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Aaron L. Friedberg: In the Shadow of the Garrison State □□

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INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW

What follows is a study of the interior dimension of American grand strategy during the Cold War. My goal is to explain the shape and size of the domestic mechanisms through which, over the course of nearly half a century, the United States created the implements of its vast military power.

The argument that I intend to make can be briefly summarized: War, in Charles Tilly's pithy phrase, "made" the modern state. As the technology of warfare evolved, the kingdoms and principalities that crowded the landscape of early modern Europe were forced to assemble larger and more capable militaries in order to survive. But, as Tilly explains, "the building of an effective military machine imposed a heavy burden on the population involved: taxes, conscription, requisitions, and more." In order reliably to carry out these power-creating functions, successful political entities had to develop more efficient tax systems, bureaucracies, and professional armies. The process of creating military power thus tended "to promote territorial consolidation, centralization, differentiation of the instruments of government and monopolization of the means of coercion, all the fundamental state-making processes."¹ War made the state. Or, to put it less elegantly, war and the threat of war required the creation of military power, and, over time, the creation of military power led to the construction of strong, modern states.

The American republic was born while this larger historical process was already well underway and, indeed, it was founded in part out of a reaction against the trend toward ever-greater concentrations of state power (and ever-expanding state capacities for military power creation) taking place on the other side of the Atlantic. If not for its geographical good fortune, the new nation might well have undergone an early, traumatic transformation or, perhaps more likely, it might simply have ceased to exist. Instead, the comparative absence of immediate military threats permitted the United States to survive and thrive during the first century and a half of its existence without developing a central state that was strong in the traditional ways. It was not until the end of the Second World War that a combination of geopolitical and technological developments brought the era of insularity to an end.

In the United States at the middle of the twentieth century, as in other countries earlier in the history of the modern age, the imminent threat of war produced pressures for the permanent construction of a powerful central state. In the American case these pressures came comparatively late in the process of political development; they were new and largely unfamiliar, and they were met

¹ Charles Tilly, "Reflections on the History of European State-Making" in Tilly, ed. *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 42.

and, to a degree, counterbalanced, by strong anti-statist influences that were deeply rooted in the circumstances of the nation's founding.

The power-creating mechanisms put in place during the first fifteen years of the Cold War can best be understood as the product of a collision between these two sets of conflicting forces. It is impossible to explain the mechanisms of power creation, the military strategy that they were intended to support, or, more generally, the impact of the Cold War on American society and the American economy without reference to the persistent presence of domestic forces tending to oppose expansions in state power.

Domestic constraints appear also to have contributed to the Cold War's eventual outcome. By preventing some of the worst, most stifling excesses of statism, these countervailing tendencies made it easier for the United States to preserve its economic vitality and technological dynamism, to maintain domestic political support for a protracted strategic competition and to stay the course in that competition better than its supremely statist rival.

ELABORATION

The remainder of this book will be devoted to developing the basic argument sketched out above. Before proceeding I would like to provide preliminary answers to three central questions: What is it, exactly, that I am trying to explain? How do I propose to explain it? And why should the reader prefer the explanation I am offering to others that might be advanced?

Focus

Although I will touch on both sets of issues, I will not be concerned here primarily either with measuring changes in the overall size and internal organization of the federal government or with assessing the effects of over four decades of Cold War mobilization on, for example, American domestic politics, law, education, or culture. I will concentrate my attention not on "the state" alone nor on "society" writ large, but on a cluster of intermediary mechanisms: a parallel set of power-creating institutions that linked the state to society, and permitted it to transform societal resources into military capabilities. Why did these mechanisms take the form they did?

The answer to this question is, I believe, of fundamental importance. As they faced off against each other, the United States and the Soviet Union engaged in what political scientist Kenneth Waltz has called "internal balancing"; both drew heavily on their domestic resources in order to generate ever more military strength. Each hoped in this way to counter, and perhaps to surpass, the other's efforts.² Whatever else it may have been, the Cold War was, first and foremost, a sustained competition in power creation.

² Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979), p. 168.

