

## The World in Sixty Lines

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# America the Cautious

EDITOR'S  
NOTE  
August 8,  
1989

**T**he caution—if not downright coldness—exhibited by the United States vis-à-vis Poland, to be frank, appears quite disconcerting. And more than anything else, so does its reluctance to provide economic aid to the Solidarity-led government, in spite of the repeated appeals of Lech Walesa and the crucial importance that the Polish turn of events could hold the for the predicament of Communist-dominated Europe.

Already during his visit to Hungary and Poland last July, George Bush drew harsh criticism for having limited his commitment to only a small bundle of millions, a miserable sum in face of the country's needs and of an economic recovery plan prepared by the American economist Jeffrey Sachs for 10 billion dollars. Not even the extraordinary political changes that subsequently have occurred, with the leadership passing from the Communist Party to Solidarity, were of any help in modifying the delusive behaviour of the American Government.

Last Friday, the visit that the powerful Dole couple—she is secretary of labour, he is the Republican Senate minority leader—paid to Prime Minister Mazowiecki gave the distressing confirmation: this at the end of a week during which the Soviet leadership did not bother to hide its continuing influence in Warsaw, multiplying the warnings and constraints for the first non-Communist-led government of Poland in the post-Stalinist era.

*Just as disconcerting is American disregard for the other international problem which today seems to have come to a decisive turning point: the tragedy of Lebanon. With the excuse that the question is "too complicated", the country that is supposed to be the leading power in the Western camp has accepted, for all practical purposes, that Moscow be the one to impose in this region what some have called the "Pax Sovietica". It was only after he had received a form of guarantee from the USSR that the pope was able to announce his desire to pay a visit to Beirut. It was to no one else but the USSR that United States itself turned in order to establish a negotiating channel with Iran during the last hostage crisis.*

*Yet "Pax Sovietica" does not only mean entrusting to Moscow the protection from Syrian expansion of what is left of Lebanon. Soviet diplomacy has also had the opportunity to better its own relations with all the Arab countries. This, together with the recent rekindling of ties both with Israel and Iran reinforces in a decisive manner Moscow's role in the Middle East. In other words, as Le Monde has correctly pointed out, "by taking advantage of the American tendency to wait and see, Moscow made a spectacular comeback onto the scene".*

*How can Washington—which otherwise claims to want to fight drug trafficking—be so distracted with regard to Lebanon, where many of the factions in the struggle finance their arms supply precisely by the production and the export of drugs? In reality, America's commitment on this front, as well, is extremely lax.*

*By concentrating its attention on Colombia, the US has chosen a battlefield where it cannot even intervene openly, for in South America the prejudice against the gringos is so strong that any US presence would pave the way for the Medellín cartel to raise the flag of patriotism. This has already occurred with sinister Panamanian dictator Noriega, playing on Latino pride by proving that the*

*American giant is not even capable of splitting a country of only two million inhabitants.*

*Against the drug traffickers as well, then, American passiveness in foreign policy resurfaces—this being President Bush's truly distinguishing contribution. And if on the narcotraficantes front there is at least a timid approach, it is explained by the fact that the drug emergency is above all an internal tragedy involving the entire American society devastated by the mass diffusion of the heroine and crack trades. The Colombian case is uncomparably less important than those of Lebanon and Poland. In Colombia, there is no superpower equilibrium at stake as in Lebanon, nor is the historical defeat of communism the matter at hand, as it is in Poland. Of these three cases, the Polish one is by far the most important because there Western aid would bring about the sidelining of the Polish Communist Party and the conversion to a market economy, and it is for this reason that American "caution" in the end takes on the form of true, genuine desertion.*

## The Minimal State

EDITOR'S  
NOTE  
October 20,  
1989

**W**ith the retirement of Honecker, the winds of perestroika, passing through Hungary and Poland, finally have reached the East German outpost of the Soviet Empire. Gorbachev himself, with his visit to Pankow for the fortieth anniversary of the GDR, has to be credited for igniting the spark of change. At the very same moment, in an attempt to trace an insuperable boundary for the reform which he himself set in motion, Gorbachev delivered serious blows to those Soviet leaders who most visibly have identified with perestroika—Sakharov, Yeltsin and Afanasyev. It seems like a contradiction. Instead, a hard, complementary logic unites these two moves.

