

THE HERITAGE LECTURES

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*Quo Vadis,
Russia?*

*By the Honorable Frank
Shakespeare*



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Quo Vadis, Russia?

By the Honorable Frank Shakespeare

Before I talk about the Soviet Union, I would like to make two general observations. One is that you are, as the Executive Committee of the President's Club, the hard core supporters at The Heritage Foundation. I think that means a great deal. It is a tribute to you. I know it is vital to Heritage. You have helped create and helped sustain something which is really vital to our country, and you give not only your money, which is critical, but you give yourselves in coming to meetings like this. So I wanted to say how much I admire what you do and how grateful I am for what you do, not just as a board member of Heritage but also as a fellow citizen.

And the second observation has nothing to do with the Soviet Union, as the first did not. I have been away for thirty days and I just came back from Europe and the Soviet Union, where you are really isolated. How dismayed I am at the press doing their standard thing by portraying Dan Quayle as an amiable incompetent. It reminds me of my very earliest days and ideas in this arena when Richard Nixon was Vice President of the United States. The media constantly portrayed his possible accession to the presidency as a threat, as something to be terribly feared. When Eisenhower had his heart attack, they were merciless in portraying Nixon not as an amiable incompetent like Quayle, but as a dire threat to our freedoms. And they portrayed Ronald Reagan before he became President as a grade B movie actor: "God save us from that California cowboy." And George Bush was described as an unbelievable wimp as Vice President who did nothing but match his ties to his watch straps while he sat in a country club. And even on the other side of the fence, they portrayed Truman as a sort of gray dullard. I have spent all my life in communications, and I think it is simply sad the way they are doing that sort of thing.

Now let us turn to the Soviet Union.

Very briefly, what is the situation leading up to the present, what is the situation now, what is the policy of our government, what are some thoughts about that policy of our government? Well, what are the forces at play?

Elemental Forces. I submit to you that there are three elemental forces at play in the Soviet Union now.

One is the death of the belief system, one is the collapse of the economy, and the third is the rise of nationalism. Any one of those would be very difficult to deal with; all three together cannot be dealt with. And the state structure that we call the Soviet Union will cease to exist in the near future.

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He spoke at a meeting of the Executive Committee of The Heritage Foundation's President's Club on May 8, 1991.

What do I mean by the death of the belief system? Societies have to have some core principles. They are generally a mix of religion, philosophy, tradition, and history. It is the glue that holds them together.

Explaining First Things. Communism in the West was viewed oftentimes as an economic system, the command economy; or as a political system, the dictatorship of the few; or as a great military power – and it was all of those things. But in my view, that is not what it really was. Communism was an all-encompassing philosophy purporting to explain first things: what is man, what is God, what is the state, what is the appropriate relation among those three, how does one explain the condition of man, what society structures are most conducive to the spiritual and material development of man? The first things.

Communism presented itself as a core philosophical, all-encompassing system. Communism is dead. It is not weakening, it is not tilted over, it is not dying; in fact, it is dead. And no amount of perestroika or glasnost or other tinkering will revive it. Of course, some will wave its banner in special circumstances or seek to use it as a rationale for power, but as a belief system, it is dead, and that is what I mean by the death of the belief system. That is very important because the state really cannot exist for any period of time without a core belief system, without a rationale for the existence of that state. And it also leaves a tremendous vacuum of ideas. So when the belief system dies, something very serious happens to a state and to a nation.

Second is the collapse of the economy. It is obvious that the economy has collapsed. If any of you have been there recently, you know what a mess it is. To take only two of the most obvious examples: last autumn they had the best harvest that they have had in a very long while and they could not get it to market because the distribution system has fallen apart. They simply cannot get the produce from the farm areas where it is produced to the cities in the northern areas where it is needed, so that a great portion of that large harvest simply rotted in the fields or in the local areas.

