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How separable are IR and Comparative Politics

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EXPLAINING THE END OF COMMUNISM IN EUROPE
AND THE END OF THE COLD WAR

Introduction

There are many practical reasons for the existence of sub-disciplines within political science, including obviously Comparative Politics and International Relations. These are especially well-established units in the Politics departments of those universities which do not have a separate International Relations department. Yet, to the extent that specialists in either of these fields ignore what is going on in the other, as they frequently do, their contribution to understanding of major real-world problems is diminished. Moreover, both Comparative Politics, with its focus on common patterns or divergences within states, and IR, with its concentration on relations between and among states, too often overlook the kind of transnational influences that can be a crucially important part of the explanation of fundamental political change.

The danger of irrelevance is exacerbated when a higher priority is accorded to finding falsifiable hypotheses than to the significance of the problems being addressed. It is unsurprising that many American political scientists, in particular, are now worried that a narrow professionalism (or scholasticism) has made their work of little interest and still less influence in the world of politics they are ostensibly studying.¹ There is a tension between the scientific desideratum of parsimonious explanation and the rich political reality.² A critic of one-sidedness in the study of world politics, Adam Roberts, has stressed the need for ‘many different approaches to international relations: not just the proper emphasis on power and interest that is found in realist theories, but also approaches that stress the significance of ideas and

¹ In an article I wrote at the invitation of the Comparative Politics Section of the American Political Science Association, I cited Adam Przeworski lamenting that graduate students and assistant professors ‘learn to package their intellectual ambitions into articles publishable by a few journals’ and are encouraged to think that ‘professionalism’ involves finding answers to ‘narrowly formulated questions’. See Archie Brown, ‘Comparative Politics: A View from Britain’, *APSA-CP*, Vol. 16, No. 1, 2005, pp. 1-5, at p. 4. Political science has also suffered from economics-envy, even though other disciplines offer serious challenges to rational actor assumptions. For a recent brief critique of the latter, see Rose McDermott and Yoshiko Herrera, ‘Psychological Versus Rational Models of Human Decision-Making’, *APSA-CP*, Vol. 21, No. 1, 2010, pp. 21-23.

² A majority of the people in the world today live under authoritarian or, at best, hybrid regimes. A number of the latter fit the criteria of ‘electoral authoritarianism’, a concept developed by Juan Linz. See Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes* (Lynne Rienner, Boulder, 2000), p. 34. For recent data on the un-free or ‘partly free’ proportion of the world population, see Arch Puddington, ed., *Freedom in the World 2008* (Freedom House, New York, 2008), esp. p. 4). Yet the study of authoritarian political systems does not get the space or attention its importance warrants either in leading political science journals or in books which aspire to provide an overview of the discipline. This would appear to reflect the fact that some of the more fashionable modes of analysis cannot usefully be applied in the study of authoritarian rule (Brown, ‘Comparative Politics: A View from Britain’, pp. 2-3).

norms, the impact of domestic political and economic structures on international politics, the roles of transnational movements and international organizations, and the existence of new challenges'.³ Roberts has also noted that it was the specialists in International Relations who 'made the boldest claims for being capable of foreseeing and influencing the future and whose supposedly scientific methodologies have tended to be parsimonious, seeking to explain outcomes in terms of a limited number of considerations', who failed most comprehensively to notice the end of the Cold War coming, even to the point of failing 'to see what was going on in front of their eyes'.⁴ He observes that those criticised by John Lewis Gaddis on that account were 'overwhelmingly American'.⁵

Yet there is more qualitative research in International Relations than quantitative or formal analysis, with around 70 per cent of scholars using primarily qualitative methods.⁶ And even in the United States, political science as a whole (including IR) has continued to be defined, as Brian Barry noted, in terms of subject matter rather than by method, in contrast with economics.⁷ Writing about Comparative Politics specifically, Peter Hall, an open-minded positivist, sees the field 'not as one that makes pre-eminent use of a comparative method but as one that utilizes many methods to compare politics across nations'.⁸ Yet, the desiderata of falsifiability and replication of research cannot be met in the same way in qualitative as in quantitative research. This applies to a major problem such as explaining the end of the Cold War – a big issue for IR specialists – and the closely-related issue of the end of Communism in Europe, on which much has been written both by historians and by specialists on Comparative Politics. The findings of IR and Comparative Politics scholars working in these areas are, indeed, falsifiable, but not in such a precise way as in quantitative or formal analysis. They can be discredited and superseded only by the accumulation of more solid evidence and more cogent arguments.⁹

The end of Communism in Europe

There are many competing explanations for the end of Communism in Europe. They overlap with those for the end of the Cold War, for the interconnections are clear. To

³ Adam Roberts, 'International Relations after the Cold War', *International Affairs*, Vol. 84, No. 2, 2008, pp. 335-350, at pp. 335-336.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 338-339.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

⁶ Andrew Moravcsik, 'Active Citation: A Precondition for Replicable Qualitative Research', *PS: Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 43, No. 1, January 2010, pp. 20-35, at p.29. Moravcsik is citing a recent study of IR Faculty in ten countries.

⁷ Barry, 'Politics as a Vocation', in Jack Hayward, Brian Barry and Archie Brown (eds), *The British Study of Politics in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, in association with the British Academy, 1999), pp. 423-467, at 454-455.

⁸ Peter Hall, 'Letter from the President. Beyond the Comparative Method', *APSA-CP*, Vol. 15, No.2, 2004, pp. 1-4.

⁹ Moravcsik has argued that those who engage in qualitative research need to do much more to address the problem of replicability. He advocates not only more extensive and more rigorous use of primary sources but, perhaps more controversially, making available electronic copies of sources. Moravcsik describes that as 'a significant but tolerable burden on scholars' ('Active Citation', p. 33). In the case of many archives, it would also fall foul of their copyright regulations. More prosaically, Moravcsik deplores the sloppiness whereby, even in case-studies, books and articles are often cited without reference to precise page numbers, making it harder for other scholars to see whether the evidence cited has, or has not, been taken out of context or manipulated to support a particular point of view ('Active Citation', pp. 30-31).

understand the ending of Communist rule, we must go back to its origins and bear in mind what kept it going for so long. The Cold War began when Communist regimes were established in Eastern Europe at, or in some instances shortly after, the end of World War Two. In a majority of these cases, they were not only Soviet-type regimes but also Soviet impositions – as in Poland, Hungary, East Germany and Romania. Indeed, the single most important reason for the establishment of Communist regimes in Eastern Europe was the success of the Soviet army in ending Nazi rule in the region. In Albania and Yugoslavia local Communists came to power largely as a result of their own efforts, with the war again the essential facilitator of their triumph. Czechoslovakia was the most borderline case between indigenous takeovers and Soviet impositions. Most of the country was liberated by the Red Army, but the Soviet forces did not remain in Czechoslovakia. When the Communists seized full power in Prague in February 1948, there was no Soviet military presence, but the Czechoslovak leadership were under great pressure from Stalin to toe the Soviet line. When the coalition government in which Communists held key positions reacted positively the previous year to the idea of receiving American economic aid under the Marshall Plan, the Czech Communist leader and prime minister Klement Gottwald was summoned to Moscow and berated by an angry Stalin. He promptly reversed the earlier decision, taken at a cabinet meeting, over which he had presided in July 1947, to participate in the Paris Conference to discuss Marshall aid.¹⁰

Gottwald, in principle, had a choice in 1947-48. The choice was constrained primarily by his ideological commitment which included acceptance of Stalin's supreme authority within the international Communist movement – not by coercive force. The Soviet Union, still recovering from its devastation in World War Two, was in no position to risk an invasion of Czechoslovakia in the late 1940s. Later the limits of choice for East European leaders became much narrower, as persuasion was augmented by tanks. Uprisings in East Germany in 1953 and in Hungary in 1956 were suppressed by Soviet troops, even though the Hungarian defiance of Moscow was led by Imre Nagy, an old Communist who had survived expulsion from the party to become, on his readmission, prime minister. Czech Communists believed that they had made their own revolution in 1948 and so, when a reform movement within the party ranks got underway from the mid-1960s, its proponents assumed that they could make significant departures from the Soviet model of 'socialism', even if these were not to the liking of the leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. When the 'Prague Spring' of 1968 was forcibly ended by the intervention of almost half a million foreign troops – mainly Soviet but with the participation of Polish, Hungarian, Bulgarian and East German contingents – Czechs and Slovaks joined the majority of East and Central Europeans in taking this as confirmation that the limits of change in their part of the continent were determined in Moscow.

