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# **The Fifteenth Anniversary of the End of the Soviet Union:**

Recollections and Perspectives

*Conference Proceedings*

Edited by Markian Dobczansky

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# The Fifteenth Anniversary of the End of the Soviet Union: Recollections and Perspectives

*Conference Proceedings*

Edited by Markian Dobczansky

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Washington, D.C.

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Moscow, 1990–1993

**Jack F. Matlock, Jr.**, Ambassador to the Soviet Union, 1987–1991

**E. Wayne Merry**, Former Chief Domestic Political Analyst, U.S. Embassy, Moscow,  
1991–1994

**Honorable Richard Miles**, U.S. Consul General in Leningrad, 1988–1991

**Blair A. Ruble**, Director, Kennan Institute

# Panelist Biographies

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**Stephen F. Cohen** grew up in Kentucky, received his B.A. and M.A. in government and Russian studies from Indiana University, and received his Ph.D. from Columbia University. From 1968–98, he was Professor of Politics at Princeton University, and for much of that time served as Director of its Russian Studies Program. Since 1998, he has been Professor of Russian Studies and History at New York University. In addition to his many scholarly publications, he has written widely for American and Russian newspapers and magazines. He is also a frequent commentator on American television and radio. Professor Cohen's books include *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution: A Political Biography*; *Rethinking the Soviet Experience: Politics and History since 1917*; *Sovieticus: American Perceptions and Soviet Realities*; (with Katrina vanden Heuvel) *Voices of Glasnost: Interviews with Gorbachev's Reformers*; and *Failed Crusade: America and the Tragedy of Post-Communist Russia*.

**James F. Collins** served from 1997 to 2001 as the U.S. ambassador to the Russian Federation. He is one of America's leading authorities on Russia and Eurasia and on U.S. relations with Russia and that region. Before becoming ambassador to Russia, Ambassador Collins enjoyed a broad and distinguished State Department career. As a member of the Senior Foreign Service, he served as a presidential appointee both overseas and in Washington. He was ambassador-at-large and special advisor to the secretary of state for the New Independent States and deputy chief of mission and charge d'affaires with Ambassador Robert S. Strauss at the American Embassy in Moscow during the events surrounding the collapse of the USSR.

In addition to his diplomatic postings in Moscow, Ambassador Collins held management positions at the Department of State and the White House in Washington, focusing extensively on Russian/Soviet and Middle East affairs. His overseas tours, in addition to three diplomatic postings in Moscow, included positions at the American Embassy in Amman, Jordan, and at the American Consulate General in Izmir, Turkey. In

Washington he served at the Department of State as deputy executive secretary for Europe and Latin America and as director of the Department of State's Operations Center. He also served at the White House as director for intelligence policy at the National Security Council, and held policy positions at the Department of State in the Bureaus of European and Canadian Affairs, Near East and South Asian Affairs, and Intelligence and Research.

Ambassador Collins has received numerous honors during his career, including the Secretary of State's Award for Distinguished Service, the Department of State's Distinguished Honor Award, the Department of Defense Medal for Distinguished Public Service, and the NASA Medal for Distinguished Service, as well as several meritorious and superior honor awards from the Department of State. He was the American Chamber of Commerce in Russia's "Friend of the Chamber" in 1998. He holds honorary degrees from University College, University of Maryland; Indiana University; the Russian Academy of Sciences; and the Linguistics University of Nizhnii Novgorod, as well as an honorary professorship from Moscow State University. In 2002 he was named to the U.S.-Russia Business Council's board of directors.

Before joining the State Department, Ambassador Collins taught Russian and European history, government and economics at the U.S. Naval Academy. He received his B.A. cum laude from Harvard University in 1961 and his M.A. from Indiana University. He conducted research at Moscow University in 1965 as an exchange fellow and at the British Museum in London in 1966 as an Indiana University fellow.

**Jack F. Matlock, Jr.**, a retired diplomat, has held the following academic posts since 1991: Sol Linowitz Professor of International Relations, Hamilton College, 2006; visiting professor and lecturer in public and international affairs at Princeton University, 2001–2004; George F. Kennan Professor at the Institute for Advanced Study, 1996–2001; Senior Research Fellow and then Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Professor in the Practice

of International Diplomacy at Columbia University, 1991–1996.

During his 35 years in the American Foreign Service (1956–1991) he served as Ambassador to the Soviet Union from 1987 to 1991, Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs and Senior Director for European and Soviet Affairs on the National Security Council Staff from 1983 until 1986, and Ambassador to Czechoslovakia from 1981 to 1983.

Before his appointment to Moscow as Ambassador, Mr. Matlock served three tours at the American Embassy in the Soviet Union, as Vice Consul and Third Secretary (1961–1963), Minister Counselor and Deputy Chief of Mission (1974–1978), and Chargé d’Affaires *ad interim* in 1981. His other Foreign Service assignments were in Vienna, Munich, Accra, Zanzibar, and Dar es Salaam, in addition to tours in Washington as Director of Soviet Affairs in the State Department (1971–1974) and as Deputy Director of the Foreign Service Institute (1979–80). Before entering the Foreign Service, Mr. Matlock was Instructor in Russian Language and Literature at Dartmouth College (1953–1956). During the 1978–1979 academic year he was Visiting Professor of Political Science at Vanderbilt University.

He is the author of *Reagan and Gorbachev: How the Cold War Ended* (Random House, 2004, paperback edition 2005); *Autopsy on an Empire: The American Ambassador’s Account of the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Random House, 1995); and a handbook to the thirteen-volume Russian edition of Stalin’s *Collected Works* (Washington, D.C. 1955, 2nd edition, New York, 1971).

Mr. Matlock was born in Greensboro, North Carolina, on October 1, 1929, and was educated at Duke University (A.B., *summa cum laude*, 1950) and at Columbia University (M.A. and Certificate of the Russian Institute, 1952). He has been awarded honorary doctorates by four institutions. In addition to the books noted, he is the author of numerous articles on foreign policy, international relations, and Russian literature and history.

**E. Wayne Merry** is a Senior Associate at the American Foreign Policy Council, a private educational foundation in Washington established in 1982.

Mr. Merry is a Russia Country Specialist for Amnesty International/USA and serves on the

boards of directors of the Kolodzei Art Foundation and the Center for Realistic Foreign Policy Studies. He was Director of the Program on European Societies in Transition at the Atlantic Council of the United States in Washington (1999–2000) and later a non-resident Senior Fellow there. He also served as a Senior Fellow of the Lester Pearson Peacekeeping Center in Nova Scotia.

In a twenty-six year career in the United States Foreign Service (1972–98), Mr. Merry served six years in Moscow as a specialist in Soviet (1980–83) and Russian (1991–94) politics. In the early 1990s he was in charge of reporting and analysis on the Soviet collapse and emergence of independent Russia.

In early 1995 Mr. Merry joined the staff of Secretary of Defense Perry as Regional Director for Russia, Ukraine and Eurasia to develop defense relations with the states of the former Soviet Union. Before retiring from the Foreign Service, Mr. Merry was Senior Advisor to the U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, a bipartisan Congressional-Executive human rights monitoring body.

Mr. Merry also served in the German Democratic Republic during the early period of the U.S. diplomatic presence in East Berlin (1977–79). At the Embassy in Athens (1987–90), he reported on domestic politics, Greek-Turkish relations and the Cyprus issue, and terrorism. At the U.S. Mission to the United Nations in New York (1983–85) he specialized in arms control and disarmament issues. He also served in the State Department’s Office of Congressional Relations (1972–74) and Office of Central European Affairs (1985–87), at the Headquarters of the U.S. Marine Corps (1976–77), and at the Embassy in Tunisia (1974–76). He worked on trade issues at the U.S. Treasury (1972).

A native Oklahoman, Mr. Merry attended the University of Wisconsin, Madison (B.A. 1970), Princeton University’s Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs (M.P.A. 1972), and the U.S. Army Russian Institute in Garmisch-Partenkirchen (1990–91).

**Richard Miles** is the Executive Director of the Open World Leadership Center, located in the Library of Congress.

He was born in 1937 in Little Rock, Arkansas. He grew up in rural and small-town Indiana. After serving in the Marine Corps from 1954 to



1957, he obtained degrees from Bakersfield College, the University of California at Berkeley and Indiana University. He is also a graduate of the U.S. Army Russian Institute, Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany.

Ambassador Miles worked for the South Carolina Voter Education Project from 1964 to 1967 in the field of voter registration and political leadership training. He entered the Foreign Service in 1967 and has served abroad in Oslo, Moscow, Belgrade, as Consul General in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg), and as Principal Officer of the U.S. Embassy Office in Berlin.

Ambassador Miles worked for Senator Ernest F. Hollings (D-SC) on an American Political Science Fellowship in 1983–84, and in 1987–88 he was a fellow at Harvard University's Center for International Affairs.

Ambassador Miles served as Ambassador to Azerbaijan from 1992 to 1993, as Chief of Mission to Belgrade from 1996 to 1999, and as Ambassador to Bulgaria from 1999 to 2002. In the State Department, he also worked in the Offices for Soviet and East European and Yugoslav Affairs and in the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs.

Mr. Miles was U.S. Ambassador to Georgia from 2002 until 2005.

Ambassador Miles has been awarded the State Department's Meritorious Honor Award and Group Superior Honor Award (twice). In 1992

he was awarded a Presidential Meritorious Service Award and a national award for reporting. In 2004 he was the recipient of the State Department's Robert C. Frasure Award for peaceful conflict resolution.

**Blair A. Ruble** is director of the Kennan Institute of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C. He also serves as director of the Comparative Urban Studies Project at the Wilson Center. He received his M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in political science from the University of Toronto (1973, 1977), and an A.B. degree in political science from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (1971). He has edited more than a dozen volumes. His book length works include a trilogy examining the fate of Russian provincial cities during the 20th century: *Leningrad: Shaping a Soviet City* (University of California Press, 1990), *Money Sings! The Changing Politics of Urban Space in Post Soviet Yaroslavl* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Cambridge University Press, 1995), and *Second Metropolis: Pragmatic Pluralism in Gilded Age Chicago, Silver Age Moscow, and Meiji Osaka* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001). His latest book, *Creating Diversity Capital: Transnational Migrants in Montreal, Washington, and Kyiv*, was published by the Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Johns Hopkins Press in 2005.

# The Fifteenth Anniversary of the End of the Soviet Union:

## Recollections and Perspectives

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**BLAIR A. RUBLE:** We are here to talk about events that happened 15 years ago. Fifteen years is a kind of awkward moment because not everyone, but probably most people in the room, remembers 15 years ago. It still seems fresh, and yet we know that memory sometimes can play games after 15 years, and information that was not available at the time is available now. So it's an awkward moment because people's perceptions have changed, and yet the memories are very strong. So we thought we would try to talk about the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 by inviting here some Americans who were in a way involved. They were professional observers, inside the government and without, of the events that were unfolding, and we would like to ask them to reflect back on how they viewed the events then and how they view the events now. This is an American perspective. There are no Russians here, but we think that that is valid as well, because we are in yet another period in which discussions about policies toward countries like Russia and Ukraine and the countries of Central Asia are beginning to take off again, and we thought it would be useful to hear what people who dealt with some of the issues raised by the collapse of the Soviet Union felt at the time.