*The changes in East Germany, in fact, fit into the global plan for reorganisation of the Communist bloc, made necessary by the unsustainable cost of imperial expansion that under Brezhnev had been stretched too far beyond Moscow's resources. In abandoning the principle once formulated by Stalin according to which military control by one of the two superpowers necessarily implied the imposition of the controlling power's own social system, Gorbachev has tended in each of the satellite countries to maintain in friendly hands only the "minimal state", comprised of the armed forces, the police, the diplomatic corps and the secret service. All the rest—not only the economy but also the crucial sector of propaganda and information—is abandoned to the self-organisational capacities of these societies, and to the support of their allies abroad.*

*Case in point: Poland. Here, "civil society" in its entirety is entrusted from now on to Solidarity and to the Catholic Church. In Hungary already it is in the hands of American companies and even of media mogul Robert Maxwell (who seems to be on the verge of creating the first private television channel there). And yet in no satellite country is this abandoning of the non-"strategic" sectors of social life more advanced than in East Germany, with the exception that in this case nothing is given to the local society and the devolution has been towards its outside allies, namely West Germany. In this country, where the USSR maintains a hefty 400,000 troops, the economy, in effect, is practically integrated into the EEC, and the information sector is entrusted to West German television.*

*Naturally, for the Communists to barricade themselves into a "minimal state" is more risky in East Germany than in any other of the Empire's provinces. In East Germany, each and every margin of self-organisation devolved to society risks setting off an uncontrollable movement for reunification. Hence it was only destiny that Honecker's successor be the man who controlled the army, intelligence and police.*



*But this entire attempt at concentrating the Empire's forces in a few holdouts of vital interest is a high-risk operation. It would take little more than an excessive activism on the part of the reformist camp inside the USSR for the political trapeze to fly from Gorbachev's hands, leaving the field open to those who accuse him of draining the system. Gorbachev would then be left with the choice between chaos and repression. The attempt can succeed only with the condition that the evolution of Soviet society is held under control. Maintaining order at the centre of the Empire by striking out at the more radical reformists (Yeltsin, Sakharov and Afanasyev) thus becomes an indispensable ingredient for the restructuring of Soviet control over Central and Eastern Europe, reducing each country to the bare substance of state.*

## *From Détente to Entente*

EDITOR'S  
NOTE  
October 30,  
1989

**F**ollowing each other with a rhythm which has become quite frantic, recently there has been a real multiplication of signals from Eastern Europe, which would suggest that radical change in the international situation and in the relations between the two superpowers is close at hand.

*At the first meeting of the Warsaw Pact since the coming to power of Solidarity, Soviets and Poles went beyond themselves to be friendly to each other. Mazowiecki in person reaffirmed Poland's engagement "to carry out to the hilt its duty as an ally". And Shevarnadze returned the favour, stating that the USSR "has forever renounced imposing its own opinions by force forever". Shevarnadze*

*then advanced the hypothesis that by the year 2000 Moscow might recall all its troops stationed beyond the borders of the USSR.*

*At exactly the same time, in Helsinki, Gorbachev was acknowledging Finland's right to neutrality; the reward of almost fifty years of "good conduct" with regard to the Soviet Union. In this way, he was indicating to the ex-satellite countries a model for relations with the USSR, based on self-limitation in foreign and defence policy in exchange for Soviet acknowledgement of their right to self-government in all other areas. Thus the idea of the "Finlandisation" of Eastern Europe, still a dream to the members of Solidarity only a few years ago, is today becoming a concrete prospect, even though, as Shevarnadze has pointed out, earning this privilege will nonetheless require a transitional phase which will last (save for unexpected problems) until the end of the century.*

*There are two immediate objections to all this. Firstly, that ten or eleven years are an extremely long period in foreign politics, and beyond the limits of the foreseeable future. And for all these years Central and Eastern Europe would have to be satisfied with a self-government which does not get to the "heart of the state", that is, the untouchable kernel of army, alliances, police and espionage, which would have to remain in the hands of provedly trustworthy friends of the Soviet Union.*

*Secondly, no real withdrawal of the Soviet army is possible except within the framework of an agreement between the two global superpowers, an agreement which would obviously transcend Europe.*

*Yet signalling a propensity to an agreement of this kind is probably the purpose of another clamorous event of the last few days: the Soviet Union's self-criticism for its invasion of Afghanistan, which constituted a flagrant violation of the postwar division of the world into two spheres of influence,*

*and for the construction of a giant radar station, in violation of the ABM Treaty.*

*Considered together, the two signals launched by Shevarnadze—self-criticism over Afghanistan and the long-term hypothesis of a military withdrawal from the ex-satellite countries—can be interpreted as nothing less than an offer addressed specifically to the USA for relations of a new kind. It is significant in this respect that no self-criticising mention was made of the invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia, insofar as they were “police actions” inside the Soviet sphere of influence, so that they represented no violation of relations between the superpowers. Once the table is cleared of these blunders of the past, it will simply be a question of handling together the gradual transition from a Europe divided into areas of military control, to a Europe divided (to use the words of Shevarnadze himself) into areas of “friendship”; a transition to be managed in such a way as to avoid any uncontrollable liberatory explosions in the process.*

