

An American Conservative Views U.S.-Soviet Relations

By Burton Yale Pines

I.

I must start by telling you something that you here in Moscow already know very well: the world is changing enormously. At the center of this change is the changing relationship between my country and yours.

A very small symbol of this change is that I am in Moscow today with you. A couple of years ago, I would not have come to speak with you. I would have said that you and I had nothing to talk about. And you probably would not have wanted to meet with me.

Now I think that we have much to talk about.

Let me tell you who I am. I am an American Conservative. I am an activist American conservative, perhaps some even would say a shock worker — an oodarneek.

As a conservative, all my professional life I have been anti-Communist and anti-Soviet. I felt strongly that the Soviet Union was the most dangerous enemy of America; the most threatening enemy. I saw the Soviet Union as the Great Satan.

In believing this, I have been typical of millions of American conservatives — and typical of tens of millions of American voters. Ronald Reagan, of course, also held these beliefs. It was, after all, Reagan who declared that the Soviet Union was an “evil empire.” When he said this he was applauded by me and my colleagues. And this was one very important reason why Reagan was elected and re-elected president by huge majorities.

But that was yesterday — a day that seems long ago. Since then so much has changed that I must ask myself: Are my former beliefs still valid?

As I question these beliefs and analyze the new relationship between your country and mine, I discover some things that we may have in common. Certainly the level of our cooperation in the Persian Gulf reveals common interests.

Remember, however, that I am a conservative. This means that I am going to be cautious about all changes — including changes in international relationships. I am not yet sure whether the changes here in your country are reversible or not.

I am not yet sure that the Cold War is really over. I believe that it is, but I cannot be absolutely sure. Not yet.

Let me tell you personally, honestly: I want the Cold War to be over.

I do not enjoy worrying about the threat from the Soviet Union.

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I do not enjoy spending so much American money on defenses designed to oppose the Soviet Union. I know that money spent by the government — by any government, for anything, including defense — is money that is not spent wisely or efficiently.

I know that when a nation increases its military power, it also increases the size of government. As a conservative, I do not like this. I do not like big government.

Thus, I would prefer a world in which America is not threatened by the Soviet Union and thus a world in which America could spend less on defense.

I prefer a world in which America could work with and cooperate with a reformed, democratic and free market Soviet Union — or a reformed, democratic, free market Russia, Ukraine, Latvia and other nations of this region.

This is a point I must emphasize. My fight never has been with the Russian or Ukrainian or the Soviet people. Rather, my fight has been with Stalin and Brezhnev and those other architects of Soviet foreign expansion after World War II. I believed — and continue to believe — that such expansion threatens America.

If you no longer are expanding, if you no longer seek to dominate and control the nations on your borders and elsewhere, then I do not want to fight you. In fact, I may want to work with you.

I seek no unilateral advantage for my country. As a conservative, I know that the world is not a Zero Sum game; I know that it is not necessary for you to lose in order for me to gain. I hope that you no longer feel that the only way for you to win is for America to lose. It is possible, after all, for us both to gain together.

So I welcome the changes that we have been seeing here and in our relations. I want the changes to be permanent.

II.

In some respects, just as the nature of our antagonism and hostility was special, so the nature of our emerging relationship may become special. Despite the tremendous differences between your nation and mine, there are important similarities.

We may be more like each other than we are like Europe. We both have been told for centuries by Old World Europe that we are unsophisticated — that we are peasants, country bumpkins, Oblamovs.

Yet we both long have known that we have something that Old World Europe does not have and never can have. We both — your country and mine — are huge continents. We both have had frontiers that challenged us to become pioneers and to be brave enough to settle in virgin lands.

We both have a romantic sense of the land and the people. We have a romantic sense of who we are and a sense that we have a special destiny.

We both have a sense of mission, a sense that we are different from other nations. In my country we express this as The American Dream, as Manifest Destiny. Throughout our history we have seen ourselves – and Ronald Reagan reminded us of this often – as a Zion in the Wilderness, a City upon a Hill, the last great hope of man. It is Reagan who asked us in a way that Americans deeply understood: “If not now, then when? If not us, then whom?”

And you too have seen yourself as a special place, a special land. You have viewed yourself as The Third Rome or, later, as the center of a world revolution.

