

1991

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ENTANGLED FOREVER

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If communism is dead," Irving Kristol pointed out to the 1990 gathering of the Committee for the Free World, "then anticommunism is dead, too." This is true in a way of a tautology—*per definitionem*. Alas, there is more than a vacuous truism to this proposition. For it puts the axe to the roots of almost half a century of American foreign policy.

Or does it?

Realpolitikers would fiercely deny such a lapidary DOA pronouncement. They would insist that anticommunism was but the icing on the cake, rich as it was. American foreign policy since 1945 has followed interest rather than ideology, and so the former will outlive the latter. Cut through the anticommunist clamor, they would contend, and you discern the classic behavior of a normal great power.

Their rebuttal might continue along these lines: The end of American innocence came as early as 1947—when Britain abdicated responsibility for embattled Greece.

With Stalin set on expansion, and Britain and France—both exhausted—out of the equation, the United States had to assume the burden of the balance for good. No longer could the United States withdraw behind the cozy barrier of the Atlantic (and the fog of idealist *pronunciamento*). Like the great powers of yore, America was now irrevocably stuck in the self-help system that is the essence of world politics, and so it had to obey the system's eternal rules. Which it did—consciously or not. True, the Truman Doctrine, the founding document, was enveloped in the grandiloquent oratory of antitotalitarianism. So were NATO, SEATO, et al., those Cold War alliances thrown up around the Soviet Union. But in essence, these were the time-honored tools of power politics—coalitions sponsored by the United States in order to constrain the one and only rival who threatened America's physical security.

Move and countermove, thrust and parry, became the choreography of a stylized, sometimes bloody “grand strategy” that Americans had always learned to despise as the game of princes and despots. But “containment” was the same game nonetheless. Whether it came to coalition-building (as in NATO) or coalition war (as in Korea), whether the crisis was over Berlin or Cuba—all the way down to the Euromissile Battle of the 1980s—the United States acted as great powers have always done: so as to balance or best its existential foe.

By way of Q.E.D., our realpolitiker would conclude: The power of Soviet Russia and not the threat of communism was the motivating force of postwar American foreign policy. How else would we explain our long-term love affair with the communist despots of China, which even the Tiananmen massacre could not interrupt? How else would we explain our “policy of differentiation” in communist

Eastern Europe which ranged us along such sterling characters as Nicolae Ceausescu? Indeed, if the real game was value rather than balance, why did America fall into bed with a long succession of nasties from Chiang Kai-shek to Manuel Noriega (before he was fingered as a drug lord)?

If the realpolitikers are right, then all is not lost now that “communism is dead” and Mikhail Gorbachev is dragging his country into democracy and the free market. If Russian power rather than Soviet ideology is the problem, then America's purpose must still address itself to the great existential threat embodied by Moscow. Communism might disappear, but thermonuclear weapons and vast conventional forces will not. (Precisely for this reason, even a disintegrating Muscovite empire will pose the single most important danger for world stability and American security.) Russian democracy would change hardball into softball, but not the rules themselves (which, at any rate, must always take into account a reversion to yesterday's pitching and slugging). Alas, in spinning this tale, the realpolitiker has left out a critical part. Democracies do not like realpolitik, and none has disliked it more than America, the oldest democracy which was founded in revulsion against the “corrupt game of princes” that was Europe's bloody lot.

In their own minds, Americans never went to war to uphold the balance of power, let alone for glory or booty. What really riled them in their first war was the “Cruelty & Perfidy” of George III—above and beyond his “plundering our seas [and] ravaging our Coasts.” When America at last entered the war against Germany in 1917 and 1941, the nation did not think about the European balance but about the sheer evil of Kaiser Bill and Adolf Hitler. Nor was Russian power the problem that galvanized American

society during the Cold War; it was the *ideological* enemy as embodied in the persons of Stalin and his successors.

Writing about "Democracy in America," Tocqueville reminds us of the basic reason: "There are two things that a democratic people always will find very difficult—to begin a war and to end it." In other words: Democracies do worst in the twilight zone between war and peace. Unless they are roused by great passions or great ideologies, they turn their backs on "reason of state." Yet once they are so roused, they similarly ignore the subtle intricacies of diplomacy. Instead, they will fight to the bloody finish when the foe is at last crushed as prelude to his moral-political reform.

