's. And in the autumn the Soviet Prime Minister Nikolai Ryzhkov told the Politburo that his orders were not being followed.¹⁶⁰

Gorbachev now found himself having to manoeuvre between the hard-line communists, on the one hand, who wanted to preserve the Soviet order, and Yeltsin, who wanted to destroy it and championed independence for the republics, on the other. Thus when Lithuania became the first of the republics to declare its independence in March, 1990, and hundreds were killed or injured when Soviet troops were sent into the republic in January, 1991, it was Yeltsin who supported the "rebels". By the middle of 1991 he was President of *Russia*, as opposed to the Soviet Union, and as his power and popularity increased by virtue of his pro-Russian and anti-Soviet stance, so did Gorbachev's decline.

Paradoxically, the American President George Bush, who arrived in Moscow at the end of July, 1991, favoured Gorbachev the communist over Yeltsin the anti-communist: first, because he had just signed the START treaty with the Soviets, and feared that a breakup of the Union could destroy the gains of that treaty and lead to nuclear proliferation; and secondly, because the break-up of the Union could lead to bloody civil war... Garry Kasparov

¹⁶⁰ Serhii Plokhy, *The Last Empire. The Final Days of the Soviet Union*, London: Oneworld Publications, 2015, p. 37.

records meeting several American foreign policy experts in this period. Even at this late stage, they believed in the stability of Gorbachev's regime, and laughed at Kasparov's prediction that it would fall in 1991.¹⁶¹

On August 19, the day before a treaty determining the new relationship between the centre and the republics was due to be signed, a KGB-led plot tried to oust Gorbachev while he was on holiday in the Crimea. The coup failed after only seventy-two hours, but the main beneficiary of the coup's failure was not Gorbachev, but Yeltsin, who with thousands of Muscovites courageously held out in the Russian parliament building (the "White House") until the nerve of the plotters cracked. Gorbachev returned to Moscow, but Yeltsin publicly (on State television) and humiliatingly showed that he was now the boss by forcing him to sign a series of decrees that effectively destroyed the power of the Soviet Union.

"Formally speaking," writes Judt, "Gorbachev resumed his power; but in reality everything had changed for ever. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) was terminally discredited – it was not until August 21st that Party spokesmen publicly condemned their colleagues' coup, by which time the plotters were already in prison and Yeltsin had taken advantage of the Party's fatal hesitations to ban it from operating within the Russian federation. Gorbachev, who seemed dazed and uncertain when seen in public, was understandably slow to grasp the import of these developments. Rather than praise Yeltsin, the Russian parliament or the Russian people for their success, he spoke to the cameras about *perestroika* and the indispensable role the Party would continue to have in renewing itself, promoting reforms, etc.

"This approach still played well in the West, where it was widely assumed (and hoped) that after the abortive coup things would carry on much as before. But in the Soviet Union itself Gorbachev's anachronistic reiterations of failed goals, and his apparent ingratitude to his rescuers, were a revelation. Here was a man who had been overtaken by History and didn't know it. For many Russians the events of August had been a true revolution, a genuinely popular uprising not *for* the reformers and their Party but *against* them: the CPSU, as the demonstrators shouted at Gorbachev on his belated arrival at the Russian Parliament, was 'a criminal enterprise' whose own government ministers had tried to overthrow the constitution. By the time a chastened Gorbachev had got the point, suspended the CPSU and (on August 24th) resigned as its General Secretary, it was too late. Communism was now irrelevant, and so too was Mikhail Gorbachev.

"Of course, the former General Secretary was still President of the Soviet Union. But the relevance of the Union itself was now in question. The failed putsch had been the last and greatest impulse to secession. Between August 24th and September 21st Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan,

¹⁶¹ Kasparov, *op. cit.*, chapter 1.

Uzbekistan, Georgia, Tajikistan and Armenia followed the Baltic republics and declared themselves independent of the Soviet Union – most of them making the announcement in the confused and uncertain days that followed Gorbachev's return. Following Kravchuk's lead in Ukraine, regional First Secretaries like Nursultan Nazarbaev of Kazakhstan, Askar Akaev in Kyrgyzstan, Gaidar Aliev in Azerbaijan, Stanislav Shushkevich in Belarus and others cannily distanced themselves from their long-standing Party affiliation and re-situated themselves at the head of their new states, taking care to nationalize as quickly as possible all the local Party's assets.

“Gorbachev and the Supreme Soviet in Moscow could do little more than acknowledge reality, recognize the new states and lamely proposed yet another ‘new’ constitution that would embrace the independent republics in some sort of confederal arrangement. Meanwhile, a few hundred yards away, Boris Yeltsin and the Russian parliament were establishing an independent Russia. By November Yeltsin had taken under Russian control virtually all financial and economic activity on Russian territory. The Soviet Union was now a shell state, emptied of power and resources.”¹⁶²

*

Let us look more closely at that fateful day, August 22nd, when Gorbachev confronted the Russian Duma. First, he was forced to confirm Yeltsin's decree on Russian economic sovereignty, whereby, writes Plokhy, “as of January 1, 1992, all enterprises on Russian territory would be transferred to the jurisdiction and operational control of the Russian Federation. The Russian president also decreed measures to create a Russian customs service, form Russian gold reserves, and subject the exploitation of natural resources to licensing and taxation by Russian authorities. It was a ploy designed to make Gorbachev approve a decree that he would not otherwise have countenanced, as it undermined the economic foundations of the Union...