I'm not going to give a full introduction of the speakers, because time is short and each one of their biographies is far too long. As you'll see, they're all quite distinguished. I will, in a moment, quickly identify everyone. But I have to say the one discovery I made in looking over the biographies is that despite the fact that they are associated with such august power institutions as the State Department, in fact they're all from the South and the Midwest. So I think that says something about the American system that we shouldn't forget.

Let me just identify the speakers in the order in which they're going to speak, and then we'll get right to the remarks. Each speaker has been instructed to take no more than 15 minutes, so we'll have plenty of time for discussion.

We'll hear from Ambassador Jack Matlock, who is former George F. Kennan Professor, Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey. [He was] U.S. ambassador to the USSR between 1987 and 1991, and he's also a former member of the Kennan Institute Advisory Council.

E. Wayne Merry is a senior associate with the American Foreign Policy Council here in Washington, and between 1991 and 1994 he was chief domestic political analyst with the U.S. Embassy in Moscow.

Ambassador Richard Miles is executive director of the Open World Leadership Center here in Washington. He happens to be chair of the Kennan Institute Advisory Council, and he's a former U.S. ambassador to Georgia, Bulgaria, and Azerbaijan. Between 1988 and 1992, he was U.S. consul general in Leningrad.

Ambassador James Collins is presently senior international adviser at Akin, Gump, Strauss, Hauer, and Feld, and former deputy chief of mission and chargé d'affaires at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, [serving] between 1990 and 1993, and U.S. ambassador to the Russian Federation between 1997 and 2001.

Professor Stephen Cohen is professor of Russian studies and history at New York University.

So Jack, the floor is yours.

**JACK F. MATLOCK, JR.:** I thank you very much for the invitation to come and be here with so many colleagues and friends. I must say that I know that there are people in the audience who very much went through these periods with us not only on the American side but also on the Soviet side, and I hope we will hear from them in the discussions.

For a start, I will address what I consider some of the most damaging and mistaken myths about the breakup of the Soviet Union, because I think that these are widespread. I hope they're not widespread among those of us who really



experienced these events, but they are among the public at large. I would like to set them to rest at least in terms of the way I understand things, and understood them at the time.

First, I would say that I was outraged at the multipart TV series on the end of the Cold War that was shown on CNN a few years ago that ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union. I think that's absolutely incorrect. The Cold War ended well before the Soviet Union collapsed. One has to look at the three seismic events—seismic in geopolitical terms—that occurred right at the end of the 1980s and culminated in 1991. These three events are interconnected, but they were separate events. They had different causes, and the American role in each was quite different.

The first geopolitically seismic event was the end of the Cold War. We can argue about when it ended. I think it ended ideologically in December 1988, but obviously there was still a lot of cleanup diplomacy necessary at that time. I've been accused of belittling it by calling it "cleanup diplomacy." I don't belittle it at all. It was extremely important diplomacy. But certainly by, say, early autumn of 1990, the Cold War was totally over, with all the important issues raised by the Cold War settled. By then, of course, Europe had been united. Germany was united and allowed to stay in NATO—and with Soviet blessing. Emigration was virtually free at that time from the Soviet Union. That had been a big issue for us. Reform of the Soviet system was proceeding at a dizzying pace, and when Iraq invaded Kuwait, the Soviet Union voted with the United States and others in the Security Council. There was not one significant element of the Cold War left unresolved at that point. The first of these seismic events was in fact the end of the Cold War, and that's one that I think the United States and the Soviet leadership at that time cooperated on.

One of the myths that we hear—and I think it's very damaging—is that we won the Cold War, as if it was a victory over another country. President Reagan put it much more accurately in his memoirs when he said it was a victory of one system over another. I would add to that: when the Cold War ended, the Soviet system was no longer what it had been. In cooperating to end the Cold War, Gorbachev made no concessions that were contrary to the interests of his country. The agreements we made were in the interests of both countries. It was a "win-win"

solution, and it freed the Soviet Union of the burden of the arms race, which was really killing it. There was cooperation, and both sides won. It was the communist system and the old policies that lost, but they were changing already.

The second big change—and this didn't occur overnight, but it occurred very rapidly—was the end of communist control over the Soviet Union, ultimate communist control. Now this was not done by Western pressure. I'm a great admirer of President Reagan and his diplomacy—as people who have read my books know—but he was not the man who defeated communism. The man who defeated communism in the Soviet Union was Mikhail Gorbachev. As general secretary, he was probably the only person who could have done it, by forcing or tricking the party and the *nomenklatura* to take themselves out of ultimate control of the country. It was these two events, the end of the Cold War and the end of communist control of the Soviet Union, that eventually made the breakup of the Soviet Union possible. It broke up, I think, entirely because of internal pressures, internal contradictions. That would not have happened, in my judgment, if the Cold War had still been raging. Under those conditions, Gorbachev could not have embarked on his *perestroika*, and without *perestroika* the Communist Party and the organs of repression it controlled would have prevented the Soviet republics from seceding and destroying the Soviet state.

The Cold War had served to contain tensions in the Soviet Union as a pressure cooker contains steam. This helped keep the Soviet Union intact. It helped keep the Communist Party in control. When the Cold War ended, this created an entirely new situation. The idea that American or Western pressure brought down the Soviet Union seems to me utterly absurd. It turns reality on its head. And this attitude is quite dangerous: it led to triumphalism in the 1990s and the idea that Russia should be treated as a defeated power. Actually, Russia wasn't even a party to the Cold War. It was only one part—though the largest part—of the Soviet Union.

Now related to that is the myth that somehow the U.S. forced the end of the Cold War through military pressure. In fact, I recall that during the first Reagan administration, when I drafted guidance for government officials, I included instructions not to question the legitimacy of the Soviet government. We did not ask for regime change, we asked for a change of

behavior, particularly a change of behavior externally. Our military buildup was meant to back up our diplomacy, not to give Gorbachev an easy way out, knowing that he really needed to reduce the defense burden, but to encourage him to open up the country and reform simultaneously. This, I believe, was in the ultimate interest of the Soviet Union, if it could have been kept together at all. So I think the idea that we somehow forced the Soviet collapse is the opposite of the truth. And frankly, that perception, which many people have, has led us into some very serious foreign policy blunders.

A third myth I will mention is that the U.S. was caught unawares. It's usually said that this must be true because the CIA never predicted the breakup of the Soviet Union. That's true. Thank goodness the CIA never officially predicted the breakup, because the moment they did, if they had, it would have leaked, and the whole process of reform in the Soviet Union would have ended. But the fact that the U.S. intelligence community refrained from a formal prediction that the Soviet Union would destroy itself doesn't mean our policymakers didn't understand what was going on. As ambassador to the Soviet Union, I sent my first message that advised the United States government to make contingency plans for the possible breakup of the Soviet Union in June 1990, 18 months before it happened. My "heads-up" was not based upon clandestine intelligence. During my term as ambassador, and that was from 1987 to August 1991, we did not have a single spy recruited in the Soviet Union because our moles here, [Robert] Hanssen in the FBI and [Aldrich] Ames in the CIA, had betrayed them all.

But our diplomats were there. We had a terrific staff, and Jim Collins led it and managed it beautifully. They were all over the place. Ints Silins out of Leningrad was going to the Baltic states and Latvia and so on. We had people who spoke Uzbek. We had people who spoke Ukrainian. And once the country began to open up, frankly, we were all over it. I think our embassy understood much better what was happening in the country than Gorbachev did himself, because the KGB was giving him false information.

There is another lesson here that some people seem to have forgotten. When you insist upon hearing only what you want to hear, you usually don't get the true picture. So yes, we in the American embassy in Moscow saw what was

happening. We did not want it to happen the way it did. Of course we wanted the three Baltic countries to recover their independence. We would have been very happy to see Gorbachev negotiate a voluntary union treaty of the remaining 12 republics.

As a matter of fact, when President Bush the elder, on August 1, 1991, in Kyiv, made a speech that Bill Safire jokingly called "the Chicken Kiev speech," it was supposed to be for all the non-Russian republics, not just Ukraine. What he said was "don't confuse freedom with independence." Freedom first. Although Bush did not explain in detail, what he had in mind was that if a republic became part of a federal, democratic state, they could, if they had good cause later, secede. If, however, they declared independence before they had a democratic system, freedom might be harder to obtain. Bush also spoke of "suicidal nationalism." He wasn't thinking of Ukraine at that time, but of Georgia under Gamsakhurdia.

So, the fact is that the United States did not engineer the Soviet collapse, we did what we could to encourage a democratizing Soviet Union. Obviously we had no influence over the situation by the summer of 1991 because internal forces, aided by some of Gorbachev's mistakes, were what was forcing the country apart.

I would just add one thing, and that is that many people cheered when the Soviet Union collapsed, thinking this is the end of problems, that suddenly everything was going to be sweetness and light and so on. When I wrote a book on the collapse of the Soviet Union, *Autopsy on an Empire*—it was published in 1995—I said my champagne is still corked because we didn't know what's going to happen. The problem was that in Gorbachev's last years it was Moscow that was giving great support to the democratic movements in many of the other republics. I had a Belarusian tell me, "When our local officials would not let me publish my things, I would go to the Central Committee in Moscow, and they would order them to be published." I talked in 1991 to democratic forces in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and so on. Now almost all of these forces have been virtually wiped out, and they went very quickly.

Often I think that the regional parties, the republic party leaders, saw that Gorbachev's reforms were going to undermine their power, and chose independence in order to maintain

their power. So as we look back, I think it is important, as we remember those days, to think about what really happened, and to reconsider the lessons we might have drawn from them.

Thanks very much.

**E. WAYNE MERRY:** Thank you, Blair. Let me say it is a privilege to appear on so distinguished a panel.

For me, the breakup of the Soviet Union and its attendant empire was one of the three great transformative geopolitical events in my lifetime, the other two being the decolonization of the former European imperial empires, to which the breakup of the Soviet Union contributed, and the return to global prominence of Asia, and particularly China, to which the breakup of the Soviet Union also contributed. These three great transformations had deep roots and long histories, and the consequences will be with us for the rest of our lives and well beyond.

But the breakup of the Soviet Union was unique in at least two respects, from my personal experience. The first was just as geopolitical drama. Even to be a bit player mostly in the wings during that period was a unique experience and almost worth entering the Foreign Service just to be able to do so. Because of the concentration in time and space, I think it presented to the world events worthy of consideration and historical debate of a kind that we haven't seen since the end of the Second World War.

And the second thing that was so important was its impact on the interests and the policies of the United States because, since the end of the Second World War, the United States had largely defined its role in the world in contradistinction to the Soviet Union and its power system. Almost all of our policies around the world were in whole or in part defined by that rivalry. In the absence of the Soviet Union, we've been going through a 15-year-long process of trying to figure out what we want to do in the world and to define what our role should be. Some people are looking for a new enemy, whether radical Islam or China or something else. And I think, really, much of the debate between neoconservatives and so-called realists is a debate about what the United States should be in a world in which the fundamental definition of our role is not anymore about "them" but is about us, and I don't think this process is anywhere near an end.