Indeed, reason of state or the "primacy of foreign policy" are fundamentally alien to the democratic spirit. They imply a realm of policy that is above and beyond the fray of democratic politics. If the people are the sovereign, *no* issue must be excluded from the public debate. The very idea of the "primacy of foreign policy" is antidemocratic because it presumes a "national interest" defined and guarded by an elite not beholden to the normal democratic contest.

Finally, the principles of democracy do not mesh too well with those of diplomacy. Diplomacy must be subtle; democracy lives by the rough and tumble of domestic politics. Democratic politics is to choose between stark alternatives, either ideological or personal; diplomacy is a game of ambiguous rules and stark dilemmas that are not so much resolved as muted or suspended. Democracy obeys the rule of law; diplomacy is the art of ruse and reinsurance. Democratic politics thrives on publicity and public discourse. Diplomacy must act with circumspection and secrecy, frequently pretending one objective (portrayed as lofty) even as it pursues another (which happens to be quite self-serving).

In short, democracies do not like Clausewitz. It is either total peace or total war, be it hot or cold. If suitably galvanized by an ideological threat and moral purpose, they will "pay any price" and "bear any burden," as John F. Kennedy put it, but they will not move smoothly along the "Clausewitzian continuum" where ideology means little and power everything, where diplomacy and force are but shades of one and the same spectrum of choices.

Yet if the Cold War (a.k.a. the ideological threat) is over, then we have a problem. Neo-isolationists could point to the collapse of Soviet power, declare victory, and go home. Internationalists could point to the collapse of communism, declare the "end of history," and also join the homeward trek. Both sides would unite in the conviction that America no longer needs to sustain the struggle—indeed, remain chained to the world—because the threat had vanished. Isolationists would feel safe in physical insulation; internationalists would conclude that the vision of the Enlightenment had at last come true. Since only despots make war, while democracies are inherently pacific, international politics henceforth will be reduced to global domestic policy. Welfare, not warfare, will shape its rules; global threats like ozone holes and pollution will dictate the agenda—and cooperation, to boot.

Realpolitikers ignore the domestic side of democratic foreign policy and pooh-pooh change. Idealpolitikers fall for the opposite temptation. Believing, as had Jefferson, that there is "but one system of ethics for men and for nations," they are always quick to spot a new "paradigm" in the making while ignoring that states, no matter what their constitution, remain chained to the self-help system. Whereas the citizen can *assume* security, the state cannot. In the self-help system, great conflicts like the Cold War

may abate, even vanish—but not so the necessity to worry about security, status, and position. Old conflicts might return, new conflicts might supersede them. Even in peace, nations cannot take tranquility for granted as long as they live in a “state of nature” lacking both an arbiter of conflict and enforcer of peace.

The existence of *states* defines the essence of the game. Whence it follows that only their disappearance could usher in a new paradigm of global politics. Yet despite the onslaught of trans-, sub-, and supranational forces, the nation-state is alive and well. And so, the old rules of the self-help system will survive, too. Nor do the retraction of Soviet power and the collapse of Soviet ideology change the fundamentals. Even without its far-flung empire, Russia will still be the largest country on earth. Even with a democratic political culture, nuclear-armed Russia will still be the only country that can annihilate the United States.

Has nothing changed then? This is not the real issue. If completed, the democratization of the Soviet Union certainly would remove the peculiar intensity that attended the conflict in decades past. If continued, the retraction of Soviet power will remove many sources of the struggle—above all in Europe, the original and foremost arena of the Cold War, where the forward projection of Soviet power was the *casus belli*. Yet waning stridency and diminishing stakes do not signify the end of conflict, let alone the end of the self-help system. And so, there is no exit for the United States.

First, take the Soviet Union. Though lily-white democrats they might yet become, the heirs of Lenin and Stalin will still preside over the greatest military power apart from the United States. Though the competition will be muted

and encased by cooperation, one thing will and cannot change: Unless the USSR self-destructs or another super-power arises, only America and Russia can extinguish each other. That is an existential fact with consequences. It limits both trust and cooperation, and it will keep the game of containment and counter-containment going. Each must still keep a wary eye on the other, and each must take care that his competitor-partner does not accumulate too many assets that might yet be turned to malign uses. And so, American policy must still harken the commands of the self-help system, cooperating where it can and competing where it must.