“That was not all. A separate decree signed by Yeltsin on August 22, the day on which Gorbachev resumed his functions as president of the USSR, banned the publication of *Pravda* and other newspapers that had supported the coup. Yeltsin clearly overstepped his jurisdiction by firing the general director of the all-Union information agency TASS and establishing Russian government control over Communist Party media outlets on Russian territory. These measures went far beyond the rights ascribed to the Russian Federation by the draft union treaty [agreed between Gorbachev and Yeltsin earlier that month] that had been derailed by the coup. They left no doubt that as far as Russia was concerned, the treaty was dead. But Yeltsin was not content with taking more sovereign rights for Russia. Having saved Gorbachev from the plotters, he was subjecting the Soviet president to a new

¹⁶² Judt, *op. cit.*, pp. 656-657.

captivity. Gorbachev's aide Vadim Medvedev referred to Yeltsin's actions in the first days after the coup as a countercoup..."¹⁶³

That is true; and it makes us wonder whether this *coup de grâce* was not in fact a *contre-coup du diable*. But if this was a diabolic *counter-coup*, there is no question that the coup it overthrew was even more diabolic, nor that Gorbachev, while formally the victim of the coup, had made it possible insofar as the leading plotters were all his men, his appointees.

But the *coup de grâce* was still to come. On August 22, as crowds tore down the statue of Felix Dzerzhinsky outside the KGB's headquarters, and milled round the headquarters of the Communist Party headquarters, while desperate communist officials tried to shred compromising papers (the machine was jammed by a hairpin!), in the Russian parliament deputies were bombarding Gorbachev "with questions about his own complicity in the coup and demanded that the Communist Party, his real power base, be declared a criminal organization. Gorbachev went on the defensive. 'This is just another way of carrying on a crusade or religious war at the present time,' he told the deputies. 'Socialism, as I understand it, is a type of conviction which people have and we are not the only ones who have it but it exists in other countries, not only today but at other times.'

"Then came a question about the ownership of all-Union property on the territory of the Russian Federation and the decree on Russia's economic sovereignty signed by Yeltsin. 'You today said that you would sign a decree confirming all my decrees signed during that period,' said Yeltsin, referring to the measures he had signed during the coup.

"Gorbachev knew he was in trouble. 'I do not think you have tried to put me in a trap by bringing me here,' he responded. Gorbachev went on to say that he would sign a decree confirming all Yeltsin's decrees of the coup period except the one dealing with all-Union property. 'I will issue such a decree after signing the [union] treaty,' he said to Yeltsin. This was not merely a delaying tactic. Gorbachev was trying to keep Yeltsin on the hook: signature on the union treaty first, property second.

"The Russian president did not like what he heard. His ruse of backdating the decree had failed, but he had a trump card in hand and knew how to use it against Gorbachev. 'And now, on a lighter note,' declared Yeltsin in front of the cameras, 'shall we now sign a decree suspending the activities of the Russian Communist Party?' Yeltsin used the pronoun 'we' to refer to himself. Gorbachev was stunned. All party organizations in Russia were suddenly on the chopping block. Without them, his already dwindling powers would be reduced to almost nothing. After realizing what was going on, he asked his 'ally', 'What are you doing?... I... haven't we... I haven't read this.'

¹⁶³ Plokhly, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

“The Russian president took his time signing the decree temporarily banning Communist Party activity on Russian territory. When Gorbachev told him he could not ban the party, Yeltsin responded that he was only suspending its activities. Welcoming the decree with applause and chants of approval, the Russian deputies went on with their interrogation of the trapped Soviet president. Gorbachev found it hard to recover from Yeltsin’s blow. ‘At that encounter,’ he remembered later, ‘Yeltsin was gloating with sadistic pleasure.’...”¹⁶⁴

*

The August coup and counter-coup took place on the Orthodox Feast of the Transfiguration, when Christ demonstrated the power of His Divinity before his three chosen disciples, Moses and Elijah. This was to remind all those with eyes to see that the fall of the Soviet Union – so unexpected by all except a very few, who included none of the leading politicians – was the work of God, not man. “Not by horses and chariots”, still less by tanks or nuclear weapons, was the Cold War brought to an end and the Soviet bloc liberated, but by the right Hand of the Most High...

However, while the Soviet Union and the Communist Party appeared to have been destroyed, there was one part of the Communist apparatus that survived the coup and even extended its influence – the Sovietized Moscow Patriarchate. The survival of this “second administration” of the Red Beast boded ill for the future. It reminds us that while the fall of the Soviet Union was an all-important political event, it was not a *religious* event; and that without true faith and repentance for the sins of the Soviet past even the most outwardly successful counter-revolution remained a house built on sand.

This is clearly seen in the actions of the leader of the MP at that time, Patriarch Alexis (Ridiger) – Agent “Drozdov”, as he was known in the KGB...

In June, 1990, the Hierarchical Council of the MP elected Metropolitan Alexis as the new patriarch. This was the man whom the Furov report of 1970 had called the most pro-Soviet of all the bishops, a KGB agent since 1958 who had been prepared to spy to the KGB even on his own patriarch, and who, when he was Metropolitan of Tallinn, said: “In the Soviet Union, citizens are never arrested for their religious or ideological convictions”.¹⁶⁵ On being elected, he immediately, on July 4/17, 1990, the day of the martyrdom of Tsar Nicholas II, announced that he was praying for the preservation of the communist party!

Of course, after that gaffe, being a clever man, “Patriarch” Alexis quickly recovered his balance, his sense of which way the wind was blowing; and there was no further overt support of the communists. True, he did attach his

¹⁶⁴ Plokhly, *op. cit.*, pp. 143-44.