The mechanisms of power creation were the primary transmission belts through which the pressures of the superpower confrontation made themselves felt in both societies. An adequate appreciation of the domestic effects of the Cold War on the United States (or the Soviet Union) must begin with an examination of these mechanisms. Moreover, as I have already suggested, differences in the power-creating programs of the two sides appear to have had a direct effect on the ultimate outcome of their competition. Understanding the process of power creation may therefore hold the key to explaining the course and conclusion of the Cold War. And understanding the Cold War, in turn, can shed light on an even larger issue: why it is that, over the course of several centuries, liberal democracies have been able to best a series of less liberal, less democratic challengers.

Explanation

The central chapters of this book (chapters 4 through 8) contain detailed examinations of the formation, during the years 1945 to (roughly) 1961, of the main mechanisms of power creation: those intended to extract money and manpower and those designed to direct national resources toward arms production, military research, and defense-supporting industries. Taken as a whole, this period marked an interval of institutional creation, or "founding." After a decade and a half of flux, the broad outlines of American grand strategy, both its internal and its external aspects, would stay largely fixed for the remainder of the Cold War.

The emergence of stable institutions involves a competition among alternatives, resulting eventually in the selection of a dominant form. In the course of explaining what happened in each power-creating domain, I will therefore need also to offer an account of why certain other things did *not* happen. I will be interested, in other words, in counterfactuals, in paths not taken, as well as in actual outcomes.

There are, of course, an infinite variety of such parallel possibilities, most of them so far-fetched as to be entirely irrelevant to an adequate understanding of actual historical events. I will limit myself here to a consideration of what appear in retrospect to have been the serious contenders; those policies and mechanisms which enjoyed significant support at the time, and which had a real chance of adoption. In every case, as I will show, the main alternatives to what actually emerged would have involved greater societal exertion and a more powerful and intrusive central state. The puzzle I seek to solve, in each instance, is why this did not occur.

In providing an answer I will make reference repeatedly to three sets of explanatory factors: the basic structure of American governmental institutions, the interests and relative strength of various groups (both within the government itself and in society at large), and the content of prevailing ideas, or ideology. Institutions and ideology were, I will argue, of central significance; together they imposed a marked anti-statist bias on the process through which

Cold War power creating mechanisms were built. The fragmented character of the American political system, and in particular the separation of powers between the executive and legislative branches, tended to place considerable obstacles in the way of those who wanted to build stronger, more highly centralized power creating mechanisms. Ideas also acted to shape the struggle over policy among self-interested groups, increasing the influence of those adopting an "anti-statist" stance, while weakening the hand of those whose views could be characterized, fairly or not, as "statist." At the very least, ideas were weapons and, in the ideologically charged atmosphere of the early Cold War, particularly potent ones.

But widely shared and sincerely held beliefs about the proper relationship between state and society, and about the urgent need to limit state power, also exerted an independent influence on the course of events. Ideology was not just a rhetorical cloak concealing selfish interests; it was also a strong source of self-constraint on American government officials. In other places and times, national leaders have tended to be among the most determined state-builders. In the United States, because of the country's unusual history and unique ideological heritage, the highest-ranking political officials have sometimes been the most resolute anti-statists. This is a profoundly important phenomenon, one that cannot simply be explained away with reference to the usual narrow categories of greed or electoral ambition.

A brief word about my own biases: while I have not set out to write a morality tale, I do intend clearly to emphasize the long-term benefits to the health and vitality of the American regime of the anti-statist influences that are so deeply embedded within it. That does not mean, however, that I regard these influences as always and unreservedly positive, or that I intend to treat the postwar advocates of anti-statism as the unvarnished heroes of my story.

Some portion of the anti-statist impulse whose impact I will analyze here was the product of impersonal forces; it was the result of the routine functioning of American political institutions, rather than of the deliberate efforts of any particular contemporary party or group or individual. To the extent that anyone deserves the credit for this, it is the Founding Fathers, not their descendants.

