Bullies: A Psychohistory of the Cold War—from Truman and Stalin to Trump and Putin

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Delbert McQuaide Distinguished Lecture in History, March 20, 2017

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One of the tasks that historians set for themselves is to provide explanations for past events. Since the end of the Cold War, dozens of historians, poring over troves of declassified documentation, have offered explanations, drawn conclusions, and assigned degrees of responsibility. Collectively, this body of work is known as "new Cold War historiography."[1] One of the important elements that distinguish "new" from "old" Cold War historiography is that it takes the key players at their word. Soviet propaganda consistently claimed that Moscow acted in line with the prescriptions of Marxism-Leninism while the Americans really believed that a quest for freedom underpinned U.S. foreign policy. Of course, there have been a few detractors, but, on the whole, the post-1991 historiography of the Cold War highlights the importance of ideology for understanding the nature of the conflict.

This brief article, based on the author's March 2017 talk at Juniata, follows a different trajectory. I argue that ideology, while important, was not really as important as Cold War historians make it out to be. Far from serving as the determining factor for foreign policy, it helped in the *post facto* rationalization of policy decisions. It was, to put it informally, the icing on the cake. To justify my skepticism, I look at four case studies involving the Soviet Union, the United States, and a host of other countries. In these cases, I argue, it was the players' concerns about prestige and credibility that drove policy, not abstract factors like class struggle or rival visions of modernity. There is nothing particularly innovative about this approach. Psychological explanations for political behavior are increasingly a part of the mainstream, at least in fields like International Relations and Political Science.[2] Historians, who usually approach the above two fields with a mixture of distrust and trepidation, are yet to take these insights to heart.

THE ORIGINS OF THE COLD WAR

There is now a growing consensus among historians that Stalin's post-war aims were conservative.[3] He had little interest in expanding his sphere of influence beyond the strip of buffer states along the Soviet periphery, and even here he was often willing to sacrifice direct military control for indirect influence, provided he received a degree of Western recognition for the legitimacy of his gains. Stalin did not have the urge to spread Communist ideology until the entire world became "red." Indeed, I

contend that ideology was almost immaterial to Stalin's foreign policy. Yes, it did imply that the world would become Communist one day, much as the Bible predicts the second coming of Christ. But the prospect of the second coming of Christ never carried much weight with American policy makers. Why, then, should we suppose that the prospect of a global Communist society carried weight with Stalin?

If not ideology, then what, exactly, mattered for Stalin? Security? True, it is tempting to see Stalin as a cynical realist looking after buffer zones, believing that the only way to keep his country safe was to keep it armed to the teeth.[4]

But there was a lot more to Stalin than a simple pursuit of security. There was one thing in the postwar world that he desired above all else. It was to assure the legitimacy of his wartime gains. Legitimacy was not something that could rely merely on internal propaganda. Soviet newspapers could—and did—defend Soviet rights in Eastern Europe and East Asia on the basis of any number of historical, legal, or moral reasons. So could Soviet allies from Berlin to Beijing. But this was not the kind of recognition that mattered. The recognition that Stalin craved was that of the United States. That is why, in February 1945, he had the ailing President Franklin Delano Roosevelt join him and Churchill at a conference at Yalta, where they worked out what the world would look like after the war. There was a big place in it for the Soviet Union.[5]

The Soviet Union was given territory—for example, the southern half of the island of Sakhalin in the Far East—and allowed to keep Mongolia as a satellite. Stalin was pleased with these gains. In return, he promised to limit his ambitions. The Soviet Union could easily have supported the Communists in Greece, which was then in the middle of a civil war, but Stalin refused to back the Greek revolutionaries to keep his side of the bargain. You respect my sphere, and I respect yours.

In studying the origins of the Cold War, most historians are unduly focused on Europe. Europe was, of course, important. But to understand Stalin's postwar thinking, it is vitally important to look at Asia.

In August 1945 Stalin, instead of supporting the Chinese Communist leader Mao Zedong, signed a treaty with the nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek and forced Mao Zedong into peace talks with the government. That was not an obvious choice. After all, since Mao was a Communist, it would have seemed more natural for Stalin to embrace a fellow Communist rather than the proverbial American puppet Chiang Kai-shek. Yet, Stalin sided with the latter against the former. This was because his treaty with China was underpinned by the Yalta Agreements, which gave the Soviet gains an aura of legitimacy, something that a relationship with Mao—a fellow Communist—could not have.