¹⁶⁵ *Keston News Service*, № 94, March 21, 1980 p. 1.

signature, in December, 1990, to a letter by 53 well-known political, academic and literary figures who urged Gorbachev to take urgent measures to deal with the state of crisis in the country, speaking of "... the destructive dictatorship of people who are shameless in their striving to take ownership of territory, resources, the intellectual wealth and labour forces of the country whose name is the USSR".¹⁶⁶ But the patriarch quickly disavowed his signature; and a few weeks later, after the deaths in Vilnius by Soviet troops, he declared that the killings were "a great political mistake - in church language a sin". Then, in May, he publicly disagreed with a prominent member of the hardline *Soiuz* bloc, who had said that the resources of the army and the clergy should be drawn on extensively to save the people and the homeland. In Alexis' view, these words could be perceived as a statement of preparedness to use the Church for political purposes. The patriarch recalled his words of the previous autumn: the Church and the Faith should not be used as a truncheon.¹⁶⁷ By June, the patriarch had completed his remarkable transformation from dyed-in-the-wool communist to enthusiastic democrat, saying to Yeltsin: "May God help you win the election".

Still more striking was his apparent rejection of Sergianism, the doctrine justifying the submission of the Church to militant atheism preached by the first Soviet patriarch, Sergius Stragorodsky. Thus in an interview granted to *Izvestia* on June 6 he said: "This year has freed us from the state's supervision. Now we have the moral right to say that the Declaration of Metropolitan Sergius has disappeared into the past and no longer guides us... The metropolitan cooperated with criminal usurpers. This was his tragedy.... Today we can say that falsehood is interspersed in his Declaration, which stated as its goal 'placing the Church in a proper relationship with the Soviet government'. But this relationship - and in the Declaration it is clearly defined as being the submission of the Church to the interests of governmental politics - is exactly that which is incorrect from the point of view of the Church... Of the people, then, to whom these compromises, silence, forced passivity or expressions of loyalty that were permitted by the Church leadership in those days, have caused pain - of these people, not only before God, but also before them, I ask forgiveness, understanding and prayers."¹⁶⁸

And yet, in an interview given to *Komsomolskaia Pravda* only two months earlier, he had said: "The most important thing for the Church is to preserve itself for the people, so that they should be able to have access to the Chalice of Christ, to the Chalice of Communion... There is a rule when a Christian has to take on himself a sin in order to avoid a greater sin... There are situations in which a person, a Christian must sacrifice his personal purity,

¹⁶⁶ *Keston News Service*, № 369, February 21, 1991, p. 6.

¹⁶⁷ Letter in *Literaturnaia Rossia* (Literary Russia), June 14, 1991; Oxana Antic, "Patriarch Aleksii II: A Political Portrait", *Report on the USSR*, vol. 3, № 45, November 8, 1991, p. 17.

¹⁶⁸ "Patriarch Alexis II: I take on myself responsibility for all that happened", *Izvestia*, № 137, June 10, 1991; Bishop Gregory Grabbe, "Dogmatizatsia Sergianstva" (The Dogmatization of Sergianism), *Pravoslavnaia Rus'* (Orthodox Russia), № 17 (1446), September 1/14, 1991, p. 5.

his personal perfection, so as to defend something greater... Thus in relation to Metropolitan Sergius and his successors in the leadership of the Church under Soviet power, they had to tell lies, they had to say that everything was normal with us. And yet the Church was being persecuted. Declarations of political loyalty were being made. The fullness of Christian life, charity, almsgiving, the Reigning icon of the Mother of God were also renounced. Compromises were made." In other words, Sergianism, though sinful, was justified. It may have "disappeared into the past", but if similar circumstances arise again, the "sacrifice" of personal purity can and should be made again!...¹⁶⁹

The patriarch showed that the poison of Sergianism was in him still during the attempted *coup* of August, 1991. When the Russian vice-president, Alexander Rutskoy, approached him on the morning of the 19th, the patriarch pleaded "illness" and refused to see him. When he eventually did issue a declaration – on the evening of the 20th, and again in the early hours of the 21st – the impression made was, in Fr. Gleb Yakunin's words, "rather weak".¹⁷⁰ He called on all sides to avoid bloodshed, but did not specifically condemn the plotters. As Jane Ellis comments: "Though Patriarch Alexis II issued statements during the *coup*, they were bland and unspecific, and he was widely thought to have waited to see which way the wind was blowing before committing himself to issuing them. It was rather the priests in the White House – the Russian Parliament building – itself, such as the veteran campaigner for religious freedom, Fr. Gleb Yakunin, as well as the Christians among those manning the barricades outside, who helped to overthrow the Communist Party, the KGB and the Soviet system."¹⁷¹

It was not until Wednesday morning that the patriarch sent his representative, Deacon Andrew Kurayev, to the Russian parliament building, by which time several dissident priests were already established there. And it was two priests of the anti-sergianist ROCOR who celebrated the first service to the New Martyrs of Russia on the balcony of the White House. Not to be outdone, the patriarchate immediately responded with its own prayer service, and at some time during the same day the patriarch anathematized all those who had taken part in organizing the *coup*. By these actions the patriarch appeared to have secured his position vis-à-vis Yeltsin's government, and on August 27, Yeltsin attended a memorial service in the Dormition cathedral of the Kremlin, at which the patriarch hailed the failure

¹⁶⁹ Grabbe, "Dogmatizatsia Sergianstva", *op. cit.*, p. 5.

