

US AND SOVIET WORLD MYTHS:  
CONTRADICTORY OR COMPATIBLE?

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The structure of this paper is as follows. First, there are some general reflections on the topic of occidental constructions of world space, their world myths, in other words. Then, a presentation of this author's image of the US and Soviet images of the world. And finally, the more topical political discussion of to what extent these images are contradictory or compatible.

The point of departure will have to be the manichaeian dichotomy between Good and Evil. Maybe one source of origin for the significance of this way of conceiving of the world is Persian, and more specifically Zoroasterism. Then there are extremely important western and eastern manifestations of this way of thinking, such as the Katars, in the west and the Bogomils in the east--thinking particularly of France and Russia. God and Satan are the concrete expressions as actors of the two more general principles, and typical of the occident (as opposed to, for instance, Daoism) is the way in which the two actors are kept separate, diametrically opposed in cosmos, up and down, heaven and hell.

Christianity embodies this basic dichotomy and gives it flesh and blood so to speak. It is found both in the western and eastern churches (the Catholic and Protestant churches in the west, the Orthodox churches in the east). The nuances are numerous, but the basic structure still prevails. If there is a difference maybe one expression could be as follows: there

is something lighter, more optimistic over the eastern, Orthodox churches. God loves his children, there is no doubt. There is less of Satan. In the Protestant churches in the west, to the contrary, God also loves, but the love is more conditional and some are Chosen, some are not--for salvation. And those who are not, the unchosen, are obviously in for damnation, meaning that God plays some of Satan's role if we assume that the primary sorting is done by God and Satan receives the leftovers. Maybe the Catholic churches in-between may be closer to the hint at Orthodox optimism than the rather gruelling, painful, uncertainty of particularly the puritan branches of Protestantism.

These are fundamental and collectively shared beliefs a social construction in general and a world construction in particular will have to be marked by so strong figures of thought. A gradient has to be introduced in world space, sloping, even steeply, from Good to Evil. And what would be more natural than seeing one's own country as closest to God because it is Good and one's favorite enemy as closest to Satan because it is Evil? What would be more natural than to invoke the figure of being Chosen, by the Prince of Light and the Prince of Darkness, respectively? What would be more natural--for two reasons: the metaphors have been worked into the population by systematic teaching of religion for centuries, even millennia and--(rather importantly), they are very easy to understand. They can be collectively shared, excluding nobody precisely because of their extreme simplicity.

The reader will find on the next page an effort to present world space as divided into four parts and as seen by the two super-powers, both of them within the Christian, or rather manichaeian circle of metaphor production. The US side of the story, the left hand column of the table, has been spelled out elsewhere. The world is divided into four parts: on top the US as God's own country, surrounded by a center of "allies" ("-") because they are not that reliable, meaning concretely that they may not necessarily share all aspects of this world construction sufficiently explicitly, and publicly); in turn surrounded by a periphery of countries that may fall either way, less reliable and consequently should be protected from a fate worse than death; and that is the fourth and outer most circle of purely evil countries, chosen by Satan himself, being a manifestation of his designs, his true instruments on Earth.

The question in this connection is where evil countries can be found. Searching the world's political history and geography, where do we find material for the construction of evil countries, or more generally evil actors, on the world scene?

I think there are four rules governing the search, limiting the choice, but also making it sufficiently broad to guarantee not only a supply, but a fresh supply of enemies.

TABLE 1: US And The Soviet Union: World Myths Compared

	GOD		HISTORY	
I	US		USSR	
II	CENTER "Allies" First World Capitalist		CENTER "Allies" Second World Socialist	
III	PERIPHERY Third World		PERIPHERY Feudal, Capitalist	
IV	EVIL		EVIL	
	Russia Turkey & Successors Yellow Peril & Successors	Jews Muslims Non-whites Pagans/ Savages Atheist/ Communists	Jews Muslims Non-whites Ahistorical peoples Anti-Historists Greens	Imperialist Turkey & Successors Yellow Peril & Successors
	SATAN		AHISTORY	

First, there has to be an enemy to spur one on. The enemy has to be sufficiently strong to constitute a physical threat and at the same time sufficiently alluring, attractive, even tempting to constitute a spiritual threat. To be Good means not only to reject Evil, but also to be able to withstand, to fight Evil. You can only know that you are Good if you are tested, all the time, and pass the test. And a tough test at that.

Second, the presence of Evil in the world also serves the important function of making you feel Good even if you are not challenged. There is always the possibility of comparisons. For that reason the Evil actor also has to be bad in the sense of making oneself look Good. The Evil actor provides us with the possibility of saying "we may make some mistakes but we are at least not down to that level".