And the second is the staggering, stunning decision of saying to all the Soviet people in 72 hours, “All your 50-ruble notes and all your 100-ruble notes are now worth zip.” Imagine if they told us in this country that in 72 hours every \$50 bill and every \$100 bill no longer would be worth a penny. I mean, it is simply staggering.

So those two extreme examples show the collapse of the economy.

Now, it is important, of course, to know that the economy has collapsed. More important is to know that the men now in charge of that government can't fix it. That is a very important point. They can't fix it. Why can't they fix it? They can't fix it for three reasons.

Antithetical System. One, the only way you can turn that economy around now is to unleash the immense human creativity that comes from private enterprise, from the profit system, from millions of people working for themselves, for their wife and children, their family, their community, their country. In other words, private enterprise. In the theoretical sense, that is totally antithetical to all the men now in power in the Kremlin. They have lived their entire life with the understanding that was wrong, so it goes against their whole training, their whole background, their whole philosophy.

Secondly, they have no experience with it. There is not a single man in the government or the Central Committee or the Politburo or anywhere in Moscow who has any experience

whatsoever with the private market. A Soviet leader might just as well be talking about Egyptian hieroglyphics in terms of their understanding of it.

And thirdly, while it is a system which runs against their total premise and while they have absolutely no experience with it whatsoever, if they put it into effect, it means, of course, decentralization of economic power. And decentralization of economic power – as every Heritage Foundation member knows – means decentralization of political power. And when you decentralize first economic power and then you decentralize political power, the center, the core, the Communist Party, is finished, because their whole structure is a command system. So they would – if they put it into effect – be signing their own death warrant. I mention that because we should know that their economy is in collapse. It is even more important to know that Gorbachev and Company cannot fix it.

Unique Nation. Now, the third thing that I mentioned is the rise of nationalism. Very briefly I want to put that in an historic framework since it is peculiarly difficult for us in the United States to understand the force of nationalism because we are a unique nation in all of history. Essentially we are an empty continent, and we came from many places, many countries, many nations, voluntarily choosing to leave behind us our ancestral territory, our ancestral culture, our ancestral people, to come here and form a new nation. And while we have a certain pride in the fact that we are Italian or Irish or German or Scottish or have some other background, it is a matter of no relevance at all in terms of our being Americans or understanding each other. That is unique in all the world. It never happened before and it will never happen again unless we find an empty planet somewhere.

So for us to understand the force of nationalism is very difficult. It is an intellectual exercise, because it is something we never experienced. Now, let me dwell on that for a moment and approach it this way. In the Twentieth Century, the form of government – or societal organization – which we call the empire, meaning that one nation rules another nation, came to an end. Either another nation far away or another nation right near it, but nation A rules nation B; that is an empire, and it was this form of government that in some cases worked pretty well and for some centuries. Thusly, the British Empire, the French Empire, the Dutch Empire, the Belgian Empire, the German Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Turkish Ottoman Empire all had their day. In the middle of the Twentieth Century, more or less, all those empires came to an end. We here tend to think of empires as sea-based; that is to say, a nation in Europe rules a nation far away, like the Dutch ruled Indonesia or the French ruled Vietnam or the English ruled India or the Belgians ruled the African Congo.

But, of course, there were also huge land-based empires – Turkey ruling the Middle East and the southern Balkans and such places, Austria-Hungary ruling what is now Czechoslovakia, what is now Poland, what is now Lithuania. Now, all of those empires have disappeared in the lifetime of some of us here in this room, with the exception of one empire whose life was artificially extended, namely, the Russian Empire. The Russian Empire, like the others, had been created and the Russians had conquered adjacent peoples very much in the style of the Austro-Hungarian Empire or the Ottoman Empire or even the British Empire. They conquered adjacent peoples and they ruled adjacent peoples under the czars, and that had gone on for hundreds of years. But at the time when all the other empires were ceasing to exist, the ideology of Communism, coupled with absolutely bloodthirsty thugs with machine guns, took over and artificially extended its life, so that you had the prolongation of a now anachronistic form of state structure existing side by side with the imposition of the philosophy of Communism. And now, the belief system has died, the men at the center are

