

Fading Hegemony

Can the old Atlantic relationship survive such new realities as the American budget deficit, the European progress towards a single market, and Gorbachev's new foreign policy?

Three excellent books, published in 1987, represent the most impressive attempt so far at coming up with an answer. Yet if we try to draw a balance sheet out of their diverging predictions and prescriptions we may find ourselves, as the saying goes, just as confused as before, but on a much higher level.

The first, which is also the most elegant, coherent and complete, is David Calleo's *Beyond American Hegemony*. It represents the perfect cross between the old tradition of books announcing the demise of NATO and the newer one announcing the decline of the United States. It argues from the American deficit and the progress of the Common Market to the possibility and the necessity of devolution.

The second, if less comprehensive and systematic is just as brilliantly written and cogently argued. It is both more satisfying in its description and more frustrating in its conclusions: it is Josef Joffe's, *The Limited Partnership*. He very effectively takes the counterpart of Calleo's hopes for a multipolar future based on European power

and independence; but the forcefulness of his demolition of all alternatives to the *status quo* is matched only by his demonstration - as trenchant as Calleo's - that this very *status quo* is crumbling.

Stylistically, the third book could not be more different. It is infinitely more abstract and tortured in its writing as well as in its reasoning, and more far-fetched in its presuppositions as well as in its conclusions. But it may also be the most original, the most profound and ultimately the most interesting of the three: it is George Liska's *Rethinking U.S. - Soviet Relations*. Like Joffe's book, it is based on articles already published; but it builds upon an argument developed in Liska's last works, particularly *Russia and the road to appeasement*. It is essentially, in the author's provocative terms, an argument (all the more startling since it comes from a theoretical and political conservative of East-European origin) in favour of appeasing Russia. According to Liska, only a U.S.-Soviet condominium can save peace and keep world order from the present turbulences of the Third World and the future challenge of China; only through "decompression" can one expect a liberalization of the Soviet empire; only if Russia is recognised as both a global equality and a regional hegemony in Europe can the smaller sacrificed

David CALLEO,
Beyond American Hegemony,
Basic Books,
New York, 1987

Josef JOFFE,
The Limited Partnership;
Europe, the U.S. and the Burdens of Alliance,
Ballinger,
Cambridge Mass, 1987

George LISKA,
Rethinking US - Soviet Relations,
Blackwell,
London, 1987

states of East Central Europe enjoy a vicarious feeling of power though the ascent of their leader and a greater margin of autonomy and of openness to Western influence.



One might say that Calleo and Liska take up the two versions of the Gaullist challenge to Atlantic orthodoxy: that of "European-Europe" and the Franco-German Treaty, and that of "Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals" and "*détente*, *entente* and cooperation" with Russia. Both have held these views for a long time. The continuity of the Atlantic alliance is matched only by that of Calleo's critique of it, since the basic argument of *The end of the Atlantic Hegemony* was already present in 1971, in *The Atlantic Fantasy*. As for Liska the pro-Russian bias is as constant in his work as the anti-Third World one, even though at the time of the Vietnam War he was calling on America to impose world order by fulfilling its imperial role, and at the time of de Gaulle he was stressing the renaissance of Europe. But each of the two authors feels that recent events have given new force to his old arguments.

In Calleo's case, the American budget deficit and the calls for protectionism and for troop withdrawals emanating from American society seem to confirm that financing the costs of hegemony has become irreconcilable both with the dynamics of the domestic economy and with the working of the international system itself: "Am-

erica's endemic economic disorder is to-day a more serious threat to the postwar international liberal order than is any plausible Soviet aggression. Fortunately, the cure is at hand: the economic progress of the European Community makes a more multipolar economic order possible and the political and military progress of European, particularly Franco-German, cooperation enables the Europeans to go a long way in substituting for America's conventional and even nuclear role in their defense (without explicitly advocating it, Calleo does seem to envisage a nuclear role for Germany).

In Liska's case, the *deus ex machina* has a name: Gorbachev. Calleo's optimism on West-European cooperation seems downright gloomy or hostile compared to Liska's enthusiasm for Gorbachev. The book carries one of his declarations in favor of regional cooperation as a motto and is dedicated to the future American Gorbachev. Before smiling at such excesses one should remember, however, that Liska was fighting, almost alone on the right, for appeasing Russia at the time when the dominant American rhetoric was that of the "evil empire", whereas today "Gorbymania" and optimism about Russia are found in the highest and most unexpected places.

Finally the most conservative and sceptic of our three authors is the youngest one. Joffe sees no hope either in West European unity nor in East-West reconciliation. He is far from blind, however, to the trends towards a psychological

separation between the United States and Europe, particularly Germany, or towards a change in the latter's attitude towards the Soviet Union. In two excellent chapters he shows the damage done by *détente* to the priority of the Alliance, and the lasting impact made by the peace movement upon European socialist parties. But he keeps his faith in America's awareness of its interest as a superpower and in the constraint imposed upon Germany by its geographical and historical situation. More generally, his theoretical belief in the dominance of the international system over the aspirations and frustrations of national societies leads him to a kind of schizophrenic conservatism for which an alliance system increasingly devoid of legitimacy survives by lack of any realistic alternative.