Third, there should be only one Evil actor at the time. If there are more several problems arise: a feeling of being encircled, overpowered by Evil forces of different kinds with the possibility that still new ones may arrive; the feeling that there may be some reason why so many are against us, maybe we are bad!; a complex world view, multipolar particularly if the Evil forces also are Evil to each other. In a sense this was the US metaphysical problem when Hitler Germany attacked Stalin Soviet Union in 1941. And on top of this there is the

more fundamental theological problem: will we not have to assume mono-Satanism as a corollary of monotheism?

Fourth, the Evil country cannot be constructed ex nihilo; there must be some historical basis. And that historical basis must by and large satisfy the three rules just mentioned. The question, then, is what historical basis there is in the western part of the occident. And then, the eastern part of the occident.

Broadly speaking I think a distinction can be made between two types of raw materials for the construction of Evil countries.

Thus, there are the concrete country actors, sources of threat through the centuries, maybe millennia. Russia was always a problem to the west partly because of its size and consequently capability, partly because it had been invaded so often by the west that there might also be a motivation over and beyond internal expansionist inclinations: the revenge. Turkey was in the same category, the capability of the Ottoman empire being undisputed. But the motivation partly in terms of Islamic religious zeal, partly as a revenge for the Christian cruelty they had been exposed to during the crusades was also present. And then there was always the Yellow Peril, probably a heritage from the Mongol tradition coming out of the steps of Central Asia, of invasions westwards, from Attila the Hun to the Great Khans.

The second source would be group actors, for instance defined by some ethnic characteristic. Very important in this connection would, of course, be the competitors or challengers to Christianity, in other words Judaism and Islam within Occidental religion, and then all the others, conveniently lumped together as "Pagans". And that category, actually meaning the people who live in the countryside (pagani) as opposed to "civilized" people living in the cities, comes very close to the category of savages. A modern version of the saying would be the category "atheist". Behind it all lurks anti-nonwhite racism.

In all of this there is more than enough material. The Soviet Union could immediately be declared an enemy, partly because of the Russian nucleus, partly because it was "atheist". The word "communist" was destined to be a new word for Satan, and the Soviet Union could be fitted into its role as Evil actor not because of anything the country does, but because of what the country is. This in itself goes a long way towards explaining why the image of the Soviet Union is so inelastic, so independent of what a country does internationally, or even intra-nationally. The country is evil. Full stop.

But there is certainly more material for the construction of enemies. "Turkey and successors" syndrome has been filled in succession by Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Libia and Iran, singly and combined. And the "Yellow Peril" syndrome was certainly filled

by "Red China" for a long period (where it was combined with the pagan/savage/atheist/communist syndrome), a position vacated by China and now probably gradually being filled by Japan.

The first enemies of the people destined to become "Americans" were the pagan/savages/non-white combination: the "Indians", the native Americans. The same argument can be made: it does not matter so much what they do, what matters is what they are. They are the material of which enemies can be made, hence enemies are made out of that material. And next in line were the Africans treated in a way that certainly made enemies out of them, a role which they were also predestined to fill by the logic of the scheme.

But then there is more to come: the Jews and the Moslems. Anti-Semitism was also predestined to become a part of the American world myth, taken over from centuries, even millennia of anti-semitic theory and practice in the west. When that changed after the Holocaust, or more precisely after the TV series about the Holocaust it was probably due to three major reasons. Nazi atrocities made open anti-Semitism impossible; Israel was a part of the US anti-Soviet strategy and hence not only Israel but also American Jews had to be supported; and American Jews themselves were not only becoming mainstream Americans through vertical mobility in the social structure and horizontal mobility politically towards the right but also increasingly in a position themselves to control the world myths through influence over the media. One may perhaps venture the hypothesis that the balance

between an inclination towards anti-Semitism on the one hand and the "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" logic that would lead to Philo-semitism is precarious, and may be overturned any time.

More reliable is the anti-Moslem sentiment. This does not only derive from the antagonism between Israel and the Palestinians living under Israeli occupation and the Arab states having a Jewish state in their midst. It has much older, historical roots that date back not only to the Crusades, but also to the fundamental challenge Islam represented to Christianity as a purifying religion. The Crusades, like the many invasions of Russia must have given to the west a sense of Russians and Moslems as very dangerous people: one day they may come back, treating us the way we treated them. There are of course also countless stories of how aggressively they defended themselves, with little or no ability to distinguish between aggressiveness brought about by western attack and a more permanent aggressive inclination.

In short, more than enough raw material to produce out of separate instances of Moslem terrorism a major Evil actor, one of sufficient magnitude to satisfy the first three requirements mentioned above.