For a time it seemed that Poland – the one Communist state in which a vibrant society, at times meeting the criteria of civil society, managed to survive – had falsified that assumption. In 1980-81 Solidarity grew into a mass movement with such momentum behind it that the party-state authorities felt obliged to make concessions. Indeed, a third of the members of the Communist party (the Polish United Workers' Party) were for a time members also of Solidarity. In August 1980 the Soviet Politburo set up a sub-committee to consider what should be done in order to put a

¹⁰ For a fuller account of Communist takeovers in Eastern Europe, see Archie Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism* (Bodley Head, London, 2009), pp. 148-178.

stop to the rise of Solidarity.¹¹ The conclusion they and the Politburo as a whole reached was that an invasion of Poland would be unwise. This was not yet an abandonment of the ‘Brezhnev doctrine’, whereby, following the invasion of Czechoslovakia, the Soviet leadership had arrogated to itself the ‘right and duty’ to intervene to ‘defend socialism’ (meaning Communism) if it were to be threatened in any Warsaw Pact country. It was, however, a recognition that Poland posed special difficulties. It had the largest population of the Warsaw Pact countries apart from the Soviet Union and a people, moreover, with a tradition of resistance. The Polish diaspora also had an especially significant representative in Washington – in the person of President Jimmy Carter’s National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski. Most crucially, the Soviet Union was less than a year into a war in Afghanistan, in which it was already losing many troops in a conflict with echoes of the US experience in Vietnam. The mujahidin were supplied and politically supported by the United States and its allies, just as the North Vietnamese had received arms and other supplies from the Soviet Union and China.¹² The Director of the Institute of the United States and Canada, Georgiy Arbatov, later observed that the fact that the Soviet Union ‘was bogged down in Afghanistan may have helped us avoid an even more dangerous adventure: intervention in Poland during the political crisis in 1980’.¹³

‘Realists’ who emphasise preponderance of military power were not wrong in seeing this as a key to the general quiescence – notwithstanding occasional crises – of Eastern Europe. There was no hope of the *armies* of the individual East European countries turning against the Soviet Union, for they were tightly enmeshed in the Warsaw Pact structures with Soviet officers playing a decisive role. *Unarmed* resistance could be repressed if, as in Czechoslovakia in August 1968 and in Poland in December 1981, the Communist authorities had the political will to use the coercive force at their disposal. Explanations of change in Eastern Europe in terms of a developing civil society are unconvincing. Only in Poland was there a civil society worthy of the name.¹⁴ The regimes did not, of course, rely on coercion alone. There was a sophisticated hierarchy of rewards for politically conformist behaviour and of sanctions, of varying degrees of severity, for political deviation.

We can hardly begin to understand why Communist systems in Eastern Europe collapsed when they did without asking why they did not cease to exist earlier. Their economic problems and political injustices, together with the unpopularity of most of their leaders, were far from being new phenomena in the late 1980s. The single most important reason why the regimes lasted so long was the determination of successive Soviet leaderships to sanction, or themselves employ, whatever level of force was required to preserve Communist rule in those countries which they saw as their rightful geopolitical gains from the Second World War. Scarcely less important

¹¹ Chaired by Mikhail Suslov, it included Foreign Minister Andrey Gromyko, KGB Chairman Yuriy Andropov and Brezhnev’s closest associate Konstantin Chernenko.

¹² Armed with Russian weapons, the North Vietnamese shot down more than 500 American aircraft in 1965-66 alone (Patrick J. Hearden, *The Tragedy of Vietnam*, Pearson Longman, 3rd ed., New York, 2008, p. 136). In the case of Afghanistan much of the American aid to the mujahidin was channeled through Pakistan, with the Islamist movements supported by General Zia becoming ‘the internationally supported Afghan opposition’ (Odd Arne Westad, ‘Reagan’s Anti-Revolutionary Offensive in the Third World’, in Olaf Njølstad, *The Last Decade of the Cold War* (Cass, London, 2004), pp. 251-252.

¹³ Georgi Arbatov, *The System: An Insider’s Life in Soviet Politics* (Random House, New York, 1992), p. 200.

¹⁴ This is a central theme of Stephen Kotkin (with Jan T. Gross), *Uncivil Society: 1989 and the Implosion of the Communist Establishment* (Modern Library, New York, 2009).

was the *belief* of East Europeans that to take on their own rulers meant taking on the Soviet Union as well. Even the Polish population could not be sure that they would be immune from direct Soviet military intervention. The leader of the Catholic Church in Poland, Cardinal Glemp, described the martial law of December 1981 as a ‘lesser evil’, the unspoken greater evil being a Soviet invasion. Glemp was not to know that the Soviet Politburo had ruled out the latter course, instead concentrating its efforts on stiffening the resolve of their Polish comrades to institute their own domestic crackdown.¹⁵

Solidarity led a shadowy, underground existence between 1982 and 1987. It re-emerged as a serious political force only in 1988, by which time dramatic change both in internal Soviet developments and in Soviet foreign policy had changed the political climate throughout Eastern Europe. Successive Soviet leaderships, backed by armed forces which, since the early 1970s, had attained a rough parity with those of the United States, had locked the doors to fundamental change in East and Central Europe. If East European citizens had been able to co-ordinate their opposition to Soviet hegemony, they could have offered a more difficult challenge to their ultimate overlords in the Kremlin. That, however, was not possible. East European oppositionists and dissidents, when they were not in prison, were closely monitored by the political police, and they had no access to the domestic mass media. With the exception, again, of Poland, their *samizdat* publications had a very modest circulation. Their ideas gained wider currency mainly through foreign radio, especially Radio Free Europe, although systematic jamming of these broadcasts curtailed even their reach.

The clearest case of transnational influence – as distinct from crude imposition of superior power – within Eastern Europe was, therefore, the change within the Soviet Union itself which got underway shortly after Mikhail Gorbachev succeeded Konstantin Chernenko as Soviet leader. Indeed, as early as Chernenko’s funeral, Gorbachev told East European Communist leaders, in his individual meetings with them, that they should expect no more Soviet military interventions to prop them up. The ‘Brezhnev doctrine’ was rescinded.¹⁶ Gorbachev had the feeling that his interlocutors did not believe him, since they had heard before about their supposed equality of rights.¹⁷ Even if they accepted that this time the message was different and sincere, these were not tidings the East European leaders had any incentive or desire to share with their own people. The idea that a military superpower stood behind the Communist leaders of each Warsaw Pact country usefully lowered the expectations of the populations of East-Central Europe. The existing precedents of Soviet military intervention had, after all, left a profound impression.

What Gorbachev had made clear to the East European leaders in private from 1985 onwards, he turned into an overt public commitment in 1988. At the Nineteenth Party Conference in June 1988 and at the United Nations in December of the same year he declared that the people of every country had the right to decide for themselves what kind of system they wished to live in. He stressed the ‘binding nature of the principle of freedom of choice’, making it explicit that this was to be regarded

¹⁵ Andrzej Paczkowski and Malcolm Byrne (eds), *From Solidarity to Martial Law. The Polish Crisis of 1980-1981: A Documentary History* (Central European University Press, Budapest, 2007), pp. 35 and 449-453.

