

Demythologizing the Roots of “The New Cold War”

By [Ted Snider](#)

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When Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev received his peace prize in 1990, the Nobel Prize committee [declared](#) that “the two mighty power blocs, have managed to abandon their life-threatening confrontation” and confidently expressed that “It is our hope that we are now celebrating the end of the Cold War.” Recently, U.N. General Secretary António Guterres funereally closed the celebrations with the [realization](#) that “The Cold War is back.”

In a very short span of history, the window that had finally opened for Russia and the United States to build a new international system in which they work cooperatively to address areas of common interest had slammed back closed. How was that historic opportunity wasted? Why was the road from the Nobel committee’s hope to the UN’s eulogy such a short one?

The doctrinal narrative that is told in the U.S. is the narrative of a very short road whose every turn was signposted by alleged Russian lies, betrayal, deception and aggression. The American telling of history is a tale in which every blow to the new peace was a Russian blow. The fact checked version offers a demythologized history that is unrecognizably different. The demythologized version is also a history of lies, betrayal, deception and aggression, but the liar, the aggressor, is not primarily Russia, but America. It is the history of a promise so historically broken that it laid the foundation of a new cold war.

But it was not the first promise the United States broke: it was not even the first promise they broke in the new cold war.

The Hot War

Most histories of the cold war begin at the dawn of the post World War II period. But the history of U.S-U.S.S.R. animosity starts long before that: it starts as soon as possible, and it was hot long before it turned cold.

The label “Red Scare” first appeared, not in the 1940s or 50s, but in 1919. Though it is a chapter seldom included in the history of American-Russian relations, America actively and aggressively intervened in the Russian civil war in an attempt to push the Communists back down. The United States cooperated with anti-Bolshevik forces: by mid 1918, President Woodrow Wilson had sent 13,000 American troops to Soviet soil. They would remain there for two years, killing and injuring thousands. Russian Premier Nikita Khrushchev would later remind America of “the time you sent your troops to quell the revolution.” Churchill would record for history the admission that the West “shot Soviet Russians on sight,” that they were “invaders on Russian soil,” that “[t]hey armed the enemies of the Soviet government,” that “[t]hey blockaded its ports, and sunk its battleships. They earnestly desired and schemed for its downfall.”

When the cause was lost, and the Bolsheviks secured power, most western countries refused to recognize the communist government. However, realism prevailed, and within a few short years, by the mid 1920s, most countries had recognized the communist government and restored diplomatic relations. All but the US. It was not until several years later that Franklin D. Roosevelt finally recognized the Soviet government in 1933.

The Cold War

It would be a very short time before the diplomatic relations that followed the hot war would be followed by a cold war. It might even be possible to pin the beginning of the cold war down to a specific date. On April 22 and 23, President Truman told Soviet foreign minister Vyacheslav Molotov to “Carry out his agreement” and establish a new, free, independent government in Poland as promised at Yalta. Molotov was stunned. He was stunned because it was not he that was breaking the agreement because that was not what Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin had agreed to at Yalta. The final wording of the Yalta agreement never mentioned replacing Soviet control of Poland.

The agreement that Roosevelt revealed to congress and shared with the world – the one that still dominates the textbook accounts and the media stories – is not the one he secretly shook on with Stalin. Roosevelt lied to congress and the American people. Then he lied to Stalin.

In exchange for Soviet support for the creation of the United Nations, Roosevelt secretly agreed to Soviet predominance in Poland and Eastern Europe. The cold war story that the Soviet Union marched into Eastern Europe and stole it for itself is a lie: Roosevelt handed it to them.

So did Churchill. If Roosevelt’s motivation was getting the UN, Churchill’s was getting Greece. Fearing that the Soviet Union would invade India and the oil fields of Iran, Churchill saw Greece as the geographical roadblock and determined to hold on to it at all cost. The cost, it turned out, was Romania. Churchill would give Stalin Romania to protect his borders; Stalin would give Churchill Greece to protect his empire’s borders. The deal was sealed on October 9, 1944.

