

P 125 7/20/90

Refiguring the Cold War

At the outbreak of the First World War the ex-Chancellor of Germany, Prince von Bulow, said to his successor, "How did it all happen?" "Ah, if only we knew," was the reply.

— Robert F. Kennedy, "Thirteen Days," his memoir of the Cuban missile crisis.

For nearly half a century, the Cold War has divided the world into two armed camps, consumed the treasure and energies of the two great superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, diverted peaceful and productive endeavors into wasteful and nonproductive ones and raised the ever-present prospect of global destruction.

Now it is over, and the same kinds of questions asked about World War I and the Cuban missile crisis, when the world teetered on the brink of nuclear war, apply: How did it happen? Was it necessary? Were incomparably costly and avoidable mistakes made? Most important, how do we learn the lessons and where do we go from here?

These are not academic questions; they affect the lives of every American. But as further dramatic events these past few days have shown, there is precious little effort being made to come to grips with them or to chart a new course for the future.

On Monday the Soviet Union and West Germany struck a historic deal, virtually removing all barriers to German unification and signaling the real end of the Cold War. That very day came sharply contrasting and dispiriting news at home.

The Bush administration disclosed that the federal deficit has ballooned by nearly \$70 billion, a precipitous rise and far greater than previous official predictions just months ago. When placed alongside the burgeoning S&L costs, the weakening economy, and the increasing strain on the nation's banking system, the latest budget crisis raises the specter that the long-delayed day of reckoning for the excesses of the 1980s has finally arrived.

At the same time McDonnell Douglas Corp., the nation's largest military contractor, announced it would eliminate 17,000 jobs. In large part, this action stemmed from a combination of new budgetary constraints, Pentagon cutbacks, and the end of the Cold War era.

The connection between these events at home and abroad is fundamental. It signifies that while Europe, driven by a resurgent new Germany, moves ahead rapidly into the future, the United

States remains mired in problems of the past. Not least among them are the historic levels of debt accumulated during the 1980s and the collective price of the Cold War that Americans have borne for the last two generations.

All these news developments received prominent coverage. One that did not, but which should have, took place on Capitol Hill. It bears directly on these questions.

Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.), amid virtually no public attention, chaired a Foreign Relations Committee inquiry into the official economic estimates about the Soviet Union upon which U.S. policy has been predicated—and driven—during the Cold War era. The information disclosed is both disturbing and startling.

Miscalculation of historic import has apparently occurred. For more than a generation, the Central Intelligence Agency has provided excessively rosy estimates of the growth and strength of the Soviet economy. As Moynihan said, these estimates, upon which successive presidents based policy decisions, showed "that the Soviet economy was robust and growing at a more rapid rate than the U.S. economy."

As far back as 1957, the famous Gaither intelligence report stated "the Gross National Product of the U.S.S.R. is now more than one-third that of the United States and is increasing half again as fast."

If that estimate had been correct, the Soviet Union would be surpassing the United States economically five years from now. Instead, of course, it is the Soviet system that is bankrupt. Officials now concede that these estimates overstated by at least half the Soviet economic growth—at a trillion-dollar cost to U.S. taxpayers.

The implications of these disclosures are profound. Did vast miscalculation of Soviet potential drive the United States into expenditure of unnecessary tens of billions of dollars for its military buildup, and even into military actions like Vietnam? Did they skew the official judgments of American policy-makers from president down? Did they mislead the public about the nature of the Soviet competition and threat?

Moynihan doesn't pretend to have definitive answers. Nor is he seeking scapegoats. What he wants, he says, is creation of a select committee to begin a "formal inquiry into how do we reconstitute the U.S. government in the aftermath of the Cold War." Nothing could be more timely, or important.

How did it happen?

One answer is because the Washington Posts and the Haynes Johnsons did not ask such questions when it began to happen and instead lustily supported the policy of making it happen and keeping it going.

Johnson wrote countless articles, had innumerable opportunities to ask and raise such questions but didn't, and held his job.

He also had a fine opportunity when with reported Kennedy support he wrote the book, *The Bay of Pigs*.