
By Paul Krehbiel

When the Soviet Union disbanded in 1991, political leaders, journalists and scholars from conservative to liberal said it was due to the inherent failure of socialism. Strobe Talbott, a liberal career diplomat, and expert on the Soviet Union who served as Deputy Secretary of State under Bill Clinton, said after the downfall: "The Soviet Union collapsed: the Cold War ended almost overwhelmingly because of internal contradictions or pressures within the Soviet Union and the Soviet system itself." (Victory: The Reagan Administration's Secret Strategy that Hastened the Collapse of the Soviet Union, by Peter Schweizer, p. xii, Introduction).

Conservative British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher triumphantly proclaimed, "There is no alternative" to the so-called free market economy of capitalism. The New York Times, December 26, 1991 wrote about the end of the Soviet Union as if it were giving the obituary of a sick elderly person who died of natural causes. "The Soviet state, marked throughout its brief but tumultuous history by great achievement and terrible suffering, died today after a long and painful decline. It was 74 years old."

It is my contention that the Soviet Union didn't collapse on its own in 1991, and its end had little to do with alleged weaknesses in socialism. The Soviet Union, and especially its economy, was the target of a highly sophisticated secret ten-year campaign of sabotage by US capital, organized and led by die-hard anti-communists in the Reagan Administration under the direction of former CIA director William Casey. Socialism as an economic, political and social system is sound. It was the intense campaign of sabotage by the US, and miscalculations by the top leadership of the Soviet Communist Party that ended socialism in the Soviet Union.

While the secret campaign of destruction was underway, the public was fed a variety of stories around the theme that socialism was a fatally flawed system. One of those was that the Soviet public rejected a sick
socialist society unable to provide a good life for its people. Another claimed that there was an inherent and unsolvable internal economic crisis. A third argued that the arms race was responsible. A fourth was that Gorbachev's reform program loosened controls over society, creating chaos. The US State Department wrote: "Gorbachev's decision to loosen the Soviet yoke on the countries of Eastern Europe created an independent, democratic momentum that led to the collapse of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, and then the overthrow of communist rule throughout Eastern Europe... Bush chose to let events unfold organically...." (Office of the Historian, "The Collapse of the Soviet Union.")

All of this fit neatly with the long history of US anti-communism. It began with the US government sending US troops into Russia in 1918, along with at least 14 other countries to support the counter-revolutionary Russian White Army in an effort to overthrow the young socialist republic. The UK's Winston Churchill said the military invasion was an effort to "strangle" the socialist baby in its crib. This anti-communist war failed, at a loss of an estimated 1.5 million combatants on both sides, and five to nine million Russian citizens. The attempts by the US government and capitalist elite to undermine and overthrow the Soviet Government continued almost unabated until the Soviet Union's demise in 1991. It is not the purpose of this paper to detail every US attempt to undermine and overthrow the Soviet government. I will focus on the secret war waged by the US against the Soviet Union during the critical ten-year period from 1981-1991 as one key factor, and will argue that the end of the Soviet Union was not inevitable and does not "prove" that socialism is unviable. In fact, I believe the opposite.

**Soviet Economy Growing**

The first step taken by the Reagan Administration to ramp up the anti-communist campaign took place shortly after Reagan assumed the presidency. In May 1981 President Reagan told students at Notre Dame University, "The West will not contain communism, it will transcend it... We'll dismiss it as a sad, bizarre chapter in human history whose last pages are even now being written." (Schweizer, xiii-xiv). Reagan knew more than he was telling. There followed a steady barrage of lies intended to malign the Soviet Union, and socialism in the eyes of the American public. The focus was on destroying the Soviet economy.

Neither Reagan nor other government leaders told the true hard facts about the Soviet Union and Soviet life. For example, the Soviet Union's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) had grown from $820 billion in 1977 to $1.2 trillion in 1980, and kept climbing. Hardly a sign of decay. Studies and individual reports during this period revealed that life was improving for the vast majority of people. Arthur Schlesinger, a noted Harvard
Reagan’s secret war helped crash the Soviet economy in the late 1980s. University professor, author and leading intellectual who was also an anti-communist, wrote after a 1982 visit to the Soviet Union: "I found more goods in the shops, more food in the markets, more cars on the streets, more of almost everything...Each superpower has economic troubles; neither is on the ropes." Reports like these got little or no public exposure. (Schweizer, xiv).

