

HOW TO LOSE THE COLD WAR

While the candidates have addressed scores of significant issues in the presidential campaign, the most important issue since the end of World War II -- the fate of the political and economic reforms in Russia -- has been virtually ignored. As a result, the United States and the West risk snatching defeat in the cold war from the jaws of victory.

We have heard repeatedly that the cold war has ended and that the West won it. This is only half true. The Communists have lost the cold war, but the West has not yet won it. Communism collapsed because its ideas failed. Today, the ideas of freedom are on trial. If they fail to produce a better life in Russia and the other former Soviet republics, a new and more dangerous despotism will take power, with the people trading freedom for security and entrusting their future to old hands with new faces.

We are at a watershed moment in history. The historical significance of the democratic revolution in the Soviet Union compares only with events like the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815, the Versailles Peace Conference in 1919, and the creation of NATO and the Marshall Plan in 1948. A century of stability in Europe, the drift toward World War II in the 1920s and 1930s, and a half century of successful containment of the Soviet Union were all determined by how the statesmen of the major powers responded to these critical moments. While opportunities and dangers on that same order of magnitude face us today, the West has failed so far to seize the moment to shape the history of the next half century.

Russia is the key to success. It is there that the final battle of the cold war will be won or lost. The stakes could not be higher. If freedom succeeds in Russia -- if President Yeltsin's economic reforms succeed in creating a successful free-market economy -- the future will hold the promise of reduced spending on arms, cooperation in coping with crises around the world, and economic growth through expanded international trade. More important, freedom's success will reverberate in the world's last isolated strongholds of communism -- North Korea, Cuba, Vietnam, and China. Their leaders will face irresistible pressures to take the first steps toward political reform.

If Yeltsin fails, the prospects for the next fifty years will turn grim. The Russian people will not turn back to communism. But a new, more dangerous despotism based on extremist Russian nationalism will take power. We must remember that even before communism, Russia had an expansionist tradition dating back seven centuries. The leaders of a new despotism, who have already been organizing themselves to take over in the event that Yeltsin's reforms fail, will stoke nationalist passions and

exploit the tendency of the Russian people to turn to the strong hand -- even to dictatorship -- during times of troubles.

If a new despotism prevails, everything gained in the great peaceful revolution of 1991 will be lost. War could break out in the former Soviet Union as the new despots use force to restore the "historical borders" of Russia. The new East European democracies would be imperiled. China's totalitarians would breathe a sigh of relief. The new Russian regime -- whose leaders would cozy up to the Soviet Union's former clients in Iraq, Syria, Libya, and North Korea -- would threaten our interests in hot spots around the world. It would sell conventional weapons, ballistic missiles, and nuclear technology to any buyer. A new Russian despotism inspired by imperial nationalism shorn of the baggage of the dying faith of communism would be even more dangerous than Soviet totalitarianism.

If freedom fails in Russia, we will see the tide of freedom that has been sweeping over the world begin to ebb, and dictatorship rather than democracy will be the wave of the future.

In light of the stakes involved, the West must do everything it can to help President Yeltsin succeed. Yeltsin has been maligned by friends of freedom in the West who should have known better. Some say that he is not democratic enough politically, others that he is not smart enough intellectually, and still others that he is not smooth enough socially. A few who dismissed him as a boob in the past now seem to be hoping for his failure so that they can claim to have been proved right. That thinking is not worthy of the world's only superpower.

Like all strong leaders who try to make a difference, Yeltsin is not perfect. He has made serious mistakes. But he is an extraordinary historic figure. He is the first Russian leader in history chosen through free elections. Unlike Gorbachev, he has irrevocably repudiated socialism as well as communism. He risked his life in facing down a gang of card-carrying killers in the coup attempt in August 1991. He recognized the independence of the Baltic states and the other republics of the former Soviet Union. He abandoned the Russian imperial tradition -- throwing away the keys of what Lenin called the "jailhouse of nations" -- by dissolving the Soviet Union and forging the voluntary Commonwealth of Independent States. He risked his enormous popularity by embarking on painful free-market economic reforms, including the indispensable first step of allowing astronomical price rises. He has moved decisively toward privatization of Soviet enterprises and decollectivization of Soviet agriculture, steps Gorbachev refused even to consider. He has completely cut off the \$15 billion in foreign aid and trade subsidies that Gorbachev in his 1990 budget continued to provide to Cuba and other anti-American Communist losers in the developing world. He has not

only matched but exceeded the cuts in nuclear weapons proposed by President Bush.

The bottom line is that Yeltsin is the most pro-Western leader of Russia in history. Moreover, whatever his flaws, the alternative of a new despotism would be infinitely worse.