Stalin later changed his position and sided with Mao in the Chinese Civil War, but that took years and, when it did happen, in 1949, the international situation was completely different. The Cold War had

already begun. What had happened in the meantime? Why did Stalin turn away from cooperation with the West towards confrontation?

Once answer would be to look at the impact of Hiroshima. Historians have long debated why Harry S Truman made the decision to drop the atomic bomb. The debate between those who claim that it was a military necessity and those who perceive an effort to demonstrate U.S. power or intimidate the Soviet Union has turned bitter on occasion, but this debate is largely irrelevant to the question at hand.[6] The more relevant question here is how Stalin understood Hiroshima. The evidence here is relatively straightforward. He saw it as an effort to intimidate the Soviet Union.

Of course, for Stalin, the bomb was nothing unexpected. The Soviets, through espionage, knew of the Manhattan Project, and their own atomic effort was far advanced by 1945. Stalin did not even see the bomb as an effective weapon, Hiroshima notwithstanding. He continued to believe that it was armies—raw manpower rather than technologies—that decided the outcome of wars. But what really concerned him was that the possession of the atomic bomb elevated the United States above the Soviet Union. It was a question of prestige, a mark of a true superpower. In Stalin's view, the bomb emboldened the Americans to conduct postwar negotiations from a position of strength.[7]

The first major test for the Soviet-American relationship since Hiroshima was the London Conference of Foreign Ministers in September and October 1945. On that occasion, the U.S. Secretary of State James Byrnes played it tough, refusing to recognize Soviet-controlled regimes in Bulgaria and Romania, and once even bragged about the bomb in a conversation with Molotov. This was done in a jocular fashion, but the threat was there. "If you don't cut out all this stalling and let us get down to work," Byrnes told Molotov, "I am going to pull an atomic bomb out of my hip pocket and let you have it."[8] Remarkably, Molotov did not report this exchange to Stalin—he may well have been concerned lest the Soviet dictator deem him insufficiently tough.

However, Molotov did report on many other perceived American transgressions, including the key question of Romania and Bulgaria. Stalin's response was to resort to complete stonewalling. Any concessions, he feared, would be interpreted as a sign of weakness. "The Allies," he wrote to Molotov, "are pressing on you to break your will and force you to make concessions. It is clear that you must display complete obduracy."[9]

Game theorists would describe this as a game of chicken except, in this game of chicken, the Soviets were driving a Honda while the Americans, empowered by the bomb, were driving an eighteen-wheeler truck. This was all the more reason for Stalin to remain steadfast. The London Conference of Foreign Ministers ended in a complete deadlock, in many ways heralding the beginning of the Cold War.

All of this is relatively well known to historians, but one issue that scholars have not sufficiently explored, partly due the lack of evidence, is just how concerned Stalin was with the issues of equality and

status. For instance, one of the main reasons that he instructed Molotov to torpedo all proposals at the London Conference of Foreign Ministers, deadlocking the conference, was a single phrase uttered by James Byrnes: just one phrase, remarkably enough.

At one point during the conference, there was a discussion about what to do with the Dodecanese, an island chain off the coast of Greece: whether to return them to Greece (as the Americans wanted) or not (as was the Soviet preference). Molotov said that he would want to study the question further, at which point Byrnes said that it was unnecessary, as, in any case, the decision would pit four powers (the US, Great Britain, France and China) against one (the USSR).[10]

This four-against-one argument really hit a raw nerve with Stalin. This, he felt, was an effort to intimidate and isolate the USSR. Instead of being more reasonable, he only dug in his heels. When faced with force, Stalin applied counterforce. If the Americans were unwilling to recognize "his sphere," well, then, he'd have to play it tough and pay them back with the same coin. If that meant no compromise, there would not be compromise. For Stalin, compromising from a weaker position was psychologically unacceptable.

The main lesson of this failure is that it shows that the popular notion that the only language "they" (whoever "they" may be) understand is force is fundamentally misconstrued. The main problem with the advocates of this approach is the failure to anticipate that the opposite side may well adopt a similar approach. When both sides are seen to understand only the language of force, there is invariably a slide toward conflict. This is what happened in 1945. The Americans thought that the Soviets only understood force. The Soviets thought the Americans only understood force. The result was the Cold War.