Another thing the breakup of the Soviet Union did was to totally transform the relationship of the United States with what had been, not the only stage but the principal stage of that rivalry, which was Europe. This had largely defined my entire professional career—the divided city of Berlin, divided Germany, divided Europe, NATO-Warsaw Pact, everything that had gone on in the East-West relationship across the Iron Curtain—and the extent to which American policy and American interests had been engaged in that and then no longer were. So the transatlantic relationship 15 years on is still very much at the beginning of a transformation in which most people in policymaking positions in capitals on both sides of the Atlantic haven't quite yet accepted the fact that that which joined us together then is no longer joining us together now nor will be in the future.

Now, unlike the other panelists, I had the advantage of being up on this stage a year ago for a solid hour talking about what it was like to be in Moscow in the political section of the U.S. Embassy during the breakup of the Soviet Union, so I'm not going to repeat myself on that. I want to draw attention to what I think were two important aspects of it. One was that everyone in Moscow, observer and participant, Russians and foreigners, did have a sense of the importance of what was going on, of being involved in a tectonic, historical transformation. This was not like going through a normal crisis. In the Foreign Service, you go through crises aplenty. This was something very different in which every week, every day, sometimes almost every hour brought about events that you never expected to see in your lifetime. The pressure on us in the embassy was colossal, the pressure on the Russian participants much more so. I've sometimes been asked by scholars why certain things weren't done, why Yeltsin didn't do this and that. My usual response is to say that this is because there are only 24 hours in the day, and everybody was at saturation point.

We obviously judge the impact of these events in terms of their importance for the outside world, for our own country. The Russians, of course, viewed them differently, in terms of the role of and impact on their own country, and I think this did tend to skew our perspectives a good deal. But I think something that is not recognized is how much time and attention was consumed by those things that in fact did *not*

happen, by events that did not transpire but which might have, and the degree of concern that there was in our government and on the Russian side for the so-called nightmare scenarios: so-called loose nukes, warlordism, true disintegration of the Russian Federation, collapse of the social system, large-scale migrations. Now we know that these things did not happen, but the fact that they did not happen doesn't mean that they didn't consume an enormous amount of time and energy ensuring that they didn't happen. And I do not accept the notion that they could not have happened, because if you look at the former Yugoslavia, parts of the Caucasus and Tajikistan, there were some pretty nasty nightmares that did come into existence.

I think they didn't happen in the Russian case for two reasons. One is because so much of the end of the Soviet Union in Russia was a top-down Moscow-centric event that did not, unlike East Germany or Poland or the Baltic states or some other cases, involve societal-wide transformations. The other reason is because the institutions tended to behave extremely responsibly. People went to work even when they weren't being paid. People went to work when they had no idea what their future was going to be. And I think, unrecorded and unacknowledged, was the extraordinarily responsible behavior of what we call the power ministries: the KGB, the other security services, and the military, who accepted an extraordinary loss in global status. They went in a couple of years from having their western frontier beyond the Elbe back to borders that Russia had had about the time of the beginning of the Romanov dynasty. And yet look at the things that did not happen. There was no Russian *Stahlhelm*; there was no Bonapartism, even though there were a few candidates for that role. And most extraordinary to me, there was no Russian equivalent of the OAS (*Organisation de l'armée secrète*); there was no extralegal action by people from these enormous structures of power. And I to some degree attribute that to one of the positive legacies of the Leninist state, which was its resolute subordination of instruments of state power to civilian political authority. And I think that if there had also been such a legacy in the Titoist system, the tragedy of the western Balkans would have been much less.

Now, 15 years on, I must say that I am pretty pessimistic and negative in my views about

how things are likely to develop in Russia, but not principally because of the current affairs that so focus the attention of headline writers and editorial writers, but mostly because of my appreciation of how massive is the inherited burden of the seven decades of Soviet misrule and how extraordinary are the challenges this society faces, most particularly in demographics and health, which go way back. Those numbers were going in the wrong direction as far back as the 1960s. But there are also challenges in areas like agriculture, misinvestment in industry, and in particular the legacies of power structures that are vertical in a modern world in which most innovation and creativity take place in what are normally thought of as horizontal relationships. Another problem is the continued vitiation of what is normally called civil society—that part of society that exists between the state and the family, and also the site where most innovation, creativity, and responses to societal challenges take place. So the inheritance of a system that is so statist and so vertical makes Russia remarkably unprepared to deal with these multiple crises, these legacies of the Soviet period.

But, you know, if you look at the first 15 years of postwar Germany or France, you might want to take a somewhat more optimistic view. Fifteen years on, postwar Germany had experienced a good deal of economic recovery but was still deep in the great historic amnesia, as the society had not even begun to deal with the legacy of its Nazi past. Fifteen years on, postwar France was in transition from the Fourth to the Fifth Republic as well as damn near civil war. I mean, there were tanks in the streets of Paris and the OAS literally was trying to take their country into civil war.

And what I think of when I look at the experience of those two countries in the period, say, between the 15-year mark and the 50-year mark is how much domestic turmoil, including genuine political violence, was required to get those two countries to be the kind of successful, stable, moderately boring societies that they are today. I don't know where Russia is going to be at the 50-year mark, but I think it would be reasonable to expect that the years between the 15-year post-Soviet mark and the 50-year mark will experience a great deal of internal turmoil and probably a good deal of political violence. I don't think anyone should be surprised by that, and we, especially, should-

n't be condescending about that. If it could happen in France and Germany, it could happen in Russia as well.

At the 15-year mark I don't think it's too soon, however, to give something of a report card on U.S. policy during this period. I would give the U.S. government an A- in 1991. (I never give an A+ because my principal professor in graduate school never did.) I'd give a B+ in 1992 and then a declining grade thereafter. I think the general crisis management of the U.S. government during the period 1989-1992 for the most part was excellent. I think there were some serious failures of omission rather than of commission. These included the institutional lack of responsiveness of the international financial institutions and parts of the U.S. government to challenges that they did not recognize and understand, their tendency to respond with very off-the-shelf USAID programs and with macro-economic stabilization programs that missed what was really necessary, and the disinclination of these institutions to give serious, let alone positive, consideration to creative solutions. I think back—just as an example—to George Soros's proposal to fund a supplement to the salaries of social workers like teachers and nurses during the period of the high inflation in 1992: a very creative idea which I think could have made a real difference and which unfortunately got nowhere.

I think it's sort of characteristic that in many ways the most imaginative U.S. government response to these events came from Capitol Hill in the form of the Nunn-Lugar (Cooperative Threat Reduction) Program, and that what you needed was that kind of individual initiative, because the bureaucracies were so experienced at dealing with undeveloped countries that they really had little inclination to do the kind of serious examination of what was required in the situation of post-Soviet Russia.

Finally, just sort of as a coda to my remarks, I am going to repeat one point that I made a year ago. It's a somewhat pedantic one, but it's the issue of when the Soviet Union in fact ended. Now, the popular view is associated with Mikhail Gorbachev signing his letter of abdication. To me that's confusing the ship of state with the figurehead of the ship. I think that in a de facto sense the Soviet Union had long been out of existence, somewhere between the August putsch and certainly no later than the

Ukrainian independence referendum. But as a de jure juridical point, I choose another date whose anniversary passed earlier this week: in the aftermath of the signing on December 8, 1991 of the agreement by Yeltsin, [Chairman of the Belarusian Supreme Soviet Stanislav] Shushkevich, and [Ukrainian President Leonid] Kravchuk that created the Commonwealth of Independent States, Yeltsin returned to Moscow and had the Russian Federation unilaterally abrogate the 1922 Treaty on the Creation of the USSR. Then, the Russian Federation Congress of People's Deputies, somewhat reluctantly as I recall, ratified that act. I choose that as the end of the Soviet Union because the Soviet Union did have a technical starting point. It was the Treaty on the Creation of the USSR, which was signed on December 29, 1922 and ratified on December 30. But that treaty created an asymmetric structure in which the Russian Federation really was the keystone, and other union republics could come and go and be reformulated and renamed, as they were in subsequent decades, without affecting the constitutional integrity of the whole.

But once the Russian Federation itself left the Union, I believe the Union became a juridical as well as a practical nonentity. Now what was remarkable is that at the time the only people who took this action terribly seriously were those members of the Russian Federation Congress of People's Deputies who were opposed to it. I recall in particular that the U.S. Embassy reporting on it, which I wrote, was brief and focused exclusively on the importance of this event for Russia, not for the Soviet Union. And I think that if in some ways my analysis of when the Soviet Union legally came to an end is a correct one, it is characteristic that such a momentous event passed into the flotsam of history almost without any notice.

**RICHARD MILES:** Thank you very much. I want to make one little correction on the bio remarks that were made earlier. I don't usually do it, but it's important in this case. I left Leningrad in the summer of 1991. I was not there during the putsch and the subsequent events. Others in the audience were there, and while I may say a few words about those events in August of 1991, if others want to correct me, fine, because I wasn't there. What I know about that period came from reading about it and talking to others. But I was there from 1988 until 1991, and it was certainly



an extremely exciting time. Most people in the audience know this, but I'll just remind you that because of the U.S. policy of not recognizing the incorporation of the Baltic states into the Soviet Union, the American ambassadors had not been allowed to visit the Baltic states. So the consuls general in Leningrad—after the establishment of the consulate general in 1971 or 1972—did go, except they would just make polite protocol visits in and out very quickly to not give undo recognition to those communist governments there. Usually they went once a year.

Well, when I arrived in 1988 things already were changing, I would say, and in 1989, 1990, and 1991, of course, they changed quite dramatically, so that in the last year and half—from late 1989 until the summer of 1991—I was asked by the embassy and by the people in Washington (the National Security Council was quite interested in all this) to keep a near-continuous presence in the Baltic states, which was not always easy to do because we had a relatively small embassy. But we wanted desperately to keep people like Wayne tucked away in Moscow and not come and encroach on our turf, and so we did the best we could. I'm a former marine, and in the marines every person is a rifleman no matter if they're a professional cook or whatever. In a similar way, every American in the consulate general became a professional diplomat. We had GSO [general staff officer] people and administrative people and consular people going over and writing quite interesting reports, actually, because they brought a little different viewpoint to things.

We had pretty intensive contacts with the would-be reformers in Leningrad and with the nationalist leaders in the Baltic states. I must say I felt all the time I was there that I was just turning pages of history right in front of my eyes. There were some villains around, of course, but there were also some real heroes and heroines in both northwest Russia and Leningrad, and also in the Baltic states—people who had suffered for their beliefs and now felt that times had changed and they were not going to be put down. In many cases this reform movement grew out of ecological movements—environmental movements—in both Leningrad and Estonia. Certainly, that was true. But they quickly became politically oriented, and in Leningrad they became really quite active, more active than I realized.

I think we tried to report accurately what was happening, but we underestimated them, and frankly I guess we underestimated the times. I remember the election for the Supreme Soviet deputies when the first secretary of the Communist Party was denied his seat; the commander of the Leningrad Military District was denied his seat. I don't know how many other people fell, in a sense. I was called on the evening of that election day by an American correspondent in Moscow, and was told that informal election polls of people coming out from having voted showed that these Communist Party apparatchiks and so on had not retained their seats. And with good diplomatic chutzpah I said, "Really, I find that pretty hard to believe. And even if the votes turned out that way, the authorities would probably not allow it to happen, so I urge you to discount those election polls." I did have the grace to call back the next day and say, "Well, you want to hear a diplomat eat humble pie? I'm prepared to eat it." Because that's exactly what happened.