Churchill says that in their secret meeting, he asked Stalin, “how would it do for you to have ninety percent predominance in Romania, for us to have ninety percent predominance in Greece? . . .” He then went on to offer a fifty-fifty power split in Yugoslavia and Hungary and to offer the Soviets seventy-five percent control of Bulgaria. The exact conversation may never have happened, according to the political record, but Churchill’s account captures the spirit and certainly captures the secret agreement.

Contrary to the official narrative, Stalin never betrayed the west and stole Eastern Europe: Poland, Romania and the rest were given to him in secret. Then Roosevelt lied to congress and to the world.

That American lie raised the curtain on the cold war.

The New Cold War

Like the Cold War, the new cold war was triggered by an American lie. It was a lie so duplicitous, so all encompassing, that it would lead many Russians to see the agreement that ended the cold war as a devastating and humiliating deception that was really intended

to clear the way for the US to surround and finally defeat the Soviet Union. It was a lie that tilled the soil for all future "Russian aggression."

At the close of the cold war, at a meeting held on February 9, 1990, George H.W. Bush's Secretary of State, James Baker, promised Gorbachev that if NATO got Germany and Russia pulled its troops out of East Germany, NATO would not expand east of Germany and engulf the former Soviet states. Gorbachev records in his memoirs that he agreed to Baker's terms "with the guarantee that NATO jurisdiction or troops would not extend east of the current line." In *Super-power Illusions*, Jack F. Matlock Jr., who was the American ambassador to Russia at the time and was present at the meeting, confirms Gorbachev's account, saying that it "coincides with my notes of the conversation except that mine indicate that Baker added "not one inch." Matlock adds that Gorbachev was assured that NATO would not move into Eastern Europe as the Warsaw Pact moved out, that "the understanding at Malta [was] that the United States would not 'take advantage' of a Soviet military withdrawal from Eastern Europe." At the February 9 meeting, Baker assured Gorbachev that "neither the President or I intend to extract any unilateral advantages from the processes that are taking place."

But the promise was not made just once, and it was not made just by the United States. The promise was made on two consecutive days: first by the Americans and then by West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl. According to West German foreign ministry documents, on February 10, 1990, the day after James Baker's promise, West German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher told his Soviet counterpart Eduard Shevardnadze

"'For us . . . one thing is certain: NATO will not expand to the east.' And because the conversation revolved mainly around East Germany, Genscher added explicitly: 'As far as the non-expansion of NATO is concerned, this also applies in general.'"

A few days earlier, on January 31, 1990, Genscher had said in a major speech that there would not be "an expansion of NATO territory to the east, in other words, closer to the borders of the Soviet Union."

Gorbachev says the promise was made not to expand NATO "as much as a thumb's width further to the east." Putin also says mourns the broken promise, asking at a conference in Munich in February 2007,

"What happened to the assurances our Western partners made after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact? Where are those declarations today? No one even remembers them."

Putin went on to remind his audience of the assurances by pointing out that the existence of the NATO promise is not just the perception of him and Gorbachev. It was also the view of the NATO General Secretary at the time:

"But I will allow myself to remind this audience what was said. I would like to quote the speech of NATO General Secretary Mr. [Manfred] Woerner in Brussels on 17 May 1990. He said at the time that: 'The fact that we are ready not to place a NATO army outside of German territory gives the Soviet Union a firm security guarantee.' Where are those guarantees?"

Recent scholarship supports the Russian version of the story. Russian expert and Professor of Russian and European Politics at the University of Kent, Richard Sakwa says that

“[r]ecent studies demonstrate that the commitment not to enlarge NATO covered the whole former Soviet bloc and not just East Germany.”

And Stephen Cohen, Professor Emeritus of Politics at Princeton University and of Russian Studies and History at New York University, adds that the National Security Archive has now published the actual [documents](#) detailing what Gorbachev was promised. Published on December 12, 2017, the documents finally, and authoritatively, reveal that

“The truth, and the promises broken, are much more expansive than previously known: all of the Western powers involved – the US, the UK, France, Germany itself – made the same promise to Gorbachev on multiple occasions and in various emphatic ways.”