The results of the American sense of mission and the Russian sense of mission have been different – at times, tragically different. And I cannot overlook the differences. But what is similar is that we are both nations able to dream. For good reason did Tolstoy, Dostoevski and other of your philosophers observe that Russians are not really Europeans.

As a conservative I appreciate these feelings and impulses. And because of what we have in common, we may find that it is possible to build a special relationship. Alexis de Tocqueville, the French writer who understood America so well, recognized this 150 years ago, when he wrote:

There are now two great nations in the world which, starting from different points, seem to be advancing toward the same goal: the Russians and the Americans....Each seems called by some secret desire of Providence one day to hold in its hands the destinies of half the world.

III.

I call myself a conservative. Let me tell you what it means to be an American conservative.

First. Because we believe that man is created by God, we believe that each individual must be treated with respect. Each must enjoy liberty and freedom. At the heart and center and soul of conservative belief is liberty.

Second. We believe that man is fallible, that man makes mistakes and always will make mistakes, that human judgment is not perfect. This means that we need some checks to control human behavior. The checks are provided by our culture, religion, tradition, parents, families, community and public authorities.

And because we believe that men are not perfect, we reject the idea of utopias. We know from history that all attempts to build utopias have been disastrous and have led to terrible repression. The great mistake of utopian thinking is to believe that man can be smart enough and good enough and generous enough to create and live in perfect societies. History teaches us that this is not true.

Third, we believe that not all men and women are equal. Perhaps it would be nice if everyone had equal talent and ability and kindness, but this simply is not the case. Inequality is a fact of life. As a conservative I believe that those who are the more fortunate thus have a responsibility for those who are the less fortunate.

Fourth, we believe that each generation has a responsibility to the generations that follow – and to those that came first. We have an obligation to preserve what is valuable for future generations. It is this that makes us cautious about what we change and cautious about how we change it.

Fifth, we believe that wealth is created only by human beings. This means that the only economic system that can succeed is a system that unleashes the creativity and mobilizes the efforts of individuals. The only system that we have discovered that does this is the free market – what Karl Marx called capitalism. Every other system has failed to mobilize individual creativity and thus has failed as an economic system.

IV.

I have described the fundamentals of American conservative belief. Now, more specifically, how do we approach foreign policy.

I must start by admitting that conducting foreign policy makes conservatives uncomfortable. After all, we really do believe that – as Ronald Reagan said frequently – “Government Is The Problem Not The Solution.” We do believe that government inevitably erects obstacles to individual creativity and that government inevitably becomes the enemy of liberty. And thus, we believe that the bigger the government, the bigger the problem.

The conduct of foreign policy – especially an activist, interventionist foreign policy – requires more government than conservatives like.

Yet, in the Cold War, when we were confronted by the dangerous threat from you, we conservatives concluded – reluctantly and not happily – that we must conduct a vigorous foreign policy backed up by a strong military.

And what has been the purpose of this foreign policy? I answer by quoting a former American Secretary of State who I know did not have one of the most popular names in Moscow. I quote John Foster Dulles. In 1958, he said: “There is nothing mysterious about the goals of United States foreign policy. They seek to defend and advance the interests of the United States.”

As a conservative, I am not ashamed to say that the goal of American foreign policy is to help American interests.

The key question, of course, is: What are these interests?

For almost its entire history, my country has defined its interests as a world inhabited by democratic states conducting open and free trade.

It does help America if other nations are free and democratic.

It is good for America if other nations grow economically and expand their trade.

Sure, some of us also want to advance morality – and American policies often do advance morality. But we must not confuse advancing morality with advancing our interests. Advancing morality is the by-product, not the reason and goal, of American foreign policy. For me,

as a conservative, it is American interests that must be the goal and core and driving force and center of American foreign policy.

V.

What does this tell me about the prospects of relations between your country and mine?

The short answer is: our relations can improve enormously. They can become very friendly. We can discover many areas of cooperation. We can discover considerable mutual interests.

Of course, there still will be problems. A big problem is that we still will be worried about your nuclear arsenal. Only you can — and for the foreseeable future will be able to — attack and devastate my country. This will always worry us and create residual anxiety and tensions in our relations.