That was followed, of course, by the democrats taking control of the Leningrad City Soviet. That was not all as smooth as people like to think in retrospect, and there are some good articles about that which go into much more detail about it. Once they took control of the city soviet, they could not agree among themselves on who would become chairman, that is to say mayor, and everyone liked Mr. [Anatoly] Sobchak, who was in fact a deputy of the Supreme Soviet. But he was, unfortunately for everyone, not a member of the Leningrad City Soviet, and therefore could not become chairman of it. However, there was a handy by-election that was coming up where insufficient votes had been cast the first time around. They urged him to run for that, and they urged everyone else to stand down, and he indeed was elected to the soviet. He was then elected chairman and became rather famous as mayor. He more famously appointed Vladimir Putin as his economic adviser and later as his deputy mayor.

Putin's appointment as deputy mayor came after I left, and so I don't know how he functioned in that capacity. But I knew him reasonably well when he was economic adviser to the mayor. I found him a reasonably straightforward and pragmatic individual whose "yes" meant "yes" and whose "no" meant "no," and "maybe" actually meant "maybe" rather than "forget about it." So



we had a pretty good relationship. He came to the residence there, the consulate general. He never came with his wife—he was not a very sociable fellow—but he would come to these receptions, working lunches, and dinners and so on, have a drink, answer people's questions. He wouldn't engage much in conversation. He was a good observer, and that was pretty much my experience with Mr. Putin. I don't know what role he played during the days of the putsch in Leningrad. As I said, I wasn't there. I read some things about it that suggested that he played a strong role on behalf of the people trying to resist the putschist elements. I don't know if that's true or not true.

What I do know is that the Leningrad authorities rather quickly, although not immediately, rallied around the democratic reform movement and against the putschists, although the commander of the Leningrad Military District went on television early on to urge calm and to say that they were taking charge of the situation. He quickly backed down, and after conversations with Mr. Sobchak and others and the chief of police, we had gotten to know these people pretty well. Again, things had changed, as Ambassador Matlock said. Soviet authorities, who earlier would never have dreamed of setting foot in the residence there in Leningrad, would come and have a drink and see a movie or whatever. So we knew the chief of police, we knew the KGB chief, we knew the commander of the Leningrad Military District, and they did rally. Sobchak came back from Moscow. I don't know exactly the circumstances under which he came back. The deputy mayor at that time was a retired Soviet navy admiral, [Vyacheslav] Shcherbakov, a nuclear submarine commander, and as Shcherbakov told me later, they had gone up and sent for Sobchak to bring him back. They had to find him and bring him back, which they did. Shcherbakov is a rather conservative person, as you might imagine, but nonetheless, Sobchak, Shcherbakov, and even Yuri Yarov from the regional party committee came down to the state television on the evening of the putsch, and that broadcast in which they rallied people against the putschists was broadcast over a good deal of Russian territory. Leningrad TV was not exactly national TV, but it was not exactly local either; it had pretty wide coverage. And that TV broadcast, I'm quite sure, was a morale boost for the people in Moscow who were themselves trying to do the same thing.

In the Baltic states—again, I left before the actual events of August 1991—but I do know that, as Ambassador Matlock indicated, things had already gone along pretty far. The Soviet authorities were divided, I think, over how exactly to handle this incredible nationalism that grew rather quickly starting around 1987–1988, from song festivals and things of that sort, and then blossomed into human chain demonstrations that extended all the way from Tallinn and Estonia down to Lithuania and sometimes involved violence on the part of OMON [Special Purpose Police Detachment] elements and Soviet army elements in the capital cities. Tallinn, Estonia was somewhat of an exception. The Estonian authorities even signed a treaty with the Russian Federation, and they themselves played a rather quieter role in the expression of their own nationalism. In Lithuania and in Latvia, the nationalist leaders were much more outspoken. They had basically taken control of the parliament buildings, and had built barricades around them.

When I used to go down to Lithuania, I had this great big American car. I hated it, frankly, but it was certainly big and imposing. We flew the flag. The consul general had the right to fly the American flag on it. We would drive that car up between the ranks of the Soviet tanks and armored personnel carriers on our way into the parliament building itself. Local television was there. Sometimes Leningrad television was there, and even television reporters from the Scandinavian states were there; Finland, especially, was quite interested in what was going on. They focused not on me, to be quite blunt, but on the American flag on this enormous American car.

When you would approach the parliament building, there would be fellows with red armbands standing around barrels of burning trash and so on trying to keep warm, and they would be armed with a rifle or a shotgun. You would go inside, and you would find sleepy guys with their guns or shotguns, sitting on sofas and chairs and whatnot. Eventually you would find, in the case of Lithuania, you'd find Mr. Landsbergis, who looked just about as tired as a human being can look, but who was very appreciative of these visits and of the somewhat vague but positive messages we could convey from Washington. I think it did a lot for the morale of the nationalist leaders in the Baltic states, and it helped us to know what was going on, of course.

In Estonia, I wouldn't say it was all sweetness and light up there. I remember President [Arnold] Rüütel, who is not a bombastic man and not a real macho type either, to tell the truth, showing me a pistol in his pocket and saying, "If they come for me, I'm prepared to resist. I'm not going to go peacefully." Those were dramatic moments. Like Wayne said, diplomats live for moments like that, and [they were] very, very moving, I must say.

I don't have much more to say about these things. We saw them from our own somewhat restricted perspective, but we did see them from the standpoint not just of northwest Russia and Leningrad but also from the standpoint of those three Baltic countries. Very brave people. It was really an honor for me to be able to work with them and to report what we saw back to Washington and to the embassy in Moscow. Thank you.

**JAMES COLLINS:** Thank you very much. I will try to pick up a bit from where Jack Matlock, Richard Miles, and Wayne Merry have brought us. I would like simply to talk a bit about the context that I feel faced people in the United States who were trying to cope with the collapse of the Soviet Union and its consequences, and the dynamics that were at work over the period from the August coup on through at least the middle of the 1990s.

There is, first of all, one point that everyone really has to bear in mind, because it was very much present—certainly for all of us in the embassy or when I was back in Washington dealing with all the former Soviet space. At that time, the United States had two parallel sets of thoughts going on almost continuously as we tried to cope with this sort of revolutionary, rapid change that we saw going on in this part of the world. On the one hand, we had what Jack has called cleanup diplomacy, but which really had dimensions beyond cleanup. For instance, we were engaged from the summer of 1991 on with the Soviet government, and then immediately with its successor, in figuring out what was going to happen to the Soviet nuclear arsenal. Now, we had previously established agreements. Were they going to be negotiated on and simply developed? Suddenly we had more states, players, in the equation. How were they going to be brought in? Trying to maintain the framework to deal with the terribly dangerous phenomenon of

the Cold War nuclear arsenal—tactical and strategic nuclear weapons spread over Eurasia—was a preoccupying part of the whole policy discussion in the United States.

The second set of thoughts concerned the Middle East, which occupied a very significant place in our discussions with Moscow during the fall of 1991. The Madrid Conference [on peace in the Middle East] took place, and we were engaged in active diplomacy on the Arab-Israeli dispute, and so forth. To some extent, inertia played a role in this process. The Soviet Union had always been a major player in the Middle East, and the concept that somehow Moscow wasn't going to play that role was difficult to accept. Moreover, it was even more difficult when they were playing a constructive role, frankly. The idea that we were finally able to work together but maybe lacked diplomatic options to make something work presented us with an immense challenge.

Now, I give you this only as a set of considerations and thoughts that were major factors in the way the United States responded to all of these developments that you've heard described. What I'm really suggesting is that, number one, the first preoccupation was not always just what was happening to Moscow, pieces of the Russian Federation, or the Soviet Union. There were other large issues out there, and they tended to, if you will, balance off what might have been perfectly logical and rational approaches if you were looking only at the day's changes in Moscow.

The second thing that seemed to me to be very important in shaping the American response is the fact that bureaucracies tend not to respond well to revolutions. The pace of change that we all lived through for the next few years after August 1991 was so rapid that the United States bureaucratic response was always so far behind the events on the ground that for the most part those of us who were on the ground found ourselves in essence wondering what was going on in Washington. What they were talking about never showed up where we were. This is partly because Congress thinks it does something when it appropriates money. Well, it does, but it doesn't do anything five thousand miles away until the money shows up, and that was usually a year or two years later. So the response time lagged. Dealing with the crisis or, if you will, the developmental issues that were going to face the U.S. government, was a real problem. Most of us who

were on the ground or who dealt with it on a daily basis understood that we were always behind the curve.

The systems were simply not compatible. I used to tell people that in Moscow in those years, a day was a week, a week was a month, and a month was a year. And our system back here just was never functioning on the same calendar. So this had an impact on shaping the responses. For one thing, it tended to focus you if you were trying to address issues and be responsive or to shape a direction. It focused you on the tools at hand, that is, what you could use in time or could have at your disposal in time. So this often got us into the situation where the problem was defined by the old adage that if all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail. And to some extent that meant economic tools, loans, things that could be done reasonably expeditiously in the international and financial institutions. Those became the tools of policy, even though they often were not necessarily the ones that were perhaps best adapted to the issues before us.

A third factor that was always at play—and I think it made a huge difference in the way we approached post-breakup developments into the early '90s—was domestic politics here at home and international politics with our allies, and the whole mind-set we inherited from the end of the 20th century. This was cleanup diplomacy and cleanup politics big time, and it was a chance when everybody felt you could right every wrong and tidy up every imperfect situation left over since 1945. And so we got an awful lot injected into American policy that, I think, really in some ways made certain issues very difficult to think about conceptually.

It seemed to me that the most difficult one was the approach that emerged as almost the gospel in Washington regarding the independent states of the former Soviet Union. One of the great strategic decisions made by the United States at the beginning of 1992 was to recognize diplomatically each of the former republics, say they were independent states, and treat them accordingly. Nobody else, more or less, was doing that until we started. Many of the former Soviet republics themselves weren't quite sure what it meant; I remember getting a call from the Tajik minister of foreign affairs asking for the forms to apply for diplomatic recognition. This was really a time in which, to some extent, what

the United States said and what it did in those very critical moments shaped the entire international system of that part of the world, because we said, "You are independent states. We recognize you. Where is your ambassador?" etc.

But one of the shortcomings that followed from much of that was that this became almost an obsession. The obsession was that we couldn't even speak of something or think conceptually of anything that would look like it was restoring the Soviet Union. So we got into a situation where I could not put in a memo here in Washington the term "CIS" [for "Commonwealth of Independent States"]; it had to be "new independent states." And we were hamstrung, it seemed to me, in many respects by what I used to call "terminal bilateralism." We could basically work bilaterally with each one of these states, but to talk about or to discuss somehow the broader context of what arrangements would come to govern the relations between and among the peoples of that region, and how we would deal with the different arrangements that really ought to be made, was a topic that just never could really get on the agenda. I think this often made it difficult to deal with a number of the developmental and political issues in that region because we never really had a regional policy—we always had a bilateral policy with everybody.

