BOOK REVIEW ROUNDTABLE:

The Soviet Search for Recognition as a Superpower

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Summary

In this roundtable review, Mark Pomar, Kathryn Stoner, Carol Saivetz, Natasha Kuhrt, and Onur İşçi offer their thoughts on Sergey Radchenko's new book, "To Run the World: The Kremlin's Cold War Bid for Global Power." These contributors offer a diverse range of perspectives on Soviet foreign policy — and implications for Russian policy today. Plus, Radchenko offers a response.

1. Introduction: A Focus on Power and Prestige that Overlooks Other Key Factors

Mark Pomar

The Cold War is a vast subject that encompasses many different aspects, from the Soviet-U.S. nuclear confrontation and the proxy wars in the Third World (global south) to competition in economic achievement, artistic recognition, and sports glory. The Soviet Union challenged the United States (and the West) in every conceivable field of endeavor with the goal of showing that Soviet-style communism was a superior system to Western democratic capitalism. Not only did the Soviet Union and the United States go head-to-head in the arms race, but they also engaged in a space race, battled for gold medals in the Olympics, and even competed in international piano competitions. As Sergey Radchenko astutely notes, "the Cold War was characterized by the struggle over the best method of ordering human society, a struggle over the paths of modernity."[1]

As the reviews by our four contributors — Kathryn Stoner, Carol Saivetz, Natasha Kuhrt, and Onur Isci — show, Radchenko did not try to cover all major aspects of the Cold War but focused primarily on three overarching themes. The first explores how Soviet leaders viewed their role in the world, specifically the ways they tried to reconcile two seemingly conflicting identities. In the first instance, Soviet leaders wanted to cast their state as a legitimate superpower that in Leonid Brezhnev's memorable words could "run the world" together with the United States. At the same time, Soviet leaders wanted to cast their state as the ideological leader of the international communist movement, in effect putting

[1] Sergey Radchenko, *To Run the World: The Kremlin's Cold War Bid for Global Power*, (Cambridge University Press, 2024), 5.

the Soviet Union on a collision course with the West. Soviet support of indigenous revolutionary movements in the global south not only led to confrontation with the West but also to a tense rivalry with a rising communist China.

The second theme examines the importance that Soviet leaders attached to Western (and especially American) public recognition of their global role as a fully legitimate power. Radchenko effectively uses the theme of "Western acceptance" as a leitmotif that illustrates the constancy of Soviet/Russian foreign policy from Joseph Stalin to Mikhail Gorbachev. By examining thousands of archival documents, he shows that critical Soviet decisions were often predicated on how Soviet leaders thought the West would react. Indeed, Western recognition of the legitimacy of Soviet rule over Central and Eastern Europe was so important for Brezhnev that he made the signing of the Helsinki Accords in 1975 a high priority of Soviet foreign policy, even though it contained the "poison pill" of universal human rights.

The third theme raises the question of whether Russian foreign policy was dictated by Marxist-Leninist ideology or by age-old Russian imperialism. For many Western political leaders, Russian writers, and Soviet human rights advocates, Soviet actions were dictated primarily by the tenets of communism. So entrenched was this view in Washington that the Reagan administration's National Security Decision Directive (NSDD 11-82) baldly stated that "communist ideology is the main source of the [Soviet] regime's legitimacy ... and it controls the state administration and all spheres of society." If the Soviet Union were to reject communism, then the Reagan administration believed that Russia would cease to be an aggressive power and, in time, would evolve into a "normal" European country.

Radchenko firmly rejects that approach. "Marxism-Leninism doesn't explain Soviet behavior adequately," he argues, because the "sources of Soviet ambition are not specifically Soviet, but both precede and postdate the Soviet Union."[2] By citing thousands of documents, Radchenko shows that Kremlin decision making was based on state goals and that Soviet policy experts would even refer to Tsarist-era documents as justification for the projection of fundamental Russian geopolitical interests. Ideology was employed as a form of propaganda — window dressing for communist movements in the world. In decision memos, Marxist-Leninism was conspicuously absent.

Roundtable Reviewers' Assessments

Kathryn Stoner begins her detailed and witty review by explaining how Radchenko's tight organization of the narrative makes reading his 600-page book "easier than you might think!" She acknowledges that *To Run the World* is an "outstanding contribution to a growing body of new literature on the Cold War. There is simply no other study than Radchenko's that goes as in depth into considering what might have been in the minds of Soviet leaders during this period." To give readers a sense of the narrative, Stoner analyzes the structure of the book and shows how Radchenko incorporates the Soviet leaders' "insatiable thirst for recognition and security" as a dominant theme.

The heart of Stoner's review, however, is an examination of the limitations of Radchenko's approach. She explains that, by focusing exclusively on personalities, Radchenko inevitably gives short shrift to structural forces, ideology, domestic politics, economics, and society. As Stoner wryly notes, "In their quest for recognition, by Radchenko's telling, Soviet leaders were thus in a testosterone-fueled repeat game of strategy and tactics with

[2] Sergey Radchenko, *To Run the World*, 3.

American presidents and European leaders. They were driven not by interests or ideas, but by an unquenchable thirst for recognition of their own (and incidentally) their country's 'greatness.'" That, of course, was only part of the story.

Stoner adds that Radchenko's steadfast focus on "personalities" cannot adequately explain the ill-fated Soviet decision to invade Afghanistan in 1979. As she points out, "focusing on him [Brezhnev] alone, as Radchenko does, means ignoring other variables like American technological changes and the failures of the Soviet planning system to adapt and innovate, which were also big drivers of Brezhnev's change in course in foreign policy relative to Khrushchev and Stalin. The Soviet Union just couldn't keep up anymore."

The weakest part of Radchenko's narrative, Stoner believes, is the section on Gorbachev. "The problem for Radchenko," she notes, "is that Gorbachev simply does not fit the structure he has used to explain Soviet foreign policy until 1985 — that it was primarily about prestige, recognition, and legitimacy as a superpower." Stoner concludes her review with an examination of the parallels between the old Cold War and the new emerging confrontation between Vladimir Putin's Russia and the West. She rightly notes that "domestic political structures and constraints put guardrails on Soviet leaders and their foreign policy choices during much of the Cold War. There is no corollary in Putin's highly personalized brand of autocracy in contemporary Russia." And she adds for good measure, that "where Soviet leaders may have sought to 'run the world' with the United States, Putin seems more intent on ruining it."

In her elegantly written review, Carol Saivetz examines Radchenko's main themes of recognition and legitimacy in the context of Soviet policy and actions in the Middle East. Specifically, she looks at how Radchenko analyzes Soviet decision-making during the 1956

Suez Canal Crisis, the 1967 Six Day War, and the 1973 Middle East war. Saivetz notes that, by drawing on Soviet archival sources, Radchenko was able to describe in detail Brezhnev's visit to Washington prior to the 1973 war, including his discussions with President Richard Nixon for a superpower understanding on the Middle East. She concludes her review by examining the implications of Soviet foreign policy for today's Russia. Following the logic of Radchenko's argument, Russia's intervention in Syria, beginning in 2015, was intended not only to help an old ally, President Bashar al Assad, but also to reestablish Russia's role in the Middle East. As Saivetz notes, this move was designed to remind the world that Russia was committed to being a great power with global ambitions.

After acknowledging the main themes of the book, Natasha Kuhrt tackles one of the most significant parts of Radchenko's narrative: the complex relationship between the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. With access to both Russian and Chinese archival materials, Radchenko was able to paint a detailed picture of how the Soviet Union initially helped China and later how the teacher-student relationship turned into a bitter rivalry over which country was the true leader of the communist movement. As Kuhrt notes, "before he died, Chinese leader Mao Zedong set out what Radchenko describes as "a final testament," which assigned both the United States and the Soviet Union to the First World…; Japan, Europe, Australia, and Canada to the Second World; while China was deemed to be firmly part of the Third World." And it was in the Third World (global south) where the Soviet Union and China vied for leadership of the communist world. China saw itself as the natural leader of the Third World and the new heir to the Soviet legacy because the Soviet Union had "distorted" Leninism. For Mao, there was a clear duty to assist the Third World, or else China would be "betraying Marxism."

Kuhrt rounds out her review by posing a question that Radchenko does not address, namely to what extent "the collapse of the Soviet Union reconfirmed to the Chinese the wisdom of their ways." She adds: "While in China economic liberalization was encouraged under Deng Xiaoping, political reform was not on the agenda. In the Soviet Union, Gorbachev did things backwards: with *glasnost* (the loosening of restrictions on free speech), it simply meant that citizens were able to criticize the shortcomings of the system, including the disastrous economic policies." That policy decision on the part of Gorbachev has direct relevance for today, as the Russian-Chinese relationship has been reversed, with China now playing the role of the dominant partner.

Bringing in a different perspective, Onur Isci, a Turkish scholar, begins his review of Radchenko's book with a light touch, noting that it was not only the Soviet leaders who came to Washington as "earnest students" — a point that Radchenko illustrates by citing Soviet documents — but leaders of other nations, including Turkey. U.S. recognition and acceptance were critically important for all countries.

Agreeing with Radchenko's broad interpretation of the Cold War, Isci adds that the origins of the Cold War can be traced to Stalin's bullying of the Ankara government into recognizing Soviet primacy of the naval bases on the Turkish Straits and the repatriation of three eastern Anatolian cities. Isci confirms Radchenko's assertion that Stalin's demands turned out to be a great blunder, inciting fear and pushing Turkey into NATO.

To cast Radchenko in a broader context of political history, Isci reminds the reader of Hans Morgenthau's four basic types of thinkers: (1) the realist who thinks in terms of political power; (2) the economist who thinks in terms of the means of production and wealth; (3) the lawyer who thinks in terms of domestic and international legality; and (4) the moralist who focuses on the moral underpinnings of domestic and foreign policy.

Noting that Radchenko deals primarily (if not exclusively) with power and foreign relations, Isci examines in detail how Radchenko's analysis fits within the theory of realism. According to Isci, Radchenko differs from some realists because he believes that strategy is closely interwoven with ideology, but overall, his analysis draws heavily on realist theory. Radchenko treats the pursuit of prestige — defined in terms of geopolitical power — as an area of state policy that can be isolated and is independent of domestic capabilities and moral principles.

A Missing Piece: The Importance of Human Rights and Political Dissidence

Despite its length and extensive endnotes, *To Run the World* is not a comprehensive history of the Cold War, as all four reviewers point out. To their assessments of the book, I would add that the moral dimension of the Cold War is entirely missing. After all, questions of human rights were not only a matter of domestic politics but were central to the U.S.–Soviet relationship. In Radchenko's narrative, Soviet human rights activists, dissidents, independent writers, Jewish refuseniks, and religious figures play virtually no role. Physicist and human rights activist Andrei Sakharov is mentioned only in passing, Nobel laureate Alexander Solzhenitsyn not even once. When Radchenko mentions human rights, it's usually in a dismissive tone. He characterizes President Jimmy Carter's focus on human rights, for example, as a "constant irritant" and quotes Henry Kissinger as telling Soviet diplomat Anatoly Dobrynin that Republicans had "never been attached to such 'silly things' as human rights."[3] Yet, human rights and support of Soviet dissidents were fundamental to the development and execution of Western policy toward the Soviet Union and were one of the main reasons for the failure of *détente*.

[3] Sergey Radchenko, *To Run the World*, 455.

It would have been instructive to learn how Soviet leaders discussed human rights, why they decided to exile Solzhenitsyn (rather than send him to a labor camp), how they viewed the question of Jewish emigration, how they treated Sakharov and human rights activists, what their understanding of universal human rights was, and, most important, why the question of human rights became a fundamental part of Gorbachev's *glasnost*.

By focusing so heavily on military and political policies, Radchenko gives short shrift to U.S. efforts at supporting democratic change in the Soviet Union. He dismisses President Ronald Reagan's democracy speech at the British House of Commons in June 1982 as "verbal abuse,"[4] casts Sen. Henry Jackson's efforts on behalf of Soviet Jews in a negative light, and does not mention many U.S. initiatives to reach the Soviet public over the heads of Soviet leaders — including academic exchanges, cultural programs, and the radio broadcasts of Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Yet, it is precisely the totality of these public diplomacy efforts that had an impact on the Soviet elite and contributed to the end of the Cold War.

Here, I offer two examples. I was present at the festive celebration of the 40th anniversary of Radio Liberty, held at the famous House of Writers in Moscow in March 1993, when Gorbachev spoke of universal human rights in foreign relations, the positive impact of people-to-people exchanges, and the role Radio Liberty played in keeping alive Russian culture during the dark years of Soviet rule. And at the end of his remarks, he thanked us for the work we had done.

[4] Sergey Radchenko, *To Run the World*, 525.

One year later, I was the interpreter for Egor Ligachev, the hardcore communist in the Politburo in the 1980s, when he was visiting Washington to give a series of talks about the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In our private conversations, he told me that the Politburo had engaged in heated discussions about how human rights, censorship, and radio broadcasts affected the Soviet Union's image in the world, adding that, as an "honest Bolshevik," he wanted to maintain strict Soviet control of the media. But after lengthy debates, Gorbachev and Alexander Yakovlev prevailed, and all jamming of foreign broadcasts ended in November 1988. Access to those Politburo debates would have enriched Radchenko's narrative and given us a deep insight into the impact of Western "soft power" on Soviet decision-making.