The growth and development of the Soviet Union was remarkable from the earliest years, yet was largely ignored by the US government and the corporate-owned mass media throughout the history of the Soviet Union. Russia began in 1917 with a wholly underdeveloped economy due to three centuries of stultifying feudalism. Over 80% of the people were poor peasants, most of whom were farming small plots of land. Capitalism and industrialization was in its infancy, and much of the economy was in ruins from WWI from 1914-1917 and from the Civil War from 1918-21. Rebuilding efforts were slow since feudal society did not train people to build a new industrial society, and the obstacles were great. However, progress was made in the 1920s under these conditions, especially under the New Economic Policy (NEP). But not fast enough. Party leader Stalin told workers assembled at the First Conference of Workers in 1931 that they would have to play an important role in indus-
trializing the Soviet Union. That was the key to getting out of underdevelopment and becoming a strong industrial society. "We are fifty or a hundred years behind the advanced countries," Stalin said. "We must make up this gap in ten years. Either we do it or they will crush us." By "advanced" countries he was referring to the capitalist countries the United States, Great Britain, Germany, France and several others, all of whom tried to overthrow the infant socialist republic during the counter-revolutionary civil war.

In 1941 ten years after Stalin's speech, Nazi Germany invaded the USSR, overran the Ukraine and threatened Moscow. But the Soviet Union had successfully built up its industry, economy and military in a series of spectacular achievements in ten short years. The Soviet Red Army repelled the Nazis at Moscow's door, and handed the fascists many hard-fought but stunning defeats over the next four years, bearing the brunt of the war against Hitler's military might. The defeat of the Nazis and the end of the war can be attributed largely to the Soviet Union and its Red Army. While the victory was important for the Soviet Union, all Allied countries and humanity, the Soviet Union lost 27 million people, and had much of its land, factories, roads, livestock, homes and other buildings destroyed. A new rebuilding process was undertaken again. The Roosevelt administration had eased tension with the Soviet Union in the 1930s, as did the brief war-time alliance between the Soviet Union and the US. If that neutral attitude from the US toward the Soviet Union had remained in place the Soviet Union would have grown and flourished at an even greater pace.

But the WWII alliance was broken by the US immediately after the war when the US government and the capitalist elite turned its attention toward undermining and threatening the USSR, its economic development and its security plans. In fact, the assault began just before the war was over. The US nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan was not to force Japan to surrender, as the public story goes (Japan had tried to surrender several months earlier). The bombing was to terrorize the So-
viet Union with the clear message that it could be the next target of such a horribly destructive weapon. In the early 1950s the US military was embroiled in a war on the Korean peninsula, supporting the anti-communist South Korea and waging a horrific bombing campaign to destroy North Korea. Since that period until 1991, the Soviet people faced nearly constant attempts by the US to undermine the Soviet government and socialism through economic sanctions and blockades, economic sabotage, military threats and more. When Reagan was elected president of the US in 1980, his administration greatly increased this long-standing campaign.

In June 1982, Reagan addressed the British Parliament about an economic crisis which "... is happening not in the free, non-Marxist West, but in the home of Marxism-Leninism, the Soviet Union...What we see here is a political structure that no longer corresponds to its economic base, a society where production forces are hampered by political ones." (Schweizer, xiv).

Reagan conveniently left out the real story. In 1982 the Soviet Union's GDP rose to $1.5 trillion. Soviet citizens were working - there was virtually no unemployment, and they received free education through college, free health care, and low-cost housing, all paid for through a progressive tax structure. Nor did Reagan say anything about the recession gripping the US that year, due to the inherent downturns in capitalism, that saw 15 million workers out of work. Nor did Reagan say anything about the scores of capitalist and capitalist-controlled countries that had much higher unemployment, massive poverty, rampant diseases that could be eradicated, widespread suffering, and short life expectancies. Many hard-pressed countries suffered directly as a result of the exploitation by US imperialism. George Schultz, former president of the giant military contactor Bechtel, and Reagan's Secretary of State, tried to explain Reagan's shoot-from-the-hip utterances: "President Reagan just had an innate sense that the Soviet Union would not, could not, survive. That feeling was not based on a detailed learned knowledge of the Soviet Union; it was just instinct." (Schweizer, xvii)

