

Introduction

“Hear ye, hear ye, the case of the peoples of the Soviet Union vs. Henry Kissinger is now in session.”

“Mr. Kissinger, you are accused of betraying the cause of liberty and trying to appease tyranny. How do you plead?”

“Not Guilty,” replied the defendant’s co-counsel Mr. Nixon and Mr. Brezhnev.

“Very well, then. Prosecutors Jackson and Sakharov, you may proceed with your case against the accused.”

IN 1975 I was teaching English to a group of dissidents in an apartment in Moscow. Our KGB tails were waiting downstairs. In those days, dissidents fired from their jobs had to find other ways to make a living. Sometimes, we could earn a bit of money by giving each other lessons in various subjects. I taught English.

I tried to compensate for my limited 1,000-word vocabulary by being as entertaining as possible. On this particular afternoon, I employed my favorite pedagogical device: the mock trial. Henry Kissinger, who was then the American Secretary of State, was in the dock. His crime: support of détente. Détente, a French word meaning “relaxation,” was used during the Cold War to describe a policy approach that

was supposed to “ease tensions” between the superpowers. Its detractors—including Soviet dissidents—saw it as a euphemism for appeasement.

One of my students played Kissinger. Since I had four other pupils, two defended Kissinger and two prosecuted him. To spice things up a bit, I decided to have these students also assume the identities of famous figures. Who better to defend Kissinger, I thought, than Richard Nixon and Leonid Brezhnev? While the American president and Soviet Premier might have seemed like natural opponents, when it came to détente, each propped up the other. Both believed an “easing of tensions” served their interests. Nixon, like Kissinger, saw détente as a means to forge a “structure of peace” in which global security and stability could be most effectively advanced. Brezhnev, on the other hand, saw it as a means to preserve the Soviet regime’s grip over its subject populations, weaken the West’s resolve to firmly challenge Soviet expansionism, and prevent an economic, technological and scientific competition for which the Soviets were ill prepared.

The prosecutors would be Henry “Scoop” Jackson and Andrei Sakharov, two courageous figures who had rejected détente. A Democratic senator from the state of Washington, Jackson had co-authored the Jackson-Vanik amendment, a historic piece of legislation that linked most favored nation (MFN) status, under which countries received preferential terms of trade with America, to a foreign government’s protection of its citizens’ right to emigrate. The Soviets had slammed the doors shut on millions who

wanted to leave the USSR, including hundreds of thousands of Jews like myself. Jackson's amendment was designed to force them to open those doors. But Kissinger saw Jackson's amendment as an attempt to undermine plans to smoothly carve up the geopolitical pie between the superpowers. It was. Jackson believed that the Soviets had to be confronted, not appeased.

Andrei Sakharov was another vociferous opponent of détente. He thought it swept the Soviet's human rights record under the rug in the name of improved superpower relations. Sakharov was the father of the Soviet hydrogen bomb, which was tested in 1953. Years later, he unleashed an even more powerful weapon against his own totalitarian rulers by openly calling on them to respect human rights. My relative proficiency in English as well as my eagerness to contribute to the human rights struggle had earned me the privilege of helping Sakharov in his contacts with the international press and visitors from abroad. One message he would consistently convey to these foreigners was that human rights must never be considered a humanitarian issue alone. For him, it was also a matter of international security. As he succinctly put it: "A country that does not respect the rights of its own people will not respect the rights of its neighbors."

I assigned myself the most enviable part of all in our trial, judge. In the spirit of all Soviet mock trials, I made up my mind ahead of time: Kissinger would be stripped of his American citizenship, sentenced to exile in the Soviet Union, and forced to try to emigrate without the benefit of the Jackson Amendment!

I imagine that our mock trial of Henry Kissinger, whose sharp analyses of world affairs are rightfully admired around the world and with whom I would develop a friendly relationship after my release from prison, appears as absurd today as it would have back then to anyone who was not a dissident. The important borders during the Cold War were seen as those that separated capitalists from communists, Americans from Soviets, East from West. But not to dissidents. Of course, more than anyone else, we were painfully aware of these fault lines because we often paid the price for crossing them. Merely talking to a foreign diplomat or entering a foreign journalist's home could land us in an interrogation room or prison cell. Still, while the fault lines framed the larger geopolitical and ideological contours of the superpower face-off, they failed to capture what for many of us was an even more important threshold—a border that did not separate the world as it was, but rather as it might be. On one side stood those who were prepared to confront evil. On the other stood those who were prepared to appease it.