seen not to be so feared anymore or so invincible, the system is seen to be going anywhere, so that if you compromise to it you are not going to build anything better for your children or your grandchildren. You are just going to live in agony and in failure and in material deprivation. The peoples of the Soviet Union such as the Estonians, the Latvians, the Lithuanians, the Georgians, the Armenians, the Turkic Moslem people of Central Asia, the Ukrainians, the Georgians, now all say, "We do not want to be ruled by a foreign people. Whether we like them or not, whether they have been decent to us or not, is an irrelevancy. We do not want to be ruled by the Russians any more than the Indians wanted to be ruled by the British or the Indonesians by the Dutch. We do not want to be ruled by them. We want to" — in the present vernacular — "do our own thing."

Now, that is a very, very important development. The unleashing of that last phenomenon of the breakup of the last empire, is coincident with the collapse of Communism. It is related to the death of the belief system and the collapse of the economy, but it is a separate force now flowing together with it and making the preservation of that empire impossible.

Now, I also want to add one other thing. When the empire system collapsed, even some of the most democratic and ablest and wisest people of the West did not think it should in general — and most certainly did not think it was wise or should happen in their empire's particular case. Thus, for example, Churchill, when he for the last time became prime minister of Great Britain, said, "I did not become Her Majesty's First Minister in order to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire." He was a tough bird, he was wise, he was able, he had a lot of power, and he meant it. Did it make any difference? None whatever.

When DeGaulle was president of France and Algeria was pulling away, he said, "The world does not understand. Algeria is not a colony. Algeria is as much a part of France under our system as Lille is or as Marseilles is, and to say that Algeria will not be part of France is to say that Lille will not be part of France or that Marseilles will not be part of France; it is absurd." Did he mean it? Sure. A tough, able, strong, democratic leader, and he meant to keep the empire together. Did it make any difference? None whatever.

So, without excusing in any way the statements of Gorbachev and Company that they need to keep it together, I only want to say that it is not just dictators and tyrants as heads of empires who think it is a very good situation. And no matter how able a man or a woman, when the time came, no matter how much they meant it or no matter how able they were, it made no difference whatsoever because elemental forces were at play.

Birth of Nations. Now I want to close on this background part and go to the current situation. We have talked about three elemental forces at play — the death of the belief system, the collapse of the economy, the rise of nationalism, and the end of empire. And I have premised to you that the state structure, the empire known as the Soviet Union, will very soon cease to exist. If that is correct, then it means that the fifteen-plus nations — there are many smaller ones — that constitute what we call the Soviet Union, are going to break away and become individual states. The degree of violence, the timing, exactly how it happens, will be very important to us in this room. It could be dangerous because of the existence of nuclear weapons. It most certainly could be tragic for some of the people involved. But now — I need to be careful what I say here because I do not want to sound brutal and unfeeling — in an historical sense it does not make any difference. It did not make any difference how all those empires broke up in the middle of the Twentieth Century. The important thing is they were through, and in some cases the process was unraveling. For example, there was the

British Empire. India became independent – we all remember that – fortunately, for the most part, without violence. Then there was a little bit of time and terrible violence and terrible struggle, then there was India and Pakistan. And then there was a little bit of time and then there was terrible violence and terrible struggle and there was India and Pakistan and Bangladesh. And I submit to you that there is going to be a little more time and probably a struggle and there will be probably India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Tamil Nadu, as that process of nationhood unravels into those nations which are reasonably viable and reasonably consider themselves nations.

Now, to go back to the Soviet Union, it is unraveling. There are going to be separate nations. That is as sure as the fact that we are sitting here. When it happens, the degree of violence is important to us and affects our security, but in historic terms it is a detail. What is going to be important is what comes out of it. And the single most important thing for us in the United States, the citizens of our country, in thinking about what comes out of it, can be put in three words: *Quo vadis*, Russia?