The final point I simply wanted to suggest is that what happened as the Soviet Union fell apart was a phenomenon for which, frankly, the United States was totally unprepared in terms of a response. Now I'm not here to suggest that we didn't do a pretty good job in response, and I think in many ways we did. But in terms of what I suppose today we would call "state building" or "state rebuilding," we really didn't have the tools or the conceptual framework to deal with the challenges that were put in front of us. I think it's almost impossible for people who didn't live through this or were not part of it to have a feel for the total disorientation of a society that woke up one morning and said that basically everything that it had had the day before was illegitimate, and that everything would be starting over. And that essentially is what happened to people in every corner of the former Soviet Union. Whether you pick Christmas Day 1991 or the 8th of December, I don't care, but it happened when, in essence, the flag came down and everybody understood that there was a new system. That resulted in a number

of reactions, of course. Internally people were at sea, and they were looking for whatever anchors they could find. But one anchor that was often out there and thrown out more often than probably was wise was the United States—that we somehow would have the answer to what you did next. Having overthrown the communist system, what did you put in its place? I remember having the question put to me very seriously by senior people in the Russian government and other governments, essentially, could you tell us how to make a market economy? Or, could you tell us how to set up a democracy? The fact of the matter is that we didn't have the answers, and yet we were under great pressure to provide answers to many different queries and questioners. I think we did our best, but often fell short in terms of accomplishment.

So I think the reality is that whatever shortcomings there were in American policy in the 1990s—and there were many—it was more than anything else a simple fact that we were ill-equipped institutionally as a government, as a society, to take on the question of how one copes with something that was at least as big, if not bigger than, the American depression in the 1930s. We just didn't have the structures to do it, we didn't have the intellectual construct to do it, and we certainly didn't have the bureaucracy in place to make an effective job of it. And so we used what we could and we did what we could. And, of course, it disappointed; it fell short in many ways. Now there were many cases in which we assisted—and I think we did a good job—but it was never possible, in my view, to meet the expectations that the Russian people and the Russian government had for what we could provide in the way of suggesting a path forward for them from the end of one system to the flowering of another. And as Wayne said, and I totally agree, 15 years in is not very far into the system. We've got a long way yet to go.

One final concluding comment that I decided I really should make to this group: the one thing that I learned on the 19th of August 1991 is that you can never underestimate the role of serendipity and pure chance in the way things will develop. There were two things that stood out to me during those days of the putsch that I think were extraordinary. One was that they didn't prevent Yeltsin from moving to the White House in Moscow. I mean this is real ineptitude. And they managed to create for

themselves an opponent who basically ensured that the effort to take the government under control of a different group of people was not going to succeed.

The second was CNN. There is one story about CNN that has always remained with me because it almost symbolizes the role of modern communications and the fact that you can't repeat history when certain things have changed. At one point—and I think it was on the second day of the coup—[Soviet Vice President and putschist Gennady] Yanayev called [Kazakh President Nursultan] Nazarbayev in Almaty and in essence said, "What are you going to do? We haven't heard from you. We are in charge, and we are looking for a statement of support and for you to assure that everything is well in Kazakhstan. Nazarbayev was reported to have said, "Well how are things going in Moscow? Is everything under control?" He got the song and dance from Yanayev about how there was nothing going on, everything was fully under control and they were just making sure that the meetings worked right, and so forth. Nazarbayev was sitting there watching CNN, and he knew that there was a very different picture from what he was being told over the phone. And I think somehow that's a fitting way to understand an awful lot that happened in that peculiar period from August through the end of 1991. There was just way, way too much serendipity in much that was going on for people to cope with. I'll end with that.

**STEPHEN F. COHEN:** Not only are all of us on this panel from the South or Midwest, but Ambassador Collins and I went to Indiana University, as did the new Secretary of Defense Robert Gates. Since they may not want to be too closely associated with me, I'll refrain from calling us the IU mafia, but it does testify to the influence of the Midwest and the South on American Russian studies.

This is a good event, and I congratulate Blair Ruble and the Kennan Institute because our subject today hasn't been discussed seriously enough in the United States, if at all, during the last 15 years. This is a good beginning. We should all be grateful to Blair Ruble. I'm happy to be a part of the discussion, but I suddenly realize that I'm the only nondiplomat up here, for better or worse. It means I can either be academic or undiplomatic. I'll make up my mind as I go along.

I want to use my 15 minutes to comment very briefly on three aspects of the topic before us today. I just published a book on the subject in Moscow [*Pochemu li Ne Stalo Sovetskogo Soiuzza?*] and in researching it I read a very large amount of Western and Russian literature in search of other people's explanations of why the Soviet Union ended. Certainly it is one of the great explanatory questions of the 20th century, and I want to report briefly on the explanations I found there. Second, I want to give you my evaluation of the quality of those explanations. And third, I want to end by commenting on the discussion that's underway in Russia today on what they call the *plusy i minusy*, the pluses and minuses, of the end of the Soviet Union, a discussion that is very much not going on in the United States, for obvious reasons.

Two prefatory generalizations: In the American literature on the end of the Soviet Union, there is now a near consensus that it was inevitable. But this is a clear case of what social scientists call hindsight bias or the fallacy of retrospective determinism. Consider, for example, what three eminent American scholars said over about a decade about what the profession of Soviet studies thought at those different times:

In 1990, the first said that the end of the Soviet Union was "absolutely unthinkable."

In 1998, the second scholar said of the profession, "Nobody really expresses any surprise that the Soviet Union collapsed."

And in 2002, the third scholar told us, "The prevailing view in the profession is that the Soviet breakup was inevitable."

How did scholars go from the concepts of unthinkable to inevitable? Was it revelation, was it hindsight bias, or was it—and you people in Washington would know better than I do—political fashion?

My second generalization is that there is an analytical bias inherent in the usual formulation of the question: why did the Soviet Union collapse? But we should not use the word *collapse* in asking the question, because it prejudices the answer by implying that the system had some inherent defect, probably an inescapable one. Instead, we should simply ask, why did the Soviet Union end? In posing that question and in going through the American and Russian literature, I found about 10 rather different explanations, all of them equally certain of their cogency and validity. They can be reduced more generally to six:

1. The system was doomed from the beginning by some inherent genetic defect.
2. The system was overthrown between 1985 and 1991 by a popular anti-Soviet revolution, either a democratic revolution from below in Russia or ethnic separationist nationalist revolutions in the other 14 ethnic republics, or both.
3. The system fell victim to an unworkable economic system that went into final crisis and collapsed in 1991.
4. The system fell victim to Russia's long tradition of intelligentsia extremism. Gorbachev's moderate gradualist reformation—he called it *perestroika*—inadvertently unleashed this old tradition, and the extremism of the intelligentsia destroyed Gorbachev's *perestroika* just as it had destroyed other attempts to reform Russia without catastrophe since Alexander II. In other words, this explanation sees a recurrent outcome in Russian history. You rarely find that explanation in the United States, but it is widespread in Russia.
5. The end of the Soviet Union was a classic case of the event-making role of special leaders in history, in this case Gorbachev and Yeltsin.
6. *Na oborot*—just the opposite, it was an elite-driven event. It was the Soviet *nomenklatura*, the high elite that itself ended the Soviet Union.

In my book, I examine these six explanations at considerable length in the context of Soviet history and politics, and I rule out the first four as not plausible. Briefly, here is why.

There are two conceptions of an inherent doomsday mechanism or fatal defect that destroyed the Soviet Union. One is an original ideology or criminality, the school associated with, for example, the late Martin Malia. The problem with this explanation is that it's theological, and therefore, not suitable for real historical analysis.

The other concept is more serious, the argument that the Soviet Union was an empire, "and all empires end." The problem with this explanation is twofold and empirical. Remember, we're not talking about Eastern Europe. The Soviet



state did have some characteristics similar to those of traditional empires, but it also had fundamental characteristics that were not typical of empires. Second, the Soviet Union did not end, as almost all traditional empires have, in military defeat and colonial rebellion on the periphery. The Soviet Union was ended in peacetime and by the metropolis, the center, by Moscow. Thus, the empire explanation doesn't fit.

As for popular revolutions from below, in a word, there were none. Not even the semblance of one, even though it is widely asserted in the literature. As evidenced by many opinion surveys, election results, and even protest banners at street demonstrations, there was no anti-Soviet revolution in Russia itself. None. Even the most radical protesters and oppositionists wanted to reform the system, not abolish it.

In the other 14 republics there were, as I understand it, popular ethnic separationist movements only in the Baltics, part of the Caucasus, and arguably, though some people disagree, in western Ukraine. That was it. These exceptions constituted perhaps barely 10 percent of the entire Soviet territories, peoples, and resources, hardly a fatal loss to the Union. Moreover, we need to remember, though people often forget, that as late as March 1991 there was a national referendum with a large turnout. And of the large turnout—the referendum wasn't held in all the republics—76 percent of the people voted in favor of keeping the Union.

Now regarding the economic explanation, there were all sorts of problems, but no large modern state has ever collapsed because of its economy. It didn't happen in the United States during the Great Depression of the 1930s, and, equally telling, it did not happen in post-Soviet Russia in the 1990s, when the economic collapse was far greater than anything that had happened in the Soviet Union.

Moreover, and this we need to understand, the economic system that went into crisis in 1990–1991, was no longer the Soviet economic system, which had already been significantly dismantled. So if there was an economic causality in the Soviet breakup, it wasn't the Soviet economic system but what had followed it.

Fourth, regarding Russia's tradition of destructive intelligentsia radicalism, I was drawn to this explanation in the beginning simply because so many of my Soviet acquaintances when I lived in Russia in the late 1980s were increasingly radical,

extremist former party intellectuals. They were like the revolutionary repentant noblemen in the 19th century, repentant Communist Party functionaries. That transformation certainly happened. But such radicals were a tiny minority of the large Soviet intelligentsia—almost unrepresented among the provincial intelligentsia, indeed disliked by the provincial intelligentsia and by the Soviet people at large—and they had little influence or power apart from that given to them by the two commanding figures of the period, Gorbachev and Yeltsin.

That brings me to the role of leadership, of event-making political leaders, and my own explanation of the end of the Soviet Union. Jack Matlock adumbrated this argument, but I don't know if he'll go as far as I do. Gorbachev's political role was the primary causal factor in the Soviet breakup because of the changes he introduced in the system between 1985 and 1989. Without them, none of the other factors cited in the literature would have come into play, including Yeltsin's role. In 1989 Yeltsin emerged, again due to Gorbachev's reforms, as another potentially event-making figure, and what ensued was an extraordinary situation. At an extraordinary moment in Russian history, 1989 to 1991, two leaders of extraordinary political will appeared on the scene at the very same time. Many of you may not agree with this formulation but I believe it is correct: Gorbachev, a leader with an extraordinary will to reform, Yeltsin with an equally strong political will for power. Bang! The collision that ensued led Yeltsin to the Belavezha Forest, 15 years ago on December 8th, to abolish Gorbachev's Soviet state.

For me, that is the essential explanation, but—and it is a very large but—it is not a sufficient explanation. We must ask why the still powerful high Soviet *nomenklatura* permitted Yeltsin's struggle for power to go so far as to abolish their own, the *nomenklatura*'s, state? Why didn't they stop him? And the answer—as some of you know—is that at that crucial moment they were too busy seizing vast property. They were more interested—beginning in late 1989 and growing into a frenzy by 1991—in privatizing the state's enormous financial and economic assets than in defending or even preserving the state. Nor was this primarily the *nomenklatura* elites of the ethnic republics outside Russia. It was first and foremost the Russian *nomenklatura* itself.