Reagan: Anti-Communist FBI Informant

Instinct? It was more than instinct. Ronald Reagan long held an ideological hatred for socialism and communism born during his days
in Hollywood as a struggling B grade actor who rode the anti-communist bandwagon during the McCarthy Cold War period to a successful career. He publicly denounced people he believed were socialists and communists in the film industry and the Screen Actors Guild while acting as a secret informant for the FBI. Reagan destroyed the careers of many talented and beloved directors, writers and actors. Reagan was rewarded by being given a job as a pitchman for the General Electric Theater TV show -- the best job he ever had in show business, the one that saved his "career" and gave him economic security for the first time. Reagan used this TV program to build name recognition to enter politics, first in his successful run for Governor of California where he empowered right-wing and racist forces to help his election.

Using the same strategy, he was elected president in 1980. He immediately agreed to former CIA Director William Casey's plan to undermine and destroy the Soviet Union through a combination of economic warfare and sabotage, hot and cold war, a punishing arms race, and sophisticated and heated psychological and political warfare.

It is true that there were problems in the Soviet Union, just as there were and are in every other country. They involved problems in production, increasingly inaccessible domestic raw materials such as oil, dramatically falling world oil prices (the Soviet Union was a major world producer of oil and natural gas), political restrictions on local initiative that hurt creativity in problem solving and innovations, limited democratic rights, continuing anger over the past repressive rule and crimes from the Stalin era, and more. After four years of secret sabotage of the Soviet economy by the Reagan-Casey team the economic problems worsened, just as the new leader of the Soviet Communist Party, Mikhail Gorbachev, took office.

Gorbachev took what appeared to be radical reform steps to reverse the losses and hardships, boost the economy, and improve the quality of life under socialism. One part of this process was to open up public analysis and criticism of past and current shortcomings and wrongdoings. Progress was made in a number of areas. However, by 1987 the increasing public criticisms opened the doors for opponents of the system to assume positions of authority, especially in the mass media, and sow confusion and opposition to socialism. (See Yegor Ligachev, Inside Gorbachev's Kremlin. Ligachev, also a Communist Party leader, worked closely with Gorbachev in the first two years, 1985-86, but became increasingly critical of the failure keep the reform efforts focused on economic development and strengthening socialist political practices and policies.)

Ligachev and others believed that Gorbachev mistakenly allowed opponents of socialism to occupy leading positions in state organizations,
including the media, and that was a major factor in the weakening and ultimate downfall of the Soviet Union and socialism. Others put more focus on the legacy of the terrible repression under Stalin, or the arms race and threat of nuclear war, or the other problems noted above. It was likely a combination of all these factors, but fueled by the Reagan Administration’s plan of secret economic sabotage and threat of massive military attack. Without this fierce many-sided economic war, it’s unlikely that the other problems would have caused the downfall by themselves. The Soviet Union had weathered much worse storms before, including defeating the massive invasion of the Soviet Union by the Nazis in June 1941. The Casey plan differed from past efforts because it was largely unseen by the general public, did great harm to the Soviet economy behind the scenes, and was not a direct military assault against the Soviet Union, which would have rallied the people to defend their country.

Soviet leaders before Gorbachev saw early on what the Reagan Administration was doing. Soviet Party chairman Leonid Brezhnev said in 1981 that the Reagan Administration was committed to “a further expansion of the arms race and...working to undermine the Soviet economy.” (Schweizer, p. 40). But Gorbachev was faced with a huge increase in US military build-up and war provocations, and was motivated, first-and foremost, to prevent a nuclear war. While the Soviet economy had closed the large historical gap with the much larger US economy, the Soviet Gross Domestic was still half of the GDP of the USA in the mid-1980s. There never was parity between the Soviet Union and the United States and the US-promoted idea that there were two "superpowers" of more-or-less equal strength, was a myth. Money spent on the Soviet military weighed much more heavily on the overall Soviet economy than the US economy. Gorbachev and other Soviet leaders clearly understood that an all-out war between the US and the Soviet Union would have meant mutual nuclear destruction, and threatened much of life on earth.

Secret Plan Revealed by Anti-communist Insider

In 1994, after the Soviet Union ended and socialism was destroyed, a smoking gun appeared in the form of a book that detailed this secret
war, the above mentioned Schweizer book, Victory. Peter Schweizer was a fellow at the staunchly anti-communist Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace at Stanford University, and a supporter of the Reagan plan.

