After the Fall

By George Urban

It is, Mr. Chairman, a great pleasure and privilege to be able to share my thoughts with members of this distinguished gathering. The Heritage Foundation under the leadership of Ed Feulner is as well known and well respected in Europe as it is in the U.S. Its status and influence are rapidly on the rise, especially as so many of its policies have stood the test of time and contributed to the seismic events we have been recently witnessing in the former Soviet Union and in East/Central Europe. This brings me to the theme I want to address.

Did the Soviet system collapse under the pressure of democratic capitalism, or did it fall under the weight of its own absurdities, or both?

It would be flattering for many of us to think that *we* have done it, and it is in some significant ways true to say that we accelerated, even if we did not cause, the extinction of the Soviet model of "socialism." But the principal cause of the landslide in 1989 and, in the last four weeks, of the sudden collapse of Sovietism in the former U.S.S.R. must, in my view, be ascribed to the evils inherent in the system itself—to oppression, officially sanctioned violence, institutionalized lying and all-pervasive poverty. These were the hallmarks of Soviet socialism since its inception in 1917, and both Boris Yeltsin and Mikhail Gorbachev said as much on ABC television some two and a half weeks ago (September 6, 1991). "This experiment conducted on our soil was a tragedy," Yeltsin observed, to which Gorbachev added: "The model that was brought about in our country has failed, and I believe this is a lesson not only for our people but for all peoples." Nothing more significant has been said in the political world since Marx published the Communist Manifesto in 1848.

Indelible Imprint of Freedom. But, Mr. Chairman, we should go beyond Yeltsin and Gorbachev. What 1989 and 1991 have shown is that peoples that lived under despotic rule for half, or almost three-quarters, of a century, and have known nothing but distorted history; people who were denied the right to meet, to discuss and to worship in freedom; people who were debarred from any knowledge of alternative ways of thinking and being—that these people nevertheless carried in their souls an indelible imprint of freedom, truth and morality. They toppled an outwardly impregnable dictatorship because they knew it in their bones that the wrong they had been made to suffer was too great to be suffered any longer. Whatever the social-scientists may be telling us, it was basically as simple as that. It is Mikhail Gorbachev's historic achievement that, wittingly or unwittingly, he undermined the legitimacy of the Soviet system; but it was the nations of the Soviet empire and of Central and Eastern Europe that took the system by the throat and flung it (in the language of Marx) onto the dustheap of history.

Not so many years ago, Nikita Khrushchev warned us "we will bury you." History, Mr. Chairman, has chosen to go down a slightly different road. It was the Marxist-Leninist ideology that buried itself. It died (Hugh Trevor-Roper tells us) "quite suddenly, after a short spasm, in its own bed, apparently from natural, or at least internal, causes. It has reached its term—threescore years and ten—made its confession and passed away."[1]

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Orwell Disproved. There is cause here for celebration though not for gloating. The expiry of the system is proof enough that George Orwell's prediction was mercifully wrong, brain-washing and coercive persuasion do not ultimately work. The mind of Man is not an empty slate on which dictators and collective despotisms can inscribe their programs for us. Big Brother cannot watch all the people all the time. "Genghis Khan with the telegraph" is an antiquated threat in the age of high technology. Between the fall of 1989 and August 1991, liberty gained a whole range of fresh overtones which history will remember as surely as the French and American Revolutions.

But in what sense can it be said that we in the West made a contribution to the fall of the Soviet system? We did so, as I see it, in at least three different ways.

First, American rearmament under President Reagan, and especially the SDI project, conjured up for an already declining Soviet economy the prospect of so heavy an extra burden that the Soviet leadership was propelled to surrender Moscow's outposts in the colonial empire as well as its glacis in Central and Eastern Europe. In one important sense, *glasnost* and *perestroika* too were Gorbachev's responses to this pressure, although a strong argument can be made to show that Gorbachev, Shevardnadze, Yakovlev and other radicals had been intending to reduce or eliminate imperial over-extension in any case, recognizing that the Soviet Union was no longer in a position to take on the entire capitalist world plus China without inviting self-destruction. To put it in another way: President Reagan had caused the U.S.S.R. to spend itself into near-bankruptcy; and when bankruptcy began to loom, the U.S.S.R. sent itself into liquidation.