This is certainly the most valid description of the state of the Alliance as it has been developing in the eighties. I have described it elsewhere as "frustrated but frozen". One may wonder, however, whether the contrast between resilience of the system and the changes in the perceptions and attitudes of its members, (accelerated as it is by the fact that its most immobile component, the Soviet empire, is becoming its most unpredictable), may not call for a more dynamic analysis. In particular the relations between state and society, or between the military, the political, the cultural, the social and the economic dimensions within the two superpowers and the two Europes may lead to clashes and shifts which each of the three authors

would have trouble fitting into his particular perspective.

As far as the United States is concerned, one feels that Calleo's analysis of its economic predicament is far from accepted either by the majority of the *élites* or by the public at large. The same, in spite of the strong congressional offensive over burden-sharing, goes for the remedy through devolution. It may well be that the forces of bureaucratic inertia or of superpower hegemony, whichever way one might want to call them, will carry the day once more. However, it is also not very likely that the transatlantic reconciliation of the mid-eighties (when the Reagan administration abandoned its confrontationist stance, and the Western Europeans, after the failure of the peace movement and the re-election of conservative governments, returned to Alliance priorities) which Joffe describes, will last very long. Mutual accusations of protectionism are likely to increase when American recession sets in and the single European market starts operating.

If the Soviet threat is seen by both sides as continuing to decline, it will provide less and less of a credible deterrent to intra-Western quarrels. If, on the other hand, we enter a new period of crisis, turmoil, and perhaps repression and intervention in the East, it is likely to resurrect the divergences created by the events in Afghanistan and Poland at the turn of the decade with a vengeance.

On the prospects for West Euro-

pean unity and defence, again Joffe is more accurate for the short run but too ready to dismiss a Calleo-type perspective for the long run. Calleo certainly vastly exaggerates the political prospects of European unity and the short-run potential of European military cooperation. Even on economics there is no such thing as a common policy, even between France and the Federal Republic. Progress towards Franco-British nuclear collaboration and the extension of a European, French and/or British nuclear umbrella over the Federal Republic and the other European non-nuclear powers seems again more distant than for the last few years. It is true that after Reykjavik and the Washington agreement on INF the theme of the "Europeanization" or the self-affirmation of Europe flourished everywhere. But the whole point was what was meant by Europe: in France it had mostly the Calleo meaning, that is the political and military unity and independence of Western Europe; elsewhere, and particularly in Germany, it meant all European reconciliation under the roof of Gorbachev's Common European House. Clearly the two perspectives have to be combined; but even more clearly the second is the most powerful in the public perception of security matters, for the reason indicated by Joffe concerning Germany. Moreover, Mitterand himself is moving into this direction, under the double influence of Gorbachev and Genscher, and the Franco-German partnership is becoming more concerned with *d'é* *tente* than with defense. It has long been debated whether a withdrawal

of American troops would lead the Europeans to make a greater effort for their own defense or would be seen by them as a signal that the Americans themselves no longer believed in the Soviet danger and that at any rate whatever reassurance was needed should be sought in Moscow. The latter prediction had always been the likelier; it has become a virtual certainty since Gorbachev.

In this sense, both Joffe and Liska are more realistic than Calleo. Yet Soviet policy and East-European attitudes are the best witnesses to the fact that he is right in not selling Western Europe's projects short. Of the two competing Europes, the one of the single market and the one of the Common House, the first is based on a success story, the second is based on a dismal failure, that of the Communist regimes, and on the attempt both to limit and to exploit the achievements of the first. While in political and security matters, Gorbachev has the initiative and succeeds in embarrassing or seducing important segments of West European establishments and populations, in economic, social, as well as cultural and ideological matters, it is the West, and particularly Western Europe which fascinates, intimidates and seduces the East and occasionally provides it with a mixture of emergency help (particularly through German business) and of stern capitalist lectures (particularly through Mrs. Thatcher). The central feature of European politics today is this double ambiguous movement of attraction and repulsion between the two halves

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of Europe and the two designs for its future. Quite unequivocally, the East Europeans, while fearing the effects of the single market, fervently hope to establish as solid a link with it as possible, lest they should fall back into Russian (i.e. in their perception, into Asian) hands. More equivocally, Gorbachev himself certainly stands for a Europeanization of the Soviet Union; he seems both more Russian than his predecessors and more aware that, since 1917, the Soviet Union has been increasingly cut off from European civilization. But, by the same token his bid for the Europeanization of Russia cannot help being at the same time, a bid for Russian domination of the continent. The mixture of economic, cultural and even ideological humility and of geopolitical arrogance is unmistakable and, at any rate, is certainly not lost on East Central Europeans.