The Soviet Union's problems were solvable. Many other countries around the world had then and have today worse problems. Yet, they are still standing. Many are struggling under the weight of US imperialism but are still kept afloat. If almost any other nation was subjected to the kind of economic, political, and psychological cold and hot war that the Soviet Union was subjected to, its economy and government would suffer greatly too, and likely collapse. Those countries with rich raw materials, cheap labor, few or no pollution laws nor taxes, and compliant political leaders ("compliant" at the point of a gun) will be propped up with tons of US taxpayer dollars, economic development by foreign capitalist corporations and banks (both seeking super profits), and US military intervention to protect these operations from domestic or foreign threats.

The Russian Revolution and the Soviet Union was not one of those countries that buckled under to the will and orders of US imperialism, at least not until the last five years when it was under tremendous pressure. For the overwhelming majority of its existence, the Soviet Union was the chief aid to national liberation struggles around the world, countries trying to free themselves from colonialism, feudalism, capitalism and imperialism. The Soviet Union also supported the struggles of the working class in many capitalist countries, and was the most influential socialist country in the world at a time when a growing number of countries were looking to socialism as a solution to many generations of capitalist exploitation.

Soviet successes were noted by major US economists. Nobel Laureate Economist Paul Samuelson, who is anti-communist, wrote in his widely used college textbook, *Economics*, published in 1981, "It is a vulgar mistake to think that most people in Eastern Europe are miserable." John Kenneth Galbraith, noted economist and a reformer of capitalism (but not an advocate of socialism), said in 1984, "The Russian system succeeds because, in contrast to the Western industrial economies, it makes full use of its manpower. The Soviet economy has made great national progress in recent years." (Schweizer, xiv-xv). The gains of the left internationally in the 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s is a major reason for the Reagan-Casey-capitalist elite offensive against Soviet socialism, and all progressive forces everywhere.

**Casey: Former CIA Director and Murderer**

William Casey was the perfect man for the job. He was trained in undercover covert operations when he worked for the Office of Strategic
Services Economic Warfare Board during WWII. That organization was transformed into the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), where Casey became director. Casey later became a corporate lawyer who was ideologically driven to advance the interests of the capitalist elite.

Casey and the team he assembled willfully broke laws, violated the decisions of Congress and basic human morality, and planned armed violence against other countries. They illegally supported and armed the right-wing Contra fascists in Nicaragua in their effort to overthrow the leftist Sandinista government, and financed and armed right-wing death squad fascists and the right-wing government in El Salvador. Wanton violence, destruction, murder and torture were the tools of their trade, taught to them by US military experts at various secret sites, including the now infamous School of the Americas (renamed Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation) at Ft. Benning, Georgia.

The Casey-Reagan team supported the semi-feudal, right-wing, and anti-communist Mujahideen fighters in their effort to overthrow the progressive, socialist-oriented government in Afghanistan, and the Islamic but anti-US capitalist government in Iran and in other countries around the world. These multiple attacks have another goal. Since the Soviet Union was supporting most of the progressive governments and movements, increased US attacks required increased Soviet aid in material, food and military support. All of this cost the Soviet economy dearly compared to the much larger US economy.

The Casey-Reagan team also organized, planned and funded illegal armed invasions of the southern republics of Soviet Union during the 1980s by the US-supported Mujahideen to destabilize the country and encourage more terrorist activities inside the Soviet Union. These Reagan-Casey trained and funded Mujahideen forces fought in Afghanistan in the 1980s, and later formed Al Qaeda and ISIS, which have committed terrorist crimes against the people of Iraq, other countries in the Middle East, the US, and European countries.

Reagan meeting with anti-communist Afghan Mujahideen, which he helped to arm against the Soviets and the existing Afghan government. After the Soviets were defeated, Osama bin Laden led some of these forces against the US.
According to Schweizer in Victory, Casey told a meeting of top advisors to Reagan in 1981, "we need to be backing these movements with money and muscle... we need a half a dozen Afghani-stans" (Schweizer, page 9). All this to further the interests of multi-national US corporations and banks intent on controlling the oil and economy of that region and beyond. Specifically, in Afghanistan, the US goal was to gain control over the profitable pipelines carrying oil and natural gas to oil tankers docked in ports along the Arabian Sea near the entrance to the Persian Gulf from the largest oil and gas reserves on the planet.