But could there have been a different outcome? One approach would be for each side to recognize that the other had legitimate interests. This recognition was there in February 1945, and it definitely disappeared after Hiroshima.

So, was the United States responsible for the Cold War? The answer is no. It was certainly not the only one responsible. Trust was broken on both sides. Stalin is responsible for it no less and even more than Truman. After all, it was not Truman who faked postwar elections in Poland and established Soviet domination from "Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic."[11] Critics of Cold War revisionists justly point to Stalin's failure to observe the "legitimate interests" of Eastern Europe. However, Soviet domination was itself at least partly a result of Stalin's disillusionment with the prospects of postwar cooperation with the United States.

THE SUEZ CRISIS

My second case study concerns the Middle East. The Middle East is frequently in the news, and generally the news is bad. The hopeful rhetoric of the Arab Spring has given way to resignation at the sight of ethnic and religious violence that continues to plague this region, but the ongoing conflict in the Middle East is old news to historians. In this section, I will recount something that happened some sixty years ago in Egypt. Doing so allows me to highlight the importance of the terms "recognition" and "status."

For some seventy years (from the late-nineteenth century until 1954), Egypt was under British military occupation. The British were in a position to force a change of government, which they did every so often, for example, in 1942. In 1952, the old, British-supported King Farouk of Egypt was ousted in a military coup. The new leader, Gamal Abdel Nasser, who, like many Egyptians of his day, deeply resented the humiliating legacy of British domination, nevertheless continued to depend on the West for economic and military aid. In particular, he wanted credits for the construction of an enormous dam on the Nile River, at a place called Aswan.

The Americans, whom he asked to underwrite this enterprise, originally agreed but then pulled out, believing that Nasser was leaning too much to the Communist camp. The evidence for this was his purchase of arms from the Soviet bloc in 1955, his sabotage of the British-backed Baghdad Pact, and other infractions, indicative more of Nasser's nationalism than his alleged Communist propensities. In any case, angered by the broken promise, on July 26, 1956, Nasser decided to nationalize the Suez Canal, which connected the Mediterranean and the Red Sea and was then owned jointly by the British and the French. Thus began the Suez Crisis.[12]

The British and the French could not accept this decision, so they began planning for Nasser's removal. Some historians emphasize strategic concerns in their decision-making because the Suez Canal was used to ship oil, and oil was important to both Britain and France. This was certainly a factor, but there were also other crucial factors at play. One of the main concerns for British Prime Minister Anthony Eden was the prospect of humiliation at Nasser's hands. Doing nothing about Nasser's nationalization would have dealt a severe blow to Britain's prestige as a great power.

There was also another element. Eden feared appearing weak-kneed. He feared appeasement. Even today "appeasement" is a swear word. One is not supposed to engage in appeasement. Neville Chamberlain tried that in Munich in 1938, and it took a world war to undo the damage. People are afraid to repeat these kinds of mistakes. A lesson was learned, and it is difficult to unlearn. Nowadays, Russia's Vladimir Putin is occasionally compared to Hitler. Those who argue that Russia must be punished for its various transgressions usually say that, by appeasing Putin, one risks whetting his appetites, so in the end the world would end up with another Hitler.

Nothing is more useless than incorrect historical analogies. Wrong-headed policies are only too frequently justified by appeals to incorrectly learned historical lessons. So it was with Anthony Eden. He compared Nasser of Egypt to . . . you guessed it, Hitler. Actually, he not only compared him to Hitler but also to Mussolini and even Napoleon.[13]

So, for all these reasons—in the name of security but also in defense of Britain's prestige as a great power and to prevent Nasser from becoming Hitler, whom he never intended to become in the first place—Britain joined France and Israel in an attack on Egypt in October 1956.

The Suez invasion caused a grave crisis in U.S.-U.K. relations. The conventional take is to argue that President Dwight D. Eisenhower stuck to high moral principles, including his opposition to colonialism of all kinds. This interpretation highlights the importance of ideals to U.S. foreign policy, but it is not fully convincing. It is not that Eisenhower did not believe that colonialism was bad; he did. The inequities of colonialism are so obvious that even colonial powers like Britain and France couched their action in anti-colonial terms. This is not the question. The question, rather, is this: When Eisenhower discussed his opposition to Britain and France internally, what reasoning did he give?