¹⁶ Mikhail Gorbachev, *Ponyat’ perestrojku...Pochemu eto vazhno seychas* (Al’pina, Moscow, 2006), p. 70.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

as a 'universal principle', allowing no exceptions.¹⁸ The first draft of the UN speech was written by Gorbachev's principal foreign policy aide Anatoliy Chernyaev. Others contributed, and then Gorbachev rewrote the text himself. He consciously intended the speech to be an 'anti-Fulton' or a 'Fulton in reverse'. The aim was to bring to a definitive end the division of Europe and the wider world which had been dramatized by Winston Churchill in his 'iron curtain' speech in Fulton, Missouri, in March 1946.¹⁹

That is not to say that Gorbachev wished to see such an abrupt overthrow of Communist rule in Europe as occurred. In the Soviet Union itself he had advocated 'revolutionary change by evolutionary means' and that would have been his preferred option also for Eastern Europe. However, given the national aspirations of a majority of East Europeans, it was always likely that radical reform in the USSR, together with a change of Soviet foreign policy, would lead to more sudden and dramatic transformation in Central and Eastern Europe. Just as it was Soviet policy which had preserved Communist systems in the region throughout the post-Second World War period, so it was fundamental change in Moscow which facilitated their removal.

Domestic political reform, including the endorsement of glasnost (transparency), which developed into a growing freedom of speech and of publication, meant that by 1988 the Soviet Union had overtaken even the most reformist of East European Communist regimes at the time, that of Hungary.²⁰ The run-up to the Nineteenth Party Conference of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, held at the end of June 1988, was the period in which, faced by growing opposition to his reforms, Gorbachev and his allies in the Soviet leadership radicalised their policies. They essentially moved from wishing to reform the existing system to embracing change which would make the system different in kind.²¹ Especially notable was the decision, sprung on the conference delegates by Gorbachev, to move in the following year to elections for a new legislature, the Congress of People's Deputies. In turn, it would elect an inner body, the Supreme Soviet that, unlike the existing rubber-stamp Supreme Soviet which met for just a few days out of the 365, would be in session for the greater part of the year. The Congress of People's Deputies was to be chosen by the population as a whole in contested elections with, however, a third of the seats reserved for 'public organizations'. While that included the Communist Party and thus smoothed the way into the legislature for leading party members, the public organizations embraced also such bodies as the Academy of Sciences and the Film-Makers' Union whose own elections produced some of the most radical deputies, Academician Andrey Sakharov among them. These were not, then, totally free elections, but the fact that a majority of the seats were contested and that Communist Party officials competed against other party members on fundamentally different policy platforms drove a coach and horses through the hallowed doctrine of 'democratic centralism' which had been one of the pillars of Communist rule since Lenin's time. Moreover, the sessions of the new legislature were broadcast live on

¹⁸ Mikhail Gorbachev, *Izbrannye rechi i stat'i*, (Politizdat, Moscow, 1990), Vol. 7, p. 188.

¹⁹ Vladislav M. Zubok, 'New Evidence on the "Soviet Factor" in the Peaceful Revolutions of 1989', *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, No. 12/13, 2001, pp. 5-14, at p. 9; and Andrei Grachev, *Gorbachev's Gamble: Soviet Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War* (Polity, Cambridge, 2008), pp. 166-167.

²⁰ David Stark and László Bruszt, *Postsocialist Pathways: Transforming Politics and Property in East Central Europe* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998), p. 21.

²¹ As Gorbachev later put it, 'the logic of development' meant that what was needed was 'not to improve the system but to encroach on its foundations, to change those foundations' (Gorbachev, *Ponyat' perestroiku*, op.cit., p. 22).

Soviet TV in 1989, providing a riveting spectacle for tens of millions of viewers who, for the first time in their lives, witnessed members of the Politburo and the KGB being subjected to withering, public criticism.

These March elections in the Soviet Union were followed by still more dramatic elections in Poland in June when Solidarity swept the board in all of the seats they were allowed to contest. The rules of the game for the elections had been established in Round Table discussions between the revived Solidarity and the Polish party-state authorities. 'Better', as Lech Wałęsa put it, 'a round table than a square cell'.²² Although the Polish democratization process had not yet run its full course, an electoral contest in which Solidarity had been the most successful quasi-party, the Polish United Workers' Party had been defeated, and the Communists had *accepted* that election result meant that Poland from 4 June 1989 was no longer a Communist state. The point was underlined when General Jaruzelski, while continuing as President, resigned from the leadership of the PUWP, and a Solidarity activist Tadeusz Mazowiecki, chosen by Wałęsa for the role of prime minister, became the first non-Communist head of government in Eastern Europe since the establishment of Communist party rule in the region.²³

There is neither space nor need here to relate all the changes that took place in one country after another in 1989.²⁴ What is clear is that as each country cast aside Communist rulers and gained independence, this immediately raised expectations in other countries. The fact that the Soviet Union did not intervene to put a stop to the process in Poland and Hungary, the two countries quickest to introduce fundamental change, emboldened others. That it was December of the same year before regime change took place in Czechoslovakia and Romania is readily explicable. Czechs and Slovaks were the peoples who had most recently experienced direct Soviet military intervention and they waited until they could feel sure that, by taking to the streets, they would not be provoking a repeat invasion. Romania, under Ceaușescu, was the Warsaw Pact country over which Soviet influence was most negligible. The Romanian dictator – who had placed so many close relatives in key positions that his regime was described as 'socialism in one family' – had long pursued a partially independent foreign policy. Romanian troops did not join in the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, but, having long argued for the non-interference of one Communist country in the affairs of another, Ceaușescu urged intervention in Poland at a Warsaw Pact meeting in July 1989. This demand got nowhere, but Ceaușescu did not hesitate to resort to bloodshed to crush the domestic opposition to his rule when Romanians finally took to the streets in December 1989. This time coercion backfired, for people's expectations had been sharply raised by what had happened elsewhere in Eastern Europe that year. Moreover, and crucially, a substantial section of the elite saw the writing on the wall and changed sides.

Ceaușescu would not have been alone in giving orders for demonstrators to be shot, had different guidelines emanated from the Soviet leadership. Other East European leaders, including those in East Germany, were ready for bloodshed, but they received a strong 'recommendation' from Moscow not to use force. Faced by the

²² Victor Sebestyen, *Revolution 1989: The Fall of the Soviet Empire* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 2009), p. 221.

²³ The process of transition to democracy was complete when Jaruzelski resigned from the presidency in 1991 and Wałęsa was elected President of Poland.

²⁴ The twentieth anniversary of the year 1989 saw a plethora of books devoted to the East European transformations of that year. My own account and interpretation of those dramatic events is to be found in Archie Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism* (Bodley Head, London, 2009), esp. pp. 522-548.

prospect of even the USSR condemning them if they employed violent repression to stay in power, the East European leaders, Romania apart, toed the Soviet line for one last time. The suddenness of the demise of Communist parties that followed was, accordingly, an unintended consequence of the Soviet decision to let the people of East Europe decide for themselves in what kind of system they wished to live. Gorbachev would have preferred evolutionary change to revolutionary upheaval, but never at any point did he consider the use of force to put a stop to the loss of what had been client states.²⁵

The transformations of 1989 constituted a striking example of demonstration effect and contagion – partly ‘contagion by proximity’,²⁶ for what happened in neighbouring Communist states was of far greater relevance to citizens in Eastern Europe than the transition from authoritarianism to democracy in Spain and Portugal in the 1970s. The significance of proximity is also suggested by the fact that no corresponding change took place in Cuba, even when Soviet support for the ailing Cuban economy dried up. It is also pertinent, however, that the Cubans had made their own revolution in January 1959, although the fact that the Communist seizures of power in Albania and Yugoslavia at the end of World War Two had been indigenous did not prevent those two countries making a transition from Communist rule (particularly bloodily in the case of Yugoslavia). The transformations of 1989 were not part of the ‘Third Wave’ of democratization, but of a discrete Fourth Wave which began with the changes in the Soviet Union. It was Samuel Huntington who coined the term, ‘the Third Wave’, and he included the countries of Eastern Europe in the same ‘wave’ as Iberian and Latin American democratization.²⁷ Latin American specialists have tended to follow his example. Laurence Whitehead has been an exception among those scholars. In contrast with Huntington and others, he refers to the process of democratization in Eastern Europe as a ‘fourth wave’, although without elaborating the point.²⁸

²⁵ Other members of the Soviet top leadership team, as well as leading figures in the KGB and the military, criticized Gorbachev in retrospect for what they saw as a unilateral weakening of Soviet military power, his willingness to let East Europe go its own way in 1989, and for permitting the unification of Germany in 1990, although the authority of the general secretaryship was such that they did not offer a serious challenge to him until, from their point of view, it turned out to be too late. At a seminar jointly organised by the Mershon Center of Ohio State University and the Institute of General History of the Russian Academy of Sciences, held in June 1999 in Moscow (where I was the only British scholar present), the Russian participants included the main organizers of the August coup of 1991 against Gorbachev. One of them, Oleg Baklanov, the Secretary of the Central Committee who supervised the military-industrial complex, after praising the Soviet Union’s achievement of military parity with the United States, said that ‘this parity held the world in a delicate balance, but a balance nonetheless’. He continued: ‘And in my opinion, the horrible sin, the horrible sin of Gorbachev and his stooges ... consisted in the fact that this parity was violated, and we ended up with what we have now’ (Moscow Cold War Conference, Tape 2, Mershon Center, Ohio State University). See also the book by former KGB head Vladimir Kryuchkov, *Lichnost’ i vlast’* (Prosveshchenie, Moscow, 2004), p. 174.