Indeed, Radchenko's narrow focus on the military struggle of two great powers for world dominance could lead readers to reduce the Cold War to "two scorpions in a bottle." That was certainly not the case. For many in the West (and for critically minded Soviet citizens), the Cold War was fundamentally a battle of values. It pitted a cruel totalitarian system that had killed millions of its citizens, violated basic human rights (encoded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights), and imposed imperial rule on Central and East European countries and ethnic nations within the Soviet Union against an open, democratic West that, despite its various flaws, stood for democratic governance, individual freedom, and the rule of law. Above all, the Cold War was a moral struggle. And Reagan's description of the Soviet Union as an evil empire may have been "over-the-top rhetoric," to quote Radchenko,[5] but it resonated with millions and millions of Soviet citizens who agreed with that characterization and celebrated the end of the Soviet Union.

[5] Sergey Radchenko, *To Run the World*, 531.

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After teaching Russian studies at the University of Vermont, Pomar worked as assistant director of the Russian Service at Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (*Munich*)*, director of the USSR Division at the* Voice of America*, and the executive director of the Board for International Broadcasting, a federal agency that oversaw* Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

He later served as president of IREX and the founding chief executive and president of the U.S.-Russia Foundation, a private U.S. foundation that supported educational programs and exchanges.

Pomar is the author of many articles and two books: Cold War Radio: The Russian Broadcasts of the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (*University of Nebraska Press/Potomac Books, 2022*) and A.F. Koni: Liberal Jurist as Moralist (*University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996*).

2. An Insatiable Thirst for Recognition and Security: A Useful Framework Helps to Explain Some but Not All That Motivated the Kremlin During the Cold War

Kathryn Stoner

Sergey Radchenko's masterful history of the Soviet Union in the Cold War reminds us that if history does not repeat itself, it can sometimes rhyme. His extensive and expansive book carefully chronicles the many pathways that Soviet leaders pursued in their quest to establish the Soviet Union as a recognized and respected global superpower. Some of this is hauntingly familiar to the contemporary analyst of Vladimir Putin's oversight of Russian foreign policy. But where Soviet leaders may have sought to "run the world" with the United States, Putin seems more intent on ruining it.

Radchenko offers thorough historical research and a fresh set of explanations for Soviet strategy abroad during the Cold War. He particularly focuses on Soviet leaders' desires to have their country recognized and respected as a great power, equal at least — but preferably superior to — the United States. He makes a compelling case that this insistence on recognition and prestige was an important factor driving Soviet foreign policy from Joseph Stalin through Leonid Brezhnev. However, Radchenko downplays other important influences, such as the role of ideology and domestic politics. By the time he gets to Mikhail Gorbachev's *perestroika*, Radchenko's relentless focus on recognition and security all but disappears in explaining Gorbachev's motivations. And while there are echoes of Soviet foreign policy in some of Putin's attempts to establish a multipolar post–Cold War order, we must be circumspect in drawing too much from the past in understanding the present.

Seeking Recognition as a Great Power After World War II

Radchenko picks up the story of the rise of the Soviet Union as a force in international politics as World War II is coming to an end and concludes with brief mention of some of the parallels in Putin's foreign policy more than five decades later. As he notes in the introduction: "This is a very long book that recounts the Cold War, mainly from the Soviet perspective from the mid-1940s to 1991."[6] At over 500 pages of text and an additional 100 pages of footnotes, Radchenko isn't kidding about it being a very long book. But how could any conscientious historian cover this 50-year period in any detail without producing a doorstopper of a treatise? Radchenko has scrupulously searched the Russian, U.S., and (evidently) Chinese archives for material to produce one of the most thorough treatments of this period since the publication of *The Cold War: A History* by Arne Westad, to whom Radchenko, a student of Westad's, dedicates his book. While Radchenko may owe an intellectual debt to Westad, his coverage of the Cold War period is rather different in that he focuses primarily on the view from the Kremlin. Radchenko's book also includes fascinating passages from the Chinese standpoint in the 1950s and 1960s as well.

Although expansive, *To Run the World* is well organized, and its 20 chapters are rarely longer than 30 pages each, which makes reading the entire book in a reasonable amount of time easier than you might think! The book's first four chapters focus on Stalin's growing aspirations for the Soviet Union in global politics as the Soviet military rose from its knees to defeat Hitler. This, argues Radchenko, gave Stalin and Soviet policymakers a sense of entitlement, not just over the reconstruction of Europe, but the world: " …it was

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[6] Sergey Radchenko, *To Run the World: The Kremlin's Cold War Bid for Global Power*, (Cambridge University Press, 2024), 11.

an explicitly imperial world but also a world where contradictions between great powers could be settled on the basis of mutual acceptance of spheres of influence."[7] The problem that endured from the immediate post-war period for Soviet leaders from Stalin to Gorbachev, Radchenko asserts, is *recognition* (my emphasis) of the Soviet Union's claim to great-power status and its right to settle problems in its expanding geographic sphere of influence — a perspective evidently shared by Russia's current leader, Vladimir Putin. This quest for recognition, Radchenko argues, was one of the two guiding forces of Soviet foreign policy throughout the Cold War — specifically, the quest for recognition of its legitimate right "to rule the world" with (or against) the United States. The second pillar of Soviet foreign policy stemming directly from the Soviet experience of Hitler's invasion of its territory was security. But Radchenko spends far less time on the latter than the former — Stalin's and Khrushchev's shared obsession with getting the United States (the world's only other superpower) to recognize the Soviet Union as its equal in global influence.

Thus, we see in chapters 5–11 of the book, following Stalin's death in 1953, Nikita Khrushchev constantly seeking American attention and deeply desirous of the respect of U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower. Radchenko emphasizes that, as a historian, he is interested in the psychology of Soviet leaders, and he presents Khrushchev as a petulant, unpredictable schemer who needs to convince Eisenhower, and subsequently the far younger U.S. President John Kennedy, that the Soviet Union should be taken seriously as a world power. When he feels slighted, Khrushchev makes desperate decisions that tend to have near disastrous global consequences, like nuclear war. Mao Zedong, too, in Radchenko's telling, serves as a pesky rival for supremacy and legitimacy to Khrushchev in particular as the leader of the communist world until the Sino–Soviet break in 1962.

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[7] Radchenko, 17.

As depicted by Radchenko, Khrushchev made foreign policy decisions guided not by ideological concerns of communism versus capitalism, or as a result of social or economic pressures on the Soviet economy, but to enhance his own — and more incidentally, the Soviet Union's — global reputation and credibility. Focusing as he does on the apparent macho narcissism of Soviet leaders, Radchenko downplays — indeed, at times, simply omits any mention of — the importance of Marxism–Leninism as a motivation in Stalin's initial drive to reshape Europe or Khrushchev's later efforts to gain a grip on global power. Radchenko sees ideology as relatively unimportant compared to the overarching priority of recognition of Soviet parity or even superiority relative to the United States.

Radchenko's dismissal of virtually any ideologically motivated role in Soviet decision-making throughout the Cold War drives his explanations for Soviet involvement abroad in the Middle East, Africa, South Asia, and Latin America. The Soviets were not in these places to promote communism over capitalism. They were not there to show that theirs was a superior model of human development to the inequalities and exploitation of "man by man" that capitalism had always produced, according to the tenets of Marxism–Leninism. Instead, in Radchenko's account, the expansion of Soviet influence into the "Third World" was a function of (mostly) Khrushchev's quest for American recognition of the indispensability of the Soviet Union in settling any global problem — be it the Suez crisis, the Iraqi or Cuban revolutions, or Chinese interventions in the Taiwan Strait. This sentiment — again, as opposed to ideological or really even security concerns — drove Khrushchev to some pretty risky brinksmanship, according to Radchenko, including the surprise construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 and, infamously, the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962.

Radchenko's focus is on individual leaders driving decisions. This is clear from the book's introduction that describes young "Nikita" (Khrushchev), "Lyosha" (Brezhnev), and "Misha" (Gorbachev), and their whereabouts during World War II. This is a book about personalities, not structural forces, ideology, domestic politics, economics, or society. In their quest for recognition, by Radchenko's telling, Soviet leaders were thus in a testosterone-fueled repeat game of strategy and tactics with American presidents and European leaders. They were driven not by interests or ideas, but by an unquenchable thirst for recognition of their own (and incidentally) their country's "greatness." Such recognition must come from the only country they deemed capable of bestowing such respect — the world's only other superpower, the United States.

Advisors (but not citizens) are mentioned on both sides of the Cold War, although Radchenko keeps his aperture sharply focused on leaders. As a result, his telling of events tends to come down to Khrushchev's or Kennedy's or Mao's thoughts, feelings, and resulting decisions. When Soviet leaders were slighted or offended in their perpetual quest for honor and recognition from their American counterparts, they lashed out and made some bad choices.

The problem with this perspective, however, is that even dictators face internal politics. Not all the decisions on major events during the Cold War were taken by just one person, even in the Soviet context, but you would never know that from reading Radchenko's treatise. Khrushchev, of course, was ultimately a victim of the bureaucracy that surrounded him, and the information that it provided to him. In the democratic United States, Kennedy was influenced in his decision-making by the electoral cycle of American politics and congressional critics. But Radchenko's mission is not to give us a good sense of what the Cold War period was like for politicians or publics on both sides and the interactions between domestic pressures and policy decisions. His focus is narrowly on

the men — and they were all men — ostensibly in charge. But because nothing else seems to matter in explaining the Kremlin's bid for power, we are left with a few unsatisfactory answers to some important questions.

Brezhnev Looks Closer to Home

Radchenko in chapters 12–17 moves from Khrushchev to Brezhnev's tenure as Soviet leader from 1964 through his death in 1982. Here, Radchenko describes the decline of the Soviet quest to rule the world with the United States. After the turbulence of the 1970s — with coups and revolutions in different parts of the globe defining the competition between the United States and the Soviet Union — the Chinese withdrew from global competition under Deng Xiaoping in favor of development. Brezhnev, although engaged in a nuclear arms race with the United States, and with the end of a brief *détente* with the West, invested in Soviet security interests closer to home. Radchenko argues that Brezhnev's foreign policy, though, had largely lost direction relative to the earlier Soviet quest for recognition as a global power, and this in part explains his ill-fated decision to invade Afghanistan in 1979.

The problem is Radchenko's framework cannot really explain why this is so. The theory provided is that Brezhnev's health worsened, and the Soviet economy stagnated, and so Brezhnev's foreign policy eventually languished too — becoming more intensively focused on preserving rather than extending the global influence that the Soviet Union still had. However, Brezhnev was not Stalin, and he was not the sole decision-maker on Soviet foreign policy. Focusing on him alone, as Radchenko does, means ignoring other variables like American technological changes and the failures of the Soviet planning system to adapt and innovate, which were also big drivers of Brezhnev's change in course in foreign policy relative to Khrushchev and Stalin. The Soviet Union just couldn't keep up anymore.

Radchenko does demonstrate, however, that there was a clear shift in the balance of the relative importance of recognition and the leader's personal prestige versus national security as the motivating factors for Soviet foreign policy choices. This is even more the case from 1985 to 1991 (covered in only 53 pages in the final three chapters of the book) as Gorbachev's reforms ended in the demise of the Soviet Union and the conclusion of the Cold War.

The Limitations of Radchenko's Approach

Radchenko's unwavering focus on the motivations of Soviet leaders' foreign policy decisions as determined by a quest for recognition and, to a lesser extent, security is both a blessing and a curse. It is a blessing in that he is able to delve deeply into the archival records to get inside the minds of those making the decisions that in the 1960s and 1970s risked a nuclear war seemingly every few months. But his emphasis on these two factors — recognition and security — in policy decisions assumes that Soviet leaders were seldom influenced by anything else such as their own domestic political survival. For Khrushchev, this was of course the case; he made risky policy decisions at home as much or more than he did abroad, ultimately resulting in his ouster by his own Politburo in 1964. To what extent, then, were the risks he was willing to take in foreign policy part of his attempt to shore up clearly shaky support at home? Radchenko does not connect any of this for us.

Overlooking domestic political problems and their role in foreign policy decisions is a particular danger in trying to understand what motivated the last leader of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev (1985–1991). It is hard for Radchenko to argue that recognition of the Soviet Union as a peer power to the United States was what mattered most to

Gorbachev: He gave up so much abroad in order to attempt radical reform at home that pursuing global parity with the Americans simply does not make sense as his motivation. Surely, Gorbachev's decision not to intervene in 1989 when the Berlin Wall fell, or his decisions to sign arms control agreements that ultimately limited rather than enhanced Soviet power, were not because he expected to extend Soviet prestige as much as to decrease potential threats or insecurity from abroad as he focused on desperately urgent problems at home. Indeed, the endemic references to recognition as a key motivator of Stalin, Khrushchev, and the early Brezhnev eras largely disappear in Radchenko's discussion of the Gorbachev era.

Radchenko appears almost baffled as to what might have motivated Gorbachev when he clearly made decisions that damaged rather than enhanced Soviet prestige in the eyes of American leaders. The problem for Radchenko is that Gorbachev simply does not fit the structure he uses to explain Soviet foreign policy until 1985 — that it was primarily about prestige, recognition, and legitimacy as a superpower. But we know from Gorbachev's own biographies and a comprehensive recent study of him by William Taubman, for example, that he was motivated in no small part by ideology (describing himself often as a "true communist"). His stated goal was to fix what ailed the Soviet system to make it stronger, and still communist. His foreign policy decisions were not driven by the quest for glory or prestige that Radchenko attributes to his predecessors, so much as they were an aspect of his interest in improving the daily drudgery of life for the Soviet citizen while rebuilding a system that he still deeply believed could be better than capitalism. *Perestroika* meant "re-construction," after all. To rebuild at home, Gorbachev had to get guarantees of security from abroad, and that meant an international withdrawal from spaces and bases that the Soviet empire could no longer afford.