Escalating the Arms Race and Nuclear War Threat

Reagan also immediately began a huge build-up of massive and sophisticated military weapons, including nuclear weapons in the early 1980s, publicly called the Soviet Union an "Evil Empire" on March 8, 1983, and threatened nuclear war with the Soviet Union. This took place while the Soviet Union was making proposals for nuclear disarmament. Reagan told the American people that we had to be ready to win a nuclear war - - an oxymoron since the scale of destruction would leave no winner. Reagan brought the next generation of intercontinental ballistic missiles, the MX Missile, to successful completion, padding the bank accounts of his financial donors including the giant military contractors Bechtel, Boeing and McDonald Douglas, with tax payers' dollars. Soviet leaders were alarmed. Schweizer wrote: "Hundreds of select meetings were held across the USSR in which 18 million members of the CPSU were briefed about the 'aggressive intentions of the enemy' in October 1983." (Schweizer, page 166.)

Reagan advisor Richard Allen met with Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin, and the exchange is in Schweizer's book: "They (the Soviet leaders) thought they had some first-class nut-balls on their hands," Allen
explained. "They were frightened to death...It was part of Reagan's strategy to get the Soviets to think he was a little crazy." Schweizer explained that this strategy was proposed by Herman Kahn, "who had compared the superpower competition to a game of chicken. Neither side wanted a crash...but neither wanted to back down...Yet ultimately someone would back down to prevent all-out war. As Kahn so succinctly put it, 'No one wants to play chicken with a madman.'"

To further the madman image, the Reagan Administration played military chicken with the Soviet Union, risking accidental nuclear war. Schweizer quoted a general: "Sometimes we would send bombers over the North Pole, and their (the Soviet Union's) radars would click on," recalls Gen. Jack Chain, the former Strategic Air Command commander. "It really got to them," recalls Dr. William Schneider, under-secretary of state for military assistance and technology..."They didn't know what it all meant. A squadron would fly straight at Soviet airspace, and their radars would light up and units would go on alert. Then at the last minute the squadron would peel off and return home."

On more than one occasion these war games almost provoked the Soviet Union into launching its nuclear missiles, fearing a real US first strike. In August 1984, during Reagan's re-election campaign, he gave a radio address: "My fellow Americans, I'm pleased to tell you that today I've signed legislation that will outlaw Russia forever. We begin bombing in five minutes." That was supposedly a joke. But the Soviet Union and Eastern European socialist countries didn't think it was funny, especially given the real life bombings and other acts of war that the US committed against Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Cuba, the Philippines, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Greece, Angola, and against Japan in WWII when Hiroshima and Nagasaki were leveled with US nuclear bombs.

**Corporate Support for Economic Sabotage**

This psychological warfare was one important piece in a larger campaign to unnerve Soviet leaders and undermine and destroy the Soviet economy by forcing the Soviets to spend more on defense. Giant corporations and banks played a special role. At one point in this ten year operation, Casey was meeting with nearly 200 corporate executives and recruited or planted CIA undercover informants in these corporations. Chase Manhattan Bank was one of many banks and corporations involved. Casey met with leading US business executives, wrote Schweizer, to persuade them not to do business with the Soviet Union. Specifically, he urged US banks to stop making loans to them. The largest and most important economic program for the Soviet Union during that period was the construction of a large natural gas pipeline running 3,600 miles
from rich gas fields in northern Siberia to the Soviet-Czech border. The pipeline would carry natural gas for sale throughout Europe and beyond.

The Soviet Union had very large reserves of natural gas and oil, major income producers for their socialist economy. Sophisticated equipment was needed for this project, and several western European companies specialized in producing this equipment. So, the Soviet Union made a deal to purchase this equipment in exchange for 25 years of natural gas at relatively low guaranteed prices. It would deliver 1.37 trillion cubic feet of natural gas a year to a French, West German and Italian consortium. The western Europeans jumped at the good business deal, which also reduced their dependence on the more volatile Middle East oil.