The second way in which we hastened the demise of the Soviet system has been by example: the mere existence of relatively rich and relatively free capitalist countries, side by side with the Soviet Union and its satellites, carried its own message. The spirit of rebellion grew from nothing more dramatic than geographic proximity. This was, of course, especially true of Western Europe where wealthy and on the whole well-managed countries such as Austria, Germany, the Scandinavian nations, Belgium, Holland, offered daily and highly damaging standards for comparison. What could be bought in Germany, spoken in France and printed in Holland could not be bought, spoken or printed in the U.S.S.R. or Poland. With *glasnost*, the abolition of jamming, growing economic links, cultural cross-fertilization and international travel, it proved no longer possible to isolate the Soviet system from the rest of the real world. Something had to give—and it did.

We can now see why Stalin and the Stalinists were, from their point of view, right to segregate their empire from the rest of humanity; for as soon at the Soviet model of Communism came to be exposed to the light of day, it withered and brought the empire down with it. Those who ignore human nature have no choice but to look to the police-state as their natural ally.

Far-Sighted Americans. Our third contribution to the fall of the Soviet system has been a deliberate policy of identification with the nations under Communist tutelage. Back in the early 1950s, far-sighted Americans recognized the need to equip Western—especially U.S.—foreign policy with a psychological arm to enable us to talk to the peoples of the extended Soviet empire. Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty were born under that dispensation.

They turned out to be (if I may say so as an interested party) one of the most successful political investments the U.S. has ever made, for much of World War III was fought and won in terms of ideas and culture—the very tools which these two Radios used on our behalf in the world-wide spiritual contest better known as the "Cold War." What was their function? They helped to prevent national consciousness from being wiped out by the homogenizing influence of Marxism-Le-

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1 *Sunday Telegraph*, September 8, 1991.

ninism—they helped to prevent Poles from being deprived of their history, Estonians of their culture, Ukrainians of their language and the Russian nation from being identified with the claims and practices of Communism.

Domestic Access. Let me say in passing that surrogate broadcasting (for that is how it has come to be known) did not carry universal approval, least of all by the American Left. Frequently, the two stations were under severe domestic attack, and we have in this room a very distinguished American, Ambassador Frank Shakespeare who, as Chairman of the Board for International Broadcasting, bore for some years the brunt of these attacks but never made concessions to them. We were accused of being "anti-Communist," of wanting to jeopardize the integrity of the Soviet state, of pitting polemical arguments against Soviet ideology. Hideous sins, these, don't you think? From time to time strange guidelines were imposed on us under the pressure of the liberal establishment—guidelines which some U.S. legislator would, I'm certain, now be happy to see expunged from the record. One of these said: "RFE/RL have no mandate to advocate the establishment or disestablishment of any particular system, form of state organization, or ideology In the areas to which they broadcast"[2]—please mark the wording: the disestablishment of any particular system or ideology.

In 1977-1978, John A. Gronouski, the Chairman of the Board for International Broadcasting, proposed that the RFE/RL should make airtime available to Soviet and East European officials "whenever they believe a program has violated our Statement of Mission, the Program Policy Guidelines or RFE/RL or the "Final Act" of the Helsinki Process. This access to American airwaves would, as he hoped, make the Communist powers think again and stop the jamming.[3]

Fortunately, Gronouski's suggestion was frustrated by Congress. An amendment to the BIB Act threatened to deny all funds to RFE/RL if the two Radios permitted a Communist country to use their broadcasting facilities without full reciprocity. But that such an attempt should have been made in the first place, and then by the Chairman of the Board, tells us something about the atmosphere in which the two radio stations had to operate in the 1970s.

Two-Front War. I remember Senator Claiborne Pell telling me with some irritation in the 1970s: "What are these radios about at a time of detente? You don't want to stir things up in Eastern Europe, do you?" or words to that effect. So our broadcasters had to do their jobs with one arm tied behind their backs. They had no difficulty dealing with the Soviet system, but they did have a hard time fending off the suspicions and vituperations of certain congressmen and the liberal press. Sometimes it was a war on two fronts—on the Elbe and the Potomac—of which the one fought along the Iron Curtain often struck me as much the less demanding.