¹⁷⁰ Hieromonk Tikhon (Kozushin), personal communication; Natalia Babisyan, "Sviashchenniki na barrikadakh" (Priests on the Barricades), *Khristianskie Novosti* (Christian News), № 38, August 22, 1991, p. 21.

¹⁷¹ Ellis, "The Russian Church: hopes and fears", *Church Times*, September 13, 1991. During the 1993 attack on parliament he showed a similar indecisiveness. "He promised to excommunicate the first person to fire a shot, but when shooting... thundered around the 'White House', he forgot about his promise." (Eugene Sokolov, "Tovarisch Drozdov – Vor Hevronskej" (Comrade Drozdov – the Thief of Hebron), *Russkoe Novoe Slovo* (New Russian Word), 18 July, 1997)

of the coup, saying that “the wrath of God falls upon the children of disobedience”.¹⁷²

So in the space of thirteen months, the patriarch had passed from a pro-communist, anti-democratic stance to an anti-communist, pro-democratic stance. This “flexibility” should have surprised nobody; for the essence of sergianism, the root heresy of the Moscow Patriarchate, is *adaptation to the world, and to whatever the world believes and praises*. In view of this, it is not surprising that the successful counter-revolution against Communism that took place under Yeltsin in 1991 quickly ran into severe difficulties in the later 1990s. Not being nourished and supported by true religious feeling, it withered and died in the midst of rampant corruption, bloodshed and the disillusion of the people with the “freedom” they had now received.

A highly symbolic example of how the democratic 90s failed to satisfy the people, and even led them to a “pessimistic nostalgia” for the Soviet past is the state’s treatment – or rather, non-treatment – of the results of the Chernobyl catastrophe. As Alexander Lee writes, commenting on the testimonies collected in Svetlana Alexievich’s *Chernobyl Prayer* (1997), “the disaster illustrated all that was wrong with the decaying Soviet system. It was not just that the reactor had been built by corrupt contractors, or poorly maintained by incompetent apparatchiks. It was that they had been lied to. No one had told them about radiation or its effects, even after the explosion. They had blundered blindly into a terrifying world of cancer and death. In their agony, they railed and fulminated at all that the USSR had been. But when they looked at what the Soviet Union had been replaced with, they saw even greater suffering. Now that socialism had gone, they were abandoned. No one wanted to be near them, let alone waste money treating their illnesses. It was no surprise that, when they narrated their experiences, they gave the impression that they would have preferred the rotten certainties of the Soviet system than this hopeless, inhuman freedom...”¹⁷³

And so the ground was already being prepared for New Year’s Day, 2000, when the “empire of evil” staged a triumphant comeback in the person of KGB Lieutenant-Colonel Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin...

*

The Union could probably have survived the breakaway of, for example, the Baltic republics or Georgia. The real problem was *Ukraine*, the second-largest republic which, writes Judt, “had a history of independence (albeit chequered), last asserted and promptly lost in the aftermath of World War One. It was also intimately associated with Russia’s own history in the eyes of

¹⁷² He said that the Church had not supported the coup (although there is clear evidence that Metropolitans Philaret of Kiev and Pitirim of Volokolamsk supported it), but had “taken the side of law and liberty” (*Report on the USSR*, vol. 3, № 36, September 6, 1991, p. 82).

¹⁷³ Lee, “Portrait of the Author as a Historian, No. 12: Svetlana Alexievich”, *History Today*, June, 2017, p. 88.

many Russian nationalists. Kievan 'Rus' – the thirteenth-century kingdom based on the Ukrainian capital and reaching from the Carpathians to the Volga – was as integral to the core identity of the empire as Russia itself. But of more immediate and practical consideration were the material resources of the region.

“Sitting squarely athwart Russia’s access to the Black Sea (and the Mediterranean) as well as to central Europe, Ukraine was a mainstay of the Soviet economy. With just 2.7 percent of the land area of the USSR it was home to 18 percent of its population and generated nearly 17 percent of the country’s Gross National Product, second only to Russia itself. In the last years of the Soviet Union Ukraine contained 60 percent of the country’s coal reserves and a majority share of the country’s titanium (vital for modern steel production); its unusually rich soil was responsible for over 40 percent of Soviet agricultural output by value.

“The disproportionate importance of Ukraine in Russian and Soviet history was reflected in the Soviet leadership itself. Nikita Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev were Russians who hailed from eastern Ukraine – Khrushchev returning there in the 1930s as First Secretary of the Ukrainian Party; Konstantin Chernenko was the son of Ukrainian ‘kulaks’ deported to Siberia, while Yuri Andropov had risen to the top as a consequence of occupying the strategically central post of KGB head in Ukraine. But this close association between the Ukrainian republic and the Soviet leadership did not imply any special regard for its inhabitants.

“Quite the contrary. For much of its history as a Soviet republic, Ukraine was treated as an internal colony: its natural resources exploited, its people kept under close surveillance (and, in the 1930s, exposed to a program of punitive repression that amounted to near-genocide). Ukrainian products – notably food and ferrous metals – were shipped to the rest of the Union at heavily subsidized prices, a practice that continued almost to the end. Following World War Two, the Ukrainian Socialist Republic was considerably enlarged by the annexation from Poland of eastern Galicia and western Volhynia: the local Polish population, as we have seen, was expelled westward in exchange for ethnic Ukrainians forced out of Poland itself.