That key promise made to Gorbachev was shattered, first by President Clinton and then subsequently supported by every American President: NATO engulfed Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic in 1999; Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia in 2004, Albania and Croatia in 2009 and, most recently, Montenegro.

It was this shattered promise, this primal betrayal, this NATO expansion to Russia’s borders that created the conditions and causes of future conflicts and aggressions. When, in 2008, NATO promised Georgia and Ukraine eventual membership, Russia saw the threat of NATO encroaching right to its borders. It is in Georgia and Ukraine that Russia felt it had to draw the line with NATO encroachment into its core sphere of influence. Sakwa says that the war in Georgia was “the first war to stop NATO enlargement; Ukraine was the second.” What are often cited as acts of Russian aggression that helped maintain the new cold war are properly understood as acts of Russian defense against US aggression that made a lie out of the promise that ended the Cold War.

When Clinton decided to break Bush’s promise and betray Russia, George Kennen, father of the containment policy, [warned](#) that NATO expansion would be “the most fateful error of American foreign policy in the entire post-cold-war era.” “Such a decision,” he prophesied, “may be expected to . . . restore the atmosphere of the cold war in East-West relations . . .”

The broken promise restored the cold war. Though it is the most significant root of the new cold war, it was not the first. There was a prior broken promise, and this time the man who betrayed Russia was President H.W. Bush.

The end of the Cold War resulted from negotiations and not from any sort of military victory. Stephen Cohen says that

“Presidents Reagan and George H.W. Bush negotiated with the last Soviet Russian leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, what they said was the end of the Cold War on the shared, expressed premise that it was ending ‘with no losers, only winners.’”

The end of the Cold War and the end of the Soviet Union occurred so closely chronologically

that it permitted the American mythologizers to conflate them in the public imagination and create the doctrinal history in which the US defeat of the Soviet Union ended the cold war. But the US did not defeat the Soviet Union. Gorbachev brought about what Sakwa calls a “self-willed disintegration of the Soviet bloc.” The Soviet Union came to an end, not by external force or pressure, but out of Gorbachev’s recognition of the Soviet Union’s own self interest. Matlock flatly states that

“pressure from governments outside the Soviet Union, whether from America or Europe or anywhere else, had nothing to do with [the Soviet collapse].”
“Cohen demythologizes the history by reinstating the chronological order: Gorbachev negotiated the end of the cold war “well before the disintegration of the Soviet Union.”

The Cold War officially ended well before the end of the Soviet Union with Gorbachev’s December 7, 1988 address to the UN.

Matlock says that “Gorbachev is right when he says that we all won the Cold War.” He says that President Reagan would write in his notes, “Let there be no talk of winners and losers.” When Gorbachev compelled the countries of the Warsaw Pact to adopt reforms like his *perestroika* in the Soviet Union and warned them that the Soviet army would no longer be there to keep their communist regimes in power, Matlock points out in *Superpower Illusions* that “Bush assured Gorbachev that the United States would not claim victory if the Eastern Europeans were allowed to replace the Communist regimes that had been imposed on them.” Both the reality and the promise were that there was no winner of the Cold War: it was a negotiated peace that was in the interest of both countries.

When in 1992, during his losing re-election campaign, President Bush arrogantly boasted that “We won the Cold War!” he broke his own promise to Gorbachev and helped plant the roots of the new cold war. “In psychological and political terms,” Matlock says, “President Bush planted a landmine under the future U.S.-Russian relationship” when he broke his promise and made that claim.

Bush’s broken promise had two significant effects. Psychologically, it created the appearance in the Russian psyche that Gorbachev had been tricked by America: it eroded trust in America and in the new peace. Politically, it created in the American psyche the false idea that Russia was a defeated country whose sphere of interest did not need to be considered. Both these perceptions contributed to the new cold war.