Reagan Goal: Destroy Soviet Pipeline

The Reagan-Casey goal was to destroy this pipeline before it could even be built. One of Casey's key contacts in the business community was Roger Robinson, a vice president of Chase Manhattan Bank, who was in charge of his bank's loans to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Robinson informed Casey just how lucrative the pipeline would be for the Soviet economy. Casey and his team had been studying in detail the Soviet economy and determined that stopping the pipeline would deal the Soviet economy a terrible blow. Casper Weinberger, a former vice president and general counsel at Bechtel Corporation, a major military contractor, was Reagan's Secretary of Defense and urged tough sanctions against the Soviet pipeline.
Casey received a report from the CIA that one of the bottlenecks in the Soviet energy sector was the need for new advanced rotary drills. Schweizer explained: "The Soviets would have to drill deeper in existing wells and through harder rock to sustain production. This would force them to shift from their domestic turbo drills to American rotary drills." Schweizer continued, "The United States had a near monopoly on many of these oil-drilling technologies...If Moscow could be denied access to these technologies, it would cost them billions," Schweizer wrote. And this denial of access would shut down a large portion of Soviet oil drilling and the Soviet economy.

Harming Allies to Cripple the Soviets

On December 29, 1982, Reagan went on the airwaves to announce to the American people that the US was imposing an embargo on the Soviet Union. This embargo also negatively impacted other countries, including US allies. Schweizer summarized Reagan's remarks and what it meant: "American involvement in the pipeline would be prohibited. The plan affected some sixty US companies but also halted Japanese and Soviet plans to develop oil and gas fields off Sakhalin Island. That arrangement was very similar to the pipeline deal: Japan was financing the project in exchange for guaranteed supplies of gas and oil." Japan would also suffer economically.

The US also used its dominant role in various international organizations to apply pressure on other countries to join its economic war on the Soviet Union, even those who resisted. Schweizer explained: "Economic realities made European leaders hungry for exports. Unemployment was running at 14 percent in Britain, 9 percent in France, and almost 8 percent in Germany...The pipeline would create tens of thousands of jobs all over Europe." The US convened a meeting of the Coordinating Committee on Export Controls and pushed its European allies into cutting off world-wide oil and gas technology to Moscow. Schweizer wrote that the US demanded that "all contracts with the Soviet bloc (including Eastern European socialist countries) worth $100 million or more automatically be submitted to the committee for approval to ensure that they did not result in the transfer of sensitive technologies. This would in effect give Washington veto power over European trade agreements with Moscow." (Schweizer, p. 78.)

For countries who did not want to join Reagan's economic war against the Soviet Union, such as Sweden and other neutral European countries, Reagan launched a campaign of destabilization, economic warfare against them, and in some cases even threatened to overthrow their elected leaders. Sweden was targeted because it did a large volume of business with the Soviet Union, and refused Reagan's demand to stop
conducting this business, and because it supported progressive and socialist programs at home and abroad. Schweizer explained a part of this plan in his book. He wrote that Defense Secretary Weinberger saw that "shutting down the Scandinavian highway was critical if Moscow was going to be hit hard in the technology area."

Schweizer went into great detail about many of the other campaigns that were used in the overall, many-sided war against the Soviet Union. Here is a list of the major campaigns, all of which were carried out:

- Covert financial, intelligence and logistical support to the major political force poised to overthrow socialism in Poland, the Solidarity movement, involving the manipulation of pro-labor political forces to achieve that goal. This forced the Soviet government to send more aid to the Polish socialist government, creating additional economic hardship on the Soviet Union.

- A campaign to reduce Soviet hard currency income by driving down the price of oil on the world market, which included Soviet oil, boost the US economy, while working in collaboration with (and using threats against) Saudi Arabia -- the world's largest oil producer, to accomplish these goals. The Reagan-Casey team got Saudi Arabia to lower the price of its oil, but then helped the Saudis make up this financial loss with massive US financial aid.

- Conduct a widespread technological disinformation campaign, that included selling the Soviet Union high technology equipment that was expensive for the them to buy, but was designed to purposely fail in order to cost the Soviet Union millions of rubles in waste, broken equipment, repair costs, and severe monetary losses for these purchases, all to undermine the Soviet economy.

- The massive US military build-up would divert money away from Soviet social programs for education, health care, housing and other needs. The goal was to create dissatisfaction and open opposition to the Soviet government and Soviet socialism among Soviet citizens.

Schweizer did not discuss the undercover CIA agents that infiltrated the Soviet Union, many disguised as US business people, to sow dissension among the Soviet people and aid organized anti-socialist dissident groups.