The question that has now to be addressed is whether our victory means peace for the foreseeable future; more particularly whether the attempt to instil democracy in the former Soviet empire is likely to succeed and promote world peace.

Personally, I am far from being persuaded that the universal assimilation of democracy and the spread of the free-market will automatically secure the peace of the world, fashionable though it is to believe so. All we can say is that governments that do not oppress their own people are less likely to be aggressive to their neighbors than those that do. But that is all we *can* say. World War I (to take one example) was fought, in the West, between countries that shared a culture, had very similar and inter-dependent economies, almost identical social institutions and professed to be led by common Christian values and ideas. Yet young Frenchmen, Germans, Englishmen, Italians,

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2 From Guidelines for the 1970s and early 1980s, part 3.

3 Board for International Broadcasting, Fifth Annual Report, 1979, pp. 31-32.

Russians, Austrians, Americans and other supposedly "Christian" nations went on butchering one another for up to four years, at the end of which European civilization was close to self-annihilation.

Democracy and the free market do not, by themselves, guarantee peace. Power and the politics of power can be sufficient causes of war. The Peloponnesian war, as we learn from Thucydides, broke out because the growing capability of one side struck fear in the heart of the other. That was all: "... the real but unavowed cause [of the war] I consider to have been the growth of Athens, and the alarm which it inspired in Lacedaemon; this made war inevitable."[4] Nothing has happened in history since those distant days to invalidate the Greek historian's judgement.

What I'm saying is that even if we could be assured that democracy would quickly strike root in the former Soviet Union, we could not be assured that the power-competition between it and the Western world would quickly come to an end. I said "even if... "—but I am not clear whether we can be assured of the success of democracy in a post-Soviet federation. Democracy is a fairly new and exceptional phenomenon in the successive activities of Man; it has been known in only a small number of countries and for short periods of recorded history. Tyranny by one man or a ruling caste has been the normal thing in human affairs. The Soviet Union is just beginning to emerge from that unhappy but familiar tradition. We have to be prepared for protracted chaos, perhaps civil war, but certainly conflicts of varying intensity along ethnic and other fault-lines. Many of them are already in full swing, others are on the verge of bursting upon us.

One danger that may arise from the turbulent birth of a new Union is a militant, missionary Russian super-state; another a new, monolithic "socialist" federation attained by a more shrewdly thought-out hard-line coup than the one that ended so ignominiously on August 21, 1991. I would myself not rate the chances of such a coup occurring in the immediate future as very high, but given a harsh winter, little food or fuel in the shops, and public order in shreds, we would be well advised not to exclude it from our calculations.

Drummed Out of the Party. There are forces waiting in the wings ready to put the former Soviet empire back on the map reinforced by an element of 19th century-style nationalism. You may be amused to hear that on September 5, 1991, Nina Andreyeva, the renowned chemistry lecturer in what used to be Leningrad, and head of the self-proclaimed Bolshevik Platform, expelled Mr. Gorbachev from the Soviet Communist Party for (I quote) "betrayal of the cause of Lenin and the October Revolution, betrayal of the international workers' and Communist movement, the disintegration of socialist power, the destruction of Lenin's Party, for being a renegade, for double-dealing, for deceiving the workers, and for demagogy." She said that the August coup had been jointly scripted by Gorbachev and Yeltsin and that it was an "operetta coup."

Meanwhile the first underground meeting of Soviet Communists, including two members of the former Central Committee, took place in a Moscow apartment under conditions of strict secrecy.[5]

At a more serious level, we hear the voice of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, a former RSFSR presidential candidate and head of the Liberal Democratic Party who garnered some months ago an unexpectedly large number of votes in his contest with Boris Yeltsin. On September 3, 1991, he made the following observations: "Sixty million people will vote for me [at the next Presidential elections], and all I need to win is 52 million. If I win, a new SCSE [Emergency Committee] will be set up. I will immediately introduce a state of emergency, close all newspapers and disband all parties." Zhirinovskiy then said he was sure the people would support him. "What else can they do?

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4 *The Peloponnesian War*, Book i: 23.