Second, take the international system. Twenty years after the first wave of “multipolarism,” whose proponents declared the death of bipolarity and the birth of a tri- or quintapolar world, there is now the sequel with the subtitle “The Decline of American Power.” The obvious need not be gainsaid. The United States is good merely for a quarter of the gross global product, and no longer for one-half. Germany (plus the EC) and Japan are serious, though still much smaller, commercial competitors, and there are at least five nuclear powers. As force has become less fungible, other “currencies” of influence have moved to the fore; power in general has become more diffused. Yet in a critical respect, the world is more “unipolar” than ever.

As was true twenty years ago, the United States is the only nation present at each gaming table—the strategic, the conventional military, the diplomatic, economic, and ideological-cultural. And at each table, it is the dominant player to boot. The Soviet Union was always a developing country with thermonuclear weapons; today, it is an economic basket case which has lost even its ideological trump card. To make this case is not to crow but to stress

the special responsibility that has devolved upon America as its existential rival is deflating.

Nor are the new centers of power—Germany, Japan, China—ready to assume the burden of global management. China is a societal earthquake waiting to happen. Germany has its hands full with reunification and thereafter will be busy with its many conflicting obligations between EC integration and *Mittleuropa*, between pacifying and containing Russia. Japan will have to come to grips with the sharpening tensions between consumerism and mega-mercantilism before even beginning to contemplate an autonomous strategic role in East Asia. The mighty yen and deutschemark can always bring down the American dollar, beholden as it is to the German interest rate and to Japanese bond hoarders. But neither Japan's Ministry of International Trade and Industry nor the Bundesbank can deal with Soviet SS-24 missiles, Lithuanian separatists, or Iraqi poison gas.

Which brings us to the third reason why there is no exit for the United States. As the previous dominant conflict (a.k.a. the Cold War) is declining, many lesser ones (with a heavy growth potential) are jostling to take the Cold War's place. Here is an abbreviated checklist: the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Iraqi ambitions, Libyan mischief, economic catastrophe in Eastern Europe, Yugoslavia's explosion, Arab-Israeli war, nuclear and poison-gas proliferation, Islamic fundamentalism, the collapse of the marvelous Western economy that stretches from Frankfurt via New York to Tokyo. Take your pick and try to imagine any crisis management minus the United States.

To all of this, a neo-isolationist might rightfully reply: "You have made the *world's* case for America's entanglement. But what's in it for the *United States*?" The point is

well taken. To shoulder the burden would require a sense of responsibility that is costly and not self-evident to a society unwilling to sustain *les vastes entreprises* (as de Gaulle put it) in the absence of an overweening ideological threat. Moreover, many items on the checklist of conflict do not undermine the isolationist creed because such crises do not necessarily affect American physical security. Let the Europeans take care of Qaddafi. Yugoslavia '90 is not Sarajevo '14; today, no great power will start World War III because of Serbian nationalism.

The counterreply is an old one. If you don't believe that power is destiny, then how about: "What is good for the world is good for America?" While it is true that a nuclear-armed United States can assure its own security (as it always could), great powers have interests which transcend their national space, requiring order beyond borders. Conflict in Yugoslavia may not spill over; conflict in the Middle East, a strategic locale harboring a strategic resource (oil), has a nasty habit of attracting outsiders. Europe may be on the road to pacification, but it is not foreordained that the Continent can take care of itself.

The underlying problem has hardly vanished. There is Russia, larger and militarily more potent than anybody else, and there is Germany, the biggest economic player at the fulcrum of the European balance which is now being liberated from the fetters of dependence the Cold War has wrought. On the other hand, there is an abiding American interest in European order for reasons both strategic and economic (which this analysis assumes to be self-evident). If the past 120 years are a guide, Germany and Russia are not the ideal comanagers. When they have not been at each other's throat, they have conspired against the rest while simultaneously trying to weaken each other. By contrast,

Europe has flourished, as after 1945, when a power stronger than both was ensconced in the system. That power was, and remains, America.