Not only was the broken promise of NATO expansion not the first broken American promise, it was also not the last. In 1997, when President Clinton made the decision to expand NATO much more than an inch to the east, he at least signed the [Russia-NATO Founding Act](#), which explicitly promised that as NATO expanded east, there would be no “permanent stationing of substantial combat forces.” This obliterated American promise planted the third root of the new cold war.

Since that third promise, NATO has, in the words of Stephen Cohen, built up its “permanent land, sea and air power near Russian territory, along with missile-defense installations.” US and NATO weapons and troops have butted right up against Russia’s borders, while anti-missile installations have surrounded it, leading to the feeling of betrayal in Russia and the fear of aggression. Among the earliest moves of the Trump administration were the moving of NATO troops into Lithuania, Romania, Bulgaria and nearby Norway.

Mikhail Gorbachev, who offered the West Russia and cooperation in place of the Soviet Union and Cold War, was rewarded with lies, broken promises and betrayal. That was the sowing of the first seeds of the new cold war. The second planting happened during the Yeltsin years that followed. During this stage, the Russian people were betrayed because their hopes for democracy and for an economic system compatible with the West were both destroyed by American intervention.

The goal, Matlock too gently explains, “had to be a shift of the bulk of the economy to private ownership.” What transpired was what Naomi Klein called in *The Shock Doctrine* “one of the greatest crimes committed against a democracy in modern history.” The States allowed no gradual transition. Matlock says the “Western experts advised a clean break with the past and a transition to private ownership without delay.”

But there was no legitimate private capital coming out of the communist system, so there was no private money with which to privatize. So, there was only one place for the money to come. As Matlock explains, the urgent transition allowed “privileged insiders[to] join the criminals who had been running a black market [and to] steal what they could, as fast as they could.” The sudden, uncompromising transition imposed on Russia by the United States enabled, according to Cohen, “a small group of Kremlin-connected oligarchs to plunder Russia’s richest assets and abet the plunging of some two-thirds of its people into poverty and misery.”

The rape of Russia was funded, overseen and ordered by the United States and handed over by President George H.W. Bush to the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Much of their advice, Matlock says generously, “was not only useless, but sometimes actually damaging.”

Sometimes damaging? In the first year, millions lost their entire life savings. Subsidy cuts meant that many Russians didn’t get paid at all. Klein says that by 1992, Russians were consuming 40% less than they were the year before, and one third of them had suddenly sunk below the poverty line. The economic policies wrestled onto Russia by the US and the transition experts and international development experts it funded and sent over led to, what Cohen calls, “the near ruination of Russia.” Russia’s reward for ending the Cold War and joining the Western economic community was, in Cohen’s words, “the worst economic depression in peacetime, the disintegration of the highly professionalized Soviet middle class, mass poverty, plunging life expectancy [for men, it had fallen below sixty], the fostering of an oligarchic financial elite, the plundering of Russia’s wealth, and more.” By the time Putin came to power in 2000, Cohen says, “some 75% of Russians were living in poverty.” 75%! Millions and millions of Russian lives were destroyed by the American welcoming of Russia into the global economic community.

But before Putin came to power, there was more Boris Yeltsin. Yeltsin was a necessity for Clinton and the United States because Yeltsin was the pliable puppet who would continue to enforce the cruel economic transition. But to continue the interference in, and betrayal of, the Russian people economically, it would now be necessary to interfere in and betray the Russian democracy.

In late 1991, after the fall of the Soviet Union, Boris Yeltsin won a year of special powers from the Russian Parliament: for one year, he was to be, in effect, the dictator of Russia to facilitate the midwifery of the birth of a democratic Russia. In March of 1992, under pressure from the, by now, impoverished, devastated and discontented population, parliament

repealed the dictatorial powers it had granted him. Yeltsin responded by declaring a state of emergency, re-bestowing upon himself the repealed dictatorial powers. Russia's Constitutional Court ruled that Yeltsin was acting outside the constitution. But the US sided – against the Russian people and against the Russian Constitutional Court – with Yeltsin.