²⁶ Laurence Whitehead (ed.), *The International Dimensions of Democratization: Europe and the Americas* (Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 5.

²⁷ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1991).

²⁸ Whitehead, *The International Dimensions of Democratization*, op.cit., p. 4. For detailed argument that the transitions from Communist rule constituted a ‘fourth wave’ of democratization (in some cases, although a transition to a different form of authoritarianism in others), and that they had little or nothing to do with the transitions from right-wing authoritarian rule of the 1970s, see Archie Brown, ‘Transnational Influences in the Transition from Communism’, *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 16, No. 2, April-June 2000, pp. 177-200, esp. pp. 181-186; and Michael McFaul, ‘The Fourth Wave of Democratization and Dictatorship: Noncooperative Transitions in the Postcommunist World’, *World Politics*, Vol. 54, No. 2, January 2002, pp. 212-244. Philippe Schmitter has also written about a ‘fourth

The comparative politics literature on the transitions from authoritarian rule in Spain, Portugal and a number of Latin American countries paid very little attention to international influences. Even Laurence Whitehead, who was a notable exception in his contribution to a major ‘transitological’ study of the 1980s, held that ‘internal factors were of primary importance in determining the course and outcome of the transition attempt, and international factors played only a secondary role’.²⁹ Ten years later he returned to that theme and noted the greater importance of the international dimension in the East European context. He rightly observed: ‘As always, correlation must be separated from causation. It is not contiguity but the policy of a third power that explains the spread of democracy from one country to the next’.³⁰ Noting also, and rightly, that in Communist countries ‘the societal push for democracy became a major independent variable as the transition process got underway’, he cautiously concludes that ‘the domestic and international components were so intermingled that it would be arbitrary and artificial to disentangle them, let alone to present the former as dominant over the latter’.³¹ Since what changed in East-Central Europe was not the desire for independence and democratization – that had long been present – but the willingness of the regional hegemon to allow these sentiments to be expressed and those goals to be achieved, with an explicit eschewal of foreign military intervention, I have no hesitation in giving explanatory priority to *internal* change in the case of the Soviet Union and to the *international* context and *transnational* influences in the case of Eastern Europe.

The End of the Cold War

This begs the question of what produced such major internal change within the Soviet system. It is useful to address the question in the context of the end of the Cold War, although, as noted at the outset, the interconnections between Soviet domestic and foreign policy in the perestroika period and, still more fundamentally, between the dismantling of Communism and the end of the Cold War, are both close and profound. Few people today would dispute the fact that the policy of the Soviet Union during the period of less than seven years when it was led by Mikhail Gorbachev changed fundamentally, although there are some who argue that Gorbachev himself did not change his basic ideas. One such person was Ronald Reagan’s Defense Secretary, Caspar Weinberger, who in an interview for the oral history of the Cold War, conducted and collected by the Hoover Institution, said:

wave of democratization’, but dates its beginning from the changes in Portugal in 1974 (Schmitter, ‘The Influences of the International Context upon the Choice of Political Institutions and Policies in Neo-Democracies’ in Whitehead, ed., *The International Dimensions of Democratization*, pp. 26-54, at p. 37). In other words, his ‘fourth wave’ is what a majority of scholars have called the ‘third wave’. To that extent, Schmitter underplays the specificity of the East European transformations and the indispensable role played by political change in the Soviet Union. Yet he, too, recognizes that ‘Eastern Europe may provide the best possible case for contagion, even though the initial impetus for regime change was given by an exogenous event, i.e. the shift in Soviet foreign and defence policy *vis-à-vis* the region’ (ibid., p. 40).

²⁹ See Laurence Whitehead, ‘International Aspects of Democratization’ in Guillermo O’Donnell, Philippe Schmitter and Laurence Whitehead (eds), *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Comparative Perspectives* (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1986), esp. p. 4. See also Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1996), esp. pp. 72-76.

³⁰ Whitehead (ed.), *The International Dimensions of Democratization*, op.cit., p. 9.

³¹ Ibid., p. 388.

Mr Gorbachev did not really have any different thinking. The difference of Mr Gorbachev was the recognition that he couldn't win and the recognition that the Soviet Union was not going to succeed and needed economic help. ... And if he was going to get help from the West, he'd have to change his tune.

Change his rhetoric. And he changed his rhetoric, but not his thinking.³²

Weinberger's view (expressed more elegantly by others) represents one of four major explanations for the change of Soviet foreign policy, namely dire economic necessity. The other explanations, each of which I shall briefly consider, are President Reagan's military build-up combined with ideological offensive; ideational change within the Soviet Union; and the coming to power of Mikhail Gorbachev.

The economic determinist argument

The argument that the Soviet Union was forced into change by dire economic necessity is made at length by the former acting prime minister of post-Soviet Russia, the late Yegor Gaidar.³³ He claimed that Gorbachev gave up the whole of Eastern Europe and made large unilateral reductions in armaments essentially for economic reasons, and that this was also why he did not use force to put a stop to restive Soviet republics' quest for independence. These policies were pursued, according to Gaidar, with the aim of securing 'large, long-term politically motivated credits that would at least postpone the looming state bankruptcy'.³⁴ If Gorbachev had pursued such policies for economic reasons, it would have been a remarkably roundabout way to go about seeking credits (which, in any event, were not forthcoming). To 'lose' Eastern Europe was to risk the extreme wrath of the Soviet armed forces. To lose large parts of the Soviet Union meant forfeiting the support of almost all the party-state organs. If Gorbachev had been as obsessed with the economy as Gaidar and other economic determinists assume he was, it would have been less risky to move to market prices. That, after all, as Gaidar insists, was the key to beginning to end the shortages, thus avoiding a further deterioration of the economic situation (exacerbated in the second half of the 1980s by the fall in the oil price).

In reality Gorbachev, rightly or wrongly, was far more actively concerned with political than economic reform, even though that removed many traditional levers of power. Chinese Communist leaders have been much more fearful of that kind of reform than of marketizing measures which, so far, they have survived comfortably enough. Indeed, when reflecting recently on the mistakes of his leadership during the perestroika years, Gorbachev wrote: 'In the heat of political battles we lost sight of the economy, and people never forgave us for the shortages of everyday items and the lines for essential goods'.³⁵ The Soviet economy was, moreover, far from being on the verge of collapse in 1985, and though the gap between it and the economies of advanced Western countries was widening, it takes more than relative economic failure to bring down a highly authoritarian regime prepared to use all the forces of

³² Interview with Caspar Weinberger, 20 October 1998, Hoover Institution Archives, Cold War History Collection, Box 3, Folder ID, at pp. 17-18.