Many things, however, can change. I see five big areas in which it is possible for our relations to improve: 1) global security; 2) regional security; 3) bilateral concerns; 4) American participation in your economic reforms; and 5) helping Third World nations grow economically.

First, let's examine the matter of global security. This is the most urgent and important area, of course, because this was the heart of the cold war. What brought America in 1947 and 1949 back into world affairs, what forced us to develop advanced nuclear weapons, was to keep first Europe and then other parts of the world secure from Soviet expansion.

We developed our terrifying weapons to halt your expansion. It is this "global" confrontation that created the nightmare of Nuclear Holocaust.

The Cold War, thus, will truly end only if we end it in this area. To start, we must agree on genuine and large reductions of conventional weapons in Europe.

Then we must conclude a strategic arms agreement that really — not cosmetically, but really — eliminates the most dangerous and provocative weapons, especially the giant-size missiles. This is a polite way for me to say that your SS-18 missiles must be eliminated. They are the only weapons in the world capable of inflicting a devastating First Strike attack. In the new world of our new relations, no nation needs such a weapon.

The nuclear threat, of course, will come not only from our countries. More troubling, perhaps, is that too many Third World countries appear to be developing nuclear, chemical and biological arsenals. We must work together, and with Europe, to impose a very tough regime to prevent Third World states from becoming nuclear powers.

And then, we must start working together on strategic defenses, on defenses against missile attack. As a conservative, I favor strategic defense more than any other weapons system.

As a conservative, I insist that the only indisputable legitimate function of government is to defend its people. Strategic defenses at last will enable my government — and your government — to do this. If I manage today, and in future conversations, to persuade some

of you to become conservatives, then you will understand why strategic defense is the most important weapon we can develop.

Throughout the entire nuclear age, after all, we both have been unable to defend ourselves from nuclear attack. Instead, we relied nervously on the threat of devastating counterstrikes to deter attack. We conducted hundreds, perhaps thousands, of academic seminars on the virtues and problems of Mutual Assured Destruction. Perhaps tens of thousands of scholarly articles were written about it.

And yet, during all this time, we were nervous. We talked nervously about miscalculations; we talked nervously about launching-on-warning; we talked nervously about a leader's need to make a counter-attack decision in just 15 minutes; and we talked nervously about the hairline trigger.

With strategic defense we will not need to be nervous about any of these.

American security will not have to depend on rational decisions being made in Moscow. Your security will not have to depend on rational decisions being made in Washington. Strategic defense may not be a 100 percent protection against a massive nuclear attack, but it can be an almost total protection against miscalculation and irrationality.

And, perhaps as important and surely with increasing importance, strategic defense can protect us from Third World tyrants — from a Hussein, a Gadhafi, a Kim Il Sung — who builds rockets armed with chemical or even nuclear warheads.

I urge that we begin working together on devising a system for deploying strategic defenses. Perhaps we can even work together on some aspects of developing the technology. Give us a chance to convince you that strategic defense will increase the security of all of us.

I suggest that the most important thing that we can do to demonstrate that the Cold War has ended and that a new epoch has begun would be for us to shift the foundation of our security from devastating offensive weapons to a defensive shield.



The second big area in which our relations can improve involves regional matters.

Your very constructive efforts opposing Iraq's invasion and military occupation of Kuwait give me hope that the most serious tensions of the volatile Middle East at last can be reduced.

A main cause of the tensions in the past 40 years has been that Arab nations have known that you probably would back them if they opposed the U.S. and Israel. Your action on Iraq this past month very much changes this and could create an environment in which most Middle East nations conclude that it is wise for them to begin pursuing peaceful policies.

This would be helped enormously if you normalized your relations with Israel and then help us repeal the 1975 United Nations General Assembly Resolution that declares that Zionism is racism.

Also constructive have been your recent contributions to stability in East Asia. I know that you have reduced – and perhaps even ended – your support of the anti-government guerrillas in the Philippines; now it would be useful to repudiate them publicly.

I know that you have reduced significantly your naval operations at Viet Nam's Cam Ranh Bay; now I suggest that you begin reducing your arms shipments to Viet Nam's navy and air force. Meanwhile, I welcome your increased commercial relations with Taiwan.

The most important policy in Asia, of course, concerns Japan.