Intoxicated with American support, Yeltsin dissolved the parliament that had rescinded his powers and abolished the constitution of which he was in violation. In a 636-2 vote, the Russian parliament impeached Yeltsin. But, President Clinton again sided with Yeltsin against the Russian people and the Russian law, backed him and gave him \$2.5 billion in aid. Clinton was blocking the Russian people's choice of leaders.

Yeltsin took the money and sent police officers and elite paratroopers to surround the parliament building. Clinton “praised the Russian President has (sic) having done ‘quite well’ in managing the standoff with the Russian Parliament,” as *The New York Times* [reported](#) at the time. Clinton added that he thought “the United States and the free world ought to hang in there” with their support of Yeltsin against his people, their constitution and their courts, and judged Yeltsin to be “on the right side of history.”

On the right side of history and armed with machine guns and tanks, in October 1993, Yeltsin's troops opened fire on the crowd of protesters, killing about 100 people before setting the Russian parliament building on fire. By the time the day was over, Yeltsin's troops had killed approximately 500 people and wounded nearly 1,000. Still, Clinton stood with Yeltsin. He provided [ludicrous cover for Yeltsin's massacre](#), claiming that “I don't see that he had any choice.... If such a thing happened in the United States, you would have expected me to take tough action against it.” Clinton's Secretary of State, Warren Christopher, said that the US supported Yeltsin's suspension of parliament in these “extraordinary times.”

In 1996, elections were looming, and America's hegemonic dreams still needed Yeltsin in power. But it wasn't going to happen without help. Yeltsin's popularity was nonexistent, and his approval rating was at about 6%. According to Cohen, Clinton's interference in Russian politics, his “crusade” to “reform Russia,” had by now become [official policy](#). And so, America [boldly interfered directly in Russian elections](#). Three American political consultants, receiving “direct assistance from Bill Clinton's White House,” secretly ran Yeltsin's reelection campaign. [As Time magazine broke the story](#), “For four months, a group of American political consultants clandestinely participated in guiding Yeltsin's campaign.”

“Funded by the US government,” Cohen reports, Americans “gave money to favored Russian politicians, instructed ministers, drafted legislation and presidential decrees, underwrote textbooks, and served at Yeltsin's reelection headquarters in 1996.”

More incriminating still is that Richard Dresner, one of the three American consultants, maintained a direct line to Clinton's Chief Strategist, Dick Morris. According to [reporting by Sean Guillory](#), in his book, *Behind the Oval Office*, Morris says that, with Clinton's approval, he received weekly briefings from Dresner that he would give to Clinton. Based on those briefings, Clinton would then provide recommendations to Dresner through Morris.

Then ambassador to Russia, Thomas Pickering, even [pressured an opposing candidate to drop out of the election](#) to improve Yeltsin's odds of winning.

The US not only helped run Yeltsin's campaign, they helped pay for it. The US backed a

\$10.2 billion International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan for Russia, the second-biggest loan the IMF had ever given. The *New York Times* [reported](#) that the loan was “expected to be helpful to President Boris N. Yeltsin in the presidential election in June.” The *Times* explained that the loan was “a vote of confidence” for Yeltsin who “has been lagging well behind ... in opinion polls” and added that the US Treasury Secretary “welcomed the fund’s decision.”

Yeltsin won the election by 13%, and *Time* magazine’s cover declared: “Yanks to the rescue: The secret story of how American advisers helped Yeltsin win”. Cohen reports that the US ambassador to Russia boasted that “without our leadership ... we would see a considerably different Russia today.” That’s a confession of election interference.

Asserting its right as the unipolar victor of a Cold War it never won, betraying the central promise of the negotiated end of the cold war by engulfing Russia’s neighbors, arming those nations against its written and signed word and stealing all Russian hope in capitalism and democracy by kidnapping and torturing Russian capitalism and democracy, the roots of the new cold war were not planted by Russian lies and aggression, as the doctrinal Western version teaches, but by the American lies and aggression that the fact checked, demythologized version of history reveals.

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Ted Snider writes on analyzing patterns in US foreign policy and history.

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