5 BBC Monitoring, September 12, 1991.

A severe winter is threatening and the shadow of famine and strikes is looming. There will be trouble in army barracks. At a time like this, the current leaders have nothing to offer the people. But I will give them everything. I will use a simple method: I will put troops into what was the GDR, one million five hundred thousand of them. I'll rattle my weapons, including nuclear weapons, and it will turn out all right." When a journalist drew a parallel with Hitler, the leader of the Liberal Democrats answered: "Adolf was an illiterate lance corporal, but I graduated from two higher educational establishments and I speak four languages."

We do not know what significance to ascribe to such articulations, but the Soviet jungle is teeming with rogue elephants, and we'd better be prepared for surprises,

Some of these considerations raise the delicate question of whether a powerful post-Soviet union (or federation) is more in the Western interest, and better for world peace, than a fragmented and weak successor state. President Bush and Chancellor Kohl have both stated that they would prefer a strong central government "with which it would be possible to deal confidently." I find this surprising. Happily, the speed of events in Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, the Baltic states and elsewhere has been such that our influence on shaping the re-distribution of power in the former U.S.S.R. is limited. The Soviet Union has fallen apart. The hardliners' coup has backfired to such remarkable effect that a collapse that might have taken several more years to reach its climax under Gorbachev Mark I was completed in little over two weeks under Gorbachev Mark II, with Yeltsin in the driving seat. It was indeed, as Gorbachev put it, "a cleansing thunder." The plotters' incompetence has achieved what the armed might of the Western world could not have achieved without fearful losses, and what therefore the Western world would never have attempted. They have put us profoundly in their debt.

Foolish-Looking U.S. But what about the argument that the U.S. and the West are more comfortable dealing with a strong central power than with a large group of Republics? "Comfortable" is the right word. Never underestimate the inertia and lack of imaginative foresight of the State Department and other Western foreign ministries. Whoever advised President Bush to castigate national separatism in Kiev on the eve of Ukrainian independence; whoever advised Secretary Baker to advocate support for the unity of a Communist-dominated Yugoslavia on the eve of Yugoslavia's disintegration; whoever saw to it that the U.S. Government was 37th in recognizing the independence of the Baltic states, bears a heavy responsibility for having made the United States of America look foolish in the eyes of the world. I readily concede that it is simpler for our bureaucrats to deal with officials and military men they have known all their lives than with a collection of Uzbeks, Moldavians and Latvians. But that is not what statesmanship is about. I concur with Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick who wryly observed toward the end of her U.N. embassy that even the most inspired American foreign policy initiatives tend to end up in lawyers and bureaucrats talking to lawyers and bureaucrats.

It will be obvious by now, Mr. Chairman, that I do not agree with the view that a strong post-Soviet center is in the American or Western interest. For 46 years, and arguably longer, we have been working for the dissolution of the Soviet system and the weakening of its monolithic foreign policy. We gave aid and comfort to the despicable President Ceausescu and to the despotic Marshal Tito precisely because our officials thought that Ceausescu and Tito were an impediment to the power of Moscow. For 46 years we promoted the Rights of Man and more recently Human Rights under a whole series of resounding declarations. We stated again and again that we stood for national self-determination, and indeed we did a great deal to promote the national self-confidence of all nations, large and small, within the extended Soviet empire.

Miraculously, all these policies have now attained their objectives, but lo and behold, some of our political leaders are unhappy. They have suddenly discovered that they want a powerful Soviet

center after all, an unfractured Soviet foreign policy, self-confident Marshals and Generals to run the Soviet military and a Yeltsin who does not get in the way of Gorbachev. They haven't (yet) said that they prefer a strong KGB too. The lack of understanding and statesmanship that lurks behind such sentiments gives me concern. It smacks of the thinking that caused the premature termination of the Gulf War—"beat them, but don't beat them too hard lest we upset world stability."

Sense of Proportion. But, Mr. Chairman, any instability we may now see arising from the ruins of the Soviet empire has been caused, not by the disintegration of the Soviet system, but by its long survival. Instability has arisen from the despotism of the Communist Party, not its disappearance; from the presence of Soviet troops in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, not their withdrawal; from the imposition of Marxism-Leninism, of corrupt thinking and false values, not from their elimination.