“These population exchanges – and the wartime extermination of much of the local Jewish community – resulted in a region that was by Soviet standards quite homogeneous: thus whereas the Russian republic in 1990 contained over one hundred minorities, thirty-one of them living in autonomous regions, Ukraine was 84 percent Ukrainian. Most of the rest of the population were Russians (11 percent), with the remainder comprising small numbers of Moldovans, Poles, Magyars, Bulgarians and the country’s surviving Jews. Perhaps more to the point the only significant minority – the Russians – was concentrated in the industrial east of the country and in the capital Kiev.

“Central and Western Ukraine, notably around Lviv, the second city, was predominantly Ukrainian in language and Eastern Orthodox (Greek-Catholic) in religion.¹⁷⁴ Thanks to the relative tolerance of the Habsburgs, Ukrainians in Galicia had been allowed to preserve their native tongue. Depending upon district, anything from 78 percent to 91 percent of the local inhabitants used it as their first language in 1994, whereas in the territories once ruled by the Czar even those who identified themselves as Ukrainians often spoke Russian more readily.

“The Soviet constitution.... ascribed national identities to the residents of its separate republics and indeed defined all its citizens by ethnic-national categories. As elsewhere, so in Ukraine – particularly the recently-annexed Western Ukraine – this had self-fulfilling consequences. In earlier times, when the local language was mostly confined to the remote countryside, and the cities were Russian-speaking and Soviet-dominated, the theoretically decentralized and federal character of this union of national republics was of interest only to scholars and Soviet apologists. But with the growing number of urban-dwelling Ukrainian-speakers, Ukrainian-language media, and a political elite now identifying itself with self-consciously ‘Ukrainian’ interests, Ukrainian nationalism was the predictable accompaniment to Soviet fragmentation.

“A non-Party movement – RUKH (the ‘People’s Movement for *Perestroika*’) – was founded in Kiev in November 1988, the first autonomous Ukrainian political organization for many decades. It gathered considerable support, notably in the major cities and from ‘60s-era reform Communists; but in marked contrast to independence movements in the Baltic it could not automatically count on mass backing and did not reflect any groundswell of national sentiment. In elections to the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet in March 1990 the Communists secured a clear majority, RUKH won less than a quarter of the seats.

“Thus it was not Ukrainian nationalists who were to seize the initiative but rather the Communists themselves. The Communists in the Ukrainian Soviet voted, on July 16th 1990, to declare Ukrainian ‘sovereignty’ and asserted the republic’s right to possess its own military and the promise of its own laws.”¹⁷⁵

However, writes Serhii Plokhy, “Boris Yeltsin shared Gorbachev’s stand on Ukraine. Both believed that the second-largest Soviet republic could not be allowed to go its own way. If Gorbachev, in his conversations with Bush, raised the possibility of civil strife and even war involving Ukraine and other Soviet republics, Yeltsin was calmer but no less determined. ‘Ukraine must not leave the Soviet Union,’ he told the American president during their

¹⁷⁴ This is a mistake. The Greek-Catholics commemorate the Pope, so they are Catholic, not Orthodox. (V.M.)

¹⁷⁵ Judt, *op. cit.*, pp. 648-650.

meeting in Yeltsin's Kremlin office. Without Ukraine, Yeltsin argued, the Soviet Union would be dominated by the non-Slavic republics. His 'attachment' to Ukraine reflected the attitude of the Russian population in general. According to a poll sponsored by the United States Information Agency in February and March 1991, only 22 percent were opposed."¹⁷⁶

Now Gorbachev was determined to preserve the Soviet Union with Ukraine inside it not only because he was a Communist and the Union was his spiritual homeland, but also because he was half Ukrainian. Yeltsin was, of course, far less Unionist; but like most Russians he, too, could not conceive of Russia without Ukraine; and some of his advisors believed that Russia should now take the place of the Soviet Union as the new imperial masters – an idea that was anathema to the Ukrainians. As if responding to this thought, on August 24 the Ukrainian parliament voted for independence; the decision would be submitted to a referendum to be held on December 1. A little later the Ukrainian communist party was outlawed.

Serhii Plokyh writes: "August 24 marked a turning point, not only because of the declaration of Ukrainian independence but also because, on the same day, the three Baltic republics, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, received recognition of their independence from Yeltsin himself. The Russian president signed three letters that same day recognizing the independence of Russia's western neighbors without attaching any conditions or questioning the newly independent states' Soviet-era borders. His action left hundreds of thousands of ethnic Russians, most of whom had moved to the region after World War II, beyond the borders of Russia and the Union. Their concerns did not seem to be those of Yeltsin's government.

"The new, democratic Russia refused to use force, economic pressure, or legal and diplomatic tricks to keep the Baltics republics in the Soviet Union. Territorial issues and minority rights did not seem to be significant issues at the time. In previous years, many members of Russian communities had opposed independence for the republics they called home. They joined the Moscow-sponsored and communist-run Interfronts, which welcomed Moscow's crackdown on Baltic independence in early 1991. Their leaders, who had openly supported the coup in Moscow, now feared revenge on the part of local majorities. Yeltsin's Russian government largely ignored their worries. Its allies were national democrats in Tallinn, Riga, and Vilnius, not Russian minorities who had sided with the Kremlin conservatives.