As an American, I find that discussing Japan requires some delicacy. I almost hesitate to do so publicly.

As an American, I am proud that my country's policies have helped make Japan a good citizen of the world, a democracy and an economic power. I am proud that we have held our security umbrella over Japan so that Japan could recover politically and economically from the war that Japan started and Japan lost.

And yet, I worry about Japan – as I suspect you do. The main problem is that Japan – once again – can become a military threat to all of Asia. Japan has the technology and the money to build – once again – a mighty war machine.

I do not believe that Japan at this moment wants to do so. I know that Tokyo is very sensitive to the fears of Japan that run deep throughout Asia.

The danger is that if Japan begins to feel threatened, then Japan understandably will begin to acquire the weapons it needs to protect itself. These weapons will include those which Japan so far does not have: aircraft carriers, long-range bombers and, perhaps, even missiles.

If Japan builds such an arsenal, all of Asia will be terrified. Asia will be destabilized. This would be a threat to America; it would be a threat to you.

I hope that stability in Asia becomes a Soviet foreign policy objective. Then my country and yours could explore ways to prevent Japan from feeling threatened. If Japan does not feel threatened, then Japan probably will not expand its arsenal.

I believe that a large American military force in Asia is necessary to prevent Japan from feeling threatened. The main purpose of this force increasingly is to give Japan a sense of security. If we withdraw our troops from Asia, Japan almost certainly would begin to do more to defend itself.

I thus make two suggestions: 1) that you accept the need for American forces to remain in Asia to maintain stability; and 2) that your own actions in Asia, perhaps working with us, contribute to stability. A good first step towards this may have been Foreign Minister Shevardnadze's visit to Japan earlier this month.



The third big area of potential improvement in our relations involves our bilateral concerns.

Here I hope that your New Thinking means that you will end those programs that directly damage America — such as giving military aid to Cuba.

I also hope that you will end entirely those disinformation campaigns that attempt to discredit my country. Some of these campaigns, in the 1980s, as you may know, said that the U.S. army deliberately created and spread the AIDS virus. Some campaigns said that America kidnapped South American babies to use them for medical experiments.

All of this, of course, was nonsense. There is no reason for you to have said such things about us. I know, and welcome, that such campaigns have been decreased substantially in the past year. Now I hope that they are ended entirely.

I also welcome the decreasing aid and shelter that you have been giving to terrorists. I hope that terrorists will discover that they have no friends in your country. I suggest that we work together on policies and programs to end state-supported terrorism.

Another matter important to America, of course, is the international narcotics traffic. I know that the drug problem mainly is an internal American matter. It is mainly for we Americans to solve ourselves. Yet more could be done to stop drugs from reaching the U.S. In this regard, I ask you to use your very strong influence in Laos to pressure its government to take strong action against narcotics traders. Laos is becoming an increasing source of narcotics that reach America.

Finally, I am sure that you share America's concern about North Korea's apparent efforts to obtain nuclear weapons. It would be useful for you publicly to ask North Korea to allow the International Atomic Energy Agency to inspect all North Korean nuclear facilities.



The fourth area of possible improvement in our relations concerns how America can assist perestroika. If you want our help in developing your democratic institutions and your market economy, we are ready to help. In fact, The Heritage Foundation and other American conservative organizations, for more than a year, have been giving advice to economic reformers in Russia, in the Baltic states and elsewhere in the Soviet Union.

If we help perestroika, we will ask nothing in return.

But I want to make certain that you understand me.

We are not offering to help you because we want to do something nice for you. We are offering help because we want to do something for America. The creation of a democratic, free market Soviet Union is in America's interest.

For this reason I urge that there be linkage in America's help to you.

Let me explain this linkage: our help must be used only to create democracy and free markets in your country.

We do not want to help keep your central planners in power.

We do not want to help you subsidize producers.

We do not want to help you distort market dynamics.

This will not help you grow economically and it will not help us.

We can help you in several ways – with advice, with investment, even with direct financial aid.

Specifically, as a start, we would like to help you do six things:

1) Create an absolutely free price system. Only this allows an economy to operate at top efficiency.

2) Establish private property and create a judicial system to protect private property. Only this gives individuals the incentives to work hard, to improve what they own and to save for future generations.