Radchenko tries to shoehorn some of Gorbachev's behavior into the "recognition framework," but it just does not work. Had Radchenko relaxed his insistence on the pursuit of recognition and legitimacy as the driving force of Soviet foreign policy to allow for the possibility that domestic problems within the Soviet system might also have mattered, then Gorbachev's decisions might seem less enigmatic.

Comparisons to Putin Today

That said, *To Run the World* is an outstanding contribution to a growing body of new literature on the Cold War. There is simply no other study than Radchenko's that goes as in depth to consider what might have been in the minds of Soviet leaders during this period. Radchenko has marshalled his considerable powers as researcher and writer to produce a truly laudable study of Kremlin decision-making at some of the most crucial points in 20th century history.

There is a natural tendency to want to know how all of this relates to the current era of tensions between Russia and the United States. Indeed, a study of leaders as detailed as Radchenko's encourages such comparisons. Clearly, there are parallels to be found between Russia's behavior abroad under Putin's leadership in the last 20-plus years and that of various Soviet leaders. For example, similar to Stalin and Khruschev, narcissism appears to be an important foreign policy motive for Putin, as he seeks to make Russia a great power again. Similarly, Putin seems to be on a quest to expand Russian influence in the Global South — either through the sale of advanced weaponry, the supply of mercenaries to sustain autocrats in the Sahel region, or the marketing of blood diamonds and sanctioned oil, for example. He also has articulated his clear preference for a multi-polar world: an echo, perhaps, of his Soviet predecessors. His pursuit of a rapprochement with China in opposition to the United States also has a feel of familiarity in the policies

of Brezhnev, for example. Even his frequent references to Western leaders as "Anglo-Saxons" has a Stalinist ring to it. Putin obviously cares about Russia being taken seriously, his country being recognized by the United States (and China) as a peer power, and himself legitimated as one of its greatest leaders. To that extent, he shares the desire for international appreciation and respect in the way that perhaps Stalin and Khrushchev did.

Nonetheless, we must be cautious in seeing too many similarities. Contemporary Russia is a very pale version of what the Soviet Union once was. As Radchenko notes, it has less than half the population of what the Soviet Union had at its peak, and only 75% of its territory. Although it does a lot with what it amassed during good economic times in the 2000s, Russia today does not have anything close to the hard power assets to expend abroad that the Soviet Union once did. Indeed, the Russian military has stumbled in its invasion of Ukraine since 2022, despite its clear military advantages on paper. The resulting battlefield casualties are estimated as greater than the combined losses of every Soviet-involved conflict since 1945, including the decade-long war in Afghanistan, and Russia's two wars in Chechnya. This does not give one confidence that Russia today is indeed a peer power to the United States or to an emerging China, except for its nuclear supremacy.

Another key difference between contemporary Russia and the Soviet Union during the Cold War is the domestic political system. The Soviet Union was an autocracy, as is contemporary Russia — but not all autocracies are the same. Putin has evolved over his 24 years in power into a personalistic dictator ruling Russia in an institutional vacuum and without political checks on his seemingly unbridled authority. In contrast, the Soviet Union had institutions — not always effective or efficient ones, of course, but the Communist Party provided a structure to policy choices and their implementation. Often,

the Soviet political system was slow and failed to adapt quickly to change, whereas one-man rule under Putin has enabled him to be nimble although increasingly unaccountable. The over-institutionalization and bureaucratization of the Soviet system undoubtedly contributed to its ponderous rate of innovation during the later stages of the Cold War and to its ultimate demise. But it also meant that Soviet leaders faced constraints in their decision-making. Except for Stalin, they were not personalistic dictators in the way that Putin is today. Khrushchev and Gorbachev both faced mutinies from their closest comrades in the Politburo, and both were eventually dismissed from power for their policy failures. Brezhnev too was a first among equals as general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. He did not govern alone, and by the time of his death in 1982, he was so incapacitated that he may not have been actually governing at all. It is hard to see anything similar that constrains Vladimir Putin in 2024.

Similarly, although Radchenko discounts its importance, it is difficult to understand some Soviet foreign policy choices, regardless of leader, without considering the role of communist ideology. While not the only — or even always the most important — factor in explaining Soviet foreign policy, it played some role, of course. Why else would Soviet leaders bother to support liberation movements in impoverished former colonial states if not to show that communism was a better path to human development than exploitative imperialist domination? There was little competition with the United States in many of these countries for natural resources, or territory, and it is difficult to comprehend how Soviet influence over them could possibly enhance the supposed quest for recognition to which Radchenko attributes so much importance. Communism was a serious thing in the Cold War, and at least some Soviet leaders were not merely cynical seekers of glory in a macho strategy game of global risk and domination. They were true believers.

The guidance of a structured political system and a (semi-)coherent underpinning ideology are but some of the crucial differences between the drivers of Cold War Kremlin foreign policy and Russia's today. While Putin clearly shares bygone delusions of grandeur abroad, the lack of structural constraints at home on his now highly personalized autocracy have threatened global peace and security to a greater extent, arguably, than at any point in the Cold War. Recall that Khrushchev's communist colleagues removed him from power because of his "hare-brained schemes" at home and his blunders abroad. Without political institutions or well-defined procedures and processes for decision-making that go beyond Putin himself, one is hard pressed to see any similar elite-led challenge to Putin's domestic political authority in Russia today.

In sum, domestic political structures and constraints put guardrails on Soviet leaders and their foreign policy choices during much of the Cold War. There is no corollary in Putin's highly personalized brand of autocracy in contemporary Russia. He is opportunistic, not strategic. He lacks the resources and will continue to lack the recognition and respect that Soviet leaders may not only have desired, but undoubtedly received, from their American counterparts during most of the Cold War.

Moreover, Radchenko's expansive study of what motivated the Kremlin's actions in the Cold War leaves the reader with the impression that there are merely echoes in Russian decision-making today, but not a blueprint for action that Putin is following. Where the Soviets were, in a way, predictable adversaries to the Americans by the late 1970s, Putin, unconstrained by institutions, is most certainly not. That said, the single clear legacy of the Soviet Union in his hands are its formidable nuclear arsenal. That alone, however, does not give Vladimir Putin the ability to run the world, but merely to ruin it.

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3. Cold War Retrospective: Seeking Recognition as a Partner or an Adversary

Carol R. Saivetz

Although the Cold War ostensibly ended 33 years ago, we find ourselves in a new/renewed confrontation with Vladimir Putin's Russia. It is, therefore, timely and illuminating to read Sergey Radchenko's *To Run the World: The Kremlin's Cold War Bid for Global Power.* Many of the themes underscored by Radchenko in this meticulously researched book have resonance today, and many of the legacies he discusses are relevant to 2024.

Radchenko's central theme is that the Kremlin's policies from 1945–1991 were motivated by what he calls "narratives of legitimacy." He writes further that "these narratives were negotiated through constant interaction between Soviet ambitions and those who recognized and so legitimized them or those who refused to recognize them and, through their refusal, also (unexpectedly) legitimized them."[8] He adds that Soviet leaders were to a person concerned about the "legality and justice of their and their country's position in the global hierarchy."[9] This explains the Soviet Union's and now Russia's obsession with being perceived as a co-equal of the United States.

Radchenko adds to our understanding of Soviet motivations by stressing that recognition could come from either being seen as a partner or an adversary. This is, in fact, the core tension in the Soviet Union's ambitions: Could it achieve legitimacy as a partner to the West, while simultaneously seeking to be the leader of a worldwide revolutionary

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[8] Sergey Radchenko, *To Run the World: The Kremlin's Cold War Bid for Global Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 3.

[9] Sergey Radchenko, *To Run the World*, 5.

movement? As he illustrates in this detailed analysis of the Cold War, using newly available archival materials, Soviet leaders sometimes tacked toward attempting to partner with the West and at other times moved toward the more ideologically defined position as revolutionary.

The Role of Communist/Soviet Ideology

Radchenko makes clear throughout the book that Soviet leaders did understand that there were ideological challenges to their aspirations. Nonetheless, he at best relegates ideology to a lower rung of motivations. And even then, he seems to hedge his conclusion. This is particularly evident in his discussion of Soviet policies toward Afghanistan in 1979 and Poland in 1980.

In 1978, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan came to power and closely aligned Afghanistan with the Soviet Union. By 1979, however, infighting and an increasingly strong Islamist insurgency destabilized the country. As the infighting within the party intensified, the Soviets faced a dilemma: Could they/should they give up on the supposed communist revolution that had occurred in Kabul? In the spring, the Politburo decided not to intervene in the worsening situation. According to Radchenko and others, the Soviet leadership opted for practicality and seemingly understood the negative implications of any military action.[10]

But, what a difference six months makes. After the Hafizullah Amin regime removed his communist rival, Nur Muhammad Taraki, from power, the Politburo tried to make the best of a bad situation. Justifying continuing support to Amin, whom they did not trust,

[10] Sergey Radchenko, *To Run the World*, 480.

Communist Party General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev apparently argued that there were good Marxist-Leninists within Amin's circle. During the fall of 1979, Soviet leaders increasingly worried about losing Afghanistan as a client state. In a memo prepared by Yuri Andropov (then the head of the KGB) for Brezhnev, the former argued, "All this has created, on the one hand, the danger of losing the gains made by the April [1978] revolution."[11] In response to the deteriorating situation, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in late December 1979. Indeed, at a Cold War history conference in 1994, Anatoly Dobrynin, the long-serving Soviet ambassador to the United States, explained that the "driving factor was ideological."[12]

In Radchenko's masterful chronology of the Cold War, ideology again appears in Politburo discussions about the situation in Poland in 1980. That September, Brezhnev apparently stated: "we are dealing with a new type of an offensive against socialism by the class enemy…"[13] In the Polish case, the driving motivation again seems to have been the irreversibility of the revolution (which would contravene Marxism-Leninism). Soviet leadership contemplated military intervention, but in the end the Polish communist leadership instead imposed military rule.

If nothing else, what these two case studies illustrate is just how difficult it is to tease out ideology from more general geopolitical considerations. Yet, it is shocking in some ways that, in the course of serious deliberations, Soviet leaders among themselves used the terminology of Marxism-Leninism. In both Afghanistan and Poland, the issue was the irreversibility of the revolution. It might be fair to conclude that what began as "window

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[11] "Personal Memorandum from Yuri Andropov to Leonid Brezhnev," early December, 1979, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/document/19777-national-security-archive-doc-12-personal

[12] Cited in Sergey Radchenko, *To Run the World*, 493.

[13] Sergey Radchenko, *To Run the World*, 511.

dressing" for pragmatic considerations eventually became ingrained as serious categories of analysis.

Mikhail Gorbachev's ascent to power illustrates just how confining ideological precepts were. To state the obvious, railing against the West and capitalism would not help Gorbachev garner what he and the Soviet Union needed from the outside world. Gorbachev's introduction of "new political thinking" would seem to indicate that the last Soviet leader understood — after Afghanistan and Poland — that ideology could not help as the Soviet Union sought to maintain its status as the other co-equal superpower. Nonetheless, I would argue that ideology had its place and played a role in earlier Cold War history. In the final years of the Soviet Union, it no longer served its purpose.

Recognition Through Partnership

All of this brings us to the other tenet of Radchenko's narratives: the Soviet Union's search for legitimacy as a partner — or, as Dmitri Trenin put it, a rule setter on the international stage.[14] If we examine Soviet policy in the Middle East, the tension between these two tenets, and the shift toward legitimation through partnership, becomes clear. The 1956 Suez Canal Crisis is perhaps the bridge between ideologically driven foreign policy and the more pragmatic approach to international relations.

By the time Egypt nationalized the Suez Canal in 1956, the Soviet Union had already initiated arms transfers to Cairo. Indeed, the crisis presented Moscow with opportunities to solidify its ties with the Third World and to counter what Communist Party Secretary Nikita Khrushchev viewed as the imperialist powers. The history of the crisis is beyond

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[14] Dmitri Trenin, "Russia's Strategic Choices," *Carnegie Policy Brief*, no. 50, (May, 2007), 1.

the scope of this review, but it should be noted that then-Premier Nikolai Bulganin felt that "there seemed to be between the United States and the Soviet Union a common position in that both felt that this matter must be settled by peaceful means."[15] Yet, the Soviet Union was not able at that point to be a truly international player: The uprising in Hungary that fall required immediate attention.

In fact, it seems odd to me that Radchenko separates his analysis of the Hungarian uprising from his study of Suez. The two are intimately interconnected. According to notes from an Oct. 31 Politburo meeting, Khrushchev said:

> If we leave Hungary, that would encourage the American, British and French imperialists. They would understand this as our weakness and would be on the offensive. Our party wouldn't understand us. Besides Egypt, [they] would add Hungary.[16]

It would seem fair to infer that power closer to home needed to be consolidated before the Soviet Union could be a truly global co-equal of the United States. Citing the Soviet after-the-fact threats, Radchenko concludes that what Khrushchev did learn was that bluster and threats can compensate for lack of power.[17]

The 1967 so-called Six Day War, when Israel soundly defeated Soviet clients, was a setback to Soviet ambitions. It would have been interesting for Radchenko to include more about this war. The events surrounding it, including reports that the Soviets egged

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[15] As cited in Carol R. Saivetz, "Part 2: Moscow," in Philip Zelikow and Ernest May, *Suez Deconstructed* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2018), 166.

