

Why Is the World So Dangerous?

1. [The dangers we face are not confined to military forces. The level of global violence has risen sharply and suddenly. In just the last several months we have seen the shoot-down of KAL Flight 007, the assassination of Benigno Aquino, the murderous decapitation of South Korea's leadership in Rangoon, the terrorist bombings of US, French, and Israeli soldiers in Lebanon, the Libyan invasion of Chad, and the anti-Bishop coup in Grenada that ultimately triggered our own successful action on that island. What makes these acts of violence so especially disturbing is their common denominator: each has hurt the citizens, governments, or interests of the Free World.]

2. [Clearly, the world has become a much more dangerous place. We need to know why. Are these acts of violence somehow linked, or merely part of a series of frightening, tragic, but unconnected events whose one-after-another timing is mere coincidence?]

3. I believe the current outbreak of violence is more than coincidence. More precisely, I believe it signals the beginning of a new stage in the global struggle between the Free World and the Soviet Union. My contention rests on a perception that present US policies have fundamentally changed the course of history in a direction favorable to the interests and security of ourselves and our allies. What we are seeing now is a Soviet-led effort to fight back, in the same sense that the Mafia fights back when law enforcement agencies launch an effective crime-busting program. Let me concede right now that I cannot prove this -- if your definition of proof is restricted to intercepts, photographs, and purloined documents. Of course these things matter. They matter hugely. But to truly understand an alien phenomenon like the Soviet Union, one needs to go beyond a listing of facts; one needs also to make a leap of imagination:

4. Suppose four years ago the Soviet leadership had asked my counterpart, Yuri Andropov, then chief of the KGB -- for his evaluation of the global struggle. He might have replied: "Comrades, I'm delighted to report that the correlation of forces is moving steadily in our direction." He would have cited the following trends to support his upbeat analysis:

- The US economy was faltering.
- US defense spending was too low to truly assure the nation's security.
- The Soviet Union had established a mechanism for the steady flow of wealth from West to East.

- The Soviet Union had established a companion mechanism to assure the steady flow of technology from West to East.
- The Soviet Union, through the effective use of surrogates such as Cuba and Vietnam, had developed a technique for spreading its influence throughout the Third World by targeting fragile countries, destabilizing them, and swiftly taking over.
- Through the massive deployment of SS-20s, the Soviets were changing the balance of power in Europe.
- In more and more countries, policymakers, elites, and the masses were coming to accept the Soviets' long-standing claim that time was on their side; that one needed only to align with Moscow to be on the winning team.

5. Were the Chief of the KGB called in by Chairman Andropov today and asked for his evaluation, I believe he would sing a very different song. He might say: "Comrades something has gone wrong. The US is refusing to accept history!" He could cite in support of this thesis that:

- The US economy is now growing sharply, with the only argument focusing on the breadth and duration of the boom.
- US defense spending is up, with the debate in Congress and on the campaign hustings focusing only on the proper size of the increase.
- The flow of wealth from the West to the East is less than the Soviets had anticipated it would be by now. (Moscow's most audacious project, the Siberia to Western Europe pipeline, had been literally cut in half by US opposition; after all, the pipeline was originally to have comprised two strands, and lately no one either in Western Europe or the Soviet Union has even mentioned that second strand.)
- The flow of technology from West to East is less than the Soviets had anticipated it would be by now. In part, by reducing the flow of wealth the US also reduced the Soviet Union's ability to buy equipment and know-how. And the US-led crack-down on illegal technology transfers had put a crimp in that key effort.
- The Soviet mechanism for gaining power over the Third World, while still a considerable threat to Western security, has run into unexpected resistance. Soviet textbooks insist that anti-Soviet Third World insurgencies cannot develop. Yet in 1983 there are five of them -- in Nicaragua, Mozambique, Angola, Kampuchea and Afghanistan.

Thus Moscow can no longer target a Third-World country and assume that no serious resistance will develop. Most worrisome of all is the shocking setback in Grenada.

- With deployment now certain of Pershing IIs and cruise missiles, NATO is about to change the balance of power in Europe back to its favor.
- And most dangerous of all, by describing the Soviet Union as "the focus of evil" US President Reagan has singlehandedly deployed the one weapon for which the Soviets lack even a rudimentary defense: the truth.

6. From Moscow's perspective, the immediate danger would be the taking hold of a perception among leaders and voters throughout the West, but particularly in the US, that this new course was not only right but also successful. Surely Western politicians -- especially those up for re-election -- would chortle: "You see, we were exactly right to stand up to the Russians. We are defending our own interests more effectively now, and it's working." The inevitable result of this approach would be precisely what Soviet leaders dreaded most: widespread public support for the new US course and, therefore, a continuation or even an acceleration of it.

7. If Moscow's chief objective were to knock the US off its course, Moscow's most likely strategy would be to discredit this course through the following tactics:

- Raise the level of violence, thus making the world a more dangerous place. (Keep in mind that US tolerance of violence has declined markedly during the last 10 years.)
- Attribute the increased violence and danger to the inevitable result of reckless US policies. (It could be safely assumed that members of the US media and other elites would swiftly pick up and amplify this theme.)
- Hope that voters will force a change of course, either by replacing the incumbent leaders or forcing them to adopt more "moderate" policies.