Nor did Schweizer discuss the relentless US propaganda campaign aimed at the Soviet people through sophisticated 24-hour media to hammer away at real or alleged weaknesses in Soviet society, from shortages of consumer goods to the repression of the Stalin years to the lack of "freedom."
This was done through Radio Liberty, a US government anti-communist propaganda source, print media (western press and dissident underground newspapers), and western culture. A steady stream of stories about rich, carefree Americans was showered on the Soviet people daily. The message was that capitalism was great and socialism a disaster. That same message was presented to the American people too, often using hysterical scare tactics depicting communism as a land of flames and chaos.

The United States had a 200 to 300-year head start over Soviet socialism in building an economy, and for nearly a century during the critical years from the 1880s through the early 1970s, the US did not have any serious foreign competition. The Soviet Union had been trying to play catch up since, and under constant and severe obstacles of competition from more advanced economies, war, famine, and constant efforts to undermine and sabotage the Soviet economy and socialism. Hardly a level playing field to compare the two economic systems.

Gorbachev, Reforms, and Subversion

While Reagan’s secret war caused many serious problems for the Soviet Union, clearly other factors were at play. Some may ask if the Russian Communists could defeat the counter-revolutionary White Army and its foreign allies in 1921, and Nazi Germany in 1945, why couldn’t it combat the economic and psychological war and arms race waged by the Reagan Administration from 1981-91? After the revolution and in the 1940s the Soviet people saw a clear life-and-death threat from invasion and war and rallied behind their government to defend their country. Some criticize Gorbachev’s policies during his tenure as leader of the Communist Party and Soviet government from 1985-1991. Others suggest that the crimes committed under Stalin during his time in power from 1929-1953 unleashed deep wounds among the Soviet people and their outrage led to a loss of confidence in the system.

Just a short comment on Gorbachev, since these dramatic changes took place when he was the party and government leader. When Mikhail Gor-
bachev was elected general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party in 1985 with promises to open up society, allow more open discussion, encourage more democracy, welcome a greater public airing of complaints, and new innovations to help boost the economy, and negotiate an end to the dangerous nuclear arms race, I was supportive. I thought it would help safeguard world peace and allow socialism to develop to the next, higher level, where increasing millions of people gained greater control over their lives and the direction of the country. An important nuclear arms agreement was negotiated and world war was averted, and I do believe that progress in opening up discussion and debate took place. However, when political forces critical of socialism in the Soviet Union gained major platforms, especially in major media, to express their views, and these views turned more and more against socialism and the government. I became concerned that the direction Gorbachev initially laid out, namely to strengthen socialism, was being undermined, and threatened.

Expanding democracy is an important component in building socialism. But how it is done is also important. The business owners of the major television stations and newspapers in the US, all public advocates of democracy, would not open their editorial boards to be dominated by people and organizations that they strongly disagree with -- leaders of the labor movement, civil rights organizations, the black liberation movement, women's movement, all the other social justice movements, along with the Democratic Socialists of America, Committees of Correspondence for Democracy and Socialism, and the Communist Party USA -- and allow us to cover the news that we deem important and to publish our views as we see fit. That is what happened in the Soviet Union. Sharp critics and opponents of the socialist system gained these positions in many important media and other organizations and gave support and direction to those that ultimately brought down the Soviet Union and socialism in 1991. This was done with little government opposition, and contrary to majority support of the Soviet people, expressed in polls during that period, that they wanted the Soviet Union to stay intact and to keep their socialist way of life.

The US, its capitalist elite, their economists and spin-masters had been advising and leading an anti-socialist faction that had emerged in Russia, under the leadership of Boris Yeltsin. Yeltsin, a former member of the Communist Party and a non-ideologue who had worked in construction for the party, had been won over to capitalism. He ran for election as president of the Russian Federation in 1991, with massive US business interference in that election on Yeltsin's behalf, and he won. Once in office, he promoted and implemented the neoliberal austerity policies of his US handlers and initiated a "shock therapy" transition to capitalism that was supposed to jump-start the economy. But instead it caused mas-
sive unemployment, falling wages, lost pensions and other benefits, massesive poverty, hunger, and a reduction of life expectancy. Serving his US advisors, Yeltsin turned over most public socialist property and assets at fire sale prices to a handful of aspiring individual capitalists who took private ownership of this property and became billionaires. Yeltsin's vice president, Alexander Rutskoy, called Yeltsin's policies "economic genocide."