*If such designs were to materialise, the bipolar control of the USA and USSR over the world, today at risk due to the tempest blowing across the Eastern bloc, would be re-established in more bearable terms of risk and cost. The Yalta agreements would not be cancelled, but profoundly transformed. And the end of the Cold War would mean going beyond détente to reach a kind of historic and global compromise between the USA and the USSR. Or, to use the language of diplomats, it would mean passing from “détente” to “entente”.*

## *New Germany! Old Germany?*

EDITOR'S  
NOTE  
November 12,  
1989

**N**owadays, the instance of Berlin can be found on the front page of newspapers around the world. The city where—as it has been so frequently said—a war was ended and another one could begin, is back on the stage of current affairs as the heart and symbol of the German question. How far are we from the times when international politics had us accustomed to exotic actors: Viet Congs and Afghan mujaheddin, Red Guards and Khomeini's pasdarans! With the hurricane that is sweeping through the Eastern bloc, the centre of history is back in its classic theater—Europe. And the problem we are facing today is itself a classical one—the same problem that was left unsolved by two world wars, that of finding a settlement for Central Europe, a region where among its many nationalities, 80 million Germans tower above all others.

Are we, then, “back to normalcy” after forty-five years of hibernation of the Old World? Is the “German question” again, as it has been for such a long time in the past, the crucial problem of international equilibrium? And the main actor of this new play, is it really the same as before? Are we dealing, once again, with “Eternal Germany”, the country that history made so powerful and that geography made so central as to condemn it to be either a permanent threat to its neighbours, or to be divided among them? These questions are popping up in a disturbing manner when the East German regime is playing an extremely risky game, in the hope of avoiding its impending collapse. If the gamble fails, and the collapse does take place, the result could be the appearance in a fast, spontaneous and uncontrolled manner of a newly united Germany, right in the middle of an extremely volatile region.



*To exorcise this ghost, and in order to preserve the strategic equilibrium that has guaranteed over forty years of peace, the West would prefer that the democratisation of East Germany be restrained in such a way as not to endanger the extremely important strategic position that the Soviets hold in this country. Not everybody can say it with the same frankness. Bonn, indeed, is bound to assert exactly the opposite. But all the countries interested in preserving the stability of world order could easily adopt the idea that, for the moment at least, the world would live better with two Germanies than with a big, unified one.*

*Obviously, no political leader in the Federal Republic may publicly agree with this statement and remain in office. But the Federal Republic, in the very moment that it claims its attachment to reunification, it also encourages reforms in Pankow, and actually helps the East German Government, a move that assumes the survival of the GDR for at least a few more years. What is more, Bonn sends signals to the rest of the world that go even beyond the renunciation, for the foreseeable future, to immediate reunification. On top of the East German refugees, West Germany accepts every year some hundred thousand settlers of German origin from the Eastern European countries, and foresees that all the "ethnic German" communities in Eastern Europe will be sucked in by the end of the century.*

*The meaning of this behaviour has been played down by the German observers, and largely underestimated by the non-German ones. But it adds up to nothing less than a final and irreversible renunciation of the territories which had been the breeding ground of modern Germany. In spite of the subtle—too subtle—distinction that the Federal Republic, and not the entire German nation, has renounced forever the territories that the winning powers tore away from within its 1937 borders (one fifth of post-Versailles Germany), it is easy to forecast that once these territories will be void of their German population, all claim for the old borders will become practically impossible.*

*Forty years of democracy in West Germany have therefore not been in vain. The Germany we know is another political animal from the one that still haunts the night of some observers. And the Germans, having lost most of their traditional angst, no longer fit very well into their Faustian image. The myth of a revanchist Germany, already discredited by the intensive and obsessive use of it at the hands of Soviet propaganda, today is even more betrayed by hard, indisputable facts, namely the socio-political revolution of the Federal Republic.*

*This can be easily seen in comparison with East Germany. There, indeed, there is enough accumulated frustration to destabilise the European order, as the formidable explosion of the last two weeks suggests. To this explosion of liberation fever that spills over the crumbling wall, the West Germans look—no doubt—with feelings of solidarity and sympathy. However, accustomed and spoiled as they are by liberty and affluence, they also look at it as further proof of the substantial historical gap which at this point divides them from their less fortunate brothers.*