The evil was a totalitarian regime that had killed tens of millions of its own subjects, and ruled an empire of fear by repressing all dissent for over half a century. Those in the West who were willing to reconcile themselves to this tyranny came in all stripes—European and American, Left and Right, Democrat and Republican. Some were well-intentioned, some were naïve, others were venal. Many were simply afraid. But all had one thing in common: They did not believe in the power of freedom to transform the USSR.

More than any other factor, the presence or absence of this belief determined on which side of the border one stood.

There were many skeptics. During the Cold War they included almost every American president and secretary of state and almost every Western European government (with the notable exception of Thatcher's government in the UK) and most of the mainstream media. While the reasons for their skepticism varied, the effect was the same: Actively or passively they supported policies that helped deprive the hundreds of millions of people living in the Soviet Union of their freedom.

For Soviet leaders, whether a bloodthirsty tyrant like Stalin was at the helm or men of a more moderate disposition like Khrushchev and Brezhnev, accommodation with the West was invariably viewed as a means to consolidate the regime's control and expand Soviet power. In contrast, support in the West for détente stemmed from less malevolent motives. There were those who questioned whether the peoples behind the Iron Curtain really wanted democracy. The Russians, after all, had lived under autocratic czars for nearly a millennium. Worse, their brief experiment with democracy in early 1917 led to the rise of an even greater tyranny a few months later. Given that the Russian people and their culture were intrinsically inclined toward despotism, the argument went, pressing for democratic changes within the USSR, though a noble undertaking, was simply a waste of time.

Another argument offered in favor of détente was that a democratic Soviet Union would not necessarily serve the

interests of the West. The Soviet regime was brutal, but predictable. Democratic reforms, on the other hand, could unleash chaos and instability. During the fragmentation of the Soviet Union, this argument was particularly prominent. A single nuclear power was seen as safer and more controllable than a proliferation of small states, each with their own decaying facilities. Additionally, despite the external dangers it posed and its own internal shortcomings, the Soviet Union was seen as helping to put a lid on many smaller conflicts around the world. A decade after the collapse of the USSR, many are still making these same arguments.

The idea that certain peoples are incapable of democratic self-rule or have no desire for it has a long pedigree in Western diplomatic thinking. So too does the notion that the spread of democracy is not always in the democratic world's interest. Still, for most of the Cold War few people bothered to re-examine these old prejudices because almost no one believed that a democratic revolution in the USSR was possible. Efforts by the West to "impose" its values on the Soviets were considered completely unrealistic. The Soviets may not have been the ideal partner, but they were seen as strong and going nowhere. Confrontation, it was believed, would only make things worse—for America, for the Soviets, for everybody. Better to work out a compromise that would bring order and stability to world affairs than to engage in a reckless brinkmanship that had no chance of success. Put simply, most people believed there was little point in fighting a war that could not be won.

Our world has changed so much over the last fifteen years that it may be difficult for today's reader to get a sense of the degree of skepticism there once was in the West over the possibility of a democratic transformation inside the Soviet Union. In the early 1980s, when some were actually arguing that the Soviet Union could be challenged, confronted, and broken, the possibility was dismissed out of hand. The distinguished historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr., expressing the sentiments of nearly all of the Sovietologists, intellectuals, and opinion makers of the time, said that "those in the United States who think the Soviet Union is on the verge of economic and social collapse, ready with one small push to go over the brink are wishful thinkers who are only kidding themselves."¹

