

DISCUSSIONS ABOUT CAUSES OF DISSOLUTION OF THE USSR IN MODERN AMERICAN POLITICAL SCIENCE

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Abstract

This article analyzes the causes of dissolution of the Soviet Union in the publications of American political scientists. More than twenty-five years have passed since dissolution of the USSR, the most important event in world history in the end of the 20th century. Despite the past years, among historians, political scientists and current politicians, disputes about causes that have led to this epoch-making event do not cease. For some, dissolution of the Soviet Union seems to be a triumph of Western democratic values and a market economy, while for others it is 'the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century'. Particular attention is paid to the analysis of the causes of dissolution of the USSR in American political science. After analyzing the various approaches to the problem of dissolution of the USSR, which have become firmly established in American political science, the authors come to the conclusion that, despite the years that have passed since this event, there was no consensus in the US scientific community with regard to causes of the tectonic shift in the global policy represented by the dissolution of the second superpower.

Keywords: political science, scientific community, dissolution of the Soviet Union, Cold War, socialist system.

I. INTRODUCTION

More than 25 years have passed since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the most important event in world history of the late 20th century. In spite of the years passed, historians, political scientists and active politicians are still debating on causes of this landmark event. Some of them see the dissolution of the Soviet Union as the triumph of democratic values and market economy, while others think that it was 'the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century'. The particular attention is paid to the analysis of causes that led to the dissolution of the USSR in the American political science, since the USA are sure that they won the 'Cold War' and their strategy of containment eventually resulted in the collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist system as a whole.

II. METHODOLOGY

As for general scientific methods, we used the systematic approach requiring the holistic view of the research subject. This approach promoted the comprehensive examination of works by American historians and political scientists dealing with the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

The historical approach allows researchers to study the establishment of main concepts concerning the

dissolution of the USSR in works by American political scientists since 1991 up to now.

The objective approach requires unbiased, clear-eyed consideration of the problem in hand. The objective analysis of works by American political scientists is very important for estimation of the USA role in the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

The chronological approach allows us to identify the main periods in development of American scientific literature dealing with the question under consideration.

The comparative approach helps us to reveal similarities and differences in works by American researchers dealing with the dissolution of the USSR.

III. DISCUSSION

Just after the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, American historians and political scientists, as if being confused by this event, limited themselves to publishing individual newspaper articles dealing with it. But a few years later, the volume of publications dealing with the dissolution of the USSR increased significantly. American scholars and politicians tried to answer the question why the second superpower disappeared so quickly and what undermined its internal strength and devoted to collapse?

IV. RESULTS

Now there are several approaches to this problem in American political science:

Overstress in arms race

Presidents R. Reagan and G. Bush have inspired the school in American political science whose representatives believe that the dissolution of the USSR was caused by its inability to be on equal footing with the USA in the strategic arms race. They declared many times that in the 1980s the USSR could not spend 40% of its research works and up to 28% of its gross domestic product for military needs and to deploy its intermediate-range missiles in Europe on a par with the USA.

When R. Reagan was asked about the most important achievement of his presidency, he said: 'I won the Cold War'. During the presidential debates in 1992, G. Bush stated: 'We did not agree with an opinion of the group that demanded to freeze the nuclear arms race. President Reagan said no to this group, since peace could be achieved only due to the increase of our power. And it worked'. As a result, without seeing positive prospects in competition with the unrivaled economic and war machine of the USA, 'Soviet leaders couldn't but renounce communism and agree with the dissolution of their empire' [1, p.17].

While explaining the collapse of the Soviet Union, President G. Bush constantly expressed his opinion that 'the Soviet communism could not compete as an equal with the free enterprise system. It was fatal for its leaders to tell their people the truth about us. It is wrong to say that the Soviet Union lost the cold war; it is better to say that western democracies won it' [2, p.194-195]. The US Secretary of Defense C. Weinberger also wrote about the critical importance of arms race in the dissolution of the USSR: 'Our will to spend more and to strengthen the weapon structure has a necessary effect on Soviet leaders. Fight for peace has achieved its goal' [3, p.31].