[16] "Working Notes of the Session of 31 October 1956," as contained in "Kak Reshilis Voprosy Vengrii," (How the Hungarian Question was Decided), *Istoricheskii Arkhiv,* 3 (1996), 87.

[17] Sergey Radchenko, *To Run the World*, 167.

Egypt on, seem not to fit either strand of the search for legitimacy. Was the Soviet Union seeking to push the United States out of the region? Did the Soviets simply miscalculate? The best example of legitimacy/status through partnership was perhaps the 1973 Middle East war. And here Radchenko marshals his arguments well. He describes Brezhnev's visit to Washington prior to the war, where the general secretary pleaded with President Richard Nixon for a superpower understanding on the Middle East.[18] Their shared interest was also evident is an exchange between Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and Dobrynin. Kissinger admitted that "my nightmare is a victory for either side." Dobrynin observed "it is not only your nightmare."[19]

And then, when the ceasefire that had been negotiated fell apart, Brezhnev appealed to the Nixon administration:

> "Let us together, the Soviet Union and the United States, urgently dispatch to Egypt Soviet and American contingents with their mission the implementation of the decision of the Security Council ... [if the United States refused,] we should be faced with the necessity urgently to consider the question of taking appropriate steps unilaterally."[20]

Viktor Israelyan, in his book *Inside the Kremlin During the Yom Kippur War*, argues that this was not a threat. The whole thrust of his book is that Brezhnev thought he was

[18] Sergey Radchenko, *To Run the World*, 398.

[19] "TELCON Amb. Dobrynin- Secretary Kissinger, October 13, 1973, 7:55 p.m.," Digital National Security Archive, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/document/19487-national-security-archive-doc-08-telecon-amb.

[20] Sergey Radchenko, *To Run the World*, p. 415.

operating in the spirit of *détente*. That is, that the two great powers in the world should be able to cooperate and tamp down tensions between them.[21]

The bottom line may be that by maintaining communication during the war, the superpowers established certain rules of the game going forward. Indeed, Alexander George argued at the time that "each superpower shall accept responsibility for pressuring its regional ally to stop short of inflicting such a defeat on its local opponent."[22] If nothing else, such recognition implies that the interests of the other are legitimate and to be respected. That respect, according to Radchenko, is the name of the game.

Implications for Today

Although Radchenko stops his narrative with the collapse of the Soviet Union, there are clear implications for today's standoff between Russia and the United States. Ideology is a thing of the past: It is obvious that Russia is no longer vying to be the leader of a revolutionary force.

More importantly, I think Radchenko is right about Soviet and now post-Soviet Russian leaders striving to (re)gain status in the world. One could argue that Putin felt humiliated by Russia's collapse and by its loss of superpower status. According to political

[21] Viktor Israelyan, *Inside the Kremlin During the Yom Kippur War*, (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2010).

[22] Alexander George, "US-Soviet Efforts to Cooperate in Crisis Management and Crisis Avoidance," as cited in Carol R. Saivetz, "The Superpowers in the Middle East: Cold War and Post-Cold War Policies," in Geir Lundestad, *The Fall of Great Powers Peace, Stability, and Legitimacy,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) 262.

psychologists, "There is no more humiliating experience than to have one's relative lack of power, in relation to another, continually rubbed in one's face."[23] Putin's early foreign policy illustrated that he hoped that, by siding with the United States after 9/11, he would ensure that Moscow had a seat at the table. This is precisely the motivation of Soviet leaders that Radchenko analyzes.

Subsequent events — the abrogation of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, the war in Iraq, the enlargement of NATO and the European Union — convinced him otherwise. One need only look at Russia's intervention in Syria (2015) or the invasion of Ukraine (2022) to see this playing out in real time. In helping Syrian President Bashar al Assad, Putin sought not only to support a long-standing ally, but also to regain Russia's role in the Middle East: The move was designed to remind the world that Russia was a great power and had a global role to play.[24]

Ukraine is by far a more complex issue, and Putin's motivations are myriad. The Russian president has clearly always been neuralgic about Ukraine, but I would argue that the invasion was designed primarily to signal that Russia was still a great power and that it could do what it wanted within what it saw as Russia's sphere of influence. Indeed, some have argued that Moscow cannot be a global power until it reestablishes itself as the regional hegemon. Putin longs for the days of the Soviet Union, when it was a given that Moscow's views would be considered if not accommodated.

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[23] Blema Steinberg, "Psychoanalytical Concepts in International Politics: The Rôle of Shame and Humiliation," *International Review of Psychoanalysis*, Vol 18, No 1 (February 1991), 66.

[24] Carol R. Saivetz, "Russia Bets on Assad," Lawfare Blog, The Brookings Institution, October 18, 2015, https://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/russia-bets-assad.

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4. The Soviet Union and China: Status, Competition, and Ideology

Natasha Kuhrt

Sergey Radchenko is well known as a historian of the Russia-China relationship, as well as a keen observer of contemporary security issues. His expertise on the aforesaid relationship is in many ways what makes this book stand out from the crowd. Much has been written already on the Cold War and the role of both the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China in it. Radchenko has drawn on new archival material that puts flesh on the bones of our often somewhat skeletal understanding of Cold War decision-making.

The primary problem with researching the Cold War was always a lack of evidence, particularly in terms of the Soviet dimension. As Radchenko acknowledges, during the writing process new archives opened up in Russia, including the "Molotov files" in the archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation; the "Mikoyan files" of the State Archive of the Russian Federation as well as party documents that included Leonid Brezhnev and Nikita Khrushchev's personal files; and other archives provided access to Joseph Stalin's files. In addition, in the case of China, the Chinese Foreign Ministry's archive was used until access was shut down in 2012–13.[25]

While Radchenko has one foot in international relations, his heart is in international history. And this shows. His main argument is that the Soviet Union has always sought recognition from the United States in order to satisfy its need for status, prestige, and

[25] Sergey Radchenko, *To Run the World: The Kremlin's Cold War Bid for Global Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 711-712.

legitimacy as a great power. In the discussion on ideology, legitimacy, and great-power identity, readers are treated early on to some cursory engagement with international relations theory and discussion of what "legitimacy" (described as a "famous can of worms") entails — suggesting that the "usual definition" relates to legality and justice, often with a moral dimension. Radchenko notes further that justice — in other words, the Soviet Union's rightful position in the global hierarchy — was the main concern of Soviet leaders.[26] There is a brief nod to Ian Clark's work on legitimacy and international society, but Radchenko soon leaves this behind, plunging the reader into a panoramic view of the Cold War. As a one-time student of "Soviet Studies," with a foot in the discipline of international relations, I find Radchenko's approach both appealing and refreshing. Having said that, a more detailed explanation of what legitimacy actually entails would have been welcome, as we are often left to work out for ourselves what it means in practice. Clark also argued that legitimacy was made up of competing norms of morality, legality, and constitutionality, as well as a public accounting of legitimacy (the latter clearly lacking in the Soviet context).[27]

For Radchenko, recognition from the West — principally the United States but also Europe — is what the Soviet Union required for legitimation. Yet, at the same time, he argues that Khrushchev "sought recognition by the Third World and his allies for his opposition to the West, as a revolutionary and an anti-imperialist."[28] Arguably, legitimacy also depends on authority. Ian Hurd describes the essential ingredients as "(1) a relation between subordinate and superior; that is (2) recognized by both as (3) legitimate." Hurd goes on: "Authority is a subset of the category 'relations of power': and its defining

[26] Sergey Radchenko, *To Run the World*, 5.

[27] Ian Clark, *Legitimacy in International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[28] Sergey Radchenko, *To Run the World*, 252.

feature is the existence of a legitimated hierarchy.'"[29] This can be extrapolated to great-power relations — for example between the Soviet Union and the United States or between China and the Soviet Union —when they recognise each other as legitimate, thus having authority. And nowhere has hierarchy been more relevant than in Soviet-U.S. and Sino-Soviet relations.

An Ideological Competition for the Third World

One aspect of the Cold War was a struggle between the Soviet Union and China for leadership of the communist movement, including in the Third World. In essence, again, it was about who had the authority. The Sino-Soviet split was a crucial facet of the Cold War and, as Allen Lynch explains, the Chinese challenge, which had originally begun as an ideological dispute, eventually turned into a political and later, in 1969, a military conflict, which meant that "Soviet theorists were led to admit explicitly the possibility of war between communist countries." Clearly, then, factors other than class needed to be accounted for, including national characteristics. In the case of China, this also meant factoring in nationalism, "as the moving force behind Chinese foreign policy."[30]

Before he died, Chinese leader Mao Zedong set out what Radchenko describes as "a final testament," which assigned both the United States and the Soviet Union to the First World (interestingly, given that most Western analysts allocated the Soviet Union to the Second World); Japan, Europe, Australia, and Canada to the Second World; while China

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[29] Ian Hurd, "Theories and tests of international authority," in Bruce Cronin and Ian Hurd (eds.), *The UN Security Council and the Politics of International Authority* (Oxford: Routledge, 2008), 23-41 and 24-25.

[30] Allen Lynch, *The Soviet Study of International Relations,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 142.

was deemed to be firmly part of the Third World. For Mao, though, there was a clear duty to assist the Third World, or else China would be "'betraying Marxism.'"[31]

Radchenko's book discusses the role of Marxist-Leninist ideology in Soviet foreign policy decision-making frequently. Ideology as a determining factor in Soviet foreign policy has been a major point of debate amongst historians and political scientists. Certainly, the central role of ideology in legitimizing the Soviet regime and giving it a "sense of mission"[32] is widely acknowledged, and in particular the role of "really existing socialism" and the continued striving for full communism. Radchenko acknowledges the role of ideology, but then often seems to dismiss it almost completely. It is clear that Soviet foreign policy ideology could yield to pragmatism when required but, as Andrew Heywood reminds us, we should "acknowledge the constant interplay between ideas and ideologies on the one hand, and historical and material forces on the other."[33] With the collapse of the Soviet Union, archival material has demonstrated the central importance of Marxist-Leninist ideology. Indeed, it could be argued that ideology was the battleground for the contest over leadership of the communist world that was the backdrop to Sino-Soviet competition.

A realist would argue that all states are the same (the black box theory) never mind ideology. Through that lens, domestic factors are irrelevant. Yet, in the case of the Soviet Union, domestic factors were just as relevant as external ones. As George Kennan points out, while ideology was not "officially junked," it came to be much more about the preservation of the Soviet regime itself and its central role in the world communist

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[31] Sergey Radchenko, *To Run the World*, 442.

[32] Adam B. Ulam, "Soviet Ideology and Soviet Foreign Policy," in Erik P. Hoffmann and Frederic J. Fleron Jr. (eds), *The Conduct of Soviet Foreign Policy* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1980), 136-154 and 142.

[33] Andrew Heywood, *Political Ideologies: An Introduction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992), 4.

movement. Nonetheless, one thing stayed constant: the enduring belief in the innate antagonism between socialism and capitalism and the continuing struggle against imperialism.[34]

Some of the most fascinating sections of the book are those that deal with Khrushchev's forays into the "Third World." His courting of the developing world was, as Radchenko notes, a reversal of Stalinist foreign policy. However, one could also plausibly argue that, rather than a diversion from ideology, expanding ties with the developing world was consistent with the Leninist strategy of tactical alliances with national liberation movements.[35] Decolonization removed a Western military presence from a whole host of countries in Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. Around the same time, the Non-Aligned Movement emerged. India was a key player in the movement, and its role threatened China. Radchenko says little about India in his book, other than in the context of the Sino-Indian border dispute.

Ultimately, the Soviet Union did not gain a firm foothold in the Third World. Its main comparative advantage was military power, and even that eventually declined.

China Takes on the Ideological Mantle

It was Khrushchev, as Radchenko emphasizes, who compromised on Marxist strictures. National liberation movements based on self-determination, essentially nationalism, were

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[34] George F. Kennan, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," in Frederic J. Fleron Jr., Erik P. Hoffmann, and Robbin F. Laird (eds.), *Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-1991: Classic and Contemporary Issues* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers), 313-327 and 317.

[35] Joseph L. Nogee and Robert H. Donaldson, *Soviet Foreign Policy Since World War II* (Pergamon Press, 1998), 148.

completely inimical to communism, with its emphasis on class. Ernest Gellner put it well with his "wrong address theory" — the idea that "the liberationist message intended for classes was 'by some terrible postal error' delivered instead to nations."[36] Khrushchev, however, resolved to support national liberation movements in Africa and Asia, seeing an opportunity to gain ground for Marxism-Leninism, but also seeing this as potential leverage with the West.

Soviet activism in the Third World is at the heart of the book. It was here that the Soviets and the Chinese vied for leadership of the communist world. China saw itself as the natural leader of the Third World. In particular, China criticized the Soviet Union for having "distorted" Leninism.[37] As Radchenko explains, China saw itself as the new "heir" to the Soviet Union[38] and presumably as preserving Vladimir Lenin's legacy intact, which the Soviets did not appear to be doing.

For Radchenko, ideology tends to be more about an "ex-post facto" framing, and so the idea that ideological conflicts made the Cold War inevitable "falls flat."[39]

Once again, Radchenko underlines the search for legitimacy by means of recognition and he seems to suggest that, while China also saw recognition from the West as important, it was far more vital to the Soviet Union. Is that because, as Radchenko remarks, the Soviet Union's European cultural identity made recognition from the "other" so key? Iver Neumann has argued that Europe has always been the significant other of Russia, then

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[36] Brendan O'Leary, "On the Nature of Nationalism: An Appraisal of Ernest Gellner's Writings on Nationalism," *British Journal of Political Science* 27, no. 2 (1997): 191-222, 198.