The answer, backed by solid documentary evidence, is quite straightforward. Eisenhower was mostly concerned about America's standing in the world. As he put it at one of the White House meetings, "If we did not do something to indicate some vigor in the way of asserting our leadership, the Soviets would take over the leadership from us."[14] True, this meant punishing America's own allies, Britain and France. That was acceptable. In fact, that was even better: This way, everyone would know who was in charge.

Thus, it was not the anti-colonial sentiment *per se* but the need to show global leadership and credibility that drove America's foreign policy. Failing to do something about Egypt or Iran (1953) or Syria (1957) or Lebanon (1958) implied a loss of American leadership and damaged U.S. regional prestige and credibility, opening the door to the Russians. The same imperatives are still largely in place today, for instance in the American-Russian confrontation in Syria. At stake once again is America's leadership. Allowing Russia to extend its influence in the Middle East is not so much a security problem as it is a credibility problem, for it raises questions about Washington's continued willingness to defend its regional and global hegemony against would-be usurpers.

To return to 1956, when the British, the French, and the Israelis attacked Egypt, the Americans intervened heavily with their allies, especially the British, by applying the financial lever. With the U.K. pound under mounting pressure, Eden had few options but to call it quits, and the French shortly followed suit. London set out to humiliate Nasser and assert its regional prestige, but it ended up being itself humiliated and losing its regional prestige, never to recover it again.

It should not be surprising that Britain and France played for prestige in Suez and that the same concerns animated policy makers in Cairo and Washington, D.C., but "prestige" is not necessarily the first word that comes to mind in assessing Moscow's involvement. The conventional take credits Soviet ideology: the imperative of spreading Communism in the Middle East. The more strategically minded see a plot to gain access to oil deposits or, in the view frequently espoused by the former U.S. National Security advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski and China's one-time leader Deng Xiaoping, to gain access to warm-water ports.

The emerging documentary evidence does not support these interpretations. Did, for instance, the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev ever say to his colleagues at the Communist Party Presidium, "Comrades, we must have warm-water ports in the South; therefore, let us get involved in the Middle East!" or "Comrades, we must turn the Middle East red because this is what Marx and Lenin said we should do!"? If he did, it was not written down.

What we have instead is the evidence that the Soviet interest in the Middle East was primarily opportunistic and driven by considerations of national prestige. Khrushchev realized that he could compete for the Middle East with other powers by winning over clients, but why would he want clients in the Middle East? This is because clients are an attribute of a great power. If one considers oneself a superpower, one better be able to show some clients for it.

Under Stalin, there was very little interest in the region, with the exception of Iran and Turkey, which immediately bordered on the USSR. But to the extent that Stalin was interested in places further afield, it was, again, for reasons of prestige. For instance, at the end of the Second World War, Stalin had the American Secretary of State Edward Stettinius promise the Soviets a trusteeship (in effect, a colony) in Libya. Libya was an Italian colony until then, and Stalin's idea was that the Allies would each get a piece of the country. But after Hiroshima, Byrnes went back on this promise, which was one of the reasons for the failure of the London Conference of Foreign Ministers in September 1945.

Why, though, did Stalin want a colony in Libya? It was obviously neither economically viable nor important for defense purposes. It was primarily for prestige. Why? Because great powers have colonies in Africa. Why not the USSR? With Libya, Stalin did not get what he wanted. It is worth noting, however, that today Russia is again trying to insert itself into Libya for substantially the same reasons.

Unlike Stalin, Khrushchev did have an opportunity to extend Soviet influence to the Middle East. In 1955, he sold weapons to Egypt, gaining points in the eyes of the Arab world. Then he sided with Egypt in the Suez crisis and even, at the height of the crisis, threatened to use nuclear weapons against Britain and France. Soviet prestige soared, and by 1957 the Soviets had established themselves firmly in Syria as well, which would later become a Moscow satellite. Oil, warm-water ports—all of these were of marginal importance in the Soviet calculations. It was a question of prestige or doing what Eisenhower

feared the Soviets might do: claiming leadership from the United States. Khrushchev later credited himself for stopping the "imperialist" intervention in Suez and was seriously annoyed when it turned out that, of them all, it was Nasser who did not buy this interpretation.