³³ Yegor Gaidar, *Collapse of an Empire: Lessons for Modern Russia* (Brookings Institution Press, Washington, DC, 2007).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

³⁵ Mikhail Gorbachev, 'Perestroika Lost', *New York Times*, 13 March, 2010. (Gorbachev's interpreter, Pavel Palazchenko, who translated this article for the newspaper, complained to the *Times* about the title they gave to it. In addition to admitting mistakes, Gorbachev had noted many of the achievements of perestroika and the article does not correspond to the arguably defeatist implication of the title assigned to it.)

coercion and manipulation at its disposal. There is no shortage of Third World dictatorships, with a less sophisticated system of rewards and sanctions than that operated by Communist rulers in Europe, which survive for decades longer than they deserve to. It was fundamental political reform and partial economic reform which made the Soviet leadership vulnerable to pressure from below at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s. In other words, it was not crisis which determined reform but reform which provoked crisis. However, an unreformed Soviet system would have dealt with the discontent – the manifestations of which would have been on a far more modest scale in the absence of the liberalization and democratization of perestroika – in the traditional way. Economic failure does not by itself lead to the downfall of a highly authoritarian regime.³⁶

Reagan's arms build-up and ideological offensive

The view, still popular in the United States, that Ronald Reagan won the Cold War by combining an armaments build-up which the Soviet Union could not match with an ideological offensive against Communism has its academic as well as political proponents. Robert G. Patman may serve as an example of an academic author who holds that Reagan's hardline approach played a decisive role in producing the 'New Political Thinking' in the Soviet Union and even influenced the choice of Gorbachev as Soviet leader in 1985.³⁷ Patman's arguments are deeply flawed, quite apart from containing some basic factual errors. Thus, he writes, that 'the slim Politburo majority that voted Gorbachev in as leader did so precisely because they recognized a need for some reform'.³⁸ That statement was published a decade and a half after it became definitively known that the Soviet leadership voted unanimously for Gorbachev as General Secretary on 11 March 1985, the day after Konstantin Chernenko's death.³⁹ The full transcript of the Politburo meeting which chose Gorbachev makes no mention of reform or of adopting a softer line in international relations.⁴⁰ Gorbachev became General Secretary for three main reasons: first, because annual state funerals of Soviet leaders had become a national embarrassment and even some members of the aged oligarchy could see merit in having a younger and more energetic General Secretary; second, even those in the leadership who were suspicious of Gorbachev and concerned that he might be a new broom who would sweep them away had no plausible alternative candidate, and thus no incentive to vote against what was clearly going to be the winning side; and, third, Gorbachev, as second secretary of the party,

³⁶ Many 'realist' interpretations of the end of the Cold War also suggest that Soviet economic decline drove the leadership to radical change. See, for example, Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, 'From Old Thinking to New Thinking in Qualitative Research', *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 4, 2002, pp. 93-11, esp. p. 95; and Wohlforth, 'Realism and the End of the Cold War', *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 1994-95, pp. 91-129. Realists are not in error in emphasizing economic pressures on the Soviet leadership, but misleading when they elevate this factor over all others and especially when they overlook the priority that Gorbachev gave to political over economic transformation.

³⁷ Robert G. Patman, 'Reagan, Gorbachev and the emergence of "New Political Thinking"', *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 25, pp. 577-601, esp. p. 586; and Patman, 'Some Reflections on Archie Brown and the End of the Cold War', *Cold War History*, Vol. 7, No. 3, 2007, pp. 439-445.

³⁸ Patman, 'Archie Brown and the End of the Cold War', p. 441.

³⁹ Patman's source for the 'slim majority' is a journalistic account published in 1991.

⁴⁰ The Soviet record of the meeting – from archival documents released early in the Yeltsin presidency – is readily available in microfilm or photo-copies in a number of Western libraries. My own copy comes from the Hoover Institution Archives at Stanford: HIA, Fond 89, 1.1001, opis 36, file 16, pp. 1-14.

seized the initiative when Chernenko died, calling – and presiding over – a Politburo meeting that met within hours of his predecessor’s death. Indeed, that meeting on the evening of 10 March pre-selected Gorbachev by appointing him head of Chernenko’s funeral commission. (When Leonid Brezhnev and Yuriy Andropov died within fifteen months of each other, that role had been allotted to the person who followed each of them as General Secretary.)

Patman shares the view of some of those in the Reagan administration who knew least about the Soviet Union that SDI was an important factor in leading to change in Soviet policy under Gorbachev. It is true that Gorbachev was sufficiently influenced by the objections of the Soviet military-industrial complex to Reagan’s SDI project to make Reagan’s abandonment of it a condition of the deep cuts in nuclear arsenals which were otherwise agreed at the Reykjavik summit meeting in 1986.⁴¹ However, by the following year he had reverted to his own earlier judgement that SDI was not worth so much fuss – it was a project of extremely dubious feasibility that even on Reagan’s optimistic account would take twenty years to become operational – and should not stand in the way of the deep cuts that were agreed at the 1987 Washington summit. After Reykjavik, as the former Soviet ambassador to Washington and head of the International Department of the Central Committee from 1986 to 1988, Anatoly Dobrynin, noted: ‘The old guard in the Politburo covertly opposed [Gorbachev’s] “new thinking” and his plans for accommodation with the United States, but he overcame them by proclaiming his firm intention to carry out his new foreign policy, fully aware that he could count on the party and on the public support he then enjoyed’.⁴²

Patman cites KGB generals in support of his view that SDI had a great impact on Soviet decisions. However, neither the army nor the KGB had decisive influence over Soviet foreign policy during the perestroika era. Dobrynin, who is a strong critic of Gorbachev in many respects, gives no credence to the assertion that it was the hard-line policies of Reagan which produced change in Moscow. As he observed:

Sadly for the ardent followers of Reagan, the increased Soviet defense spending provoked by Reagan’s policies was not the straw that broke the back of the evil empire. We did not bankrupt ourselves in the arms race, as the Caspar Weinbergers of this world would like to believe. The Soviet response to Star Wars caused only an acceptable small rise in defense spending. Throughout the Reagan presidency, the rising Soviet defense effort contributed to our economic decline, but only marginally as it had in previous years. ... It may sound like a historical paradox, in particular for Reagan’s admirers, but if the president had not abandoned his hostile stance toward the Soviet Union for a more constructive one during his second term, Gorbachev would not have been able to launch his reforms and his ‘new thinking’.⁴³

Much more recently the director of one of the main institutes of economics in Moscow, Ruslan Grinberg, poured cold water over the idea that Gorbachev began perestroika in response to US military strength, saying the argument lacked any logic. If, he said, one put aside doubts about the feasibility of SDI and assumed it would have consequences for the USSR, then the Soviet response would have been along traditional lines – the further mobilization of resources, strengthening of

⁴¹ Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence* (Random House, New York, 1995), pp. 620-621.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 622.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 611.

centralization, and so on.⁴⁴ ‘Therefore’, he concludes, ‘the suggestion that the democratic choice was an answer to the American SDI appears quite absurd’.⁴⁵

Reagan did play a significant part in the ending of the Cold War, albeit a far less major one than Gorbachev. But his role was not that assigned to him either by ‘realist’ emphases on his enhancement of American military strength or by a journalistic stress on the forcefulness of his rhetoric: ‘Mr Gorbachev, tear down this wall!’ And post hoc, ergo proper hoc, the Berlin wall fell!⁴⁶ Though it is often forgotten, not only Reagan’s conservative Republican base but also many of those who thought of themselves as ‘realists’ in international affairs – among them Alexander Haig, Richard Nixon, Brent Scowcroft, Bob Dole and Henry Kissinger – were very critical of Reagan’s constructive engagement with Gorbachev, and especially his willingness to sign the INF Treaty, banning intermediate range nuclear missiles in Europe, at the Washington summit in 1987.⁴⁷

The best-informed person in the Reagan administration about the Soviet Union – and, indeed, about America’s Soviet policy – was Jack Matlock who in 1984 succeeded Richard Pipes as the senior specialist on the USSR and Eastern Europe on the National Security Council, and from 1987 until 1991 was US Ambassador to Moscow. In his two most recent books, Matlock has shown in detail how Reagan, especially from 1984, actively sought negotiations with the Soviet Union and increasingly rejected the advice both of conservative Republicans and of the Defense Department and the CIA. So far as the Soviet Union was concerned, Reagan preferred the judgement of Secretary of State George Shultz to that of Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger. Matlock himself had important influence both via Shultz and directly, as the author of a number of Reagan’s more constructive speeches and as the principal expert who briefed him for summit meetings with Gorbachev.⁴⁸

Reagan’s presidency overlapped with four Soviet leaders – Brezhnev, Andropov, Chernenko and Gorbachev – and nothing changed for the better either in East-West relations or throughout Eastern Europe until the last of them entered the Kremlin. Even before his first term ended, Reagan had concluded that it was high time the two sides began talking to each other. But, as he complained, ‘These guys keep dying on me!’ It was not, however, only rigor mortis but the rigid policies and mindsets of the pre-perestroika Soviet leadership which ruled out any progress in East-West relations during Reagan’s first term.