[37] Sergey Radchenko, *To Run the World*, 206.

[38] Sergey Radchenko, *To Run the World*, 116.

[39] Sergey Radchenko, *To Run the World*, 107-108.

the Soviet Union, and now Russia again.[40] Where does that leave the United States, though?

For Radchenko, it is ideology versus geopolitics and pragmatism, with *realpolitik* usually winning out. For example, Mao's endorsement of the Soviet Union as the leader of the socialist camp reflected that "China has not even one-fourth of a sputnik while the Soviet Union has two," which is likely more about Sputnik as a "symbol of achievement and a source of prestige" for the Soviet Union, and it was "Soviet national power to which Mao paid deference."[41]

While ideology often gives way to pragmatism and national interest, at the same time acknowledging the equality of other communist states necessarily reduced the weight and authority of the Soviet Union's leading role. Moreover, admitting the mistakes of Stalin risked reducing that authority still further. The Chinese remained unforgiving of Khruschev's retreat from Marxist-Leninism, which explained their policy of *détente* with the West.

As far as China was concerned, the Soviet Union had caved in to the imperialists over Cuba, when Soviet leaders agreed to remove the missiles in response to the Cuban Missile Crisis. For the Soviets, the Chinese were engaging in dangerous adventurism, expecting Moscow to back them in 1958 when Chinese communist forces attacked the island of Quemoy, which was held by Chinese nationalist forces. The Soviets supported Beijing in

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[40] Iver B. Neumann, *Russia and the Idea of Europe: A Study in Identity and International Relations (Second Edition)* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017).

[41] Samuel L. Sharp, "National Interest: Key to Soviet Politics" and "Ideology and Power Politics: A Symposium," in Erik P. Hoffman and Frederic J. Fleron Jr. (eds.), *The Conduct of Soviet Foreign Policy* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1980), 101-136, 116.

that case. Then, when China went to war with India, this was too much, and Moscow took a neutral line. As Radchenko notes, Beijing viewed this as a breach of alliance obligations.[42] Of course, any lessening of tensions with the West would make the Sino-Soviet alliance of far less value, so it was in China's interest to attempt to torpedo *détente*.

Ideology remained the language of communication amongst communist states, but as those communist regimes came to be assessed against the criteria of economic prosperity and other measures, the mismatch between ideology and reality would challenge the ideology, leading to a crisis of legitimacy at home which soon translated to a crisis of legitimacy abroad. Thus it was with the Soviet experiment.

Different Approaches to Ideology, Reform, and Legitimacy

Ultimately, the Soviet Union had to survive in a world of nation-states, so it had to jettison ideological purity. Yet, as Mikhail Gorbachev discovered to his cost, abrogating article 6 of the 1977 constitution that enshrined the leading role of the Communist Party in Soviet society meant loosening the ideological "glue" holding the Soviet Union together. With this abrogation, he lost his own legitimacy and authority. Radchenko notes that Gorbachev understood very clearly the way in which "economic performance and political legitimacy were intimately related."[43] Indeed, Gorbachev and his team hoped to learn from the Chinese economic experience, and Special Economic Zones were of particular interest, but, as Radchenko documents, economic reforms in the Soviet Union were painfully slow.[44]

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[42] Sergey Radchenko, *To Run the World*, 249.

[43] Sergey Radchenko, *To Run the World*, 542.

[44] Sergey Radchenko, *To Run the World*, 543.

One of the most interesting questions, which the book does not explictly raise, is the extent to which the collapse of the Soviet Union reconfirmed to the Chinese the wisdom of their ways. While in China economic liberalization was encouraged under Deng Xiaoping, political reform was not on the agenda. In the Soviet Union, Gorbachev did things backwards: with *glasnost* (the loosening of restrictions on free speech), it simply meant that citizens were able to criticize the shortcomings of the system, including the disastrous economic policies.

The Chinese stood ready to improve relations with the Soviets and in 1990 Deng said, "[W]hatever changes take place in the Soviet Union, we should steadily expand relations with it, including political relations on the basis of the five principles of peaceful co-existence and refrain from arguing over ideological differences."[45] However, this could not disguise the huge concern in China regarding the fall of the Communist Party and the rise to power of Boris Yeltsin. At the time of the Soviet collapse, the Chinese feared a return to tsarist imperialism, a Russian change of allegiance to Taiwan, and the spillover of reformist ideas into China itself.[46]

Radchenko reminds us that Sino-Soviet rapprochement already had begun under the aegis of Brezhnev, with his 1982 speech in Tashkent, yet not all in Moscow were supportive of this move. Furthermore, progress was slow due to China's stipulation that the Soviet Union needed to address "three obstacles" — Soviet troops in Afghanistan,

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[45] Cited in Xu Kui, *Russia's Relations with Central Asia and China and the Question of Integration into the Asian Economy,* IREX Scholar Papers, January 31, 1996, 7.

[46] Natasha Kuhrt, *Russian Policy Towards China and Japan: The El'tsin and Putin Periods* (London & New York: Routledge, 2007), 11.

Soviet support for Vietnam, and the build-up of troops on the Sino-Soviet border and the border with Mongolia — in order to normalize Sino-Soviet relations.[47]

Competition and Recognition Today

While Radchenko's book stops with the collapse of the Soviet Union, there is a brief excursion into the present day and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. He does not ponder the extent to which China's "neutrality" on the war in Ukraine has facilitated Russia's actions, but that is beyond the scope of the book.

Today, as Russia — in legal terms, the continuator state of the Soviet Union — wages war on Ukraine, it also seeks to gain traction with the countries of the "Global South" (Third World) by appealing to memories of Soviet activism. China uses its multiple identities to gain favor with a number of Global South countries, as it explicitly positions itself as a developing country, as well as a Permanent-Five member of the U.N. Security Council. In many ways, the war in Ukraine has returned a measure of agency to the Global South as the war disrupts global supply chains. One positive by-product of the Russian invasion is that Europe and the United States are reappraising the importance of the Global South for international order. Ukraine also, in an attempt to "better explain Ukraine" to African countries, seeks to build political support in the countries of the Global South and has increased the number of its embassies and trade missions in Africa.[48]

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[47] Sergey Radchenko, *To Run the World*, 527.

[48] Peter Fabricus, "Ukraine steps up its charm offensive in Africa," Institute for Security Studies, May 3, 2024, https://issafrica.org/iss-today/ukraine-steps-up-its-charm-offensive-in-africa.

Yet, in some ways, Radchenko suggests that the Global South perhaps had more agency during the Cold War than it was commonly ascribed. As Radchenko points out, Khrushchev not only sought recognition from the West, principally the United States, but also from the Third World, as a "great revolutionary power" that would push back against U.S. imperialism.[49]

From whom does Vladimir Putin seek recognition today? It is still the case that recognition from the West is crucial. Whether this is recognition as an adversary or an ally is in some ways immaterial. Certainly, Putin has suggested that Russia should be treated as a great power, or more. A great power is one that can lay down the law to others. When President Barack Obama referred to Russia as a "regional power," the Putin regime viewed it as an insult.[50] It was as if Russia had been airbrushed out of history. In many ways, Putin's mission has been to remind the West that Russia is once again to be reckoned with, that it is an indispensable power, and should be given a seat at the table of the great powers. However, as Radchenko points out, in order to get a seat at said table, Russia would have to pay a price — a price it is unwilling to pay, for the price would be to "change itself and admit its flaws."[51]

Ultimately, the West recognized the Russian Federation as the continuator state of the Soviet Union (with the other former republics designated as "successor states"), so Moscow inherited the Soviet Union's permanent seat in the U.N. Security Council and its status as one of the five countries officially recognized as a nuclear power. Perhaps the

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[49] Sergey Radchenko, *To Run the World*, 286.

[50] "Obama calling Russia a regional power is 'disrespectful' — Putin," *Moscow Times,* January 12, 2016, https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2016/01/12/obama-calling-russia-a-regional-power-is-disrespectful-putin-a51414.

[51] Sergey Radchenko, *To Run the World*, 602.

problem all along has been less about seeking status from the West, but rather a kind of "status inconsistency."[52] The Soviet Union itself was a "fragile superpower,"[53] the only mystery being that it survived as long as it did.

This rollercoaster ride through Soviet adventurism in the Third World and brinkmanship with Europe and the United States cannot answer the question of why the Soviet Union was able to last so long. However, it goes some way toward clarifying the central concerns of the Soviet leaders during the Cold War: prestige, legitimacy, and status, whether this was achieved through ideological or other means. Clearly, the United States as the incarnation of imperialist capitalism was always the main interlocutor. But what happens when and if the United States is displaced and/or a U.S.-Chinese bipolar world emerges with China in prime position? It is evident from this book that status concerns loom large not just in Russia and China's relations with the West, but also in their relations with each other.[54] Radchenko quotes Khrushchev as stressing that his problems with China were not about "ideological divergences. Simply, they wanted to play 'the first fiddle.'"[55] Will Russia be content to play "second fiddle" to China in the coming years?

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[52] H. Smith, "Russia as a great power: Status inconsistency and the two Chechen wars," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 47, no. 3-4, (2014): 355-363.

[53] The term was used by Susan Shirk for the title of her book about China. Susan L. Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower: How China's Internal Politics Could Derail Its Peaceful Rise* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[54] Deborah Welch Larsson and Aleksei Shevchenko, *Quest for Status: Chinese and Russian Foreign Policy,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

[55] Sergey Radchenko, *To Run the World*, 327.

foreign policy, especially in Asia, as well as international law. Her Ph.D. thesis was published as Russian Policy Towards China and Japan: The Elt'sin and Putin Periods *(Oxford: Routledge, 2007). Recent publications include articles on the International Criminal Court and the U.N. Security Council, Russian and Chinese approaches to U.N. peacekeeping, and Russia and the Indo-Pacific.*

5. The Price of Ambition and a Longing for Recognition

Onur İşçi

In a casual conversation with Ryan Haas, who was in charge of Chinese affairs at the White House National Security Council under the Obama administration, Xi Jinping's "right-hand man" confessed how different it felt traveling to Moscow and Washington, DC. He told Haas, "When you travel to Moscow, it's friendly, it's fun, it feels comfortable, and you feel like you're going to visit a family member. You can laugh, you can joke, you can sort of be yourself. When you come to Washington, it's like taking an examination. Everything has to be precise. You've got to get it exactly right. And there is no margin for error."[56] This anecdote is revealing, not least because it echoes a similar unease felt by high-ranking guests from Moscow who have visited the White House since the Cold War began.

Nikita Khrushchev, for instance, prepared for his meetings with President Dwight Eisenhower as he would for an important exam. So writes Sergey Radchenko, a historian at Johns Hopkins University, in his weighty new book, *To Run the World: The Kremlin's Cold War Bid for Global Power*. For Khrushchev's famous 1959 visit, which was the first official trip by a Soviet or Russian leader to the United States, the Soviet leader studied thoroughly for weeks, "dictating memoranda to his stenographer, attempting to straighten out the key questions in his mind before he put them across to Ike."[57]

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[56] "The Diplomacy Dance: China and the Israel-Hamas War," CBC Radio, December 14, 2023, https://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/china-s-stance-on-israel-hamas-war-1.7059153.

[57] Sergey Radchenko, *To Run the World: The Kremlin's Cold War Bid for Global Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 238.

Ultimately, Khrushchev entered the Oval Office with a similar impression that Xi Jinping's right-hand would later share — as one about to face a tough quiz.

Why have Chinese and Russian leaders framed their experience with American counterparts in hierarchical terms — that of anxious student and test-giving tutor? It's not merely a question of American exceptionalism (Russia has long had its own peculiar messianism); it expresses an aspect of international order, in which those lower in the hierarchy harbor mixed feelings of frustration and desire for approval. Looking at other non-Western leaders' insecurities in Washington, Moscow's and Beijing's shared resentment toward being lectured and tested by Americans rings all too familiar.

I'm better acquainted with Cold War Turkish policymakers' experience in Washington. Surely Turkey was not a superpower, so the analogy might seem misplaced, but what comes across in Turkish leaders' memoirs and transcripts of their meetings is a similar quest for external validation and recognition. One striking example that triggers Turks' hypersensitivity about being treated as equals is a picture from the Oval Office back in 1999, when President Bill Clinton hosted Turkish Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit. The picture shows Clinton lazily perched on the back of a couch, listening to Ecevit, who is standing awkwardly, visibly unsure what to do with his hands. That picture stirred up a great deal of controversy at the time. The content of the meeting was irrelevant; rather, it was Clinton's haughty, professorial posture.

These emotional currents cemented America's image abroad as a snooty teacher. Radchenko's *To Run the World* shows that the Kremlin has been particularly sensitive to this attitude. The Soviet Union sought recognition and legitimation; even more, its leaders wanted parity with the United States in running the world. Focusing on Moscow's quest

for legitimacy, Radchenko departs from previous accounts that emphasized Soviet exceptionalism and socialist ideology.

A Craving for Greatness

Following the footsteps of Odd Arne Westad, Radchenko looks at the Cold War as a common struggle over the best model of improving the human condition, a conflict over the best path toward modernity. Thus, he is more concerned with Soviet ambitions than with Moscow's capabilities. "By changing the world," Radchenko argues, the Soviets thought that they "could ipso facto improve their standing in the world, for presumably the rearrangement would be to their benefit."[58] And this is essentially what his book is about: the Soviet Union's craving for greatness and recognition.