Although the Cold War ended long ago, there are remarkable continuities, certainly insofar as the Middle East is concerned. For Russia, involvement in the Syrian civil war is a way of proving Washington wrong. This is a way of saying that Russia is not, as President Barack Obama unhelpfully claimed, just a "regional power."[15]

If there is a lesson that the Suez crisis holds for the present, it is the overriding importance of status. Most powers involved were concerned about their prestige: Egypt, Britain, France, the United States, and, it now turns out, the Soviet Union. Israel, however, may be an altogether different story since security concerns loomed disproportionately large in Tel Aviv's policy making, both in 1956 and in later conflicts with the neighboring Arab states. As for ideology—namely pursuit of freedom or justice, Communism, or capitalism—the rhetoric was certainly there, but, more often than not, it served as *post facto* rationalization of policies pursued for other reasons.

THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

The third case I would like to briefly discuss is the Cuban Missile Crisis, which erupted in October 1962. The Cuban Missile Crisis is a favorite with many a Cold War historian for it highlights the dangers of nuclear confrontation and illustrates the workings of deterrence and the dangers of a fatal miscalculation. One question that has especially preoccupied historians, though, is the need to explain Nikita Khrushchev's motivations in sending nuclear-tipped missiles to Cuba.[16]

Here, opinions diverge. One popular line of reasoning attributes Khrushchev's motivations to the so-called missile gap. Despite his frequent boasts to the effect that the Soviet Union was producing missiles "like sausages," the Soviet Union had precious few intercontinental ballistic missiles.[17] These were first introduced in 1959, but even three years later the Soviets had not yet acquired the capacity to inflict guaranteed retaliation against the United States. By contrast, Moscow had sufficient numbers of intermediate-range ballistic missiles which, if placed close enough to the U.S. mainland, could help bridge the gap, giving Khrushchev his peace of mind.

This "strategic" explanation was challenged in the 1990s when Russian historians added their voices and their documents to the debate. According to this new line of argument, Khrushchev had only one interest—assuring the survival of the Cuban revolution. This explanation emphasized Khrushchev's commitment to Communist ideals and became an important contributing factor in the shift of Cold War historiography towards a greater emphasis on ideology.[18]

One thing that can be said about both of these interpretations is that they are based on relatively paltry evidence. It is true that Khrushchev's own explanations, offered in the wake of the Cuban Missile Crisis, support the notion that he was just fulfilling his internationalist duty, but these explanations can hardly be taken for granted, as they represent a classic case of *post facto* rationalization. Below, I present a case for considering prestige as another motivation behind Khrushchev's decision.

Since the mid-1950s, Khrushchev was given to bragging about the Soviet ability to destroy the United States. This was so even before Moscow developed its first ICBM (tested in August 1957) or accumulated enough of these missiles to present an existential threat to the U.S. Khrushchev's famous thesis about the necessity of "peaceful coexistence," announced from the platform of the 20th Party Congress in February 1956, was not just an admission of the horrors of the nuclear age (and so, a refutation of the Stalinist views about the inevitability of war) but also a statement of Soviet invincibility.[19]

This ability to destroy the United States was important to Khrushchev not because of security considerations (he did not think that the U.S. would attack the Soviet Union) but rather because of what it meant in terms of prestige and perceptions of power. On many occasions—for instance, as noted above, in the Suez crisis—Khrushchev professed the ability to rain nuclear bombs on London and Paris, to wipe out Turkey or to destroy Iran and Japan. But none of that was as crucial to a superpower as the proud feeling of holding America hostage. As Khrushchev told the Chinese leader Mao Zedong in August 1958, "Now that we have the [inter-]continental missile, we also hold America by the throat. They thought that America is out of reach. But this is not so."[20]

Khrushchev's incessant bragging revealed his desire to be acknowledged as the leader of a superpower; Mao's approbation was particularly important since the Chinese were already beginning to contest the Soviet leadership in the socialist camp. But this projection of power was blatantly contradicted by the rather more pedestrian reality. Khrushchev's actual ability to threaten the United States was quite limited. Unlike the United States, which had bases all along the Soviet periphery—from Japan, to Pakistan, to Turkey—the Soviets had no bases in the Western hemisphere.