⁴⁴ R.S. Grinberg, ‘Tri ochevidnykh mifa o perestroyke’, in V. Medvedev and R. Grinberg (eds), *Perestroyka dlya strany i mira: kak ona viditsya dvadtsat’ let spustya* (Nauka, Moscow, 2007), pp. 61-64, at p. 62.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ If Gorbachev had been about to try to persuade Erich Honecker to tear down the wall (Honecker himself was offended that Reagan had not recognized that it was *his* wall and that Reagan’s exhortation was not addressed to ‘Mr Honecker’, even though he had not the slightest intention of dismantling the wall), then Reagan’s injunction would have made it politically much more difficult to do so. Given the realities of Soviet politics, Reagan’s demand made little sense, but it was helpful for him in the context of American politics, reassuring his conservative supporters that he had not gone soft on Communism (although some of them, such as George Will, were arguing in 1987-88 that this, indeed, was what had happened). For Gorbachev, Reagan’s 1987 speech at the Brandenburg Gate was only a very minor irritation.

⁴⁷ On this, see Jack F. Matlock, Jr, *Reagan and Gorbachev: How the Cold War Ended* (Random House, New York, 2004), esp. pp. 274-275; and James Mann, *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan: A History of the End of the Cold War* (Viking, New York, 2009), esp. pp. 263-264 and 287-290.

⁴⁸ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*; and Jack F. Matlock, Jr, *Superpower Illusions: How Myths and False Ideologies Led America Astray – and How to Return to Reality* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 2010).

Ideational change

Some innovative thinking on foreign policy and on Western countries had been going on among the Soviet *mezhdunarodniki* – specialists on international relations and on other parts of the world – since the 1960s,⁴⁹ but the influence of the research institutes on the International Department and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to whom they sent analytical reports and some recommendations, was extremely modest prior to the perestroika era, as the First Deputy Head of the International Department, Karen Brutents, has testified.⁵⁰ It was crucially important, however, that when a new leader emerged who had already shown an interest in fresh ideas,⁵¹ and who actively encouraged social scientists to engage in constructive new thinking, there were many well qualified people in the research institutes ready to respond to the challenge. If the Brezhnev era was surely the golden age of the Soviet bureaucrat, perestroika was the golden age of the *institutchiki*. Robert English, an exceptionally thorough student of the development of new ideas on international policy over several decades in the Soviet Union, aptly entitles his chapter on the perestroika years: ‘The New Thinking Comes to Power’.⁵²

In the development of this thinking that was new in the Soviet context, transnational influences were enormously important. Georgiy Arbatov, the Director of the Institute of the USA and Canada, has noted how important his participation on the Palme Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues was for him. That body began its work during the last years of the Brezhnev era. Arbatov has acknowledged that his interactions with well-informed and open-minded Western politicians and specialists on that Commission ‘exerted a major influence on my understanding of politics and international relations’.⁵³ More generally, it was specialists from such establishments as the Institute of the United States and Canada and IMEMO who had the most opportunities to travel to North America and Western Europe. Their exposure to the West made many of them more acutely aware of the relative backwardness of the Soviet economy and the still more obvious disparity in levels of freedom and democracy between the West and the Soviet Union.

For similar reasons it was in the International Department of the Central Committee – which in the stereotype of some Western Sovietologists was the ultimate sanctuary of Soviet orthodoxy – that a significant degree of critical thinking emerged. The Department recruited well-educated specialists as full-time Consultants, people who knew foreign languages and cultures, and were influenced by their travel. There was often a wide gulf between their official utterances and their innermost thoughts.

⁴⁹ See especially Robert D. English, *Russia and the Idea of the West: Gorbachev, Intellectuals, and the End of the Cold War* (Columbia University Press, New York, 2000); and also Neil Malcolm, *Soviet Political Scientists and American Politics* (Macmillan, London, 1984); and Julie M. Newton, *Russia, France, and the Idea of Europe* (Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2003).

⁵⁰ K.N. Brutents, *Tridstat’ let na Staroy ploshchadi* (Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, Moscow, 1998), p. 168.

⁵¹ Even before he became General Secretary Gorbachev liked to be briefed by well-informed social scientists and *mezhdunarodniki*. Having persuaded Andropov to approve the appointment of Aleksandr Yakovlev as Director of IMEMO in 1983, Gorbachev consulted him frequently and, through him, drew also on the expertise of IMEMO in the period 1983-85. Once Gorbachev became Soviet leader he gave Yakovlev spectacular promotion. In March 1985 Yakovlev, in formal terms, was about number 500 in the Soviet political hierarchy – not yet even a candidate member of the Central Committee. By the summer of 1987 he was one of the top five as a full Politburo member and Secretary of the CC.

⁵² English, *Russia and the Idea of the West*, pp. 193-228.

⁵³ Matthew Evangelista, *Unarmed Forces: The Transnational Movement to End the Cold War* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1999), p. 161.

The chapter of the memoirs of the International Department's long-serving deputy head, Anatoliy Chernyaev – who went on to become Gorbachev's enlightened foreign policy adviser – devoted to his years in the ID is titled 'In the regime of doublethink'.⁵⁴ Even though members of the International Department polemicized with the 'Eurocommunists' in the 1970s, some of them were influenced by the latter's arguments. In general, West Europe – including Eurocommunist and social democratic ideas – was more influential than the United States (although American critics of their form of capitalism, such as J.K. Galbraith, were widely read by the *institutchiki*), so far as the development of the New Thinking was concerned.

Transnational influences were significant for the person who was soon to have more power than anyone else to effect change in the Soviet Union: Mikhail Gorbachev. Even as a provincial party secretary in his native Stavropol territory, Gorbachev was one of the small minority of regional officials who took advantage of the translations of political literature made available in small print-runs for members of the Central Committee. He read books by social democrats such as Willy Brandt and François Mitterrand and the writings of the Eurocommunists. Indeed, in an interview for French television in 2001, Gorbachev said he possessed about one hundred and fifty books on Eurocommunism. In the same interview, he mentioned his admiration both for Santiago Carrillo and Enrico Berlinguer.⁵⁵ Gorbachev's foreign travel was very important for the development of his ideas even before he became General Secretary – starting with his short visits to Holland, Belgium, France, West Germany and Italy in the 1970s. He had more important meetings abroad in the first half of the 1980s, most notably his visits to Canada in 1983 (where he had his first meeting with the head of a foreign government, Pierre Trudeau, and, more significantly, established a rapport with Aleksandr Yakovlev whom he enabled to return to Moscow after a 10-year dignified exile in Ottawa as Soviet ambassador); Italy in June 1984 (for Berlinguer's funeral); and Britain in December of that year when Mrs Thatcher famously declared that Gorbachev was a man she 'could do business with'.⁵⁶

Foreign travel does not automatically broaden the mind – over many years Soviet Foreign Ministers Vyacheslav Molotov and later Andrey Gromyko provided ample evidence to the contrary – but for party intellectuals and officials with reasonably open minds, it undoubtedly influenced the evolution of their views. And it was gradual, internal change in a number of official institutions that was to provide one of the major facilitating conditions for the dramatic transformation of the Soviet system and of Soviet foreign policy in the second half of the 1980s. The Soviet state could be influenced from abroad but not coerced. It had enough nuclear weapons to destroy life on earth, making any military move against it by a foreign power potentially suicidal. Moreover, the unreformed Soviet system had ample political and coercive resources to withstand any internal challenge to it from disaffected citizens.

⁵⁴ A.S. Chernyaev, 'V rezhime dvoemysliya (mezhdunarodnyy otdel TsK)', in *Moya zhizn' i moe vremya* (Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, Moscow, 1995), pp. 237-280.