Radchenko breaks new ground by showing readers why Bolshevik ideology is "a slippery concept used unsparingly by historians" to explain the Soviet Union's geopolitical decisions and goals and, at the same time, how Moscow's quest for security is intrinsically linked to ideology in such ways that the two can be described as "a subset of the other."[59] An alternative framework to tell the Soviet Union's Cold War story — one proposed most prominently by Vladislav Zubok — fuses the two: ideology and security. Radchenko, however, deflates the "revolutionary-imperial paradigm" early in the book, arguing that it often falls back on monocausality.[60] Instead, he suggests that foreign recognition underlay the Soviet worldview.

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[58] Radchenko, 6.

[59] Radchenko, 4.

[60] Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

Radchenko thinks that the imagining of the Soviet Union as solely guided by ideological or geopolitical concerns has occurred more often in the work of historians than in the words of the historical actors. Through copious anecdotes, he reminds us that the ideological tropes of socialism were not inconsequential, but that Soviet leaders were "realist" in foreign policy. Take, for example, Ivan Maisky, who once elaborated the relationship between ideology and realism in Soviet foreign policy: "The Soviet government has never pursued and does not pursue *Gefühlspolitik* [emotional politics]. The Soviet government is utterly realistic in its foreign policy. When state interests and feelings collide, state interests always win."[61] Radchenko's argument invites engagement with a question at the crux of a longstanding dispute in scholarship: Who was (more) responsible for the breakdown of U.S.-Soviet relations in the wake of World War II? If Soviet foreign policy was fundamentally realist, then what explains the birth of the Eastern Bloc and the descending of the Iron Curtain?

For Radchenko, it was Joseph Stalin's insatiable desire to attain international legitimacy through Western recognition of the Soviet Union's great-power status. Boundlessly ambitious and a master of Bismarckian *realpolitik*, Stalin's unbridled drive for global hegemony led to a superpower conflict that shaped the second half of the 20th century. And this is where the novelty of Radchenko's contribution lies: He diverges from "revisionist historians," who, beginning in the mid-1960s, blamed the United States for betraying the Yalta scheme and precipitating the Cold War. In contrast, Radchenko argues that "Stalin's two natures — imperialist and Marxist — fused in imperceptible and occasionally contradictory ways, leaving little scope to doubt his personal contribution to

[61] Radchenko, 22.

the Cold War."[62] At heart, what he really wanted was recognition of the Soviet Union's newfound prominence in the international order.

As Radchenko acknowledges, a good place to look for signs of Stalin's aspirations in the postwar order is Turkey. After Potsdam, instead of proving more pliable and open to compromise, as the Americans had hoped, Stalin adopted a policy of "tenacity and steadfastness" (or in Radchenko's translation, "firmness and perseverance") for fear of seeming weak and inviting further pressure. As with many other countries, Stalin sought to bully the Ankara government into recognizing Soviet primacy — in this case, naval bases on the Turkish Straits and the repatriation of three eastern Anatolian cities (*Elviye-i Selase*). I recently published an article on this episode (focusing on the Turkish perspective) and agree with Radchenko's assessment that Stalin's demands turned out to be a great blunder, inciting fear and pushing the Turks into NATO's arms.[63] Beyond Turkey or Eastern Europe, the broader significance of Radchenko's first four chapters on the postwar Stalin years is the way he flirts with the question of blame. He probes the complex interplay of power and legitimacy, explaining Soviet ambition, and delivers what he sets out to accomplish: a Soviet-focused narrative of the origins of the Cold War.

Of course, not everyone will find Radchenko's argument about legitimation convincing. Indeed, some may think that Radchenko himself lapses into a monocausal account of Soviet behavior. For a long time, many historians have contended that Marxist ideology was a key factor driving Soviet foreign and domestic policy, particularly under Khrushchev. David Engerman, for instance, claims that the trove of declassified

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[62] Radchenko, 37.

[63] Onur İşçi, "Turkey at a Crossroads: The Soviet Threat and Postwar Realignment," *Diplomatic History* 47, no. 4 (September 2023): 621–46, https://doi.org/10.1093/dh/dhad039.

documents after 1991 "make clear that Lenin and his successors did not use ideology as mere cover for *raisons d'état*." I imagine Czech historian Vojtech Mastny would also raise his eyebrows at Radchenko, for he argues that "there was no double-bookkeeping" in Soviet politics.[64] In any case, as thorough as Radchenko's account is, the dispute about Stalin's strategy — whether he had a grand plan after World War II or if he improvised along the way — will not be easily resolved. And Soviet intentions get even more difficult to discern during the Khrushchev period.

Khrushchev's Ambitions

For better or worse, foreign scholars often associate Khrushchev with his role in the Cuban Missile Crisis. But at home, he is mostly remembered for a famous slogan, with which he proclaimed that the Soviet Union would catch up and overtake America (*dognat' i peregnat' Ameriku*). Much to the later dismay of Soviet citizens waiting in breadlines during the 1980s, in 1957, Khrushchev set a goal defined in per capita production of meat, milk, and butter that turned out to be unrealistic. But at the time, it became a catchphrase, encouraging Khrushchev to update his prognosis: to overtake the United States in overall economic production in 15 years.

Building on this motto, the second — and longest — section of the book looks at Soviet diplomacy under the first post-Stalin reformist leader (though Radchenko has very little to say about the reforms themselves since this book focuses narrowly on international relations). In seven chapters, Radchenko addresses three foreign policy–related questions: "Where did the Soviet Union fit in the global order? Did it accept this order or seek its

[64] Vojtech Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 9.

overthrow? And what sort of a relationship with the United States satisfied the Soviet quest for recognition?"

Khrushchev's acute awareness of the reality that the Soviet Union was behind the West in economic development did not prevent him from punching above his weight. Shrewd and abundantly confident, Khrushchev's real success was to grasp the power of anti-colonial movements around the world and project greatness to win friends. Capabilities — such as the successful launching of Sputnik in 1957 — helped improve the Soviet image abroad, but through successive crises, in the Suez in 1956, then in Syria the next year, Khrushchev discovered that "bluster was a remarkably effective tool of foreign policy, and he would resort to it time and again."[65]

"What did Khrushchev want and what did he have to offer?" asks Radchenko. Catering to newborn nations' hunger for development, Khrushchev extended aid to third world nationalists such as India's Jawaharlal Nehru, Indonesia's Sukarno, or Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser. Radchenko aptly shows that this was a pragmatic embrace of winners rather than a gamble on this or that communist faction. The author argues that Khrushchev was willing to rely on nationalists as Soviet allies, and that this was a different approach than Stalin's. To be sure, Khrushchev was different; he travelled more, wined and dined foreign leaders more, and so forth. But one wonders how clearly this distinction should be drawn. As Sam Hirst has recently shown, Soviet outreach to what would later be called the third world was happening before what we now think of as "the global Cold War." In the 1920s, too, and in line with Radchenko's broader argument, Stalin's outreach eclipsed ideological loyalty. To challenge the international order during the interwar period, Stalin extended industrial aid to Turkish nationalists, built state-

[65] Radchenko, 167.

owned factories in Iran, and generally pursued trade agreements with other "developing" nations.[66] In that sense, Khruschev's third world policy was unmistakably more ambitious but not as different as Radchenko claims.

Radchenko's narrative excels in the de-Stalinization chapter. It shows how Khrushchev's famous speech disclosing Stalin's crimes at the Twentieth Party Congress inadvertently did something that he never intended: undermining the Soviet Union's moral standing in the world. "Assertion of power requires moral standing," writes Radchenko, "for power is never in itself compelling enough to command a global following."[67] The erosion of Stalin's infallibility did enormous damage to the Soviet Union's image globally, from Scandinavia to East Asia. The timing of Khrushchev's de-Stalinization speech couldn't have been more inopportune: Economic difficulties added to the people's unrest in Poznan and Budapest, and their efforts to capitalize on de-Stalinization almost derailed the Soviet system in Eastern Europe.

A Sino-Soviet specialist by training, perhaps Radchenko's most significant contribution to the existing literature on the Cold War is to highlight China's increasing role in world politics. Although the book is concerned with the Kremlin's bid for supremacy in world politics, Radchenko weighs in on the factors that led Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping to stake China's claim as a major player in global affairs. From the Hungarian uprising to the Cuban Missile Crisis, readers will learn of the interplay between American, Soviet, *and* Chinese ambitions. Russia and China were guided by a similar motive — legitimation

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[66] Samuel J. Hirst, *Against the Liberal Order: The Soviet Union, Turkey, and Statist Internationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024).

[67] Radchenko, 176.

through recognition — and Radchenko offers a comprehensive account of how this mutual goal led Moscow and Beijing to clash and drift apart.

In Radchenko's narrative, Khrushchev appears at times as a maverick and at other times as befuddled, but mostly as an opportunist trying to cash in on various conflicts for the sort of "global projection of power that he deemed essential for recognition of the Soviet Union as an equal of the United States."[68] But, often playing the role of Hamlet in his indecisiveness, Khrushchev was torn between his two roles: "as a statesman and a leader of a superpower, and as a revolutionary and the head of the international Communist movement."[69] Craving acceptance by the West as an equal ran against Moscow's simultaneous pursuit of recognition by the third world for opposition to the West, and hence Khrushchev's foreign policy was doomed. In the end, the erection of the Berlin Wall, followed by the Cuban Missile Crisis, undermined Soviet prestige and brought about its leader's downfall.

To what extent Khrushchev's comrades who plotted for his "voluntary removal from power" were responding to misadventures abroad is debatable. Radchenko admits that foreign policy probably played very little role in the machinations of the leading plotter (Leonid Brezhnev). But then, since Khrushchev's demise had much to do with economic policies, it would have been helpful to gauge the connection between shortages of goods at home on the one hand, and Soviet economic assistance to developing countries abroad on the other. Yes, Moscow sought international recognition by helping the third world and by challenging the West, but how did they finance this policy and, numerically speaking, what went wrong?

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[68] Radchenko, 167.

[69] Radchenko, 252.

This is important because Brezhnev's replacement of Khrushchev was followed by the appointment of a capable economic manager, Aleksei Kosygin, to the prime ministerial post. In Radchenko's telling, facing "a deficit of political legitimacy," Brezhnev, Kosygin, and their comrades strove to secure leadership in the socialist camp, and the war in Vietnam presented them an invaluable opportunity to be recognized as America's equal, which was "at the center of Brezhnev's approach to détente." But one might ask: Surely the attempt to attract Western investment and use foreign policy to address economic problems was equally important to the new leaders' legitimacy at home?

Beyond Realism

Humbly, Radchenko claims that his book is thin on theory. However, he also repeatedly invokes a realist framework to argue that, in the Soviet Union, state interests trumped ideology. Take the Brezhnev chapters, for instance. To show how Soviet ideology was often used for internal consumption, he cites a colorful anecdote from Anatoly Chernyaev (Mikhail Gorbachev's foreign policy aide in the late 1980s): "We are not such fools as to engage in ideological exercises in business, state-to-state relations with those who can easily tell us to fuck off."[70]

This is a telling reference with implications for understanding Brezhnev's approach to détente. Radchenko explains what the general secretary had in mind when simultaneously ordering tanks to Prague and reaching out to West Germany in the following way. In 1968, the fear was that the Prague Spring was a repeat of Budapest's 1956 autumn; it required a response. But Brezhnev sought to isolate this episode from relations with more important

[70] Radchenko, 371.

players: He successfully kept the Chinese at bay, while also maintaining a more or less amicable relationship with Richard Nixon. Radchenko points to an irony here: Both China and the Soviet Union had similar ideologies (Marxism-Leninism) in theory, but in practice sought the fruits of cooperation with capitalism. Brezhnev and Mao, then, were realists, just as Willy Brandt and Nixon were realists. Readers might aptly ask: Is Radchenko a realist? Going back to the introduction of his book (and this review), the answer is, yes and no.

In the hands of a political scientist interested in state behavior, realism is often used to systematically explain the pursuit and application of power in international relations. For the historian, it's often invoked but is rarely the only tool in the box. Thus, Radchenko does not limit his approach to realism or any of its sub-schools (classical, liberal, structural, etc.). As with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan or the Vietnam War, the author admits that, although Brezhnev often sacrificed ideology for the pursuit of glory, sometimes the two (state interests and ideology) overlapped. The fact that Soviet leaders were, to varying degrees, concerned with ideological cohesion does not totally square with realism, which downplays ideology as a factor in foreign policy. "Much like Khrushchev and Stalin," Radchenko admits, Brezhnev valued recognition of his greatness "at least on a par with his loyalty to the Marxist dogma."[71]

At last, when Brezhnev posed before cameras with Nixon and Henry Kissinger during his 1973 trip to the United States, the Soviet Union seemed to have achieved the long-sought recognition as equals. But those in the Eastern Bloc who saw those pictures got an eerie impression, which was discernably un-Marxist. It was as if Brezhnev "joined forces" with

[71] Radchenko, 494.