"Many in the non-Russian republics of the Union wondered whether the Baltic example set a precedent for Russia's dealings with other republics. It soon became apparent that it did not. The Baltics held a special place in the hearts and minds of Yeltsin's democrats, and Russian diplomatic recognition did not extend to all the Soviet republics that had declared their independence before or during the coup. Georgia, which had declared

¹⁷⁶ Plokyh, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

independence on April 9, 1991, much earlier than Estonia or Latvia, was not granted recognition. It was not clear whether Ukraine's declaration of independence would place it in the same camp as the Baltics or Georgia. Given that Yeltsin's reaction to Kravchuk's phone call on the eve of the independence vote in parliament was much calmer than Gorbachev's, there was some hope that Ukraine's position would be treated with respect and understanding in Russia. As it turned out, there was only a weekend pause. Kravchuk called Yeltsin with the news on Saturday, which meant that Russian reaction would not come until Monday, August 26, when the session of the Soviet parliament promised by the plotters on the first day of the coup finally convened in Moscow."¹⁷⁷

Yeltsin sent Rutskoy to Kiev to reason with the deputies; but he failed. And soon Kazakhstan, too, voted for independence. Yeltsin quickly understood which way the wind was blowing, and withdrew his objections to independence, as also his threat to redraw the boundaries between the two republics so as to include the Crimea and Donbass, with their large Russian populations, within Russia.

As summer passed into autumn, and it became clear that the Ukrainians were going to vote for independence in the referendum, only Gorbachev among the major players stood out against independence. For a time he was supported by his friend and admirer President Bush, still worried about nuclear proliferation if the Union should go under, as also by the prospect of civil war between the republics on the model of what was happening in Yugoslavia. However, by the end of November, under pressure from the Ukrainian lobby and the Defence department under Dick Cheney, he, too, had given in - to Gorbachev's great mortification. Gorbachev was still in control of the Soviet army and the Union ministries. But by a decree of November 30, Yeltsin withdrew funding for them. Without money, the Union was now all but dead.

As the power of the Soviet Union collapsed in Ukraine, so did that of the "Soviet Church" of the Moscow Patriarchate in the republic. The collapse was most significant and important in Western Ukraine, the most nationalist region, where the MP had recruited many of its clergy since the region's conquest by Stalin at the end of World War Two.

The MP's spiritual impotence was illustrated by its surrender of its western borderlands to the resurgent Uniates. As we have seen, at the council of Lvov in 1946 Stalin integrated the Uniates or Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC), who were Catholic by faith, but Orthodox in ritual, into the MP, and forced those Uniates who did not want to become Orthodox to go underground. When Gorbachev came to power, the Uniates began agitating for a restoration of their independence and the legalization of their Church. They were supported, surprisingly, by the chairman of the Council for

¹⁷⁷ Plokhyy, *op. cit.*, pp. 174-175.

Religious Affairs, Konstantin Kharchev, who insisted that local authorities keep the law in their dealings with believers and suggested the legalization of the Uniates and the free election of bishops. This roused the MP and others to complain about Kharchev to the Supreme Soviet. Kharchev was removed in June, 1989. But he made a telling comment about those who had removed him: "I suspect that some members of the Synod, from force of habit, have counted more on the support of the authorities than on their own authority in the Church."¹⁷⁸

The UGCC finally achieved legalization in January, 1990, just after Gorbachev met the Pope in Rome. This represented the second major diplomatic triumph of the Vatican in the communist bloc (after the legalization of Solidarity in Poland) and the beginning of the re-establishment of Catholic power in Russia. However, even before they had recovered their freedom in law, the Uniates started taking over churches in Western Ukraine which they considered to be theirs by right. By December, 1991, 2167 nominally Orthodox parishes had joined the Uniates. Deprived of the help of the local authorities, who showed every sign of being on the side of the uniates, and discredited by its associations with communism, the MP seemed helpless to stop the rot.¹⁷⁹

They were also helpless to stop the revival of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church... In October, 1989, a retired patriarchal bishop, Ioann Bondarchuk, announced the creation of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC). He was immediately placed under ban by the patriarchate. However, the patriarchate decided to make some concessions to Ukrainian nationalist feeling by creating, in January, 1990, a supposedly autonomous but pro-Moscow Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC-MP), led by Metropolitan Philaret (Denisenko) of Kiev. Later, Philaret was defrocked and anathematised by the MP, so he formed a third independent Orthodox Church in the Ukraine - the so-called "Kievan Patriarchate" (UOAC-KP).

Meanwhile, relations between the Orthodox and Catholics continued to deteriorate; and in March the Uniates withdrew from quadripartite discussions between Roman Catholics, Uniates, Russian Orthodox and the UOC-MP. Then, in June, the UAOC convened its first All-Ukrainian Council in Kiev, at which Mstyslav (Skrypnyk), who had been the leader of the Ukrainian autocephalists in the USA, was enthroned as the first patriarch in Ukrainian history. The UAOC received a further significant boost after the Ukraine achieved independence at the end of 1991.

In spite of tensions between the Orthodox and the Catholics, and between different Orthodox churches, the process of religious liberalization that was well under way throughout the Soviet Union continued also in Ukraine as the

¹⁷⁸ *Ogonek* (Little Fire), № 44, October, 1989; *Keston News Service*, № 339, 30 November, 1989, pp. 16-18; № 341, 11 January, 1990, pp. 13-14.

¹⁷⁹ One reason was that for years the MP had been teaching its seminarians, many of whom came from the Western Ukraine, that the Orthodox and the Catholics were "sister churches". 60% of those who joined the uniates graduated from Leningrad theological schools.

referendum on independence drew nearer.