The other *nomenklatura*, as we just heard from Ambassador Collins, were obedient to Moscow to the very end, including Ukraine's Kravchuk and most of the others. I want to be clear: there are many people in Russia today—historians and other intellectuals—who argue that the Soviet elites destroyed the system because they had already become protocapitalist elites. But they were not the primary factor. They were instead an enabling factor. They permitted the main causal factors, first Gorbachev, then as a result Yeltsin, to end the system.

In the minute I have left, this: in Russia today, there is a fascinating—if we can be empathetic—discussion about what was gained and what was lost with the Soviet Union, the pluses and minuses. In the United States, we don't discuss the question because we see only pluses, though some of the panelists today have hinted that there may have been a few minuses. In Russia, however, according to recent polls, 60 percent of people surveyed still regret the end of the Soviet Union. It's a large percentage. I think we can deconstruct it as follows: many of those people simply regret the loss of the Soviet Union in a sentimental way, much as we all regret our lost youth. Their feelings are expressed in the famous adage that even Putin has quoted, "Anyone who does not regret the end of the Soviet Union has no heart; anyone who thinks it can be reconstructed has no head." It is an understandable reaction. But I would guess that about 30 percent of that 60 percent is bitter because they believe that only minuses resulted from the end of the Soviet Union, and that the end of the Soviet Union was a result of a malevolent foreign or domestic conspiracy, or both. This belief remains a powerful force in Russia, and if things again turn worse in Russia in terms of human lives, it will certainly become a political factor behind a very wrathful kind of politics.

Finally, I think we American scholars ought to consider the other regret that one hears in Russia among historians and the intelligentsia: the view that what Russia lost with the Soviet Union was yet another chance to modernize the nation politically and economically through gradual rather than catastrophic means. That a reforming Soviet system was yet another missed opportunity for Russia to modernize without an ensuing catastrophe. There are people in Russia who also believe that if reform of the Soviet

state had continued, the world order today would be safer and more benevolent than it now is. Considering the role that the United States has played in both of these realms, inside Russia and in its relationship with Russia (in my judgment, on balance a detrimental role), I think it's our obligation to engage our Russian colleagues in this discussion.

**RUBLE:** I'd like to thank Steve for the kind words, but in fact they should be directed toward Joe Dresen, who pulled this program together. I want to mention Joe's role in this.

I want to begin the discussion, and then hopefully we'll have time for questions from the floor. But I'm struck as I listen to the panelists that, leaving aside for a moment the reality on the ground in Russia and Ukraine and the Caucasus and Central Asia, we heard, really, a discussion about the conceptual limitations of dealing with historic events, the conceptual limitations on policymakers and on academics. These intellectual limitations are inevitable because in both diplomacy and in social science research you're looking for the most probable outcomes based on what came before, and truly historic events are by definition low-probability events, so you're not looking for the low-probability event.

At the same time, I think one can make a credible argument that at the moment of the end of the Soviet Union, when changes were coming every day and a day was a week, a week was a month, a month was a year, in fact the intellectual response and the diplomatic response were perhaps closer and more flexible and more responsive to what was going on than what happened when we slowly moved into not just cleanup diplomacy but relations as normal.

When we get into '93, '94, and '95, presumably we are beginning to deal with a world that is more predictable. Yet one can agree or disagree with the policy of hoping that there would be a Soviet Union of 12 states voluntarily united by a common agreement that [they were] moving toward more freedom. One can agree or disagree with that, but that's at least a credible policy response. But the confusion really sets in much later, and the confusion seems to set in over misunderstanding, I guess, because people were moving along so quickly. If Steve is right, if it was really about elites beginning to grab property in 1989, we didn't necessarily pick up on that.

But I would like to ask each of the speakers very briefly, looking back, what in hindsight should we have picked up on that we didn't pick up on? Did we really privilege the nuclear question too much? Or, in fact, are all the problems that have come since really minor in comparison to what would have happened had we not really borne down on the nuclear issue? So looking back, starting with a point of view that at the time we weren't going to get it right anyway, when we began to have time to step back and think, what should we have picked up that we didn't?

**MATLOCK:** Well, if I would look at the time that I'm talking about, which is up to the failed coup in 1991 (others have more experience with the later time), I would say that the first Bush administration should have realized earlier than it did that the Cold War was essentially over. This was something we felt in our guts in the embassy, but could not get the idea across to Washington until Bush and Gorbachev met in Malta in December.

A lot of problems were still out there. Europe was still divided and whatnot, but nevertheless there was an entirely different spirit in the diplomacy. We no longer had a "zero-sum" attitude and were looking for win-win ways to settle these problems. This was very clear to us in Moscow by January 1989. It was not clear to the incoming Bush administration. I think there was an exchange fairly early on when at one point [National Security Adviser Brent] Scowcroft said on one of the Sunday interview programs that the Cold War was not over. And *The New York Times* did an editorial [stating that] the Cold War was over.

Well, you know one could make a logical argument for Scowcroft's attitude. Looking only at the past, of course, one could easily have concluded that the Cold War was still in progress. Europe was still divided. There were many problems. We didn't have the START agreements yet, and so on and so on. But as I said, I think we had moved by the end of 1988 to a situation where both sides recognized what the problems were. American and Soviet diplomats were negotiating off the same agenda, and we were looking not to defeat each other but [for] ways we could solve common problems. That was an entirely different spirit from the zero-sum game that marked the Cold War.

One of the proposals I made in February 1989 was that we expand our agenda to much more active economic consultation and cooperation. This was rejected as premature. I know [Secretary of State] Jim Baker thought that the Soviets just wanted to act as spoilers in the international economic organization. I suppose we could have had the most influence if we had paid attention not to the theories that we had but to their reality, and trying to help them cooperatively to move to that. I think that may have been a missed opportunity.

Also, I would say, reinforcing Jim Collins's comment about the difficulties in moving bureaucracy, that I have an example that may be comparatively minor in the overall set of things, but it was quite striking. One of the first recommendations I made in early 1989 in the new Bush administration was that we establish four to six consulates very rapidly, because we had an embassy in Moscow, we had a consulate general in Leningrad, we had an advanced party to set up a consulate general in Kyiv, and that was all. I spoke to the secretary of state, and he said, "Sounds good to me, why don't you take it up with the president?" They both agreed. The president turned to Scowcroft and said, "Will anybody object to this?"

And he said, "Well, the FBI will want extra personnel to watch the Soviet missions."

[President Bush and Secretary Baker] said, "We can live with that. Go ahead and do it."

So I go back to State thinking that, well, at least within a year we'll have some new consulates. Three months later, I ask the deputy secretary for management what he was doing.

He said, "Oh, yes, we're going to put it in the '92 budget."

This was 1989 I'm talking about. I said, "We've got 11 time zones in this country. It's beginning to fall apart. I need them now."

He said, "Look, Jack, I've got to open Bratislava and Leipzig first, and I don't have funds to do any more in the Soviet Union for the next three years."

Of course, when '92 came, we had to open 14 embassies to what we already had, so we had to do it with very little preparation.

The sluggishness of the bureaucracy: I had the secretary of state and the president saying "do it," and you couldn't get it done.

**MERRY:** Two points. First, I think the priority given to the nuclear issue was entirely appropri-

ate. What we were seeking to do was ensure that there be secure custodianship for this enormous arsenal. Basically, we defined secure custodianship as being single custodianship, and that really involved getting nuclear weapons out of three countries, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus, and into Russian custodianship. If we had flubbed that, the consequences would have been so enormous that I can't imagine that there would have been a retrospective view that maybe we shouldn't have given it so much priority. I don't have any quibbles about that.

Where I think we really did move too quickly was in according the legitimacy of the United States to all 15 republics. Some people will be shocked to hear me say that I think according diplomatic recognition gives legitimacy, but in these cases the word of the United States actually did do that. But we were treating all 15 as if they were all as legitimate and prepared for independence as the three Baltic states, and that objectively was not true. I think we should have established a much more provisional relationship, particularly with the Central Asian states, and that we should have created a series of much more strenuous benchmarks that I think might have helped to deal with the very real issue that Jack addressed, which was that Gorbachev was trying to bring reform into these Union republics, and the end of the Soviet Union helped enshrine a bunch of old *nomenklatura* types in power, some of them still there. If we had not moved so quickly to give the legitimacy of American recognition to all 15, I think we could perhaps have had a more positive impact on that process.

**MILES:** I don't have any big picture or comment from the Leningrad consulate general, but when Steve was talking, I was reminded of a quote that we'll find in the French ambassador [Maurice] Paleologue's memoirs written during that time of World War I on the eve of the Revolution. It's from the French philosopher [Joseph-Marie] de Maistre. Something like, "Woe to bad governments! Triple woe to bad governments which desire to mend their ways!"

**COLLINS:** I think it's important to re-emphasize one thing, and here I go back to the coup. There was no inevitability that that coup could not succeed. It didn't, and it was pretty ineptly done. But as one who woke up at seven o'clock in the morning on the 19th of August to be told that

Gorbachev was under [military] control in the south and these guys were in charge and the military showed up in town, etc., it was not exactly persuasive that this was all going to go Yeltsin's way. Now I think, in that sense, that all of this discussion about "Could the Soviet Union have stayed on?" has to be thought out very carefully. It might not have gone on forever, but I have always believed that it was fully possible that the Soviet Union could still have been with us 15 years from the day of the coup. It would have been a different place. We would have had different characters. But the fact of the matter was that these institutions were not dead, and what Gorbachev was really up against by the time the coup happened was that he was beginning to touch things that really mattered to people. Glasnost and so on was all fine, but when he started to move real power around, like ownership of assets, this was getting to be trouble, and it brought a very strong reaction. My first point is that historical inevitability is never a good idea from the point of view of the day before you know what happens, and it certainly wasn't in those days.

In terms of the nuclear issue, I agree with Wayne. I think there's absolutely no question that no matter what else we were able to accomplish or not accomplish, to have neglected that issue would have been catastrophic, because it was perfectly clear to me, and to some of the colleagues in the audience who were involved in negotiating this business and trying to harness the resources to get a handle on it, that the parties directly involved, the Ukrainian leadership, the Russian leadership, Kazakhstan, were not going to do this by themselves. They simply would never have gotten this done. And had we let it go on and fester, I'm convinced you would have four nuclear powers, or three at least, in that part of the world. We might have tactical nuclear weapons and all kinds of other things scattered around that would be extremely upsetting. So I think that there was no question that for the United States—and we were probably the only ones who could do it—[play] the role of catalyst, [be] basically the goad and negotiator to make sure that we got through that problem—[that] was problem number one.

If I had an issue that I thought took up so much time that was absolutely wasted effort, it would be the God-knows-how-many dozens of hours of negotiating over CFE [Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty] levels

that went on beyond the Soviet collapse. This, frankly, was nonsense. Getting the Soviet troops out of East Europe—this was a perfectly good Cold War counting mechanism to make sure everybody sort of knew what the other had. It was totally ridiculous to spend the time the diplomats did on it after the Soviet Union collapsed. But I can't tell you how many hours were spent. It's more than I ever care to think about. Thanks.