An even better measure of the skepticism of the era was the absolute shock that greeted the collapse of the USSR. The most prescient politicians, the most learned academics, the most perceptive journalists did not foresee that hundreds of millions of people could be liberated from decades of totalitarian rule in just a few months. In April 1989, just seven months before the fall of the Berlin Wall, Senator J. William Fulbright, who had served for 15 years as chairman of the Senate's Foreign Relations Committee, co-authored an article dismissing the views of those in the "evil empire school" who believed that Gorbachev's reforms were "no more than the final, feeble, foredoomed effort to hold off the historically inevitable collapse of a wicked system based on an evil philosophy."² Instead, Fulbright offered insight into how the "détente school," in which he included him-

self, understood the changes that were then taking place behind the Iron Curtain:

We suspect that the reforms being carried out in the Soviet Union and Hungary may be evidence not of the terminal enfeeblement of Marxism but of a hitherto unsuspected resiliency and adaptability, of something akin to Roosevelt's New Deal, which revived and rejuvenated an apparently moribund capitalism in the years of Great Depression.³

If scholars and leaders in the West could be so blind to what was happening only months before the fall of the Berlin Wall, imagine what the thinking was in 1975. Back then, the suggestion that the Soviet Union's collapse was inevitable, much less imminent, would have been regarded as absurd by everyone.

Well, almost everyone.

In 1969, a Soviet dissident named Andrei Amalrik wrote *Will the Soviet Union Survive until 1984?*, in which he predicted the collapse of the USSR. Amalrik, to whom I would later have the privilege to teach English, explained that any state forced to devote so much of its energies to physically and psychologically controlling millions of its own subjects could not survive indefinitely. The unforgettable image he left the reader with was that of a soldier who must always point a gun at his enemy. His arms begin to tire until their weight becomes unbearable. Exhausted, he lowers his weapon and his prisoner escapes.

While many in the West hailed Amalrik's courage—he was imprisoned for years and exiled for his observations—almost no one outside the Soviet Union took his ideas seriously. When he wrote his book, short-sighted democratic leaders were convinced the USSR would last forever, and according to many economic indicators, the Soviet Union appeared to be closing the gap on the U.S. Amalrik must have seemed downright delusional.

But inside the USSR, Amalrik's book was not dismissed as the ranting of a lunatic. The leadership knew that Amalrik had exposed the Soviet regime's soft underbelly. They understood their vulnerability to dissident ideas: Even the smallest spark of freedom could set their entire totalitarian world ablaze. That's why dissidents were held in isolation, dissident books were confiscated, and every typewriter had to be registered with the authorities. The regime knew the volatile potential of free thought and speech, so they spared no effort at extinguishing the spark.

I was arrested in 1977 on charges of high treason as well as for "anti-Soviet" activities. After my own mock trial a year later, I was sentenced to thirteen years in prison. In 1984, my KGB jailers, swelling with pride, reminded me of Amalrik's prediction: "You see, Amalrik is dead"—he had died in a car accident in France in 1980—"and the USSR is still standing!"

But Amalrik's prediction had not missed by much. Within a few months of that encounter in the Gulag, Mikhail Gorbachev came to power. Faced with an American administration ready to confront him and realizing that the Soviet regime no longer had the strength both to maintain

control of its subjects and compete with the West, Gorbachev reluctantly implemented his “glasnost” reforms. This limited attempt at “openness” would usher in changes far beyond what Gorbachev intended. Just as Amalrik had predicted, the second the regime lowered its arms, the people it had terrorized for decades overwhelmed it.

How was one Soviet dissident able to see what legions of analysts and policymakers in the West were blind to? Did Amalrik have access to more information than they did? Was he smarter than all the Sovietologists put together? Of course not. Amalrik was neither better informed nor more intelligent than those who had failed to predict the demise of the USSR. But unlike them, he understood the awesome power of freedom.

Dissidents understood the power of freedom because it had already transformed our own lives. It liberated us the day we stopped living in a world where “truth” and “falsehood” were, like everything else, the property of the State. And for the most part, this liberation did not stop when we were sentenced to prison. Having already removed the shackles that imprisoned our minds, our physical confinement could not dull the sense of freedom that coursed through our veins.

We perceived the Soviet Union as a wooden house riddled with termites. From the outside, it might appear strong and sturdy. But inside it was rotting. The Soviets had enough nuclear missiles to destroy the world ten times over. Over 30 percent of the earth’s surface was under communist rule and the Soviets possessed enormous natural resources.