3) Create a convertible currency.

4) Establish private banks and other private credit institutions.

5) Create a tax system that does not penalize the private sector and that does not discourage entrepreneurs, inventiveness, creativity and risk-taking.

6) Make it easier for individuals to start their own businesses. To do this, you should reduce regulations and simplify requirements for obtaining business licenses and permits.

As you begin progressing towards a free market economy, we will not object to you becoming a member of international organizations designed to advance the free market – organizations like the GATT, the International Monetary Fund, and the International Standards Organization. If you remain a centrally-planned economy, of course, you do not qualify for GATT membership. As a free market economy, you deserve to be a member.



The fifth area of possible improvement in our relations is in promoting Third World economic growth. There is so much that we together can bring to the Third World.

Here the most useful vehicle may be international organizations. Just as we are working together at the United Nations on the Persian Gulf crisis, so too we can begin to work together at the U.N. on economic development matters.

The Heritage Foundation has conducted extensive studies on Third World economies. From these studies we learn that what Third World countries need most is not our money

and not your money. What Third World countries need most is good advice on economic policies.

Such advice they have not been receiving from the United Nations. Instead, U.N. economic agencies consistently give bad advice by advocating central economic planning, state-run agriculture, artificial price systems and all of those other policies that guarantee economic stagnation, even decline.

It is no coincidence that most Third World countries are poorer today than they were 30 years ago.

For this, the United Nations bears a major share of the blame. And you too are partly to blame. This is because Third World nations and U.N. agencies have looked to Moscow for guidance on economic issues. The advice you gave them has been as bad for their economies as it has been for your economy.

Now, of course, you can begin giving Third World nations much better advice. You could tell them that central planning and a New International Economic Order are formulas for economic catastrophe. In the place of that strategy, you could recommend your own "500 Day" economic reform plan. If they adopted it, Third World states would benefit enormously.

What I thus suggest to you is that your country and mine can require the United Nations to give Third World countries good economic advice. We can change the agenda of those U.N. bodies that are hostile to free market principles — bodies like the U.N. Conference on Trade and Development (called UNCTAD, in English), the U.N. Capital Development Fund, the U.N. Industrial Development Organization and the U.N. Development Program.

Further, your country and mine can prevent the U.N. programs on the environment, oceans, shipping, multinational corporations, international financial institutions and even space from blocking economic growth.



VI.

Let me conclude.

I am very pleased to be here.

I am very pleased to be talking to you about a new era of relations between America and you, between American conservatives and you.

Georgiy Arbatov of your U.S.A. and Canada Institute said, with some amusement, last year, that the Soviet Union would do something for which America is not prepared — take away America's enemy.

Comrade Arbatov was wrong. As a conservative I am prepared to lose you as my enemy.

I don't want you as my enemy.

I have been a reluctant fighter in the Cold War – a tough and persistent fighter, I believe, but also a reluctant one. I welcome the end of this fight.

Even during the long years of the fight, I tried to be an honest enemy of the Soviet regime and thus a good friend of the Soviet people. I and my conservative colleagues certainly have been better friends of yours than have been American liberals.

These liberals – like Jimmy Carter or George McGovern or Walter Mondale and their advisors – have not been your friends because they have not been honest with you. They made excuses for your economic failings; they made apologies for your military expansion.

Though it may be painful, let us recall what Cyrus Vance, when he was Secretary of State, told the press. He actually said: “President Carter and President Brezhnev share similar dreams and aspirations on all the important issues.”

You know better than I do what outrageous nonsense this statement was. Vance not only was lying to us, he was lying to you.

Conservatives did not pretend that America and Brezhnev shared anything.

We did not pretend that everything was fine in the Soviet Union.

We did not make excuses and apologies for you.

We told you the truth.

We told you that there was no need for you to expand militarily, that you had no reason to fear America and that your economic policies would drive you to bankruptcy.

In the long run, we have proven to be true friends of yours. Now is the time to build solid structures on this friendship.

Let me end by recalling that when American liberals and other leftists would visit you, they typically would return to America and would declare that in the Soviet Union they have seen the future – and it works.

Today I come to say to you that we conservatives have seen the past – and that is what works.

History teaches us great lessons. As a conservative, I offer – in friendship – to share these with you.