**COHEN:** I'm not sure I fully understand the question. I guess it would depend on the following: What would you have done differently? It would depend on what, looking back, one thinks the best outcome would have been. If you take the view—it's not a view widely held in the United States—that it would have been better for everyone if a voluntarily reforming Soviet Union had continued to exist, then the long pause, as I think it was called, between the time President Reagan and Jack left office and the first President Bush thought it over, flabbergasted me. I was asked to come to Camp David in November 1989, on the eve of [the U.S.-Soviet summit at] Malta. Malta is usually cited by Anatoly Chernyaev and others, including Jack, as the end of the Cold War. I was invited to Camp David just before that historic event to debate an eminent colleague known for the view that Gorbachev was actually a threat to the West in 1989. My role was to make the opposite argument: that the U.S. should meet Gorbachev halfway in order to end the Cold War. What was interesting was not what I had to say but that the Bush administration—the president and almost all of his top people were at the meeting—was profoundly divided over this historic opportunity, even at this late date. Gorbachev had been in power for four years, during which he had dismantled the Communist Party dictatorship, but leading members of the administration still thought he was a threat to U.S. national security, though it was not the opinion of President Bush himself.

If the question is, "Would you have wanted to see Gorbachev succeed as a reformer, holding the Union together in a democratic and voluntary way?" then the U.S. should have helped him with money, for example when he went to London for the G-7 meeting in July 1991. I've talked with some of the coup makers and with Gorbachev's people. Most of them believe that

if he had come home with a serious financial commitment by the West, the coup makers never would have moved against him in August. But in order to have given Gorbachev such large sums of money, the will to make that commitment to him would have had to continue and build on Reagan's policy toward Gorbachev and not been interrupted by this long pause in 1989. On the other hand, if you're happy the Soviet Union ended, things worked out just fine. But if you think things would have been better, at least in Russia and some of the other former republics, and maybe in world affairs, if the Soviet Union had not ended, then you must ask, what in the world was the first Bush administration thinking about during its first 11 months in office?

**MATLOCK:** I can answer that. Bush was worried about the right wing of the Republican Party, and as usual American foreign policy is driven primarily by domestic politics.

## QUESTION AND ANSWER PERIOD WITH THE AUDIENCE

**Question:** I am a retired Russian ambassador, [and a] current guest scholar at the United States Institute of Peace. Let me say that it's a subtle pleasure to attend such an intellectual banquet. As many of you know, the most popular Russian question is, who is to blame? It is a very popular and at the same time useless question because usually the consequences, the lessons, are not drawn, even when the answers are correct. The consolation is that it's not only our prerogative. If I may make my counts, I believe that the Soviet Union was 80 percent doomed when Gorbachev came to power. It was doomed, as Merry said, by misrule of the Soviet rulers from Stalin to Chernenko. And to pull out the Soviet Union from this situation, we needed a genius, or better, a couple of them. But the 90 million-member Communist Party produced two leaders, Gorbachev and Yeltsin, and the tremendous fighting between them, and the divided house perishes. Still, I remain an admirer of Gorbachev because, paraphrasing Marx, he tried to storm the heavens. The responsibility for all of what happened is entirely ours, but did the United States help Gorbachev's huge and unprecedented project?

My answer is no. Could they have done it? My answer is yes. In the Soviet Union and in Russia there was a tremendously good disposition toward the United States. Unfortunately, what we are seeing now, when Russia and the United States again are a problem to each other, has its legs, as we say, growing from this period as well.

**QUESTION:** I was in Russia in the spring of '92, and stayed away from Moscow and stayed away from the embassy; let my Russian hosts show me their country. I have to say I was out visiting Novgorod and down the Volga, etc., etc. One of the things that was clear is that the Russians were shipping all kinds of things down the river from Nizhnii Novgorod, heavy armaments and tanks and armed personnel carriers, and who knows what all. So I'm not quite sure that we really did get a handle on all of those weapons as early as has been suggested.

But the real question I want to ask is this one: in my roaming around that area of Russia, I saw no sign of democracy being created or a free market evolving whatsoever. When I got back, I read Steve Cohen's analyses from that period and found them to be the most accurate from my perspective because they emphasized continuity rather than change. So the real question I wanted to ask you is whether the people in the embassy really believed that you were building democracy and free markets during this period. Were there any other alternatives that might have been considered, or is that the only consideration that we as Americans who truly believe in all of those things could have countenanced in those days?

**MATLOCK:** Others can answer regarding the matter of free markets and building democracy, because that didn't come up in serious fashion until after the Soviet Union collapsed. When I was there, we were trying to end the Cold War, to prevent a nuclear confrontation, and we thought that to do so we needed to press the Soviet Union to open up, to be more responsible to its people (you can call it democratization or whatnot) and, in effect, lift the Iron Curtain and of course control the arms, which were a threat. Yes, that was what we were concentrating on. The matter of democracy and markets came later, in my experience.

**MERRY:** We weren't building anything. If it was going to be built, it was going to be done by the Russians. What we were confronted with was a group of leaders who came in and said that's exactly what they wanted to do. Now were they rational or right or sensible? I think in hindsight they were overly ambitious. But I would simply say that this was no more imposed by the United States as an idea than a lot of the other developments. The real problem was that we were told or given a laundry list of aspirations by the incoming new rulers of the Russian Federation which was pretty staggering, and they wanted help in trying to do it. Now did we manage to respond adequately? I'd say certainly it's a very mixed record. But I can't quite accept the premise that it was we who were trying to build the democracy. The problem we had was that these folks were trying to do it. We were providing what we could, and by 1992 we were providing mighty little in that regard. Most of the things that were, if you want call it democracy building, didn't really get underway until after the Freedom Support Act, and that was then a year at least after that.

You're really talking about what the Yeltsin people and the people there were able to do about building a democracy in those first two years. The answer was more than we might have thought but a lot less than was necessary.

**QUESTION:** I'm a scholar in residence here at the Wilson Center. I think I can anticipate your answers because so many of you talked about the dynamic of unpredictability, about the end or the collapse of the Soviet Union. But I wondered if you all could reflect on the controversy that Senator [Daniel Patrick] Moynihan, a founder of the Wilson Center, brought up, which is to say the alleged failure by the CIA to predict the collapse.

**QUESTION:** A follow-up on Mr. Cohen's point about if only Gorbachev had gotten this financial commitment in July of 1991. In terms of bureaucratic inertia, would the Soviet bureaucracy, having these Western funds, been able to apply them productively, or would they have just disappeared into private hands?

**QUESTION:** Wayne Merry alluded to the importance of the social environment, and



demography, and health, for example. And he referred to a proposal by George Soros to help do something about that. There was an earlier proposal in 1992 by Jeffery Sachs, and I speak not of the shock therapy issue but in fact of a proposal for a large sum of money to be devoted to the economic transition in the face of the assumption of Soviet and Russian debts by the Russian Federation. A third of that was to have been spent on something called a social fund. [Sachs] was not persuasive. If I recall, Stephen Cohen, you had some critical remarks to make at the time about that very matter. Is that something that we should think about again? I guess my persuasion is that we should have thought about it.

**QUESTION:** I'm retired from the Department of State, INR [Bureau of Intelligence and Research], and I'd like to sketch a hypothesis and ask the panelists to comment on it. Gorbachev, it seems to me, was a convinced communist who wanted to reform the USSR into a communist state that would not rely on state terror or the apparatus of propaganda. And when he dismantled the apparatus of propaganda and did away with state terror, the system collapsed, because it had been held together simply by fear and by myth.

**MATLOCK:** I don't think I have much to add to what I said before. The fact is that our government understood very well what was happening, and one could not predict from one day to the other how long this would go. But as I said, I sent my first message in June 1990 recommending that the United States government prepare for the contingency that the Soviet Union could break up. The reasons the CIA never made that a prediction [are that] (1) not everybody in the CIA agreed that that was the case, although I think most by then were persuaded, and (2) the last thing we wanted was a formal determination of that sort or prediction by the CIA. It would have leaked immediately, particularly if it had been conveyed to Congress or to senators such as Senator Moynihan, and the leak would have stopped the whole reform process. There would have been a coup against Gorbachev, and it would have succeeded. I think there is a principle in science that under some circumstances simply by observing something you actually affect the outcome. Intelligence

assessments, when they are known, [are] particularly [subject to] something like that.

A second conclusion would have been that we wanted it to happen and we didn't want it to happen. Everybody would have thought, well, they are predicting it, they're going to try to make it happen. We were doing what little we could to keep it from happening.

But if it means that our government didn't understand what was going on, that's incorrect. I think we did, and we even had news before the coup occurred that there would probably be a coup, and even of the people in it. We tried to warn Gorbachev without naming the people, and he didn't take it seriously. So on the whole, I think we did understand what was going on. But even if you knew there was going to be a coup, you couldn't be sure whether it would succeed or not. Though in my last press conference, which was on the record in Moscow in early August 1991, I was asked the question, and I said that there could well be attempts to reverse the course that Gorbachev had taken, but if they happened I thought they would fail. It was never quoted in the U.S. press, although I was on the record.

**COLLINS:** Just a very short answer to your question on the CIA. All I can tell you is that outgoing DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission] Collins in the late summer of 1990 got his briefings, and I was told that there was some probability that one Baltic state might get a degree of autonomy within five years.

**MERRY:** To be fair to people, what we have are intelligence agencies, not wisdom agencies. If these agencies had predicted the breakup of the Soviet Union, they might very well have been wrong, as Jim pointed out, and we were together during those historic days in August 1991. That putsch wasn't necessarily going to fail. I mean, they may have been wrong. In the weeks before I went out to Moscow in 1991, a senior figure in the U.S. government who was briefing me told me basically that Gorbachev had taken reforms as far as they could go and we were now in for a protracted era of stagnation in the Soviet Union. Other people told me that they were expecting dramatic events within weeks, if not days, after my arrival in Moscow. Yes, government is a big place. Generally speaking, if you're making predictions rather than projections, you're a lucky



individual if you get it right, and you're even luckier if somebody remembers.

My real expertise was on East Germany, and two and a half years before the Wall came down, I made a firm prediction in the State Department that the GDR would cease to exist within five years. Everybody told me I was nuts. If I had been wrong, that would have been confirmed. But in retrospect, it made no impact on U.S. policy whatsoever.

**COHEN:** We now have to be elliptical because we are pressed for time. When I said that had the G-7 committed money to Gorbachev in London in July [1991], all I wanted to say was that there probably would have been no coup in August. The plotters would not have touched him if he had come home with such a commitment. Therefore, because so many people think that the coup was the final precipitating factor in the end of the Soviet Union, you have to think about that “what if.” Would the Soviet elite have stolen that money? Some of it, but not as much as was stolen by the Russian elite in the 1990s. The *perestroichiki*, the men who made and led perestroika, were not thieves. They may have been communists, but calling Gorbachev a typical communist is like calling Luther a typical pope. About that the evidence is abundantly clear.

On the question of whether or not the Soviet Union could have existed without force is a legitimate and serious question. But there were other factors that held the Union together. There was a common education, socialization in the army, millions of intermarriages among the Soviet peoples, a shared sense of victory in the war and other historical accomplishments, and more. You have to take many factors into account, not just the coercive ones.

