

5. The *New York Times* Announces the End of the Cold War, 1989

The cold war of poisonous Soviet-American feelings, of domestic political hysteria, of events enlarged and distorted by East-West confrontation, of almost perpetual diplomatic deadlock is over.

The we-they world that emerged after 1945 is giving way to the more traditional struggles of great powers. That contest is more manageable. It permits serious negotiations. It creates new possibilities—for cooperation in combating terrorism, the spread of chemical weapons, and common threats to the environment, and for shaping a less violent world.

True, Europe remains torn in two; but the place where four decades of hostility began is mending and changing in complicated patterns. True, two enormous military machines still face each other around the world; but both sides are searching for ways to reduce the burdens and risks. Values continue to clash, but less profoundly as Soviet citizens start to partake in freedoms.

The experts who contributed to a two-month series on the Op-Ed page called “Is the Cold War Over?” agreed, with variations in emphasis and definition, that Soviet-American relations are entering a new era. They differed over whether Mikhail Gorbachev can last and whether his policies can outlast him, and over how much the West can or should do to help him and what to ask in return. But these questions are the stuff of genuine policy debate, not grist for old ideological diatribes.

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In his four years of power, what has Mikhail Gorbachev done to bring about this reconsideration of the cold war?

A great deal, as Jeremy Stone of the Federation of American Sciences rightly pointed out. Mr. Gorbachev has pushed Yasir Arafat toward renouncing terrorism and accepting Israel, supported political settlements in Angola and Cambodia, pulled out Soviet troops from Afghanistan, agreed to vastly disproportionate cuts in medium-range missiles, and pledged significant unilateral reductions in Soviet forces in Central Europe.

At home, Mr. Stone said properly, the Soviet leader is introducing economic decentralization, allowing Soviet nationalities to assert their separate identities, encouraging free speech, and experimenting with elections. These measures give hope for a more open Soviet society and Government. And, as Graham Allison of Harvard's Kennedy School pointed out, this has been the very goal of America's containment policy.

But what if Mr. Gorbachev is ousted? Couldn't his successors readily reverse his actions?

Frank Carlucci argued that it's too early to foretell Mr. Gorbachev's fate or judge whether he or his successors might not simply change policies. The former Defense Secretary argued that Soviet policy is in a transitional phase.

Dimitri Simes of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, on the other hand, convincingly made the case that the changes occurring in the Soviet Union are of a more fundamental nature. Whoever leads the Soviet Union, he argued, would have little choice but to respond to Moscow's current economic and political weaknesses and follow the Gorbachev path.

Mr. Simes rightly argued that the debate in the Soviet Union revolves around the scope and pace of change, not the need for change. And there is little evidence that Mr. Gorbachev's foreign and military policies are under attack. Moscow simply does not have the resources for costly global challenges.

If the Soviet Union is in such bad shape, why not squeeze hard for concessions?

William Luers, a former U.S. diplomat, offered one reason. He warned against humiliating Mr. Gorbachev in ways that would unite a proud nation against the West. Ed Hewitt of the Brookings Institution provided another: Soviet leaders still have sufficient economic strength and foreign policy options to make life easier or harder for the West.

These cautions have to be kept in mind. But the West should not shy away from driving hard bargains. That can be done, as Ronald Reagan demonstrated, without destroying relations.

What should Western policy be?

Zbigniew Brzezinski correctly argued that the West needs a strategy to deal with "the gravity of the challenge and the magnitude of the opportunity." But the West would tie itself in knots if it followed his advice to "insist that any substantial assistance be reciprocated by reforms that institutionalize economic and political pluralism."

On the contrary, the West cannot manage Soviet reforms any more than it can "save" Mr. Gorbachev. It can reinforce and encourage reforms when Western interests are also at stake—by providing credits and technology on a modest and safe scale and by easing restrictions on trade. The point is for the West to rid itself of

self-made restraints on expanding economic relations so that decisions can be made on a case-by-base basis.

The prospect of such economic openings and the diminishing Soviet threat are likely to give freer play to conflicts among Western industrialized powers, according to Edward Luttwak of the Center for Strategic and International Studies. He was exactly right in urging Western leaders to "act now to construct a new system of economic cooperation that would stand on its own and not lean on the imperatives of resisting" Moscow.

No one seems to have a good answer about the division of Europe, always the most dangerous East-West question. Michael Mandelbaum of the Council on Foreign Relations offered as good a prescription as anyone. He looked toward superpower talks to bring about sovereign nations in Eastern Europe and special arrangements for the two Germanys.

The Bush Administration seems less attentive to these issues and more preoccupied with Mr. Gorbachev's seizing headlines worldwide. It would do better to think of him as part of the solution, not the problem, as Richard Ullman of Princeton University counseled. "Who takes the initiative," he wrote, "matters less than the result."

The Administration now nears the completion of its East-West policy review. Hints dribble out about senior officials worrying that Mr. Reagan was too friendly with Mr. Gorbachev and too eager for arms control. That's self-defeating talk. The treaty eliminating medium-range missiles in Europe represents a substantial victory for the West. Similarly, Mr. Bush and the country would gain by early completion of a treaty to cut intercontinental-range missiles and bombers.

None of the contributors recommended cosmic disarmament agreements, and Mr. Bush would be right to avoid them. But he would be flat wrong not to exploit Moscow's willingness to compromise on cutting troops in Europe and otherwise reduce the costs and risks of security.

It would also be unfortunate if the Bush team worried too much about its right flank and tried to prove that it can out-tough Mr. Reagan. That would drain them of the imagination and boldness necessary to go beyond the cold war. Presidents Bush and Gorbachev have the opportunity of the century to refocus energies and resources from sterile conflicts onto common threats to mankind.