8. To implement this strategy, the Soviets would not need to commit each and every act of violence themselves. They would commit some, arrange for others to be committed by surrogates or allies, and generally create an atmosphere in which violence flourishes.

9. Some Soviet experts believe, and some of them may be in Moscow, that if the Soviet Union does not achieve its ambition to displace the US as the world's pre-eminent power within -- very roughly -- the next 20 years, the Soviet Union will never succeed.

- The Soviet Union has failed utterly to become a country. Of more than 100 nationality groups there is not one major non-Russian nationality group that is content with the present, Russian-controlled arrangement; not one that does not yearn for its political and economic freedom.
- If present economic trends continue, living standards will decline. We should under-estimate the Russians' capacity for belt-tightening, but there is a limit, and that limit is coming closer every year.
- The Soviet Union is a demographic nightmare. Today only about half the country's population can speak Russian; for an industrialized, technologically-advanced society, this is intolerable.
- The East European satellites are becoming more and more difficult to control. Already economic growth rates in the key satellites are marginal, non-existent, or negative. These rates will decline further as the Soviet Union moves to insulate itself from the rising costs of empire by squeezing its satellites harder, for example by raising the prices of its raw materials and paying its satellites less for the finished goods the Soviet Union then buys. Economic trouble leads inevitably to political unrest, so the question is not whether Moscow's difficulties will mount but rather how bad things will get.

10. The Soviet leadership simply cannot make the changes necessary to either reverse these trends or cope with them. Kremlin leaders could boost their country's economic growth rate only by slashing the defense budget or by enacting massive economic reforms. Either remedy would threaten the Communist Party's grip on power, thus neither remedy has the slightest chance of being administered. The demographic nightmare is equally difficult to end. Moscow cannot transfer industrial-production capacity from the Russian to the non-Russian, and especially non-Slav, republics. Doing so would give these republics more power over Moscow than Moscow is willing to risk. And Moscow cannot import workers to Russian factories from Moslem republics because these workers (a) don't speak Russian, (b) don't want to come, and (c) would be bitterly resented by Russian workers, who would be required to share scarce housing and food with individuals they view as racially inferior.

11. In sum, time is not on the Soviet Union's side. This assertion is now widely accepted among Western observers, as I've noted. But its staggering implications have scarcely been absorbed. To do so we need to make yet another leap of imagination, this one to consider the phenomenon of thwarted ambition:

12. We have all known individuals who have come to recognize that time is no longer their ally: the 45-year-old corporation vice president who realizes that he may never make chairman; the 35-year old childless woman who lies awake at night, listening to the relentless ticking of her biological clock; the campaigning politician who has confidently brushed aside polls that show him trailing his opponent by 20 points, and who now realizes that with just two weeks left before election day, that lead may be too big to close. The perception that time is no longer on one's side may take weeks or even years to develop, and often it is obvious to others first. But by definition the perception comes suddenly.

13. There are, in fact, just two ways to cope with the perception that time has become an enemy. The first is to accept the unpleasant reality, and to resign one's self to reduced expectations: life as a mid-level corporate manager isn't so bad, there are advantages to not having children, it'll be nice to leave public life for a while. This is quite often an honorable and perfectly sensible approach.

14. The second response is to go for it. That is, to refuse to meekly accept one's likely fate, and instead to work or even fight for whatever it is one wants. This, too, is quite often an honorable and perfectly sensible approach. But it is a phenomenon of human nature that from the moment one concludes that time is an enemy and that the proper response is to go for it -- all is changed. Ideas and actions that were unthinkable the day before are now quite thinkable and even appealing. Why? Because the alternative is failure, and this is judged to be unacceptable. Ambitious, seemingly defeated mid-level business executives who have taken desperate and daring measures populate our corporate boardrooms. They populate our prisons, too. The 35-year-old single woman who conceives a child before finding a husband has gone from a scandal to a national trend. And the history of desperate politicians in the final days of their campaigns is the stuff of Washington legends.

15. All this means that if present trends continue, we're going to win the Cold War. That is, the US will continue to be the world's pre-eminent power and the Free World will both survive and flourish.

16. It has long been fashionable to view the Cold War as a permanent feature of global politics, one that will endure through the next several generations at least. But it seems to me more likely that President Reagan was absolutely correct when he observed in his Notre Dame speech that the Soviet Union -- "one of history's saddest and most bizarre chapters" -- is entering its final pages. In short, the Free World has out-distanced the Soviet Union economically, crushed it ideologically, and held it off politically. The only serious arena of competition left is military.

17. We should be optimistic, for if present trends continue we will win. But we must also be on guard, for incumbent or future Soviet leaders may not choose to await their fates quietly while their empire completes its shattering descent into history. The current outbreak of violence may thus be merely a prelude to the most dangerous years we have ever known.