Postwar opposition to the growth of governmental power was also, in some cases, merely a by-product of self-interest, rather than the result of any serious attempt to establish what was best for the country as a whole. As such it was neither contemptible nor especially laudable. Principled postwar anti-statists, meanwhile, were often motivated by other beliefs that I happen to regard as reprehensible or, at best, misguided. Many southern Democrats who favored "states' rights" and a weaker government in Washington were also, not coincidentally, racists; some midwestern Republicans who wanted lower taxes, less federal regulation, and a smaller defense budget were also, as a result, isolationists.

If the most determined postwar anti-statists had had their way, the consequences for the United States, its allies, and, ironically, for the cause of liberty that the opponents of strong government claimed to hold dear would have been

serious and perhaps even catastrophic. The world today would not be a better place if, after 1945, the United States had been unwilling to maintain its military might and global presence or to help its allies and former enemies rally and rebuild. On the other hand, in the absence of constraints, the anxiety of the early Cold War could easily have led to deep economic damage, or to radical, and perhaps truly dangerous, changes in American institutions and society. If the thoroughgoing anti-statists were misguided, so too were those of their opponents who, without necessarily intending to, might have transformed the United States into an armed camp. A balance needed to be struck between the necessity for external strength and the desire for domestic freedom. Not everyone saw this clearly at the time; my greatest enthusiasm is reserved for those who did.

Alternatives

There are two main alternatives to the overall explanation that I will offer here. Let me briefly note why I believe my own account to be superior.

Probably the most commonly held view is that the Cold War did, in fact, lead to a monstrous growth in the size and power of the federal government and to the construction of something that might properly be called a "garrison state," or "national security state." This rendering of events is not so much wrong as it is incomplete and disproportionate. There is no question that the American state was bigger and stronger in 1950 than it was in 1930. Given the external pressures, however, it was not nearly as big or as strong as it could have been, nor as many influential people believed at the time that it must become in order to survive. That the American state grew during the early years of the Cold War is important, and it is also obvious, in the sense of being plainly visible. Less obvious, but no less important, is that there were potent restraints on state expansion. It is only by considering what might have been, and by examining the process through which actual outcomes eventually emerged, that we can gain an adequate appreciation of this essential fact.

If the U.S. response to the onset of the Cold War was restrained, some have suggested that the reason may lie not in the character of the American domestic regime, but in the nature of the prevailing military technology. Perhaps, as Stephen Krasner has written, it was the sheer destructiveness of nuclear weapons that permitted the United States to deter aggression and to defend itself without developing a much stronger and more intrusive central state. Nuclear technology, Krasner notes, "made it possible to create the world's most formidable military force even with a weak government."³

Supposing that the United States *did* substitute technology for labor, quality for quantity, it does not follow that this was the only plausible response to the existence of nuclear weapons. In fact, as I will show, there were a number of

³ Stephen D. Krasner, *Defending the National Interest* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 67.

alternative courses of action, with considerable logic and powerful constituencies behind them, each of which would have required much higher levels of societal effort and a far stronger state than the approach that was ultimately chosen. The military strategy that the United States eventually adopted, and the domestic power-creating measures undertaken to support it, were matters of choice; they were not somehow dictated by objective, material circumstances or by some inescapable technological reality. Those choices, in turn, were strongly shaped by domestic, anti-statist influences.

One way of illustrating this is to match the American approach to Cold War preparedness against that of its strongly statist Soviet counterpart. A thoroughgoing comparison of the strategies and power-creating programs of the two superpowers is beyond the scope of this book. Nevertheless, as I will note at a number of points, the differences between the two were stark and revealing. The United States and the Soviet Union were very different kinds of countries, and they responded to nuclear weapons in very different ways.

In contemporary academic discourse, anyone who seeks to explain the outcome of the Cold War in terms of unique American characteristics risks being called a "triumphalist." If by this term is meant someone who believes that the United States was destined inevitably to defeat the Soviet Union, or that its eventual victory was a reflection of the inherently superior intelligence of its leaders or the greater intrinsic toughness of its people, then I must reject the label. But if the term refers to someone who not only rejoices in America's Cold War success, but sees in it proof of the practical strengths as well as the moral virtues of the American regime, then I am an unrepentant triumphalist.