⁵⁵ Jacques Lévesque, 'The Messianic Character of "New Thinking": Why and What For?', in Olav Njølstad (ed.), *The Last Decade of the Cold War: From Conflict Escalation to Conflict Transformation* (Frank Cass, London, 2004), pp. 159-176, at 175-176. The evolution of Gorbachev's views, however, went beyond Eurocommunism and became close to those of a social democrat such as Brandt.

⁵⁶ Archie Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996), pp. 41-43 and 74-78; Brown, *Seven Years that Changed the World: Perestroika in Perspective* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007), pp. 230-232; and Brown, 'The Change to Engagement in Britain's Cold War Policy: The Origins of the Thatcher-Gorbachev Relationship', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 3, Summer 2008, pp. 3-47.

In states where Communist parties had attained power indigenously, rather than being put in government by Soviet force of arms, it was not autonomous societal organizations that paved the way for fundamental change but the dual character of a number of party-state institutions – what the Chinese scholar X.L. Ding named ‘institutional amphibiousness’ – and the evolution of the views of reformers within those structures.⁵⁷

The Gorbachev Factor

The Soviet system was, however, strongly institutionalized and rigidly hierarchical. The party leader was accorded enormous authority and deference, even when that office was held by such a relative nonentity as Konstantin Chernenko who, in a competitive party system, would have been fortunate to rise to be head of a town council. (Patron-client relations – he was Brezhnev’s protégé – and Chernenko’s competence as a back-room bureaucrat facilitated his rise.) The general secretary had a substantial power of appointment and was also the one person accorded the privilege of being able authoritatively to ‘creatively develop’ the official ideology of Marxism-Leninism. Major ideological innovation had to be cleared with the Politburo if it was to be published in an official party document.⁵⁸ However, speaking for himself, Gorbachev could legitimate concepts that were important and new in the Soviet context – most notably ‘pluralism’ when he spoke approvingly as early as 1987 about a ‘socialist pluralism’ and a ‘pluralism of opinion’. By February 1990 his ideological approval had extended to ‘political pluralism’ which by then had become a political reality.⁵⁹

Writing in 1999 and arguing that there was ‘a connection between Ronald Reagan’s hardline approach and the USSR’s systemic crisis’, Robert Patman wrote: ‘Advocates of the [sic] Gorbachev as Great Man of History or the “internalist” interpretation dispute any links. Observers like Archie Brown and Raymond Garthoff argue that the Reagan administration had very little or no impact on the domestic circumstances that shaped the advent of New Political Thinking’.⁶⁰ Patman’s ‘Great Man’ theory of history attribution is also a straw man. What is needed here is a knowledge of Soviet institutions and how they worked. In a Moscow conference in which I participated in 1999, Anatoliy Gromyko (the son of the long-serving Soviet Foreign Minister) tried to explain why Gorbachev was able to get away with policies which went against the wishes or judgement of others in the leadership, saying that ‘foreigners have a hard time understanding to what extent the post of general secretary was influential in the Soviet mentality’. For others in the leadership ‘to object to the

⁵⁷ For the pioneering article developing the concept of institutional amphibiousness, see X.L. Ding, ‘Institutional Amphibiousness and the Transition from Communism: The Case of China’, *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 24, No. 3, July 1994, pp. 293-318. For its application to the Soviet case, see Archie Brown, ‘Institutional Amphibiousness or Civil Society? The Origins and Development of Perestroika’, in Brown, *Seven Years that Changed the World*, pp. 157-189. See also English, *Russia and the Idea of the West*.

⁵⁸ For an example of such Politburo discussion, based on archival sources, see Archie Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism* (Bodley Head, London, 2009), pp. 492-494.

⁵⁹ See Archie Brown (ed.), *The Demise of Marxism-Leninism in Russia* (Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2004), pp. 19-40.

⁶⁰ Patman ‘Reagan, Gorbachev and the emergence of “New Political Thinking”’, p. 585. The references in Patman’s footnote are to Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, and Raymond Garthoff, *The Great Transition: American-Soviet Relations and the End of the Cold War* (Brookings Institution, Washington, DC, 1994).

general secretary, or even worse, to debate his opinions in public – at that time [second half of 1980s] I don't think anyone would dare to do that'.⁶¹ By 1990 this had begun to change, but up until 1989 the only people ready openly to challenge Gorbachev in the Soviet Union were those who had either never had any power to lose or, exceptionally, Boris Yeltsin who had already been removed from high office and who was preparing to use the new institutional means Gorbachev had provided – contested elections – to attempt a comeback.

Patman's objections to an emphasis on the significance of a reformer acquiring the institutional power of the general secretaryship and to a stress on internal Soviet developments rather than external power and pressure in the development and endorsement of new thinking on foreign policy are imprecise and, to say the least, misleading. Thus, he writes:

The claim that Gorbachev was virtually alone within the Soviet leadership in backing perestroika in 1985 is not persuasive. The first phase of the New Political Thinking before late 1986 ... seemed to command majority support within the Politburo. Moreover, the rise of the 'system modernizers' led by Gorbachev was linked to the hardline challenge of the first Reagan administration. There is evidence of a definite connection between the rise of the New Political Thinking after the death of Brezhnev and Reagan's militant approach to Moscow in the early 1980s.⁶²

The first sentence of that statement needs deconstruction. Everyone in the Soviet leadership in 1985 backed 'perestroika' because they meant different things by that term. Indeed, it had been chosen by Gorbachev at a time when 'reform' was still taboo as a synonym for reform. It meant, however, different things to different people at different times and, indeed, different things to the same person over time. For Gorbachev, by the middle of 1988, it had come to mean systemic transformation, whereas in 1985 he still believed that the existing system could be reformed and improved. The reference to 'leadership' in Patman's first sentence is also insufficiently precise. There was no-one among the full members of the Politburo at the time of Chernenko's death who was supportive of a foreign policy based on the New Thinking – an acceptance, inter alia, that security meant mutual security, that the Soviet Union lived in an interdependent world, that military expenditure should be radically reduced and the influence of the military-industrial complex curtailed, and that Soviet troops should be pulled out of Afghanistan, unilaterally if need be – apart from Gorbachev. Of course, there were people within the broader leadership who shared Gorbachev's views or were ready intellectually for a break with traditional Soviet foreign policy. Candidate member of the Politburo Eduard Shevardnadze, soon to be promoted by Gorbachev to full membership and appointed Foreign Minister (notwithstanding his total lack of foreign policy experience) had a mind open to the New Thinking. Yakovlev, whom Gorbachev made head of the Department of

⁶¹ Moscow Cold War Conference of June 1999, Tape 2, Mershon Center, Ohio State University. By way of illustration of the point, when Dmitriy Yazov, Soviet Minister of Defence during the greater part of the perestroika period, was asked by a sympathetic Russian interviewer why he had not challenged Gorbachev policies he disagreed with – policies he believed went against the interests of the Soviet Union and, in particular, its military-industrial complex, he replied: 'At that time Gorbachev was general secretary'. When the interviewer asked: 'Did he use his authority to apply pressure?', Yazov responded: 'It's not that he used his authority to apply pressure, but we had to use certain tact with him'. See Matthew Evangelista, 'Turning points in arms control', in Richard K. Herrmann and Richard Ned Lebow (eds), *Ending the Cold War: Interpretations, Causation, and the Study of International Relations* (Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2004), pp. 83-105, at p. 93.

⁶² Patman, 'Some Reflections on Archie Brown and the End of the Cold War', p. 444.

Propaganda of the Central Committee before promoting him further, was already committed to it. The same is true of Chernyaev, the deputy head of the International Department, and of Georgiy Shakhnazarov, the deputy head of the Socialist Countries Department of the Central Committee, both of whom were to become influential aides of Gorbachev. There were others, albeit a minority, within the Central Committee apparatus, who shared Gorbachev's views and who, indeed, had an impact on them. It took, however, a change at the top of the hierarchy for the Yakovlevs, Chernyaevs and Shakhnazarovs to be able to exercise the degree of influence they proceeded to exert on Soviet foreign policy. It was, though, an area of policy over which Gorbachev took charge and of which he remained the ultimate arbiter.

