Soviet Collapse Ruined the U.S.

By [Alexei Bayer](#)

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In 2005, then-President Vladimir Putin called the collapse of the Soviet Union the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century. As time passes, I find myself agreeing with him more and more.

To be sure, my regrets are fundamentally different from Putin's. I've been a U.S. citizen for three decades, and my son is as American as they come. The United States is clearly my home, and I consider myself a patriotic American. This is why I decry the disappearance of the Soviet empire. Its demise may have dealt a potentially mortal blow to the United States.

The Soviet Union strained its resources and pauperized, exploited and oppressed its own people in order to compete with the United States, the embodiment of the bitterly adversarial capitalist system. Most Soviets didn't believe the authorities who told them that they were living and working in a "workers' paradise." It was a struggle that its leaders believed would prove the supremacy of communism. It was bad for the Soviet Union but a godsend for the United States.

The Soviet propaganda droned incessantly about how workers are impoverished and exploited under capitalism. It tried to flip the truth on its head: to deny that the U.S. government after the Great Depression implemented policies that helped raise incomes while drastically improving the work conditions and financial well-being of workers.

In the 1950s, things got even better for U.S. workers. The gap between the rich and the poor was the narrowest in U.S. history, and the U.S. middle class reached new levels of prosperity.

Soviet forays into post-colonial Africa and Asia and the revolutionary movements it fomented in Latin America forced Washington to pay attention to those countries and assist in their development. Even discounting support for the occasional tyrant, it did much good and helped spread U.S. influence and American values around the world. Even if they are not always followed in practice, democracy and free enterprise have become dominant political values globally.

To counter the Soviet "Evil Empire," the United States willy-nilly had to go for the moral high ground and become a moral arbiter in world affairs. Now, China is gradually replacing U.S. influence the world over.

Finally, the Soviet Union strained its dysfunctional economic system to create a first-rate scientific and military complex. Sputnik, launched in 1957, galvanized the United States into action. A huge government effort to improve math, science and engineering followed. Funding for education and research was increased sharply, and the government and private universities expanded programs for the brightest students to go to the best universities, regardless of their parents' ability to pay. The space race did little for the average Russian, but it did create a broad infrastructure for science and technology in the United States that set the foundation for U.S. supremacy in innovation, which the United States enjoys to this day.

After the Soviet collapse, Washington found a different adversary: al-Qaida. As a result, the leading 21st-century military and economic power is wasting its resources on a medieval war, gradually descending to the level of its new foe.

Osama bin Laden may be history's greatest military strategist. He made Washington abandon its lofty moral ideals, forced the United States into a sea of debt and played a key role in pushing the United States off its pedestal of being the world's supreme economic power. But ultimately, it is the collapse of the Soviet Union that is to blame.

Alexei Bayer, a native Muscovite, is a New York-based economist.

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