American imperialism "in running the world."[72] Riding on détente, Radchenko argues that Brezhnev sacrificed or downplayed the ideological East-West divide for the sake of a desire to "run the world," together with the Americans. This, the author concedes, may appear as a realist take. Likewise, when Brezhnev embraced Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik*, the author suggests that Moscow's policy was less concerned with ideological disputes than "the prestige and practical benefits of an improved relationship with Bonn."[73] If one looks for hints of offensive or defensive realism in Moscow's involvement in the Yom Kippur War or in the Cypriot crisis, "there is certainly evidence to back up the claim."[74]

Yet, for Radchenko, the prestige of a superpower mattered most. In the later Brezhnev chapters, Radchenko takes on a perplexing question that keeps Cold War historians busy (and divided): Why did détente fail? He argues that the Soviet Union had become a superpower but that, even though Soviet propaganda rationalized Moscow's strategic goals in Marxist-Leninist terms, "détente was more about attaining recognition by the United States as a co-ruler of the world."[75] And this is where Radchenko makes a convincing case that goes beyond realism. A realist would explain the failure of détente through theories of hegemonic rivalry and state capabilities. For Radchenko, Brezhnev's ambition for recognition — in fact, parity — meant that détente was never sustainable. "Stable relationships are those that combine shared values with the two parties' recognition of their respective places in the relationship hierarchy," the author argues, revealing his departure from a standardized realist reading.[76] Beijing and Moscow did share values, unlike Moscow and Washington, DC, but in neither relationship was the

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[72] Radchenko, 387.

[73] Radchenko, 388.

[74] Radchenko, 392.

[75] Radchenko, 425.

[76] Radchenko, 462.

powerful party willing to yield an equitable position to its rival. At the end of the day, Radchenko's book is not thin on theory.

Hans Morgenthau once said that the realist "thinks in terms of interest defined as power, as the economist thinks in terms of interest defined as wealth; the lawyer, of the conformity of action with legal rules; the moralist, of the conformity of action with moral principles."[77] Applying Morgenthau's oft-cited line to Radchenko, it would be fair to say that he thinks of Soviet diplomacy as a quest for recognition, pursued with the goal of legitimation. Unlike the realists, he thinks that "separating strategy from ideology…is a pointless exercise [because] they were closely intertwined."[78] But the main argument still has strong parallels with realism, because he treats the pursuit of prestige (defined in terms of geopolitical power) as an area of state policy that can be isolated, independent from domestic capabilities and moral principles. "The Soviets had become a global superpower and acted like one," writes Radchenko, and adds that they got bogged down in global conflicts like Afghanistan not necessarily because their capabilities matched intentions or vice versa, but "because they could."[79] Radchenko provides a nuanced picture of Soviet insecurities under Brezhnev's gerontocracy, one in which he treats the pursuit of external recognition as an overarching end unto itself.

Now, if we accept that recognition was tied to the legitimation of power, toward the end of the book we arrive at something of a problem. Ultimately, Radchenko's subject is the Cold War, and his focus on Soviet leaders' obsession with recognition cannot explain how the Cold War ended with state collapse. The Party's downfall had everything to do with

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[77] H.J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 1948), 13.

[78] Radchenko, 491.

[79] Radchenko, 439.

legitimacy, with domestic discontent that eroded legitimacy at home. As Alexei Yurchak has argued, alongside the failure of economic reforms, by the 1980s, Marxist-Leninist ideology had been hollowed out.[80] This is not to suggest that Radchenko argues against or snubs ideological and economic issues. On the contrary, he acknowledges that the Soviet Union collapsed largely for economic reasons. But, in his telling, he repeatedly ties legitimacy narrowly to foreign considerations. In the long chapters on Brezhnev, as the increasingly geriatric leader struggled for recognition, we find scant reference to the word "stagnation," which spoke to a crisis of legitimacy at home.

Given Radchenko's chronological scope, it's unfair to compare his section on Gorbachev to William Taubman's *Gorbachev: His Life and Times* or to Vladislav Zubok's *Collapse* — two recent publications that are unlikely to be surpassed in their treatment of the period. But it is telling that those works address Gorbachev's ambitious foreign policy initiatives in ways that are necessarily multicausal. After all, Gorbachev faced a crisis of legitimacy that could not be addressed through Cold War diplomacy alone. He was a farm boy from a southern Russian hamlet who had risen through the ranks, only to arrive at the top when plunging oil prices led to a global hard-currency crisis and Moscow was unable to afford the import of consumer goods, and the queues were lengthening. Radchenko does show that, like his predecessors, Gorbachev studied hard for his meetings with the Americans. And the radicalism of his foreign policy certainly sought to address a crisis of legitimacy. But he succeeded abroad and inspired adulation among "Gorbie"-chanting crowds even as he failed at home.

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[80] Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

A Hard Fall

Ultimately, Radchenko's treatment of Soviet foreign policy is original and persuasive. The author convincingly shows how important the pursuit of foreign recognition was to the Soviet leadership. Thanks to his work, that pursuit will now be a part of how scholars of Soviet foreign policy explain Moscow's diplomacy. There clearly are implications for the way we think about current international relations, but, personally, I finished the book reflecting anew on the past, on how dramatically Soviet ambitions failed. It's hard to imagine a Chinese or Turkish diplomat going through the heights of recognition and the subsequent forgetting that Gorbachev did.

I can remember 1995, when Gorbachev was traveling the world, giving guest lectures to large audiences. Among his stops was a crowded hall at Ankara's Middle East Technical University, one of the most prestigious universities in the country. The student body leans left, and the man who had so recently been hailed abroad with rapture was greeted by protesters throwing rotten eggs. At the time, I found the ideological incongruency ironic: Socialist students from across the world joined far-right Russian nationalists in levying similar accusations against a man who had betrayed their dreams. But, thinking in Radchenko's terms, worse was still to come. Ten years later, in the mid-2000s, I saw Gorbachev give a public lecture at Miami University of Ohio. Though older, he was still ambitious. And yet he had been reduced from running the world to running a think tank that received almost no recognition at all.

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6. Response[81]

Sergey Radchenko

To Run the World is more ambitious than all of my previous books put together, not just in the scope of the subject matter but also in that — perhaps unusually for a history book — it is underpinned by a fairly explicit theoretical framework, which, under the cover of writing about Soviet foreign policy, aims to proffer a view about the underlying reasons for human action.

The theoretical framework is generally recognizable to a student of political philosophy. Onur Işçi, in his excellent review, suggests that I lean toward Realism, and there is certainly something to it — though given my emphasis on the Kremlin's striving for greatness or glory (a concept that is related to but is nevertheless distinct from power), there is more here than Realism alone (or its multiple sub-schools) would account for. If I were to choose one source of intellectual influence here, I should name Francis Fukuyama, whose unjustly maligned *End of History* attempts a very interesting, and thorough, investigation of the striving for recognition, which Fukuyama discusses in relation to both individuals and states.[82]

I complicate my narrative by frequently deploying ambiguous terms like "legitimacy," which I see as connected to recognition. Indeed, I argue that legitimacy is best attained

[81] This text was workshopped at the Henry A. Kissinger Center retreat, October 2024. Contributions and critique by Henry Kissinger Center fellows are hereby gratefully acknowledged.

[82] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), especially chapter 17.

through external recognition of whatever it is that one seeks to legitimize, and not through internal narratives such as ideology.

This approach is self-evidently at odds with conventional views about the Cold War, so I expected challenging reviews.

The present roundtable — with reviews by Kathryn Stoner, Carol R. Saivetz, Natasha Kuhrt, and Onur Işçi, chaired by Mark Pomar — fully met my expectations. I am grateful to the reviewers for their in-depth, thought-provoking comments, as well as their ample praise of the book. Below, I address some of the issues that the reviewers raised.

Ideology

It is quite mind-boggling that anyone would attempt to write a book on the history of the Cold War without centering it on the two rival ideologies. So I was not surprised that the reviewers picked up on this feature of the book. Stoner writes of my "dismissal of virtually any ideologically motivated role in Soviet decision-making throughout the Cold War." Saivetz suggests that I "at best relegate ideology to a lower rung of motivations." Natasha Kuhrt echoes this view: "Radchenko acknowledges the role of ideology, but then often seems to dismiss it almost completely." Mark Pomar, the chair, registers disbelief at my attempt to "reduce the Cold War to 'two scorpions in a bottle.' … The moral dimension of the Cold War is entirely missing," he notes.

The problem with ideology, like with so many other terms we use in social science, is that it means different things to different people. Terry Eagleton famously lists 16 separate

definitions of ideology, some of them mutually exclusive.[83] I tackle this issue on page four of my book. Let me reproduce the relevant claim in full:

> Since ideology plays an important role in this book, too, let me offer the following definition. Ideology is a way of thinking about the world and one's place in it, and a set of prescriptions for either changing them (the world, and the place), or keeping them unchanged.

I could not go much further than this general statement, not because I did not want to engage with the extensive literature on ideology, but because such engagement, while useful, would take the reader down a very, very deep rabbit hole. But it should perhaps be highlighted here that my definition is in broad agreement with the acceptable usage in the sociological canon.

For example, Karl Mannheim, who generally dislikes the term "ideology" due to its moral connotations, speaks instead of a "perspective" — in other words, "the subject's whole mode of conceiving things as determined by his historical and social setting."[84] More obscurely, for Talcott Parsons, ideology is "a system of beliefs, held in common by the members of a collectivity … a system of ideas which is oriented to the evaluative integration of the collectivity, by interpretation of the empirical nature of the collectivity and of the situation in which it is placed, the process by which it has developed to its given state, the goals to which its members are collectively oriented, and their relation to the future course of events."[85] There is also Martin Seliger's definition of ideology as "a set of ideas by which men posit, explain, and justify ends and means of organized social

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[83] Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: an Introduction* (London: Verso, 2007).

[84] Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1936), 239.

[85] Talcott Parsons, *The Social System* (Illinois: Free Press, 1951), 349.

action, and specifically political action, irrespective of whether such actions aim to preserve, amend, uproot, or rebuild a given order."[86]

All of these definitions are, broadly speaking, compatible with the one I offer above, though a careful reading of the book will reveal that I occasionally substitute my definition with rival definitions, including those that see ideology as a tool, or a form of justification or legitimation of this or that political action. Such a cynical view of ideology is in itself nothing new, and is in fact a throwback to the Marxist critique of the Young Hegelians (though I am certainly no Marxist). Incidentally, the more cynical view of the relationship between power and ideology rhymes with my discussion of power and legitimacy, though for me, legitimacy is an end in itself and not a means to power. Power and legitimacy are thus inseparable, and they are each an attribute of the other.

At this point, I probably lost the reader (and myself), yet such discussions of core concepts rarely appear in histories. And that is too bad, because historians thus expose themselves to criticism that they would certainly avoid if they only made it clear to their audience what they are talking about. In any case, it should be clear by now that my view of ideology is something fairly broad, a kind of *Weltanschauung* (worldview). And if this becomes clear, then it should also become clear that what I seek to "relegate" or to "dismiss" in the book is not that Soviet foreign policy was motivated by the Soviet leaders' worldview (how could anyone even claim that? It would be nonsensical), but that their worldview was something rather broader than the Marxist-Leninist canon would comfortably permit.

[86] Martin Seliger, *Ideology and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2019), 14.

Consider two aspects of the Soviet *Weltanschauung*: imperialism and racism. Neither is to be found in the official Soviet canon. By contrast, the Soviet Union officially rejected imperialism and racism. But in reality, the Soviet leaders' thinking was profoundly affected by notions that harked back to Russian imperialism and that were deeply rooted in racial stereotypes. I show in my book how such thinking affected Soviet policy. It was not a minor blip. More often than not, imperialism and racism, not Marxist notions of class solidarity or class contradictions, were what defined Soviet policy. (The book shows very clearly how this played out in the Soviet approach toward China, for example).

Or consider another conceptual difficulty that I explore in my introduction. It is fairly common to explain Soviet foreign policy (as any foreign policy) through the dual lens of security interests and ideological imperatives. But this juxtaposition is in fact highly artificial, because security interests can, and often are, ideologically determined. One might argue, for example, that a "buffer zone" of client states was required to protect the Marxist-Leninist regime in Moscow against external encroachment (thus, security becomes a means to an ideological end: maintaining a Marxist-Leninist regime). Or one may flip this argument on its head and argue that what the Kremlin really wanted was security, and promoting Marxism-Leninism beyond its borders (as, for instance, in Eastern Europe) was merely a form of imposing control and thus maintaining security.

In other words, when scholars deploy terms like "security" or "ideology" as distinct analytical categories, what they are really doing is introducing artificial conceptual categories that in reality cannot be disentangled. These categories are still useful, because they help us ask questions, but asking questions does not necessarily lead to sensible answers.

For example, does the fact that Joseph Stalin believed in the inevitability of war make him a Marxist-Leninist, or a realist, or both? And if it is both (and it *is* both), then what's the point of our wonderful juxtapositions? Incidentally, Nikita Khrushchev, understanding the meaning of war in a nuclear age, did *not* believe in the inevitability of war. Does this make him less of a Marxist-Leninist or less of a realist than Stalin was? The question of the inevitability (or otherwise) of war is one of the most fundamental questions of global politics, and yet two Soviet leaders held opposite views on the subject. What theoretical framework can reconcile this contradiction?

Before leaving the subject of ideology, here is another question to consider. One often hears the argument that what made the Cold War distinct is that the two sides represented different and contradictory ways of organizing society: communism and capitalism. This argument is frequently used by scholars to argue that our current predicament — the strategic competition between the United States and China — is very different from the Cold War, unless one contends (as it is surely possible to contend) that democracy and authoritarianism also represent contradictory ways of organizing society. (In the latter case, the parallel with the Cold War is quite compelling.)

