

The New Commonwealth

Description

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For anyone who has followed closely the events in Eastern Europe for the past thirty years, the systematic absence of one possible scenario from the mainstream media dialog is baffling – namely that today's Russian troubles may be only a shield behind which a more powerful regeneration is in progress. The New York Times Magazine, August 10 1997, brings up one of many questions to which modern history awaits a convincing answer. On the occasion of former Defense Secretary McNamara's revisiting Vietnam, it reminds us of one such unelucidated inconsistency: "If the reason [for the war in Vietnam] was to fight communism, why did the U.S. not help China in 1949, or why did the U.S. not help the Batista regime in Cuba in 1959?"

There are indeed significant and puzzling inconsistencies in the story of the Soviet Union's "collapse." Consider the artfulness, bordering on the Machiavellian, and the lengthy effort that went into its demise and one has sufficient grounds for a different tale. The process of "collapse," basically from 1983 on, came about as the country's establishment applied blow after blow to the highly coherent and resilient Soviet system. The most intriguing aspect of this incredible series of events is that behind it was the political will of the elite – the Soviet elite who had decided that the Soviet system must be dismembered, while the so-called disgruntled masses played a minor role. That amounts, but only on a superficial look, to the impression that the elite itself might have voluntarily decided to dismantle and demobilize its own lines of defense and submit to a condition of servitude to the rest of the world. On the contrary, I am not only in agreement those who ascribe perestroika and the collapse of the Soviet system to the Soviet elite, but I suggest that today's troubles are not a result of a failed perestroika but are only Phase II of a highly successful perestroika.

From socialism to capitalism and back to a superior form of socialism is how the old Marxist dialecticians would phrase it. By compromising both models – the old communist orthodoxy as well as the newer aspirant, casino capitalism – the power establishment makes it possible to bring the country safely back to socialist capitalism.

But if one accepts this hypothesis, then it becomes the premise of an unsettling line of reasoning. The elite of the second most powerful corporation in the world, the Soviet Union, must have had a self-serving reason to take such risks and must as well have had the opportunity to reformulate its modus operandi.

If this is so, the further implication would be that the "collapse" was possible not in reaction to a stronger U.S. but precisely because the other superpower also showed every sign of weakness and crisis so that it could not mount any credible offensive, economically or militarily, while the Soviet Union went through its own version of the Great Depression en route toward economic restructuring and political modernization.

The most plausible interpretation of the series of international issues of the 1980s (the new economic assertiveness of Western Europe and Japan, the war in Afghanistan, the Iran-Iraq craze, the Solidarity movement in Poland, the world debt crisis, etc.) is that they were already setting the framework for a

future covenant – “the new world order” – between the former superpowers, to their mutual advantage. That presupposes an early, even pre-1980, agreed armistice and rethinking of the exhausting confrontation.

If Russia was in a position to let down its guard to the extent that we are witnessing today, it was only because it found itself not in a weak position but in the strongest military-strategic position in its history, free from imminent outside threat as enshrined at Helsinki in the 1975 Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. Given its control of the world's richest reserves of oil, gas, nuclear material, and raw materials, together with its educated professionals, an unmatched nuclear arsenal*, space technology leadership, etc. – all Russia needed was to repackage its system as a benevolent system, to make it into a soothing and attractive social and economic model, to launch a successful public relations scheme. To succeed at that would be worth the costs and the risks!

From such a strategic viewpoint one may infer that the dismantling of the Soviet Union was only the first step of the former Soviet elite's new policy of Soviet “market” outreach to the West as well as to the South.

In the west, Western Europe today seems at its zenith; however, its fate may well have been determined by (1) its military emasculation (by the Treaty of European Conventional Arms Reduction, the 1988 Soviet-U.S. Intermediate Nuclear Forces agreement and START II) and (2) its dependency on Russian-controlled oil and gas. In the south, oil producing Iran and Iraq, isolated by the United States' Middle East diplomacy, are quietly and slowly sliding further into the deadly embrace of the northern bear.**

The centuries long Russian-Anglo-American love-hate relationship has been evolving dramatically from late 1978 until today, that is clear. However, one might notice that it is being redesigned in such a way as to accommodate in the long run a more assertive, more successful and more powerful Russia overlordship its European and southern peripheries.

A first sketch of such an analysis I presented in 1992 at the ISA conference in Atlanta. For a more detailed analysis of the historical background, of the economic, military and political circumstances of such a probable scenario, you are invited to read the following pages.

New York, August 21, 1997

Notes:

* According to Komsomolskaya Pravda on August 7, 1997: “More than \$12.8 billion has been allocated for funding our programs for the creation of new types of weapons this year (the entire military budget amounts to \$19 billion).” According to sources from Rosvooruzheniye, a military related consortium, the present high-priority strategic programs include: “Topol-M2 mobile intercontinental ballistic missiles (an upgraded version of the SS-25 missile, which was put into mass production at the end of last year); a new tactical nuclear arms system capable under combat conditions of firing nuclear warheads over a distance of 400 kilometers (the system was tested successfully at the end of 1995); ultra-small nuclear warheads weighing less than 90 kilograms, which are already being manufactured; seven Borey-class submarines armed with the D-31 new ballistic missiles.

In addition, Russia's military laboratories are developing laser and radio-frequency weapons.”

** Notice the events taking place unremarked in the mainstream press:

– In March 1997, the Iraqi parliament ratified a 23-year oil contract with Moscow allowing a Russian oil consortium headed by LUKoil to develop reserves estimated at 7–8 billion barrels in Iraq's southern Qurna oil field, Iraqi media reported. Russia is to spend \$200 million on activities related to the project and extend credit worth \$100 million to Iraq.

– In August 1997, Interfax reported a joint venture between Russia and Iran to construct a major trade

port in the village of Olya in Astrakhan Oblast, in the Volga delta, 95 kilometers from Astrakhan and 45 kilometers from the Caspian coast. On completion, the port will handle 10 million tons of freight annually. The first new facilities, scheduled to be completed by 2000, will have an annual capacity of 2 million tons.

– In August 1997, Russian oil companies concluded a series of deals with Baghdad to buy more than 30 million barrels of Iraqi oil under the UN's so-called "food for oil" arrangement. Among them, Zarubezhneft, LUKoil, Rosneft, and Alfa-Eko led the way; each will buy more than 5.5 million barrels of oil.