This inequality bothered Khrushchev. He first spoke about missiles in Cuba in a letter to John F. Kennedy in April 1961. Khrushchev drew parallels between the mere possibility of an offensive Soviet base in Cuba and the fact that the U.S. already had such bases in countries bordering the USSR.[21] There is also evidence that when, a year later, he finally made his decision to send missiles to Cuba, it was in the context of a discussion of the U.S. bases in Turkey. As he later put it, "we'd be doing nothing more than giving them [the Americans] a little of their own medicine."[22]

Yet, given Khrushchev's aversion to nuclear war and the fact that he thought such war highly unlikely, the base in Cuba was less of a security-related expedient and more of a symbol of Soviet power.

President Kennedy was famously unwilling to tolerate such power next to American shores and called Khrushchev's bluff. After a tense standoff, lasting from October 22 to October 28, 1962, the Soviet leader capitulated: He "blinked first." Why he did so is another story; clearly, considerations of prestige notwithstanding, he had no desire to perish in a nuclear exchange.

Interestingly, Fidel Castro infamously proposed that the Soviet leader launch the first strike against the U.S. Khrushchev was shocked: "What is this—temporary madness or the absence of brains?" he wondered after receiving Castro's request.[23] In the aftermath of the crisis, Soviet-Cuban relations plunged to an all-time low. Khrushchev had a difficult time justifying his decision to withdraw missiles from Cuba not just to Castro but also to the broader audiences of the socialist world, especially the Chinese. The latter had no interest in a nuclear apocalypse but now made use of Khrushchev's fiasco to challenge the Soviet leadership in the socialist camp. The myth of "saving" the Cuban revolution from imperialism was Khrushchev's way of deflecting accusations by his many critics.

THE END OF THE COLD WAR

There were other Cold War crises and confrontations that can now be reconsidered with reference to notions like "prestige." As the Cold War dramas recede from memory and historians gain better access to archival documentation, interpretations are bound to move further away from those that emphasize ideology as the primal cause to those that focus on something most of us find more natural and understandable—recognition and status. For my final example, I will skip ahead to the very end of the Cold War. Enter Mikhail Gorbachev.

One thing that distinguished Gorbachev from his Soviet predecessors was his aversion to the use of force. He had the willingness to lead, but, unlike his predecessors, who would say, "We stand for liberty and justice, follow us—and if you don't, we'll force you," Gorbachev would say, "I stand for liberty and justice. Follow me, but if you don't want to, that is just as well." Gorbachev wanted to lead. In fact, what he offered the world was a vision: universal human values, de-nuclearization, a common European home. In 1987, he published a book called *New Thinking*. Widely cited as a proclamation of Gorbachev's new values, it was in a way indicative of his aspirations, as indicated in the subtitle: "… for our country and the world."[24] Gorbachev's audience was much wider than the socialist camp; it was the entire world! He, too, sought recognition although, unlike Stalin who, following Machiavelli, felt that it was better to be feared than loved, Gorbachev's leadership bid rested on the assumption of voluntary deference.

Gorbachev proposed to the West an implicit bargain. He would dismantle the oppressive system in return for creating a new world in which the Soviet Union would have a major role to play. Unfortunately, the bargain did not work out. Indeed, in retrospect, 1989, the end of the Cold War, was a

major moment of lost opportunity.[25] The sad reality was that, although the Wall came down in Berlin, it was just moved further to the East. With the end of the Cold War, Russia ended up humiliated and embittered. Russia found itself shut out from the West, somewhere on the margins of Europe.

Meanwhile, the Soviet Union collapsed, and its former republics, with the notable exception of the Baltics, descended into chaos and misery, which were advertised as democracy to the unsuspecting population. Chaos and democracy became intertwined in people's minds amid widespread looting of state assets, corruption, plummeting living standards, crime, alcoholism, and suicides. And we are still surprised about why Russia did not embrace democracy?

Then, too, there is the humiliation of travel restrictions. During the Cold War, it was the Soviet regime that prevented people from leaving: those who managed to defect were welcomed in the West with open arms. Today, though, this is no longer the case. Invisible borders have appeared in places where there should never have been any. The degrading experience of obtaining visas and vetting serves as a constant reminder of inferior status, not just of Russia but also of many other countries, feeding resentment and anti-Western sentiments. The end of the Cold War briefly served as a reminder of our shared humanity, but the continued post-Cold-War divisions show that the ideals for which that war was fought are more hollow than it once appeared.