The US Secretary of Defense and head of CIA J. Schlesinger called the end of the Cold War 'the triumph of the United States – the triumph of foresight, national determination and stability that have been shown for 40 years' [4, p.17]. The prominent figure in the Republican Party, the member of the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, senator R. Lugar was also sure that this point of view is right. He writes: 'Ronald Reagan came out for the increase of military appropriations and for extension of military research, including the Strategic Defense Initiative. These programs turned out to be the basis for achievement of breath-taking foreign-policy goals, such as the recoil of Soviet communism, negotiations about destruction of medium-range missiles in Europe and the fall of Berlin wall. Achievement of Reagan's goals demonstrated the irrefutable wisdom of his policy' [5, p.86-87].

According to the well-known American political scientist Z. Brzezinski, the Soviet Union started to give way when the USA strongly disagreed with deployment of the intermediate-range missiles SS-20 and set its program of Pershing-2 deployment against it. 'Large-scale development of military capability in the USA in the early 1980s, plus the Strategic Defense Initiative shocked the Soviets and resulted in the strain of their resources'. According to Brzezinski, the Kremlin knew that the USSR will be unable to withstand the competition as early as in the middle of the 1980s. That is why M. Gorbachev who took over in 1985 'willingly grabbed an olive branch offered to him by Reagan's administration, hoping to ease the arms race pressure' [6, p.42].

Such explanation of the USSR collapse immediately faced counter-arguments. Other American researchers make a point that Soviet troops were withdrawn from Afghanistan and Eastern Europe much later than the peak of attempts made by R. Reagan's administration in the field of military development (1981-1984). Critics of the 'triumphalist approach' point at weakness of the narrative about 'over-fatigue of the Soviet Union' and remind that in the 1980s the USSR was much stronger than in the 1950s or 1960s. And no one has managed to prove the connection between Reagan's military development and collapse of the Soviet system.

According to A. Carter, there is no direct evidence that radical changes in the Soviet Union were caused by actions of the US administration. M. Mandelbaum comes clean and declares that the main achievement of Reagan and Bush in the grand changes of 1989 was that they stood aside. As early as in 1983, the American historian R. Pipes maintained that 'no responsible politician can cherish illusions that the West is able to change the Soviet system or to bring the Soviet economy to its knees' [7, p.294].

Today, it is becoming evident that US hardliners were just bewildered by the end of the Cold War due to the fact that the collapse of the communist system and dissolution of the Soviet Union were less connected with the US containment strategy than internal processes in the USSR. According to D. Deudney and J. Ikenberry, 'the point of view that Reagan got a victory is a remarkable example of simplification. Increase of Soviet defense expenditures does not explain the end of Cold War and changes in the general direction of Soviet policy' [8, p.131].

Due to gaps in the evidence of the effect of US military development on the Soviet Union, American researchers soon started to focus on some other factors.

Soviet system was inherently flawed

Communism fell due to inherent contradictions. According to C. Fairbanks, 'the nature of the beast' contained the internal weakness that manifested itself at the moment of stress. The same point of view is generally characteristic for Z. Brzezinski who wrote many papers about misrepresenting nature of the communist ideology and its inability to give the right direction of social and economic development. The prominent American historian A. Schlesinger took the similar view: 'Given its inherent impracticality, the Soviet Empire was eventually doomed by any measure' [9, p.10]. Adherents of this point of view disprove the narrative of the military and economic 'overheating' of the USSR as naïve and unjustified. They are convinced that 'the Soviet Union lost the Cold War largely because its political system turned out to be flawed, but not due to the containment by the USA' [10, p.142].

Adherents of this point of view make a common conclusion that the system of liberal market economy showed its superiority over the planned system. Not only Kremlin leaders, but also the general Soviet public concluded that communism cannot be a successful rival of capitalism based on the modern science. The famous American political scientist F. Fukuyama defined the triumph of market economy as follows: 'The crucial crisis of communism started when Chinese leaders acknowledged their lagging behind the rest of Asia and saw that centralized socialist planning destines China for underdevelopment and poverty' [11, p.41].

Such interpretations come down to a statement that the communist system was unviable from the very beginning and all it took was time for it to collapse. Inadequacy of communism to the economic reality of the late 20th century was the main cause of the collapse of the Soviet Union.

USSR was destroyed by internal evolution

The third point of view concerning causes of the dissolution of the Soviet Union is based on the supremacy of internal political processes in the USSR. Adherents of this interpretation give priority to the spread of liberal ideas and attractive ideological concepts and emphasize the impact of liberal western world view on the self-isolated Soviet society.