Its people were highly educated, and its children second to none in mathematic and scientific achievement. But forced to devote an increasing share of its energies to controlling its own people, the USSR was decaying from within. The peoples behind the Iron Curtain yearned to be free, to speak their minds, to publish their thoughts, and most of all, to think for themselves. While a few dissidents had the courage to express those yearnings openly, most were simply afraid. We dissidents were certain, however, that freedom would be seized by the masses at the first opportunity because we understood that fear and a deep desire for liberty are not mutually exclusive.

Fortunately there were a few leaders in the West who could look beyond the facade of Soviet power to see the fundamental weakness of a state that denied its citizens freedom. Western policies of accommodation, regardless of their intent, were effectively propping up the Soviet's tiring arms. Had that accommodation continued, the USSR might have survived for decades longer. By adopting a policy of confrontation instead, an enervated Soviet regime was further burdened. Amalrik's analysis of Soviet weakness was correct because he understood the inherent instability of totalitarian rule. But the timing of his prediction proved accurate only because people both inside and outside the Soviet Union who understood the power of freedom were determined to harness that power.

For me, and for many other dissidents, the two men leading the forces of confrontation in America were Senator Henry Jackson and President Ronald Reagan. One a Democrat, the other a Republican, their shared conviction that the

individual's desire for freedom was an unstoppable force convinced them of the possibility of a democratic transformation inside the Soviet Union. Crucially, they also believed that the free world had a critical role to play in accelerating this transformation. Their efforts to press for democratic reform did not stem solely from humanitarian considerations. Like Sakharov, these men understood that the spread of human rights and democracy among their enemies was essential to their own nation's security.

Had Reagan and Jackson listened to their critics, who called them dangerous warmongers, I am convinced that hundreds of millions of people would still be living under totalitarian rule. Instead, they ignored the critics and doggedly pursued an activist policy that linked the Soviet Union's international standing to the regime's treatment of its own people.

The logic of linkage was simple. The Soviets needed things from the West—legitimacy, economic benefits, technology, etc. To get them, leaders like Reagan and Jackson demanded that the Soviets change their behavior toward their own people. For all its simplicity, this was nothing less than a revolution in diplomatic thinking. Whereas statesmen before them had tried to link their countries' foreign policies to a rival regime's *international* conduct, Jackson and Reagan would link America's policies to the Soviet's *domestic* conduct.⁴

In pursuing this linkage, Jackson, Reagan, and those who supported them found the Achilles heel of their enemies. Beset on the inside by dissidents demanding the regime live

up to its international commitments and pressed on the outside by leaders willing to link their diplomacy to internal Soviet changes, Soviet leaders were forced to lower their arms. The spark of freedom that was unleashed spread like a brushfire to burn down an empire. As a dumbfounded West watched in awe, the people of the East taught them a lesson in the power of freedom.

Dazzled by success, policymakers in the West quickly forgot what had provided the basis for it. Astonishingly, the lessons of the West's spectacular victory in which an empire crumbled without a shot fired or a missile launched were neglected. More than fifteen years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the free world continues to underestimate the universal appeal of its own ideas. Rather than place its faith in the power of freedom to rapidly transform authoritarian states, it is eager once again to achieve "peaceful coexistence" and "détente" with dictatorial regimes.

Less than two years after the collapse of the Berlin Wall and immediately after the first Gulf War ended, I met with the editorial board of one of America's most influential newspapers. I suggested that the United States, which had just saved Saudi Arabia and Kuwait from extinction, had an historic opportunity. Now was the time to use America's primacy in the Middle East to start bringing freedom to a region of the world where hundreds of millions are still denied it. I argued that just as the United States had effectively used "linkage" to accelerate changes within the Soviet Union, America should link its policies towards the Arab states to those regimes' respect for the human rights of their

subjects. As a first step, I suggested that America's new-found leverage in the region might be used to insist that Saudi Arabia accept an opposition newspaper or remove some of its severe restrictions on emigration.

The eyes of my hosts quickly glazed over. Their reaction was expressed in terms that Kissinger easily could have used in 1975 in discussing the Soviet Union: "You must understand," they replied politely, "the Saudis control the world's largest oil reserves. They are our allies. It is of no concern to America how the Saudis rule their own country. Saudi Arabia is not about democracy. It is about the stability of the West."