The remaining two claims in the passage cited from Patman are groundless. The rise of the 'system modernizers' in the USSR, to the limited extent to which it occurred before Gorbachev became Soviet leader, had nothing to do with Reagan's first-term policies but everything to do with the fact that Andropov succeeded Brezhnev. There were strict limitations to Andropov's ideas of reform and he was certainly not chosen as general secretary because anyone thought he was a 'soft-liner'. He did, however, value well-informed advice and his becoming leader meant that some party intellectuals, including Arbatov, Shakhnazarov and Fedor Burlatsky, who had been in his team of consultants when he headed the Socialist Countries Department of the Central Committee in the 1960s, were able to become somewhat more influential.⁶³

As for the 'definite connection' between the rise of the New Political Thinking after the death of Brezhnev and 'Reagan's militant approach to Moscow in the early 1980s', the Soviet leader chosen to succeed Andropov was Chernenko. He was selected because he represented the status quo ante, a return to the policies of the Brezhnev era and a retreat from the somewhat innovative policies which Andropov had begun to pursue. He was, above all, the choice of the heavyweight Soviet politicians who wished to continue to dominate Soviet foreign and defence policy – Andrey Gromyko and Minister of Defence Dmitriy Ustinov. Chernenko, moreover, was the first Soviet leader to be chosen following Reagan's 'evil empire' speech in March 1983 and the American president's public announcement in the same month of the launch of the SDI project. Anyone who has read the Politburo minutes for 1984 – and they do not appear to include those who have postulated a 'definite connection' between Reagan's hard-line policies and the New Political Thinking – will be hard put to find any such connection whatsoever.

Conclusions

The two themes addressed here are, of course, far too large for one paper. Each has spawned dozens of books. They do, though, illustrate the inseparability of the study of domestic political developments and international relations, if the end of Communism in Eastern Europe and the end of the Cold War are to be adequately understood.⁶⁴ Those endings coincided, and not by chance, for just as the Soviet takeover of Eastern Europe marked the start of the Cold War, the fact that Soviet troops remained in their

⁶³ I wrote about this at the time. See Archie Brown, 'Andropov: Discipline and Reform?', *Problems of Communism*, Vol. XXXII, No. 1, 1983, pp. 18-31.

⁶⁴ I have published a more detailed analysis entitled 'Ending the Cold War' in Brown, *Seven Years that Changed the World*, pp. 239-276. A shorter version of that chapter, 'Perestroika and the End of the Cold War', to which Patnum's article was a response, appeared in *Cold War History*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2007, pp. 1-17.

barracks while the countries of Eastern Europe became non-Communist and independent in 1989 marked its ending. Ideologically, the Cold War ended with Gorbachev's United Nations speech in December 1988. The geopolitical reasons for its continued existence had been removed by the end of the following year. Of all the many factors that contributed to these momentous transformations, change in the regional hegemon, the Soviet Union, was the most important.

The most serious debate, which will no doubt continue throughout the rest of this century and beyond, addresses the question of why more fundamental change in the Soviet system and in Soviet foreign policy took place within a period of five years than had occurred in the previous seventy. In the superpower relationship – and the Soviet Union *was* a military superpower – both sides mattered. If Ronald Reagan had not been prepared to engage with Gorbachev, and had believed the prominent Washington politicians who were telling him that no-one serious about reform or pursuing a constructive and peaceful foreign policy could conceivably become Soviet leader, then, as Dobrynin observed, it would have been difficult for Gorbachev to pursue the policies he did. When Reagan came to Moscow in 1988 and announced that the Soviet Union was no longer an 'evil empire' – that was 'another time, another era' – this strengthened (for a time) Gorbachev's domestic position. Removing the threat of catastrophic nuclear war counted for even more in the Soviet Union than in the United States, given that some twenty-seven million Soviet citizens perished in World War Two compared with 400,000 Americans. Reagan, then, was important, but in the way Matlock and Mann in their recent books have argued – as peacemonger, not warmonger – rather than for the intransigence to which many of his admirers attribute the end of the Cold War.⁶⁵ It was the Ronald Reagan who was prepared for dialogue, and who shared with Gorbachev a desire to rid the world of nuclear weapons, who helped make substantial progress in East-West relations possible. His hard-line, anti-Communist credentials were helpful in one respect. Although some of his erstwhile admirers did decide that he had gone soft on Communism, seduced by the personable Mikhail Gorbachev, it was easier for Reagan, given his record, to do a deal with a Soviet leader than it would have been for a Democrat in the White House or a Republican with less hawkish credentials. Indeed, precisely because he lacked Reagan's reputation as a hard-liner, George Bush the elder took a long time to engage with Gorbachev, sharing some of Brent Scowcroft's doubts as to whether the changes in the Soviet Union were for real, at a time when it should have been obvious to any serious observer that they were fundamental.

Of the explanations offered for change in the Soviet Union, each of which has been examined briefly in this paper, the Reagan factor was, then, significant but not decisive – and significant in a different way from that presented in most Reaganite or 'realist' interpretations. The economic determinist argument, which also appeals to 'realists', is unconvincing. The decline in the rate of economic growth in the Soviet Union and the widening technological gap between command and market economies was a stimulus to reform, but it did not make reform inevitable. Moreover, when reform got underway in the Soviet Union, Gorbachev gave priority to political over economic reform, pursuing quite the opposite policy to that of Deng Xiaoping in China. If Gorbachev had adopted policies similar to those of Deng, the 'dire economic necessity of change' argument might have more purchase. Even then, it would not be wholly convincing. Highly authoritarian or totalitarian regimes have other options apart from radical political or economic reform. Economic setbacks may lead to a

⁶⁵ Mann, *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan*; and Matlock, *Superpower Illusions*.

change of government in a democracy. Communist systems had different ways of dealing with a discontented populace. North Korea experienced catastrophic economic failure and famine during the 1990s, but the ‘Dear Leader’, Kim Jong-il (together with an unreformed Communist system) is still in place.

The explanations which contribute most to an understanding of the demise of Communism and the end of the Cold War are those which focus both on ideational change and on the institutional power of a leader willing to embrace ideas that were radically new in the Soviet context. It is important to stress *the Soviet context*, for few, if any, of the ideas were new globally. Transnational influences played an extremely important, and insufficiently recognized, part in the process of change within the Soviet Union itself.⁶⁶ The encounter with Western ideas and growing acquaintance with the economic progress and political and cultural freedoms of Western Europe and North America were important not only for many of those who had influence in an advisory capacity during the perestroika period but also for some of the key political decision-makers – most crucially, Gorbachev himself. Whether or not Gorbachev was a great man is something his many future biographers can debate. His contribution to the transformations with which this paper is concerned has, however, little or nothing to do with the ‘Great Man’ conception of history as elaborated by Thomas Carlyle.⁶⁷ What matters is that someone of Gorbachev’s mindset for five decisive years wielded more institutional power than anyone else in the entire Soviet bloc.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ The most thorough study to focus, quite specifically, on transnational influences is Matthew Evangelista’s *Unarmed Forces: The Transnational Movement to End the Cold War*.

⁶⁷ Carlyle’s view that ‘all things we see standing accomplished in the world are properly the outer material result, the practical realisation and embodiment, of Thoughts that dwelt in the Great Men sent into the world’ has nothing in common with the arguments of serious scholars – Stephen Cohen, the late Alexander Dallin, Robert Daniels, Robert English, Matthew Evangelista, Raymond Garthoff, Gordon Hahn, Robert Legvold, the late Alec Nove, Alex Pravda, Richard Sakwa and Stephen White, to name but a few – who emphasize the decisive role played by Gorbachev in the process of change. For the full, flowery passage from which the quotation in this footnote comes, see Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and The Heroic in History* (Chapman and Hall, London, 3rd ed., 1846), pp. 1-2.

⁶⁸ Gorbachev was Soviet leader for almost seven years. The reference above to five years is because after the end of 1989 there was no longer a Soviet bloc and because by 1990-91 Gorbachev’s power was in decline as he became increasingly constrained by a variety of new institutions and social forces which his own reforms had brought into being.