Such researchers are focused on changes that took place in the USSR and East European countries such as emergence of the middle class, formation of the liberal approach to economy, culture, ideology. Critically important were the liberal ideas that gained the grassroots support. 'The crucial role was played by the moral rethinking of more than seventy years of the socialist experiment, which shook the nation, but not Reagan's *Star Wars*. They were affected by a cascade of publications about human rights in the Soviet Union, about distortion of moral and ethical principles that discredited the system, especially when these publications became ingrained in citizens' everyday lives through media. It was this factor that focused the movement for changes and made people vote against the corrupt old elite' [12, p.183].

The basis for formation of a social stratum interested in improvement of relations with the West was created

by development of multilateral international contacts. The growing sense of arms race absurdity undermined the USSR more than any missiles. Therefore, it was the internal dissatisfaction that played the central role in measures taken by the Soviet leader to decrease the military power of his country.

Role of individual in the Soviet history

The fourth point of view concerning the dissolution of the USSR is based on the crucial role of leaders in the historical process. 'Over less than seven years, Mikhail Gorbachev has transformed the world. He turned upside down everything in his country. He vanquished the Soviet empire in the Eastern Europe by force of his will. He put an end to the Cold War, which dominated in the international policy and swallowed up the nations' wealth for half a century' [13, p.11]. This stand is taken by such prominent American politicians as the State Secretary J. Baker: 'The end of the Cold War was possible thanks to one person – Mikhail Gorbachev. Current changes would not have started, if it were not for him' [14, p.33].

The US ambassador to the USSR J. Matlock wrote: 'If we want to do justice to one person who smashed the communist domination in the Soviet Union, it will be Mikhail Gorbachev' [15, p.671]. According to J. Turpin, 'the Cold War would not have ended without Gorbachev. He started perestroika, which included the freedom of speech, political reforms and economic changes. He withdrew from 'Brezhnev's doctrine' and allowed the Warsaw Pact countries to become independent. He renounced Marxism-Leninism. And above all, he stopped the arms race and nuclear confrontation' [16, p.47].

Representatives of this point of view agree that Gorbachev was 'a genuine reformer, but not a revolutionary – a leader who knew that the USSR needed major changes, but still believed that everything could be done within the scope of the socialist system' [17, p.33]

We can distinguish three approaches to M. Gorbachev's place and role in history in works by American historians and political scientists:

- 1) Gorbachev is a bit player in the Russian player, but not a real reformist. He initiated some changes with a view to augment his personal power, but it involuntarily resulted in reforms uncontrolled by him.
- 2) Gorbachev started to implement reforms, but went astray very soon. The changes turned out to be so extensive that Gorbachev could not even understand their meaning, not to mention controlling them. In the end, he fell victim to his own reforms.
- 3) Gorbachev was a genuine reformist, but he had to face the resistance on the part of the communist party leaders who opposed innovations and it threatened him with removal from power if he continued the straight motion. It led him to tactical trade-offs, in the course of which he tried to get rid of the communist party control. His understanding of reforms was becoming more and more radical and if had had several more months, he would have been successful in removal of the communist party from power and would have founded a state based on the rule of law and retained a confederative union of the main Soviet republics [18, p.656].

Combination of factors

There are many American researchers who do not explain the dissolution of the USSR based on only one factor. Careful and thoughtful authors speak of combination of factors, which led to a known result.

The American historian P. Kennedy identified three following factors:

- 1) Legitimacy crisis of the Soviet system;
- 2) Crisis of the economic system and social structures;
- 3) Crisis of ethnic and intercultural relations.

The political scientist J. Brown finds six factors:

- 1) Forty years of arrested development;
- 2) Illegitimacy of communism;
- 3) Loss of Soviet elite's confidence in its ability to run the country;
- 4) Elite's unwillingness to strengthen its role;
- 5) Improvement of relations between the East and West;
- 6) Gorbachev's initiatives.

V. CONCLUSION

Therefore, after analyzing various approaches to the problem of the dissolution of the USSR established in the American political science, we can conclude that, in spite of the fact that this event happened almost 30 years ago, the US academic community has not developed the agreement with regard to causes of the tectonic shift in the global policy represented by the dissolution of the second superpower.

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