I want to say one more thing, because it grieves me, and someone mentioned my critical writings in the 1990s. I don't take seriously—I hope Ambassador Collins will forgive me—the American attempt at so-called democracy-building in Russia in the 1990s. Maybe it's because I grew up in Kentucky, where we knew the difference between thoroughbreds and other horses, but ever since the United States supported Yeltsin's use of tanks against an elected parliament in October 1993, and then endorsed the constitution that you all now lament because it so empowers Putin, a pseudo-democratic constitution that Yeltsin shoved through in a falsified referendum in

December 1993, the United States has had no right to use the word *democratization* in regard to Russia. Those U.S.-backed events ended it. There was never again a free and fair Russian election. Why remember that today? Not to say that some of us were right and some of us were wrong back then, but to remember that when Washington and the U.S. media bash Putin for having created whatever evil is unfolding in Russia today, they have forgotten the 1990s and the American support for the origins of Putinism in Yeltsinism.

So let us understand what's going on. A friend of mine whom you would all admire because he's so pro-American said to me, “After Yeltsin, Putin was inevitable.” He didn't mean Putin personally, but Putinism. I believe he is correct. I don't believe in inevitability, but it was a logical consequence. So let us keep things in perspective, remember that we did not play a positive role in the 1990s, and understand that we, and Russia, are paying the price today.

**QUESTION:** Thank you. I am from Odesa, Ukraine, and I am here as a Fulbright scholar with the Kennan Institute. One impression that I got from today's discussion is that indeed it would make sense perhaps to throw an annual party here in Washington, D.C., where everyone who misses the Soviet Union for whatever reason could come and talk to each other and exchange their ideas. That probably wouldn't be a massive gathering, but a substantial number of people would turn out.

Second thing, very short: from the point of view of a Ukrainian who is from a Russian-speaking, Russian-dominated area of Ukraine—however being consciously Ukrainian—I think it was a very important development for Ukraine to get this historic opportunity to move on as a nation-state. I definitely believe that the whole argument that what might have gone wrong—and many things did go wrong in various post-Soviet republics—is some kind of argument in favor of concluding that the better solution was for the Soviet Union to still exist—I don't buy this logic. It is just not fair to me.

Finally, my question. Quite unexpectedly, Blair, for you maybe, I would like to go back to Russia. Drawing on what you said in your presentations, your vast experience in dealing with the Soviet Union, then Russia, how could the lessons of what happened 15, 20 years ago be applied in U.S. dealings with present-day Russia?

Do you think there is any value there, any lesson there, any kind of experience that you got back then that could be applied in Washington's dealings with present-day Russia, which seems to be quite a challenge?

**MILES:** The only obvious thing would be that we did, at that time, stay in touch with as many different people as we could, with members of the democratic reform movement, with opposition people, with dissidents, even when it was maybe pushing the envelope a little bit at that time to do it. I think the United States government has generally been out in front of other diplomatic establishments in doing that, no matter the society. I've done it in many different countries, including some pretty nasty ones, far nastier than Putin's Russia, so I know that we are doing that in Russia today. We do have these consulates and the American Corners around Russia so that we do stay in touch, and I just think it's very, very important to have some contact between the American diplomats and all manner of people who live in that country. You never know what's going to happen. You really cannot predict the future. You never know where future leaders are going to come from. To the degree you can, it's very useful to try to influence those people.

I represent the Open World exchange program, largely with Russia but with other countries as well, including Ukraine. We don't try to coerce anyone into any particular form of thinking or way of thinking, but quite frankly we do try to influence these young leaders in a positive manner and to develop positive feelings toward the United States as they visit us. That's why Congress appropriates the money for the program, and that's what we do.

**MERRY:** I would add that diplomacy in international relations is about people. It's not about models. We have a tendency of trying to put people into stereotypical boxes and understanding them within conceptual frameworks that don't give them enough credit. For years, the United States didn't give Gorbachev enough credit; we didn't give Yeltsin enough credit. I suspect in some ways that we don't actually even give Putin so much credit. But personal contacts are very important. Who knows the benefits that may have come to the United States because Dick Miles was plying drink on Vladimir Putin when

he was a junior official in the Leningrad city government? And the reason we don't do international relations over the Internet, as Ross Perot once proposed, is because the human factor is extremely important. And I would say that if there is any lesson from that period, it is that you're not going to even begin to be able to predict the unforeseeable, let alone deal with it, if you don't really have your people out and about and actively in touch. The biggest mistake that the Foreign Service—and I don't say this just for the Foreign Service, but for the United States government—has been making in recent years has been pulling its people back into fortresses. The people I worked with, worked for, as well as the people who worked under my supervision in those days, were getting out, even taking some personal risks, but getting out and doing the job the taxpayers were paying us to do.

**MATLOCK:** I agree emphatically with those comments. I would just say that I think one of the most useful lessons we should have taken from our diplomacy in ending the Cold War is that you talk to your adversaries; you don't look for excuses not to. And one of the big differences between the Reagan administration and our current administration is that many of the same forces that today say we shouldn't talk to this country or we can't talk to that country, etc., were the same ones that [at] every small excuse [would] say, "You really can't deal with the Soviet Union. We're just somehow endorsing them if we talk to them."

Reagan turned them down every time. He said, "No, we've got to talk to them. We're on the same planet. We've got to deal with these problems."

And he knew that you don't do that by saying you're going to force a regime change. Who is going to deal with you if that is your goal? [laughter] It sort of boggles the mind. [laughter] That's not a lesson necessarily for dealing with Russia. Actually, we've kept communication with Russia, but our general foreign policy, I think, has definitely suffered from failure to follow that principle. That was a very strong principle in my day.

**COLLINS:** In response to my Ukrainian colleague, I for one have absolutely no regret about the demise of the Soviet Union. In fact, I think it is probably one of the great transforming

moments that is giving new opportunities to a whole host of different peoples across a very big piece of the Earth. That said, I think it's also true that we now face a long period in which it is going to take resources and people and some commitment on the part of not just the American government and the American people, but all of us.

Two things with Russia: one is to ensure that we don't isolate that country or try to force it into itself. In my experience, Russia is least able to cope with the world when it feels it's isolated and under siege. So keeping the world open to the Russian people and Russian involvement is going to be critical.

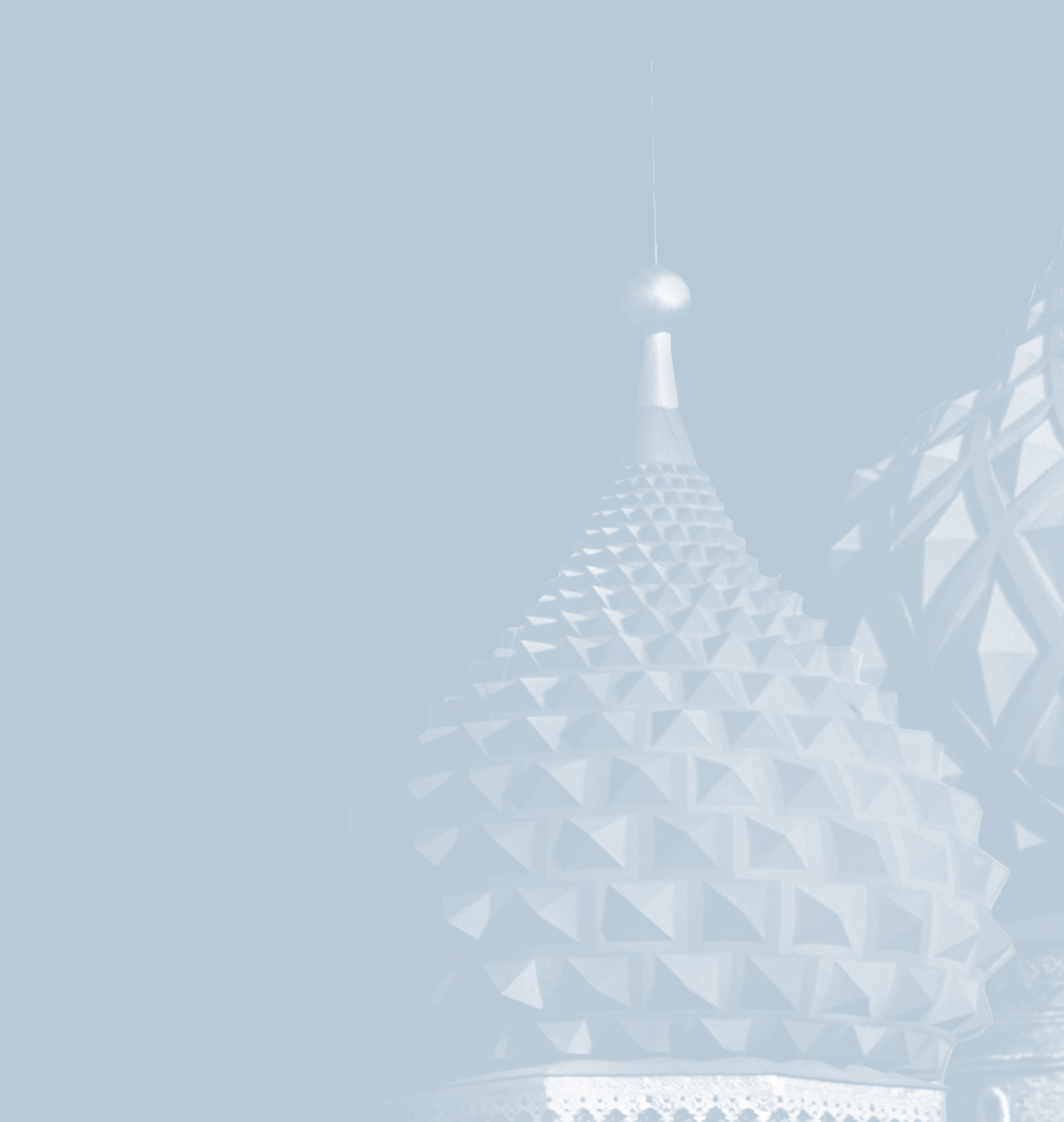
The other thing is simply to underscore what Dick and Wayne and others have said. This is not just the business of government any longer. Russia is, with fits and starts, trying to join in a variety of ways the broadest understanding of the international community, and it's going to take time. I have said to a number of people recently that much of what's going on today reminds me of the debates in Britain before World War I, when a little country by the name of Germany was beginning to assert a role in the world economy and in the colonial effort to establish colonies, etc. It's very instructive to go back and read a bit about how

Germany was described and how people thought about this. Well, Russia finds itself in much the same position as many of the other countries in that part of the world. They are new players on the world stage. The world is having just as big a time getting used to their presence as they are getting used to the idea that the world is now a part of their lives. So it's going to take at least a generation for that process to play out, and we need to have a certain amount of patience and empathy with the people trying to make it happen.

**COHEN:** Jack Matlock made an important point: We did not win the Cold War, but when ideology later persuaded us that we had, that kind of triumphalism helped lead us into Iraq.

Finally, the man whose name this institute bears, George Kennan, wrote in 1950 that when the Soviet communist system eventually ended, we should keep our noses out of Russia's internal affairs and let Russians sort out their own future. We did not follow that advice after 1991. We should begin doing so now.

**RUBLE:** I will point out that we will soon be coming up on the 15th anniversary of 1993, so we'll have more to talk about as we move forward. Thank you.



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