Thus on November 20, 1991, the presidential candidate Leonid Kravchuk “addressed the first all-Ukrainian religious forum. The former self-described chief atheist of Ukraine (under his supervision, the ideology department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine oversaw the country’s religious organizations) asked forgiveness of religious leaders, not on behalf of the defunct party but on that of the state he now represented. As communism and atheism lost their ideological appeal and religion returned to the religious sphere, religious denominations began to play an ever more important role in society. Ukraine, which accounted for two-thirds of all Orthodox Christian parishes in the USSR and was home to most Soviet Protestants, was considered the Bible Belt of the Soviet Union. It had become a religious battleground with the arrival of perestroika and glasnost’. Kravchuk called for interreligious toleration and support for independence. He wanted religious leaders to work towards the independence of their religious institutions but to avoid strife in doing so. On November 20, leaders of sixteen religious organizations in Ukraine pledged their support for government policy on religion. It was, in effect, a gesture of support for independence.”¹⁸⁰

*

On December 1, 1991 a referendum on the Ukrainian parliament’s declaration of independence in August was held. Voters were asked “Do you support the Act of Declaration of Independence of Ukraine?” The text of the Declaration was included as a preamble to the question. The referendum was called by the Parliament of Ukraine to confirm the Act of Independence, which was adopted by the Parliament on 24 August 1991. Citizens of Ukraine expressed overwhelming support for independence. In the referendum, 31,891,742 registered voters (or 84.18% of the electorate) took part, and among them 28,804,071 (or 92.3%) voted “Yes”.¹⁸¹ The results of the referendum astounded everyone: over 90% of the electorate in a very high turn-out voted for independence. In the Russian-language provinces of Lugansk and Donetsk (the same provinces that in 2014 proclaimed that they were independent republics) the majorities were 83% and 77% respectively. Even in Crimea the majority was 54%. *Every single province of Ukraine, and all its nationalities, had voted for independence. This result spelled the end of the Soviet Union...*

In general, almost all Russians were strongly opposed to the separation of Russia from Ukraine, regarding the Russians, Ukrainians and Belorussians as essentially three parts of one Slavic race who should keep together on the basis of their closely related religion, culture and history. However, this was decidedly not the view of most Ukrainians. Orthodox believers felt especially strongly about this. Thus “the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church,” said Anatolius Krasikov, “is the expression of the resolute will of the

¹⁸⁰ Plokhly, *op. cit.*, p. 286.

¹⁸¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ukrainian_independence_referendum,_1991.

Ukrainian people to finally liberate itself from the imperial [Russian] Orthodox Church which is an instrument of spiritual oppression against the Ukrainian people, aiming at its complete russification and enslavement..."¹⁸²

Fired by similar sentiments in spite of his atheism, and armed with the results of the referendum, the newly elected President Kravchuk of Ukraine travelled to the Belavezha hunting lodge in Belarus to meet with his counterparts from Russia and Belarus. The avowed purpose was to sign a new Union treaty proposed by Gorbachev. But Kravchuk rejected that on the first day; in general, he would allow no treaty or agreement that included the word "Union".

On the second day, December 8, "the Slavic Trinity" of nations signed an "Agreement on the Establishment of a Commonwealth of Independent States [CIS]". This contained fourteen articles. "The three leaders agreed to create the Commonwealth and recognize the territorial integrity and existing borders of each now independent republic. They declared their desire to establish joint control over their nuclear arsenals. They also declared their willingness to reduce their armed forces and strive for complete nuclear disarmament. The prospective members of the Commonwealth were given the right to declare neutrality and nuclear-free status. Membership of the Commonwealth was open to all Soviet republics and other countries that shared the goals and principles declared in the agreement. The coordinating bodies of the Commonwealth were to be located not in Moscow - the capital of Russia, the old tsarist empire, and the vanishing USSR - but in Minsk, the capital of Belarus.

"The three leaders guaranteed the fulfillment of the agreements and obligations of the Soviet Union, while declaring Soviet laws null and void on the territory of their states from the moment the agreement was signed. 'The operation of agencies of the former USSR on the territory of members states of the Commonwealth is terminated,' read the final paragraph of the agreement. It was a natural concluding statement for a document that began with the following declaration: 'We, the Republic of Belarus, the Russian Federation (RSFSR), and Ukraine, as founding states of the USSR that signed the union treaty of 1922... hereby establish that the USSR as a subject of international law and a geopolitical reality ceases its existence.'"¹⁸³

The three leaders returned to their respective republics fearful for their own safety. They had reason: Gorbachev was still in charge of the army and the KGB, and could have imprisoned them for treason. However, Gorbachev, though very angry and refusing to recognize the legitimacy of the Belavezha Agreement, did nothing. Most importantly, Shaposhnikov, the Soviet Minister

¹⁸² "The Exarch vs. the Patriarch", *Novoe Vremia* (New Times), № 26, July, 1992, p. 13; in Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott, *Russia and the New States of Eurasia*, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 96.

¹⁸³ Plokhyy, *op. cit.*, pp. 308-309.

of Defence and *de facto* ruler of the army, decided to support Yeltsin, and soon became *Russian* Minister of Defence. Then, in the middle of December the American Secretary of State James Baker visited Moscow, received the assurance he needed about nuclear arms, and became convinced that the USSR was no more...

But one major problem remained: the attitude of the non-Slav and non-Baltic republics to the new Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). For various complicated reasons, they all agreed to join this necessary, albeit necessarily weak new centre. These reasons included the need to preserve economic ties between the republics, the need for some protection against Islamic fundamentalism in the non-Slavic republics (and even also in Russia, where trouble was brewing in Chechnya), and the potential for ethnic conflicts in the individual republics on the model of the conflicts that had broken out in Armenia and Adzerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, or of Moldova in Transnistria.