The United States need not be there with 300,000 troops once force levels come down everywhere. But given America's stake in a prosperous and peaceful Europe, the United States ought to play the same role tomorrow as it did yesterday: as protector and pacifier from within. America on the inside would hold the balance against a diminished, but still potent Soviet Union. And in so doing, the United States would pull the sting of German power, thus allowing the entire continent to acquire the cooperative habits that came to bless Western Europe in the past forty years. It should not be assumed that an autochthonous order will arise, just because the Cold War structures are crumbling. Renationalization and the return to pre-1945 modes of behavior are just as likely in the absence of an Atlantic anchor.

But what if there is a "new paradigm" in the making—with welfare shouldering aside warfare? That would add, rather than subtract, reasons for America living up to its Number One role. Twenty years ago, exports came to 4 percent of American GNP; today, that proportion has more than doubled. At the same time, America's vulnerability to global economic forces (interest rates, capital movements, protectionism) has soared. While the United States can no longer dominate the world economy, its two closest competitors (Germany-EC and Japan) are neither willing nor able to assume the burden of global management that underlies the marvelous resilience of the Western economy. By virtue of size and position, the United States remains the hub. That role and new vulnerabilities hardly counsel self-sufficiency because the United States

will suffer more than most if free trade and monetary stability collapse. But there is more: Precisely because the United States has accumulated new economic handicaps in the 1970s and 1980s, it must not abandon its politico-strategic assets. Being present in Europe, for instance, gives the United States a more audible say in economic decision-making than from a solitary perch across the Atlantic.

Granted, but why should Washington bomb Qaddafi, stop Iraqi nuclear ambitions, fiddle with Messrs. Shamir and Arafat, "resocialize" Iran, democratize Nicaragua, and seek a settlement in Cambodia? The answer is twofold. First, while peace and the "new paradigm" might yet rule over the "northern" world that stretches eastward from San Francisco to Vladivostok, the "old paradigm"—ambition, fear, and violence—is alive and well everywhere else. Second, these conflicts have a way of impinging on the United States. Iraqi nuclear weapons may pose threats at one step removed, but when Pan Am 103 explodes over Lockerbie, the challenge is direct, brutal, and bloody.

Wherever the "old paradigm" persists, American interests will be affected. Nor could American interests be scaled down like those, say, of Canada, in order to get out of harm's way. The United States is too big, too visible, and too much of a weight in the balance to revert to the role Tocqueville had described thus: "The country is as much removed from the passions of the Old World by its position as by its wishes, and it is called upon neither to repudiate nor to espouse them"; hence "the foreign policy of the United States . . . consists more in abstaining than in acting." Yet today, even abstention will have consequences for the world and then for America itself, and so there is no exit.

Finally, there is also *pleasure* in being Number One. To exert power is better than suffering it; to be at the helm is

better than hunkering down in the hold. With the Soviet Union (temporarily) receding from the world scene, the United States need not respond to each and every change by treating it as harbinger of bigger and worse things to come. There will be some safety in indifference, and not every crisis need be approached as if it were a wholly owned subsidiary of American diplomacy. But the death of communism spells neither the birth of a new order nor the end of conflict. It is the great powers that build and maintain international order, and those who shape it most also gain most. With the decline of the Soviet Union, there is only one truly great power left in the system. Therein lies the purpose and the profit of American power at the threshold of the twenty-first century.

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A NORMAL COUNTRY IN A NORMAL TIME

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It is the first time since 1939 that there has been an opportunity for Americans to consider what we might do in a world less constrained by political and military competition with a dangerous adversary. The United States arrives at the end of the Cold War with some obvious assets. We are a powerful, affluent country with real strengths, great but limited resources, some bad habits, and a few real problems. We have virtually no experience in protecting and serving our interests in a multipolar world in which diverse nations and groups of nations engage in an endless competition for marginal advantages. This is precisely the kind of world now taking shape.

Assuming our resources and their limits—what kinds of goals should Americans and the U.S. government pursue in this post-Cold War period in which there is no pressing need for heroism and sacrifice? Some