

The End of the Cold War

Raymond L. Garthoff

For over four decades after World War II international affairs were dominated by the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. While there were times—particularly in the 1970s—when tensions between these two superpowers seemed to ease, conflicts persisted until the mid-1980s. In 1985 Mikhail Gorbachev rose to power in the Soviet Union and initiated major reform policies: *glasnost* (political and cultural openness) and *perestroika* (economic restructuring). Major changes within the Soviet Union, in other eastern European countries, and in international affairs streamed from these policies. By 1991 the Soviet Union had lost control over the states of Eastern Europe and was itself disintegrating—the Cold War was over. In the following selection, Raymond L. Garthoff analyzes the roles played by Gorbachev and American diplomacy in ending the Cold War.

CONSIDER: Why, according to Garthoff, Gorbachev set out deliberately to end the Cold War; what sorts of perceptions influenced American foreign policy during the Cold War according to Garthoff; what other factors might help to explain why the Cold War ended.

In the final analysis, only a Soviet leader could have ended the Cold War, and Gorbachev set out deliberately to do so. Although earlier Soviet leaders had understood the impermissibility of war in the nuclear age, Gorbachev was the first to recognize that reciprocal political accommodation, rather than military power for deterrence or “counterdeterrence,” was the defining core of the Soviet Union’s relationship with the rest of the world. The conclusions that Gorbachev drew from this recognition, and the subsequent Soviet actions, finally permitted the Iron Curtain to be dismantled and ended the global confrontation of the Cold War.

Gorbachev, to be sure, seriously underestimated the task of changing the Soviet Union, and this led to policy errors that contributed to the failure of his program for the transformation of Soviet society and polity. His vision of a resurrected socialism built on the foundation of successful *perestroika* and *demokratizatsiya* was never a realistic possibility. A revitalized Soviet political union was beyond realization as well. Whether Gorbachev would have modified his goals or changed his means had he foreseen this disjunction is not clear, probably even to him. In the external political arena, however, Gorbachev both understood and successfully charted the course that led to the end of the Cold War, even though in this arena, too, he almost certainly exaggerated the capacity for reform on the part of the Communist governments in Eastern Europe.

As the preceding discussion suggests, the Western and above all the American role in ending the Cold War was necessary but not primary. There are a number of reasons for this conclusion, but the basic one is that the American worldview was derivative of the Communist world-view. Containment was hollow without an expansionist power to contain. In this sense, it was the Soviet threat, real or imagined, that generated the American dedication to waging the Cold War. . . .

American policymakers were guilty of accepting far too much of the Communist worldview in constructing an anti-Communist antipode, and of being too ready to fight fire with fire. Indeed, once the Cold War became the dominant factor in global politics (and above all in American and Soviet perceptions), each side viewed every development around the world in terms of its relationship to that great struggle, and each was inclined to act according to a self-fulfilling prophecy. The Americans, for example, often viewed local and regional conflicts of indigenous origins as Cold War battles. Like the Soviets, they distrusted the neutral and non-aligned nations and were always more comfortable when countries around the world were either allies or the satellites and surrogates of the other side. Thus, many traditional diplomatic relationships not essentially attendant on the superpower rivalry were swept into the vortex of the Cold War, at least in the eyes of the protagonists and partly by their actions.

Source: Raymond L. Garthoff, “Why Did the Cold War Arise, and Why Did It End?” in *The End of the Cold War: Its Meaning and Implications*, Michael J. Hogan, ed. (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 131–32.

The Collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe

Carol Skalnik Leff

Many scholars have concentrated on the causes for the collapse of communism and the significance of the end of the Cold War. Also of great historical importance are the transformations within the states of Eastern Europe that stem

SOURCE: Carol Skalnik Leff, *The Czech and Slovak Republics: Nation Versus State* (New York: Westview Press (HarperCollins), 1997), p. 103.

from those developments. To varying degrees, these nations have embarked on experiments in parliamentary government and capitalism. In the following selection, Carol Skalnik Leff examines this new Europe created by the collapse of Communism.

CONSIDER: *The new connections between Western and Eastern Europe; what Leff means by the effort of Central European countries to "return to Europe"; future prospects in this area of the world.*

The collapse of European communism has not only created a new post-cold war global order; it has also created a new Europe in which the cold war divisions are eroding under the impact of a series of modest but persistent experiments in democratization and marketization in the east. It is no longer possible to study Western Europe without paying serious attention to the transformations under way in Eastern Europe. This is true for several reasons, the most dramatic of which occupy the headlines in the form of violent regional instability in the former Yugoslavia and the former Soviet Union. Before 1989, Western Europe was insulated from such upheavals and their spillover effects by Soviet dominance in the region. The collapse of communism meant the end of this insulation—and the need to respond to conflicts with which existing institutions like NATO were not designed to deal. However, an equally important reason to pay attention to the east is the sustained effort of Central European countries to "return to Europe" by pursuing the unprecedented goal of converting communist economies into capitalist economies and redesigning moribund political institutions into functioning democratic mechanisms. In sometimes overly optimistic anticipation of success, these formerly communist countries are already lined up outside the doors of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU), hoping for admission into a community of prosperity and security that none of these small and vulnerable countries can achieve alone.

Individually, none of these countries will have the international significance of a China or Russia. But their collective destinies will shape the future contours of European power as a whole, either adding to its political and economic weight or subtracting from it by deflecting attention and resources to regional conflict management. . . .

The use of the term postcommunist is also, however, a reminder that what we see is not necessarily describable as democracy or capitalism simply because it is no longer communist. We know what these regimes are in transition from—from authoritarian communist regimes. We do not know what they are in transition to, and it is too soon to be sure that any or all of the efforts under way will turn out to culminate in economic and political regimes that resemble

the ones we call capitalist and democratic elsewhere. Some may succeed in replicating the Western European models sufficiently well to join the European Union and other Western institutions and to be studied comparatively as variants of European politics. Others may revert to authoritarian rule, but it will still be a *postcommunist* authoritarian rule, like that of Slobodan Milošević in Serbia, that builds on nationalism more than on socialism, and includes some features of competitive politics (an opposition press, for example, or electoral competition). Still others may find themselves suspended in limbo between the former authoritarian politics and the achievement of a stable, legitimate democracy. Scholars of democratization talk about "unconsolidated" democracies that lurch from free election to free election without ever achieving governments that can govern well or gain popular acceptance and legitimacy. Many of the trappings of democracy are there, but the system does not work, and it stumbles from crisis to crisis, often reliant on emergency executive power instead of bargaining and compromise. Russia might turn out to be such a case. Or there are cases where the system achieves relative stability but is not fully democratized because certain political forces are barred from achieving any real power in the system, and others (the military or former communists, for example) exercise democratically unaccountable power behind the scenes. Romania or some of the states of the former Soviet Union might fall into this category.