On September 11, 2001, we saw the consequences of that stability. Nineteen terrorists, spawned in a region awash with tyranny, massacred three thousand Americans. I would like to believe that horrific day has dispelled the free world of its illusions and that democratic policymakers recognize that the price for "stability" inside a nondemocratic regime is terror outside of it. I would like to believe that the leaders of the free world are now unequivocally committed to advancing freedom throughout the region not merely for the sake of the hundreds of millions who have never tasted it, but also for the sake of their own countries' security. Most of all, I would like to believe that those who are confident of the power of freedom to change the world will once again see their ideas prevail.

But I have serious doubts. There are, to be sure, important signs of hope. I am heartened by the American-led effort currently underway in the region to build democratic

societies in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as by President Bush's determination to see this effort succeed. Moreover, as was true a generation ago, the belief in the power of freedom is not confined to one side of the political and ideological divide. Across the Atlantic, a left of center British prime minister, Tony Blair, appears no less committed than President Bush to a democratic transformation of the Middle East. And to his credit, Mr. Blair has had to make the case for democracy against the views of many in his own Labour Party and the overwhelming doubt of the British public.

But those who believe that a democratic Middle East is possible are few in number. Within certain parts of America, and nearly everywhere outside of it, the voices of skepticism appear ascendant. Many have questioned whether the democratic world has a right to impose its values on a region that is said to reject them. Most argue that military intervention in the Middle East is causing more harm than good. Even within the Bush administration, the president's words, expressing a profound faith in freedom, are not always translated into policies that reflect that faith.

Freedom's skeptics have returned. They may couch their disbelief in different terms than they did a generation ago. Then, with Soviet's nuclear-tipped missiles pointed at Western capitals, the focus was on the inability of the free world to win the war. Now, it is on the inability to win the peace. Nevertheless, the arguments peddled by the skeptics sound all too familiar.

They insist that there are certain cultures and civilizations that are not compatible with democracy and certain peoples

who do not desire it. They argue that the Arabs need and want iron-fisted rulers, that they have never had democracy and never will, and that their “values are not our values.”

Once again, it is asserted that democracy in certain parts of the world is not in the best interests of the “West.” While it will be readily admitted that the current regimes in the Middle East suppress freedom, those regimes are believed to also suppress a far worse alternative: the radicals and fundamentalists who might win democratic elections. The message is clear: It is better to deal with a Middle Eastern dictatorship that is our friend than a democratic regime that is our enemy.

Finally, it is said that even if the free world might be made more secure by the region’s democratization, there is little the democracies can do to help. We are told that freedom cannot be imposed from the outside and that any attempt to do so will only backfire, further fanning the flames of hatred. Since democratic reform can only come from within, the prudent role for leaders of the free world, it is argued, is to make the best of a bad situation. Rather than recklessly trying to create a new Middle East that is beyond reach and which will provoke greater hostility toward the “West,” democratic leaders are advised to work with the “moderate” non-democratic regimes in the region to promote peace and stability.

One thing unites all of these arguments: They deny the power of freedom to transform the Middle East. In this book, I hope to explain why the skeptics are as wrong today as they were a generation ago and why the West must not betray the freedoms on which it was built.

I am convinced that *all* peoples desire to be free. I am convinced that freedom *anywhere* will make the world safer *everywhere*. And I am convinced that democratic nations, led by the United States, have a critical role to play in expanding freedom around the globe. By pursuing clear and consistent policies that link its relations with nondemocratic regimes to the degree of freedom enjoyed by the subjects of those regimes, the free world can transform any society on earth, including those that dominate the current landscape of the Middle East. In so doing, tyranny can become, like slavery, an evil without a future.

The great debate of my youth has returned. Once again, the world is divided between those who are prepared to confront evil and those who are willing to appease it. And once again, the question that ultimately separates members of the two camps remains this: Do you believe in the power of freedom to change the world? I hope that those who read this book will count themselves, like me, among the believers. Here, then, is the case for democracy.