Rich Land, Tough People. The Soviet Union in round figures has 300 million people. In round figures, half of them – 150 to 160 million – are Russians. When Russia is down to Russians and Russia, what will there be? There will be a nation of 160 million people. It will occupy one-sixth of the land mass of the entire earth. It will be larger by a huge margin than any other state on the face of the earth. From its easternmost point to its westernmost point it will be eleven time zones, as New York is three time zones from Los Angeles. It will be chock full of energy in terms of coal and oil and natural gas and minerals and other good things in the ground. It will have a huge agricultural potential under private farming. It has a really tough people. The Russians are the people who absorbed Napoleon and spat him out, and they absorbed Hitler and they spat him out, and they had their share and more than their share of tyrants, but just to take one: Peter the Great was a tyrant and a brutal man, but what a leader. He took a swamp and made it into St. Petersburg and he did it in one lifetime.

Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Solzhenitsyn – our culture in literature and poetry and architecture, in music, in dance, has been staggeringly influenced by the Russians. So the Russians are a quality piece of work.

Now, suppose you get them together and you take from around their neck that awful albatross of Communism of which they were the first victims rather than the perpetrators and you make them free and you give them the awesome advantages that I have just talked about and you put that in immediate juxtaposition on one side to Western Europe and on the other side to Japan. We do not know what form of government they will have – but suppose you unleash private enterprise, and you unleash human creativity and the profit motive and gain and drive and freedom and openness with a very great people with all those natural resources. While analogies between one country and another are very dangerous, I just want to give you a time frame because we tend to think of centuries. In 1950 Japan was a basket case. What is Japan? It is a hundred million people packed on a nothing little island in the northern Pacific with a big spiny ridge, absolutely too small for a hundred million people, no agricultural land, no energy whatever, no natural resources whatsoever in the ground, remote from all the markets in the world. They have to go out and buy energy – oil or coal or natural gas – from somewhere else and ship it into this island which is nowhere. And they have to go out and buy natural resources – iron or steel or other components and ship them into Japan and apply the energy to the natural resources of human creativity and turn it into something they

call a Toyota. And then put that automobile and ship it thousands of miles to Davenport, Iowa, and sell it.

Now that is a very tough deal. I mean, that is a hard deal. In 1950, a basket case. In 1970, economic giant. Twenty years. If Russia were free, she would have advantages that stagger the imagination. If it were democratic and if we did not fear it, would the West pour in capital? You betcha. Would the West pour in technology? You betcha.

So the potential of Russia is very great. What do we focus on? What will be the spiritual and philosophical underpinning of the new Russia? Russia the independent state, where Communism is dead and forgotten, where the empire is dead and forgotten? What is man, what is God, what is the state, what is the proper relationship among the three? What are the societal structures most conducive to man's spiritual and material development? What will be the premises of the new Russian state and its leaders?

Cardinal Objective. In my view, the foreign policy of the only superpower on earth, which is us, for a while, our cardinal objective, the single objective of our foreign policy should be *Quo vadis*, Russia in the Twenty-first Century because if it goes right, it changes the world in an enormous way and if it goes wrong, it can be a disaster for all of us. So I submit that it is enormously important.

Now, the reason I mention this to you is, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania are very important emotionally, symbolically and as a trigger. But they have six million people all together. Georgia has eight million people. Armenia has eight million people. The Turkic Moslem states have many more but are behind in terms of their strength as a people at this point. Ukrainians are a different matter but still they are much smaller. They are 50 million people.

So that we want to be in our foreign policy as helpful and as decent and as caring and as forthcoming as we can and as is appropriate for the other states that will emerge out of the Soviet Union, but the key is Russia. Also, we must be reasonably aware of our limitations. They are going to pretty much decide — with fate and providence — and we in Washington are hardly going to determine what happens, but we can influence the process.

The key question then is, *Quo vadis*, Russia?