This leads us to two important question marks, about Calleo's vision and about Liska's, or about the evolution of the West and that of the East. Western Europe is certainly not ready for any structural military devolution not even for any decisive political action. Yet the logic of the Single European Act is bound, particularly if it is not deflected by American shocks and Soviet seduction, to lead to some form of political and even military unity. The logic of integration does not mechanically lead from "low politics" to "high politics", but it does increase the interpenetration of societies and limit the freedom of governments to pursue independent policies. Seen

from outside, it does create a pole of prosperity and vitality which by its very existence contributes to the frustration of East European societies with their present states. By the same token Gorbachev is right to focus on the long term threat it poses to Russia's potential domination of the continent and to try, by enlisting its economic help in a pan-European context, to minimize its political impact and to make it alleviate the crisis of the Soviet empire instead of exacerbating it.

It is precisely the neglect of this crisis which is the great weakness of George Liska's perspective. His emphasis on state versus society and on historical and geographic continuities versus economic and ideological evolutions, while certainly healthy as a counterweight to modern, and particularly American, prejudices, is still ultimately misleading when it makes him misread the current stage both in the aspirations of European nations and in the sources of Soviet conduct. His highly personal combination of small nation passion and of Great Power politics fails precisely where it should be strongest. With the help of the two Prague coups, the Czechoslovak tradition which he so eloquently expresses (that of friendliness with Russia as against the treacherous and arrogant Anglo-Saxons) has long been superseded in Czechoslovakia itself, as Jacques Rupnik demonstrates in his brilliant new book, *The Other Europe*, by the other tradition, that of Palacki, Havlicek and Masaryk, for whom Russia's aspiration to Europeanization were to be feared because its

embrace could only mean domination. Of course this feeling is even more prevalent in the other nations of the region. The present vogue of the Central European idea expresses precisely the reject of the Russian embrace. Not everybody accepts the cultural justifications given to this rejection by Milan Kundera in a famous article. But everybody shares the aspirations of the small East Central European nations (even they appeal to Gorbachev against their own leaders) to independence from Soviet power. Even more importantly perhaps, the feeling that the communist model can only lead to an ever greater fall from European prosperity and civilization is challenged by no one.

The second, and even more crucial point, is that this feeling of crisis and failure is shared by Russians themselves, and at any rate by Mikhail Gorbachev. Liska is right to stress the Russian aspirations to respect and recognition as a world power. But this was characteristic of Khrushchev and Brezhnev as well. What distinguishes Gorbachev is the feeling of dramatic crisis and of precipitous decline. This, as he freely admits himself, is what explains his spectacular changes in foreign policy.

Liska could rightly argue that this feeling of economic weakness and domestic crisis refutes Western fears of Soviet military expansionism. But it makes the hope of seeing Moscow play a constructive, benevolent role as a co-manager of world order even less plausible. We are much more like-

ly to experience years of troubles caused by dissatisfaction with economic failure as well as by fear of political revolution by national reassertion within the empire, including within the Soviet Union itself, by attempts at return to domestic repression or to external adventurism.

Of course, nobody in the West as well as in Eastern Europe can have an interest in encouraging such developments. Liska is right to argue that the time has come to reward Soviet positive evolution and to give Moscow a stake in the positive management of conflicts. But if the recent past carries any lesson, it is that such opening is only valid if accompanied by equally clear resistance and sanctions against negative Soviet actions and developments. The only really shocking theme of Liska's book is his advocacy of meeting the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan or repression in Eastern Europe with sympathetic understanding. Surely if such counsel had been followed, Soviet withdrawals and liberalization would have been less likely.

Liska argues forcefully against Richard Pipes' prescription of making the Soviet Union change its priorities and, in effect, its regime through Western political pressure and economic denial. Certainly the extreme form of this thesis still seems unreasonable. But it certainly has come closer to being confirmed than the opposite one defended by Liska. While the essential cause of Soviet "new thinking" is domestic failure, who could say that Moscow would have

withdrawn from Afghanistan without the increased American help to the resistance, that it would have withdrawn its SS-20s without the deployment of the Pershing IIs and cruise missiles in Europe, that its increased prudence in the Third World had nothing to do with the unpredictability of American reactions, that its urge to arms control had nothing to do with the fear of a costly technological competition accelerated by SDI? It may indeed have taken the Reagan administration to convert Moscow to the ideas or at least the slogans of the Carter administration - from interdependence and global issues to the irrelevance of force.

Heaven knows there is room for criticism (such as those voiced by Calleo and Liska) of American foreign policy. But in East-West relations we are witnessing the confirmation of its central idea: containment. We are beginning to reap the fruits of its first, essentially defensive phase and to see the first signs of the results originally anticipated by George Kennan (whose vision is eloquently analyzed and praised by Calleo): the transformation of the Soviet empire, the emergence of Western Europe, the overcoming of the continental division. American policy should certainly welcome these signs and encourage these developments. Evolution

towards a more multipolar world including both devolution to Western Europe and the re-integration of the Soviet Union into civilization and into the international concert, is in everybody's interest. But it can only be the end of an extremely bumpy road with huge obstacles due to Soviet and European internal contradictions which can be overcome only, if at all, if America remains both reliable and flexible, if it can accompany nascent developments with a mixture of open-mindedness and of firm but patient and discrete pressure. Both Calleo and Liska are partly right concerning long-range trends and desirable directions. But they are wrong not to realize that the best way to ruin their hopes is to act as if they were already fulfilled.



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