As the Soviet economy worsened, and the political opposition increased, Yeltsin was forced to resign in 1999. The then-prime minister, Vladimir Putin, became the acting president. Putin was elected president in 2000 and served until 2008, then became prime minister until 2012, after which he was elected president again. Putin had been a career KGB agent, a late joiner of the Communist party - likely done to help his career, and in 1991 resigned from the party to become an independent. He accepted capitalism, but distanced himself from the US-driven neo-liberal austerity, and struck out on a path focused on defending the interests of Russia, as he saw them. It's important to remember that Putin was in conflict with the US earlier in his career while working as a KGB agent in socialist East Germany (the German Democratic Republic) during the Cold War years, and saw first-hand US efforts to try to undermine the East German economy and political system. Putin's independence from US control angered the capitalist elite in the US and their politicians up to today.

Since the overthrow of Soviet socialism and much suffering under capitalism, the people of the former Soviet Union are resisting. The result has been that a reorganized Russian Communist Party is the second largest party in Russia today. It has elected many of its candidates to all levels of public office, and it has put forward a popular program to re-direct and rebuild the country to end exploitation and oppression, promote cooperation, empower and improve the lives of the working-class and all people, and promote and protect the welfare of society, in short socialism. Socialism is alive on the 100th anniversary of the Russian Revolution.

Two Choices: Imperial Murder or Social Justice

I will end with two quotes and a very short book summary. The first quote is from a former top US political leader who was also a corporate CEO, Dick Cheney. The short book summary and second quote is from a former State Department employee turned critic and author, William Blum. Together they reflect two opposite poles for the future of Russia, the US, and the world.

Vice President Dick Cheney, former CEO of the US oil company Halliburton and staunch anti-communist, gave a lecture at West Point in 2002
outlining US government goals in the world. Cheney had been a Congressman from Wyoming and chair of the House Republican Conference from January 1987 to January 1989 and was a chief supporter of President Reagan's anti-Soviet policies. Cheney said in 2002:

"The Plan is for the United States to rule the world. The overt theme is unilaterism, but it is ultimately a story of domination. It calls for the United States to maintain its overwhelming superiority and prevent new rivals from rising up to challenge it on the world stage. It calls for domination over friends and enemies alike. It says not that the United States must be more powerful, or most powerful, but that it must be absolutely powerful." (Congressional Record, V. 148, Pt. 15, October 10, 2002)

William Blum worked for the US State Department in the 1960s during the war in Vietnam and left because of his opposition to what the US was doing in Vietnam. He became a critic of US imperial policy, and has written books and other materials exposing the long sordid history of US imperialism. In his book, Rogue State (2000), he wrote that the US government, through the military, the CIA, and other organizations it controls, tries to organize internal crisis, confusion, dissent and subversion in targeted countries prior to outright invasion to force submission to the dictates of the US capitalist elite and their businesses. Here are the results of this US government policy:

• attempts to overthrow more than 50 foreign governments since the end of WWII primarily by massive military invasion (most of those governments were democratically elected) because they didn't carry out every demand of US imperialism,

• dropped bombs on the people of more than 30 countries,

• attempted to assassinate more than 50 foreign leaders - with a number of successes,

• attempted to suppress a popular progressive movement in 20 countries - with a number of successes,

• grossly interfered in democratic elections in at least 30 countries - bringing to power its selected candidate in a number of countries,

• has been more involved in the practice of torture than any country in the world while publicly denouncing and denying torture, at least until Bush the second and Trump voiced public support for torture, and

• used more chemical and biological weapons on people than any other country in the world. The result has been the murder of over 20
million people, overwhelmingly civilians, in service to US big business and the increasing enrichment of the capitalist elite.


"The Agency, as we shall see, tried to spark mass revolt in China, Cuba, the Soviet Union (prior to the late 1980s and early 1990s - PK), Albania, and elsewhere in Eastern Europe with singular lack of success. The Agency's scribes have laid the blame for these failures on the 'closed' nature of the societies involved. But in non-communist countries, the CIA has had to resort to military coups or extra-legal chicanery to get its people into power. It has never been able to light the fire of popular revolution."

The lessons are clear. The Russian Revolution and a large majority of Soviet history has taught us important truths. Build a broad popular political movement to meet and advance the interests of all the people, persevere to victory, and be vigilant in protecting what has been achieved.