We must keep a sense of proportion: the collapse of the Soviet system and the Soviet empire is the greatest blessing that has befallen mankind since the end of World War II. Whatever instability it may bring with it (and it is bound to bring some), we should embrace as the fruit of victory—and then deal with it. But the whining must stop.

That said, let me end by observing that I am not deaf to the pleas of our military leaders who fear the nuclear and social unpredictability of a many-headed federal or confederal state and the foreign policy confusions that might follow. These are, indeed, vital considerations and must be addressed. A new dispensation in foreign affairs, a two-tier approach to the new Union, a multiplication of diplomatic links, pressure groups and alliances is inevitable. But this sort of thing happened after the collapse of every modern empire. It happened most notably after the dismemberment of the Hapsburg empire in 1918-1919. Americans did not then say that Vienna and Budapest should remain strong centers; indeed, rightly or wrongly, they said the opposite and created Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. I cannot see why a dispersion of Soviet power should overtax our ingenuity or resources or disturb the balance of power more radically than it was disturbed by the fall of the House of Hapsburg, or the British and French empires—which was, of course, radical enough.

As far as strategic nuclear control is concerned, this is, we have been repeatedly assured, entirely in the hands, and will remain in the hands, of the High Command under the Union President, and is therefore said to be safe. In principle, this is fine, provided that the Ukraine and Kazakhstan agree, provided that the Federal President is democratically accountable, democratically elected, and a man conscious of his responsibilities in the nuclear age.

This means satisfying four difficult "ifs," and building our confidence on the ability of Gorbachev, Yeltsin, Sobchak, Shevardnadze, Popov, and like-minded radical reformers to win free elections. My opinion is that they will win such elections and the central control of the nuclear arsenal will be undisturbed. But we cannot be sure. Should Vyacheslev Chornovil, leader of the Western Ukraine, go on insisting that nuclear weapons on Ukrainian soil must come under Ukrainian control, or should men of the stamp of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy be voted into power or attain power in some other way, then all bets are off and the Western Alliance may have to go back to the drawing board.

But there is also a wider consideration militating against Western support for a strong "Soviet" center. However much we may fear a proliferation of fingers on the Soviet nuclear trigger, it would be wrong for us to say or to imply that governments that control a nuclear arsenal must be strong governments with which we can reliably do business. For that would encourage inequitable third world dictatorships to double their efforts to acquire nuclear weapons in the belief that, once they had accumulated the means of terror, the U.S. government and other Western governments would have no choice but to deal with them and condone their rule. Words reverberate way be-

yond the lawns of Kennebunkport. Calling for a strong center in Moscow under present conditions might produce highly unwanted consequences elsewhere in the world.

We certainly have a stake in democratic rule and a prosperous free market economy throughout the lands of the former U.S.S.R. What is more, we can, if we so choose, have a limited but important influence in bringing these things about.

Whatever the leading industrial nations ultimately decide about offering the former Soviet states long-term structural aid and knowhow, I have no doubt that the immediate, short-term provision of food, fuel, medicines and other consumer essentials is not only a duty we cannot ignore, but also a compelling Western interest. A famine-led anarchy can only generate the sort of totalitarian, fanatical nationalist rule that Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and other Zhirinovskiys forecast. Please remember that if, after World War I, the victorious powers had made a fraction of the concessions to the democratic Weimar Republic that they later made to appease Hitler, Nazism might never have arisen.

Keeping Our Powder Dry. In sum, our foreign policy should now aim for a democratically elected, fully accountable central authority of clear but limited powers. It should be strong enough to secure the control of the Soviet nuclear arsenal and respect for international agreements, but not strong enough to become a threat to the new federation's constituent or associated Republics, or to the recently self-liberated nations of Central and Eastern Europe, much less to NATO. This will require monitoring the evolution of the new federation or confederation with great skill and shaping our relations with the center and individual republics at several levels according to the needs of international peace and our own interests. The former Soviet Union is now weak in all things except its armed forces. We want to see it prosper in all things except its armed forces. We should try to keep it weak in areas where weakness is of use to us and give it calculated support where strength is of universal benefit.

At home, Mr. Chairman, this means brushing up our Kazakh, Armenian and Georgian, swapping bureaucrats for thinkers, persuading the President to be more sagacious in the appointment of American Ambassadors to certain countries in the East—and keeping our powder dry.

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