At one level, it is certainly true that communism and capitalism represented distinct ways of organizing societies. For example, there was, in the case of the Soviet Union, something called the Communist Party, a vast, vertically integrated bureaucracy. There was also extensive state ownership, and the command-administrative economy — in short, the Soviet model. The conventional argument is to see the Soviet involvement in what was then called the third world as a proselytizing mission, what Stoner refers to as Moscow's effort "to promote communism over capitalism." The logic of the argument would then suggest that, if the Soviets did not have a model to promote, they would not have

involved themselves in stirring up trouble in far-off places in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

The trouble with this argument is that the demise of the Soviet model does not seem to have resulted in the end of great power competition in the non-Western world. If anyone should think that it has, they should ask themselves what the Wagner Group and the like are doing in Africa, or why China is building naval bases in the Indian Ocean. What, exactly, is the model that they are promoting now? And, if they are no longer promoting models but are merely vying for power and influence and for their recognition as global players, then why should we not apply the same framework to understanding the Cold War?

Now that the (first) Cold War is behind us, we should be well served by unplugging ourselves from the ideological understanding of great power politics that so blurred our vision during the Cold War. So, none of these "models" mattered then? Of course, they mattered. Consider the following analogy. Suppose there are two restaurants in town. One serves Italian food. The other excels at Chinese cuisine. The Italian restaurant serves wonderful *tortellini in brodo*, as well as delicious lasagna, whereas the Chinese restaurant is fantastic at *yuxiangrousi* and does very well with the Peking duck.

The ingredients that go into preparing these dishes are very different, they taste very differently, and it clearly matters at some level that one restaurant is Italian and the other is Chinese. But it also doesn't matter in the grand scheme of things. What matters is that both restaurants are vying for customers, and they clearly want to be recognized as the best restaurant in town. Now, one might begin asking various Socratic questions: are they in business to make money, or to feed people? But this takes us too far from the subject at hand, which is this: models mattered insofar as they legitimized projection of power. They

also mattered in forging identities. The adoption of Soviet or Western methods of governing society entailed the recognition of global power hierarchies, which returns us to the question of recognition, the question central to this book.

Legitimacy

Natasha Kuhrt rightly points out that I skirt the question of legitimacy. If it is so crucial to my narrative, then I should really have done a better job with it than falling back on Ian Clark, who speaks of legality and justice as the core aspects of this concept.[87] I must add that I failed even to mention Max Weber in the text, which in itself is a terrible affront to anyone seriously interested in the study of legitimacy. My sole defense is a little bit pathetic: there were so many wonderful historical anecdotes that I wanted to recount that I simply refused to get mired in a lengthy discussion of legitimacy.

However, it is still important to understand what legitimacy means for me, given the remarkable fact that there are 147 mentions of it in the book. One may argue, for example, that Moscow attained legitimacy through ideology. This is indeed a reasonable explanation, although this would require accepting the instrumentality of ideology, insofar as it would be seen as a means of attaining a particular end (legitimacy of power). I have no problem with accepting that the Marxist-Leninist ideology (not in the sense of *Weltanschauung*, as discussed above, but in a more narrow sense) served this kind of an instrumental purpose. In fact, I talk about it in the book, in particular in connection with the hollowing out of this self-produced legitimacy discourse by the 1970s, which occasioned the Kremlin's search for more promising missions, like saving world peace.

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[87] Ian Clark, *Legitimacy in International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

But, as noted above, what I argue in the book is that external recognition was in fact as important or even more important than any internal legitimacy narratives. Let us consider another analogy. Let us say I firmly believe that *To Run the World* is a wonderful book. Not only do I believe that, but I have constructed an elaborate legitimating narrative, which I hard-sell at book talks, in op-eds, and on social media. What I am doing in effect amounts to self-legitimation. But all these efforts will fall woefully short unless *To Run the World* is externally recognized as a wonderful book. For example, it could win a book prize, or it could be adopted as a textbook, or it could just sell thousands of copies. This external recognition — in effect, validation — will matter much more in the end than my own proclamations.

The whole argument is vaguely Hegelian. Indeed, the book traces a certain genealogy to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (via Fukuyama and Alexandre Kojève). Legitimacy requires recognition, I argue, and recognition requires a recognizer, presumably someone in a position to recognize, so (in Hegelian terms), a "Master." That is why the Soviets, from Joseph Stalin to Mikhail Gorbachev, craved American recognition, whether as a principal partner or as a principal adversary. That is why President Vladimir Putin craves American recognition today, even as he seeks America's demise. In Hegel, the struggle for recognition between the self and the other ends with one side recognizing the other as "Master" on pain of death. But nuclear weapons have levelled the playing field, and submission is no longer the expected outcome. Indeed, for as long as the self can avoid destroying itself from within, the other cannot compel it to surrender from without, and the natural state between the self and the other is therefore not submission but a never-ending cold war.

American recognition was not the only recognition that the Kremlin sought. Other audiences mattered too — none more so than China, which had its own ambitions to be

recognized as a great power, even while validating Soviet pretensions to greatness and to leadership in the "revolutionary world." It is for this reason that China is so central to the book, as, indeed, Natasha Kuhrt rightly points out in her critique.

Economy

All of this is fine, but what happens to this Soviet striving for recognition in the 1980s? My account of Gorbachev's policies, Stoner argues, is the weakest part of the book. To quote the relevant paragraph of the review at length:

> The problem for Radchenko is that Gorbachev simply does not fit the structure he uses to explain Soviet foreign policy until 1985 — that it was primarily about prestige, recognition, and legitimacy as a superpower. But we know from Gorbachev's own biographies and a comprehensive recent study of him by William Taubman, for example, that he was motivated in *no small part by ideology* (describing himself often as a "true communist"). *His stated goal was to fix what ailed the Soviet system to make it stronger, and still communist*. *His foreign policy decisions were not driven by the quest for glory or prestige that Radchenko attributes to his predecessors, so much as they were an aspect of his interest in improving the daily drudgery of life for the Soviet citizen while rebuilding a system that he still deeply believed could be better than capitalism* [italics added].

I disagree with this assessment. I will probably leave out the ideological motivation (about Gorbachev feeling himself to be a "true communist"): I have already explained above why I think it doesn't work at the analytical level. However, the point about the connection between Soviet foreign policy and the need to "improv[e] the daily drudgery of life for the Soviet citizen" is very interesting, because it implies a certain hierarchy of

motivations, where economic failures required a rethink of foreign policy, bringing about the end of the Cold War.

Let's deconstruct this problem. There is no doubt that economic performance and technological breakthroughs contributed to the Kremlin's legitimacy domestically, as well as internationally. Consider the Sputnik satellite, launched on Oct. 4, 1957. Clearly, Sputnik and, broadly speaking, Soviet advances in space helped propel the Soviet Union toward recognition as the principal American rival and a leader of the socialist camp. Technological and economic leadership strengthened one's claims to greatness. But soon the Soviets began to run out of luck. Advances in distinct areas (such as space exploration) continued, but they did not translate into the sort of economic progress that could inspire anyone's confidence. By the mid-1960s, the Kremlin was aware that the economy was not doing well and attempted to fix it by improving individual incentives — the ill-fated Alexei Kosygin reforms. The Soviets were bailed out by the increase in the price of oil, which allowed them to maintain decent living standards for another two decades, but they also came to rely more and more on external recognition of their greatness, which helped fill the gap left by the worsening economic performance.

The tension between this external façade of Soviet greatness and the internal decay became all too visible by the 1980s and served as a trigger for Gorbachev's reforms. After all, how could anyone claim to be a mighty superpower and yet suffer from a deficit of basic supplies? So, when Stoner writes that Gorbachev wanted to "rebuild a system that he still deeply believed could be better than capitalism," what she really means (I think) is that Gorbachev sought to close the gap between the image of greatness that the Soviet Union attempted to project and the shabby reality on the ground. Ideology was long dead. But now external legitimation was proving insufficient. The country had to deliver economically. Still, what we are left with is the obvious: just like his predecessors,

Gorbachev sought Soviet greatness. He had specific ideas about how to achieve it. Many of these ideas weren't even that different from Kosygin's reforms, at least at the early stage. Perhaps if the oil prices did not collapse in 1986, or if Gorbachev had a better sense of how to manage a transition economy, the Soviet Union would have avoided its miserable fate. Vladislav Zubok has excellent thoughts on this subject in his masterful *Collapse*.[88]

Thus, I am something of an economic determinist. I do think economic and technological realities have a way of eroding even the most elaborate legitimacy narratives, and when the differences between who you think you are, who others think you are, and who you actually are become too great, things begin to fall apart.

I do show in the book that many of Gorbachev's key foreign policy initiatives were driven by a desire to project leadership and to be recognized as a leader, especially by the United States. This was certainly the case with the Soviet disarmament initiatives, the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, and non-interventionism in Eastern Europe. At one point, I cite Gorbachev's comments at the Politburo, where he discussed the impact that Soviet peace-loving initiatives were having. "The world," he said, "saw what great respect our work enjoys among the cultural figures, scientists, writers, and businessmen. … One can already see a serious change in the perception of the USSR by the world public opinion."[89] That emphasis on world public opinion supports my argument that the search for recognition continued to shape Soviet foreign policy even under Gorbachev.

[88] Vladislav Zubok, *Collapse: the Fall of the Soviet Union* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2021).

[89] Sergey Radchenko, *To Run the World: The Kremlin's Cold War Bid for Global Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 553.

But were there other reasons — for example, the need to save money or the need to dial down international tensions? Yes, and the book says so (see chapter 19). As I argue, “history is a friend of multicausality.”[90] While writing the book, I discovered that Gorbachev was a very complex individual who, domestically, began a dangerous reform process, understanding that it was badly overdue, but who also sought to strengthen the Soviet position internationally by reinventing the Soviet Union as a moral power. There was a lot of continuity in his thinking with his predecessors; for example, I describe in detail how key elements of *new thinking* were a carry-over from the Leonid Brezhnev era. One issue I could never quite resolve was whether Gorbachev *himself* believed that he could claim moral leadership in the absence of hard power, and the underlying economic factors that allow for the projection of hard power. If he did, then he was truly naïve. But I think he understood.

Morality

Finally, it is important to address the issue of morality broached by Mark Pomar. Were the Soviets and the Americans just “two scorpions in a bottle,” or was there a deeper meaning to the Cold War? Was it a “moral” struggle, and is it the case that I ignore this moral dimension in *To Run the World*? Mark Pomar is right. I basically do ignore the moral dimension, and that is despite the self-evident fact that I benefited enormously from the end of the Cold War, which opened opportunities. If it weren’t for the Soviet collapse, I would probably have steadily climbed the ranks and would have maybe occupied an important bureaucratic post in some place like Chelyabinsk, citing Vladimir Lenin in party speeches, while shopping for Western goods in the party nomenklatura store. Instead, I am having much more fun.

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[90] Radchenko, 361.

However, the point of the book was not to take sides but to understand what each side was trying to do. In all wars, adversaries portray themselves as morally upright, and the Cold War was no exception. Both the Soviet Union and United States perceived themselves to be more equal and more just than the other side. Both fell far short in their actual policies of their proclaimed ideals.

Yet, people who spent the Cold War fighting the other side often believed that what they were doing had important moral connotations. They were not just vying for power and influence. They wanted to make the world a better place, or least that is how they explained it to themselves.

All of this is very good, but, at the analytical level, moral claims cancel each other out. Each side perceived itself to be morally upright, while seeing the other as vile, power-hungry manipulators and propagandists. This is exactly how the Soviet leaders perceived American human rights advocacy in the Soviet Union. I show in the book that the Kremlin — including even such seemingly liberal operators as Gorbachev's principal foreign policy aide, Anatoly Chernyaev — perceived U.S. human rights advocacy as posturing, as an effort to lecture the Soviets and thus assert a higher position in the moral hierarchy, something the Soviets resented (despite their own constant efforts to assert a higher position in the moral hierarchy).

Were there people in the Soviet party establishment who understood the truthfulness of U.S. criticism and the ugliness of the Soviet system? Yes, probably, there were some. Perhaps some Soviet intellectuals, reading *samizdat* in their tobacco smoke–filled kitchens, secretly agreed with Ronald Reagan that the Soviet Union was an "evil empire." I would not go as far as Pomar to argue that the idea "resonated with millions and millions

of Soviet citizens," but there was a substantial number of dissenters. Otherwise, how could I explain the emergence of the Russian democratic movement in the late 1980s? Surely, not just by citing shortages of toilet paper (as tempted as I may be to do just that).

For me, one of the most interesting moments at the end of the Cold War is connected precisely to Gorbachev's embrace of "universal human values." The matter came up during his conversations with President George H.W. Bush in Malta in December 1989. Gorbachev was concerned that the United States was using values as a cudgel for beating the Soviet Union into submission. The United States, he said, was imposing values "for the purpose of satisfying certain unilateral interests," adding, presciently: "If someone is making a claim to the ultimate truth, they can expect disaster." "Yes," Bush said in response. It was only later that he would tell the American people: "By the grace of God, America won the Cold War."

Pomar notes my citation of Henry Kissinger's remark (in a conversation with Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin) that he would never have worried about such "silly things" (as he puts it) as human rights.[91] Did Kissinger — who fled Nazi Germany and lost family members to the Holocaust — somehow fail to see the Cold War's moral dimension? Perhaps. But I think he understood it perfectly well. He also understood that this moral dimension was often — too often — instrumentalized for the purpose of momentary political gain at the expense of the greater strategic purpose. That is why he was so opposed to Congressman Henry "Scoop" Jackson's human rights campaigns and doubted the wisdom of President Jimmy Carter's engagement with Soviet dissidents that so enraged the Kremlin.
Was Kissinger wrong? As Zhou Enlai never said, it's too early to tell.

[91] Radchenko, 455.

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