As the Cold War ended, the Warsaw Pact was dismantled. But what happened to its rival NATO? It was preserved, and not merely that: It began to expand toward the East. Historians are in disagreement about whether the Russians were promised that NATO would not expand. The documentary record suggests that it was not the case, at least not explicitly. But there is also evidence that suggests that the White House at the time perceived the existence of an implicit understanding regarding non-expansion.[26]

There is an interesting counterargument, focusing on the aspirations of East European countries, that goes back to the issue of "legitimate interests" discussed above. The argument holds that once these countries regained their sovereignty from the "Soviet Empire," it would have been unjust to deny them their free right of association. They had been oppressed by a vile regime for decades; now they wanted guarantees in the form of NATO membership. The counterargument to this counterargument is that membership in NATO is not about security—it certainly was not in the 1990s when expansion first became an issue. Membership in NATO, like membership in the European Union, was widely perceived in Eastern Europe as a symbol of belonging to the West. It was akin to membership in an exclusive golf club—a sign of power and status.

In this sense, Donald Trump's (disavowed) argument to the effect that NATO is an outdated organization is not unreasonable. It is about as outdated as the long-forgotten Warsaw Pact. But if NATO is dismissed as a Cold War relic, who should be charged with the maintenance of the liberal world order? My answer to this is that if the post-1989 transition had been handled correctly and Russia had not been

shut out from the West, the liberal order would not have needed to be preserved because no one would have threatened it! Instead, we are back to confrontation. It is as if the West needed an enemy and finally found one. The same can be said about Russia, where enmity towards the West has been blatantly instrumentalized by an increasingly authoritarian regime to bolster its legitimacy and distract attention from grave domestic problems.

So, in many ways, we are back to 1945. With so many bridges burned, it is now a little late to return to the spirit of 1989. Russia has sought to redress its various grievances by opposing the West at every turn. Are we, then, in another Cold War? Scholars have debated this subject at length. Some will say, "No, we are not because, after all, during the Cold War, the East and the West were divided by rival ideologies, communism and capitalism, and we don't have these today."

Yet, as I have tried to show, Cold War disagreements were never as deep as we made them out to be. Both sides more or less wanted the same thing. They advertised their different roads towards achieving freedom and justice and said, "Follow me!" Both sides betrayed their own values on the way because there is always a temptation to do so. The United States supported undemocratic regimes around the world, orchestrated coups in places like Guatemala and Iran, and carried out useless wars in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. The Soviet record is worse still: from Hungary in 1956 to Prague in 1968 to Afghanistan in the 1980s, the Soviets failed to stand by their supposed values, and in the process lost much of the credibility they were so afraid to lose. Today, there is yet another player, as President Xi Jinping peddles visions for a harmonious world with China at the helm. Will anyone follow China? Regardless, China will have to face the same difficulties that the United States and the Soviet Union faced: the conflict between principles and power.

So, in the end, ideological differences did not matter that much. The Cold War was fundamentally about obtaining recognition, about projecting global leadership, and, in this sense, it continues even today. There is also one more thing to think about. Today the world has much more substantial nuclear arsenals than in 1962 when, at the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis, the world came face-to-face with the prospect of a nuclear war. People were worried about this prospect then. We've somehow grown used to it. Nonetheless, the arsenals remain, merely waiting for their chance to be used or misused in some moment of miscalculation born of stupid posturing that both Russia and the United States, among others, so often fall for.

This, then, is a gloomy message, but there is also a silver lining. One good thing is that the world is becoming more and more connected. Yes, there is a countercurrent against this: walls, borders, visas, bans, fear of immigrants, and the rest. But these measures need not succeed in the end. For we have something in our DNA that we share with our brave ancestors who left Africa forty thousand years ago: curiosity, adventure, and the love of freedom. And these qualities cannot be suppressed or regulated

away: they'll be always here with us—our common humanity crying out against the divisions of our world. And once we understand that it does not matter that we are American, or Chinese, or Russian, or Syrian, once we understand that various so-called dreams, like the American dream, or the Chinese dream, or the Russian dream, are just meaningless delusions, that no one is exceptional but we are all exceptional in the sense of our shared humanity, then, perhaps, the Cold War will finally come to an end.