On December 21 the Presidents of eleven States, but excluding Gorbachev, met in Almaty. They "focused on two big subjects: the dissolution of the USSR and the creation of a new Commonwealth that would now include not three but eleven republics. It took the heads of the post-Soviet states only three and a half hours to agree on the principles of the new international structure, which would include most of what remained of the Soviet Union after the departure of the Balts. By 3:00 p.m. the final drafts of the agreements had been sent to the typists, and two hours later they were signed at an official ceremony. At the insistence of the Central Asian republics, the leaders of the post-Soviet states, including Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus, signed the declaration on the formation of the commonwealth anew. Now all present in Almaty were founding members of the Commonwealth.

"Most of the decisions were adopted on the initiative of the Russian delegation. First, the presidents agreed to form two coordinating institutions, the Council of Presidents and the Council of Prime Ministers. They also agreed to abolish all remaining Soviet ministries and institutions - an issue of paramount importance to Yeltsin in his ongoing struggle with Gorbachev. Russia also received the participants' approval to declare itself the successor to the USSR, which meant, among other things, permanent membership in the Security Council of the United Nations. The agreement on joint control of nuclear arsenals was in full accord with the scheme that Yeltsin had described to Baker a few days earlier in Moscow: only the president of Russia could authorize a launch of nuclear weapons, while the other presidents with a nuclear arsenal would be consulted but would have no technical ability to order a launch. By July, 1992, strategic and tactical nuclear weapons would be moved from Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan to Russia for disassembly. The leaders of the four nuclear republics, including Kravchuk, Nazarbayev, and Shushkevich, endorsed that solution..."¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁴ Plokhly, *op. cit.*, pp. 362-363.

On December 25, 1991, while the Americans were celebrating Western Christmas, the communist red flag came down for the last time over the Kremlin and the red, white and blue of Russia, which had also been Russia's pre-revolutionary flag, was raised in its stead. A few days later, the American President Bush, in his State of the Union address, "referred to the implosion of the Soviet Union in a year that had seen 'changes of almost biblical proportions,' declared that 'by the grace of God, America won the Cold War,' and announced the dawning of a new world order. 'A world once divided into two armed camps,' Bush told the joint session of the US Senate and House of Representatives, 'now recognizes one sole and preeminent power, the United States of America.' The audience exploded in applause..."¹⁸⁵

For the third time in seventy years the United States bestrode the globe like a colossus. All three victories – those of 1918, 1945 and 1991 - can plausibly be claimed to have been victories of American democracy over one or another species of totalitarianism. But the differences between them were important. In 1918 the proto-totalitarian state of Germany had been defeated, but it had been the Europeans who bore the main brunt of the cost, while Germany herself had been neither occupied, nor purged of her totalitarian spirit, which went on to grow in fierceness under Hitler, necessitating a second world war. Moreover, in the background then a new totalitarian empire, that of Soviet Russia, had been growing with equal speed and ferocity. In 1945 America's share in the final victory was much larger, and the demons of Nazi Germany and Japan were finally exorcised. But Germany's loss had been the Soviet Union's gain; and that empire was now at the height of its powers and more than ever dangerous, making the Cold War inevitable. In that war, America's share in the victory was larger still: the other western powers had contributed a little, but not much by comparison. Moreover, by 1991 none of the old totalitarian powers was left standing and only China, which had nipped the democratic virus in the bud on Tiananmen Square, appeared as a possible rival of the all-conquering Western democracies.

But there were disturbing resemblances between 1918 and 1991. Once again, the defeated power had not been occupied, nor its totalitarian spirit exorcised. As in 1918, so in 1991, the defeated power felt that it had been "stabbed in the back", betrayed by foreign and domestic enemies. To make things worse, it was still a nuclear power. In December, 1994 Russia, Ukraine, the United States and the United Kingdom signed "the Budapest Memorandum", thereby guaranteeing the territorial integrity of Ukraine, Belarus' and Kazakhstan in exchange for giving their nuclear weapons to Russia. This solved the problem of nuclear proliferation that had so worried the Americans. But it gave Russia still more power to blackmail its neighbours. And, as events in 2014 were to prove, Ukraine's territorial guarantees (like Czechoslovakia's in 1938) were not worth the paper they were written on...

¹⁸⁵ Serhii Plokhy, *The Last Empire. The Final Days of the Soviet Union*, London: Oneworld Publications, 2015, pp. xxvii-xxviii.

The Soviet Union appeared to be dead... But could “the Long War”, in Philip Bobbitt’s phrase, between democracy and totalitarianism, lasting from 1914 to 1991, really be over? Was there not a final battle still to be fought, whose consequences this time would surely be a nuclear holocaust wiping out most of humanity? As President Bush soberly noted, the prospects for such a war had dramatically receded, but they had not gone away completely... They had not gone away, fundamentally, because, on the one hand, of the wrath of man - the spirit of Soviet Russia was still alive and burning to avenge its defeat in the Cold War. And on the other hand because of the wrath of God - repentance for the terrible, unprecedented sins of the Soviet period had not been offered...

In the euphoria of this great, but incomplete and inevitably temporary triumph over evil, it was necessary to recall the words of the Apocalypse concerning the red beast: “And I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the earth marvelled and followed the beast” (Revelation 13.3).

The beast was wounded, but it was not yet dead...