What has the United States and the West done so far to help Russia's first democratic, free-market oriented, non-expansionist government? We have provided credits for the purchase of agricultural products. We have held a photo-opportunity international conference of fifty-seven foreign secretaries that was long on rhetoric but short on action. We are sending sixty cargo-planes of surplus food and medical supplies leftover from the Persian Gulf War. We have decided to send two hundred Peace Corps volunteers -- a generous action if the target of our aid were a small country like Upper Volta but mere tokenism if applied to Russia, a nation of almost 200 million people covering one-seventh of the world's landmass. This is a pathetically inadequate response in light of the opportunities and dangers we face in the crisis in the former Soviet Union.

What is to be done? To meet the moment, the West must step up to the task of helping President Yeltsin's government in six crucial ways:

- We must provide humanitarian food and medical aid to get Russia through the critical months until Yeltsin's reforms have a chance to start working.

- We must create a "free enterprise corps" that will send thousands of Western managers to Russia to infuse newly independent enterprises with free-market know-how.

- We must reschedule Soviet debt incurred during the Gorbachev era and defer interest payments until the new market economy begins to function.

- We must allow greater access to Western markets for Russia's exports.

- We must be ready to join with others to provide tens of billions of dollars for currency stabilization through the IMF or other means as soon as Russia reins in the growth of its money supply.

- We must create a single Western-led organization to assess Soviet needs and coordinate wide-ranging governmental and private aid projects, as the United States did when embarking on the rebuilding of Western Europe after World War II.

In light of the depth of the Russian economic crisis, there is no time to lose. Those who would put off major action on these fronts until the next international aid conference in July 1992 could find that this is too little and too late.

Can we afford these initiatives? As Herb Stein has pointed out, "The United States is a very rich nation. We are not rich enough to do everything, but we are rich enough to do everything important." Forty-three years ago, the United States alone helped its allies and enemies in Europe and Japan recover from World War II. A strong case can be made that the United States has carried the burden of foreign aid and world leadership for long enough and that it is time for Europe and Japan to assume the major financial burden in helping Russia and the other former Soviet republics. But the United States as the strongest and richest nation in the world must provide the leadership.

At the same time, we must be willing to bear our share of the burden. To play in this game, we must have a seat at the table. To get a seat at the table, we must be ready to put some chips in the pot. The stakes are high, and we are playing as if it were a penny ante game.

It is a tough call politically. Opinion polls indicate that foreign policy rates only in the single digits among issues that voters consider to be important. The American people overwhelmingly oppose all foreign aid because they want to see that money spent on solving our problems at home. But the mark of great political leadership is not simply to support what is popular but to make what is unpopular popular if that serves America's national interest. In addition, what seems politically profitable in the short term may prove costly in the long term. The hot-button issue in the 1950s was, "Who lost China?" If Yeltsin goes down, the question of "who lost Russia" will be an infinitely more devastating issue in the 1990s.

Those who oppose aid argue that charity begins at home. I agree. But aid to Russia and other reformist republics of the former Soviet Union is not charity. We must recognize that what helps us abroad helps us at home. If Yeltsin is replaced by a new aggressive Russian nationalist, we can kiss the peace dividend good-bye. Not only would the world become more dangerous, but our defense and foreign policies would also become far more expensive. Tinkering with the tax code or launching new domestic initiatives will have little economic significance if a new hostile despotism in Russia forces the West to rearm. On the positive side, if Yeltsin succeeds, a free-market Russia will provide an opportunity for billions of dollars in trade, which will create millions of jobs in the United States. Most important, a democratic Russia would be a non-expansionist Russia, freeing our children and grandchildren in the next century of the fear of armed conflict because democracies do not start wars.

President Bush is uniquely qualified to meet this challenge. The brilliant leadership he demonstrated in mobilizing the coalition abroad and the American people at home to win victory in the Persian Gulf War can ensure that the cold war will end not just with the defeat of communism but also with the victory of freedom.

The cold war, but the West has not yet won it. The Soviet Union collapsed because its ideas failed. Today, the ideas of the East are on trial. If they fail to produce a better life in Russia and the other former Soviet republics, a new and more dangerous despotism will take power, with the people trading their hope for security and entrusting their future to old hands with new faces.

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If Yeltsin fails, the prospects for the next fifty years will turn grim. The Russian people will get left back to communism. But a new, more dangerous despotism based on extremist Russian nationalism will take power. We must remember that even before communism, Russia had an expansionist tradition dating back seven centuries. The leaders of a new movement, who have already been organizing themselves to take advantage of the event that Yeltsin's reforms fail, will strike eastward, southward, and