NOTES

1. For a generous sample, see the three-volume *Cambridge History of the Cold War*, edited by Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
2. Among the most prominent is Richard Ned Lebow, *A Cultural Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). See also Jonathan Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1996).
3. See, for instance, Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).
4. For example, see Vojtech Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity: The Stalin Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
5. For a good overview, see Michael Dobbs, *Six Months in 1945: FDR, Stalin, Churchill and Truman—from World War to Cold War* (New York: Vintage, 2012).
6. For a useful review of the arguments, see Campbell Craig and Sergey S. Radchenko, *The Atomic Bomb and the Origins of the Cold War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).
7. A good background reading is Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman, and the Surrender of Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2006).
8. Cited in Richard Rhodes, *Dark Sun: The Making of the Hydrogen Bomb* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), p. 198.
9. Cable from Joseph Stalin to Vyacheslav Molotov, September 27, 1945. RGASPI: fond 558, opis 11, delo 770, list 68. For an in-depth discussion, see Vladimir Pechatnov, "The Allies are Pressing on You to Break Your Will…", *Cold War International History Project Working Paper* No. 26 (September 1999), https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/ACFB29.PDF.
10. "United States Delegation Minutes of the Sixth Meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers," September 17, 1945 (11:00), *FRUS*, 2 (1945): 206.
11. Winston Churchill, "The Sinews of Peace ('Iron Curtain Speech')," *WinstonChurchill.org*, March 5, 1946. https://www.winstonchurchill.org/resources/speeches/1946-1963-elder-statesman/the-sinews-of-peace/.
12. The best account of the Suez crisis is Keith Kyle, *Suez: Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011).
13. For a first-person account of Eden's view of Nasser, see Peter G. Boyle, ed., *Eden-Eisenhower Correspondence, 1955-1957* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).
14. "Memorandum of Discussion at the 302d Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, November 1, 1956, 9 a.m." in Nina J. Noring (ed.), *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1955-1957, Suez Crisis, July 26- December 31, 1956, Vol. XVI (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1990), https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v16/d455.
15. Julian Borger, "Barack Obama: Russia Is a Regional Power Showing Weakness over Ukraine," *The Guardian*, March 25, 2014.

16. One of the best accounts is Michael Dobbs, *One Minute to Midnight: Kennedy, Khrushchev, and Castro on the Brink of Nuclear War* (New York: Vintage, 2009).
17. Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War: The Inside Story of an American Adversary* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007), p. 255.
18. See, for instance, Sergo Mikoyan and Svetlana Savranskaya, *The Soviet Cuban Missile Crisis: Castro, Mikoyan, Kennedy, Khrushchev, and the Missiles of November* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).
19. For an account of Khrushchev's peaceful coexistence, see Nikita Khrushchev, "On Peaceful Coexistence", *Foreign Affairs*, October 1959, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/1959-10-01/peaceful-coexistence.
20. Conversation between Nikita Khrushchev and Mao Zedong, July 31, 1958.
21. Nikita Khrushchev's remarks on a draft of his letter to John F. Kennedy, April 21, 1961. *Venskii Val's Kholodnoi Voiny: Vokrug Vstrechi N. S. Khrushcheva i Dzh. F. Kennedi v 1961 Godu v Vene* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2012), p. 167.
22. Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev, Edward Crankshaw, Strobe Talbott, *Khrushchev Remembers* (Boston: Little Brown, 1970), pp. 493-94.
23. Dictation by Nikita Khrushchev, October 30, 1962. RGANI: fond 52, opis 1, delo 600, list 8.
24. Mikhail Gorbachev, *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World* (New York: HarperCollins, 1987).
25. I take 1989 as the endpoint of the Cold War. The year witnessed momentous events in Eastern Europe, including the fall of the Berlin Wall and the (generally) peaceful dissolution of Communist regimes across the region. The December 1989 Malta summit is often regarded as the moment the Soviet-American Cold War rivalry was brought to a close. The Soviet Union struggled on until December 1991, when it was formally dissolved.
26. See Joshua R. Itzkowitz Shifrinson, "Deal or No Deal? The End of the Cold War and the U.S. Offer to Limit NATO Expansion," *International Security*, 40, no. 4 (2016), http://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/full/10.1162/ISEC_a_00236.