Let us now try to turn to the Soviet side of the story. In the right hand column of Table 1 the hypothetical answers are given. The basic problem is, of course, to give sense to the

fundamental dichotomy on which the whole scheme rests, between Good and Evil. The Soviet Union is officially an atheist state and cannot be expected meaningfully to be understood in terms of a world suspended between God and Satan. On the other hand, against a backdrop of a very heavy tradition of Christianity a manichaeian distinction or polarity, inducing a field or a gradient in the world would not only make sense but be expected.

The thesis is that marxism solves the problem through the History/a-History distinction. History (actually a very capital H) is a category that takes a position very similar to God. The organizing principle in the world, with less focus on the beginning and end, on creation and destruction and more on the process in-between. History is not only a record of events, that would be history with a lower case h. It is not only those events chained together in a process. History is the forc motrice driving that process, more or less adequately recorded as history. A nation is under History like a western nation is under God; not only in the sense that History like God is above, but in the sense that the task of the nation, the best the nation can do to fulfill itself, is to be obedient to that higher force. Freedom is insight in necessity. To try to cast oneself in a role outside History is to defy inevitability, and that can only be done at one's own considerable risk. Truly an act against the order of nature the nation thereby relegates itself not only to a low position in the ranking of nations, or to a marginal position outside that ranking.

In fact the nation becomes some kind of anti-nation, not only a-historical but anti-historical.

My image of the Soviet image of the world would then run as follows:

First, there is the Soviet Union as the nation directly chosen by History, and for that reason directly under history, as the first country in the world to enter the Promised Land of socialism. Socialism being at the higher level, further ahead in the progress of peoples, this act casts the Soviet Union in the role as the First Nation. There are rights and duties in this connection. One obvious right is a leading position among socialist nations; another right is parity relative to non-socialist nations, at the very least. The duty is to construct socialism, and to protect the gains in the USSR and the socialist countries.

Second, there is the Center surrounding the Soviet Union of "allies" ("-" because they may not be reliable, meaning by that not sufficiently explicitly, publicly, sharing the Soviet world myths). But they are like-minded countries, and once they have become socialist which means that they have entered the higher level they are supposed not to slide back to the level they left behind. History is irreversible, it cannot be unwilled once done.

Third, the level they left behind: the Periphery which in the Soviet myth would be a mix of traditional and modern societies

with feudal, pre-capitalist and capitalist patterns. They are in the waiting room of history, the feudal countries waiting to become capitalist and the capitalist countries waiting to become socialist. Of course these processes are complex. But such is, more or less, the inexorable progress of History.

Fourth, there are the Evil countries, meaning ahistorical countries. These are countries that have placed themselves outside the historical Stufengang. A crime against history is a crime against nature. Historical laws of this magnitude are parts of the order of nature. The process, or rather progress of history can be held up, delayed for a while but can never be stopped, and certainly not reversed. Consequently Evil actor Number 1 would be the major imperialist countries. Imperialism would then be defined as the last stage of capitalism where for some reason there is no evolutionary transition process taking place. History is held up through active and aggressive efforts to reverse the flow of the historical tidal waves. Lesser capitalist countries cannot afford to do this: the bigger ones can. One of them was England, and one reason why the Soviet Union under Stalin supported the emergence of a modern Jewish state, Israel, was that it was interpreted as anti-imperialist being located on the sea route between England and her Asian "possessions". The Arabs were seen as more friendly to British imperialism than the Jews with their socialist inclinations.

Then there are the two Evil actors in the East that the Soviet Union would share with West in the sense of the United States: Turkey and successors, and the Yellow Peril and successors. They are considerably more real as enemies for Russia than for the West. It was Russia that was raided by the Mongols, not the West; it was Russia and Eastern Europe that was attacked and partly conquered by the Ottoman empire, not Western Europe. And yet it is not necessarily the case that these enemy constructions are more deeply rooted, more successfully, in the East than in the West. The reason for this would probably be that more important than empirical reality is how it fits into the total structure of national or regional myths; the Protestant West perhaps being more accommodating to enemy constructions than ~~the~~ the Orthodox East (or the Catholic South) because of excessive manichaeism.

However this may be the Soviet Union would certainly also have their share of anti-Moslem sentiment. Some of it would be based on the Turkish experience, on the idea that Moslems, like Jews, set themselves apart from history as defined by the core peoples in Occidental civilizations (according to themselves): the Christians. Jews may agree with the historical constructions of Christianity, liberalism and marxism (after all they are all made by Jews!), but be less inclined to accept any nationalistic interpretation of it having been forced, until recently, into some type of trans-national existence, with great capacity for universalist thought (expressing itself in science and art, and certainly not the least in the social sciences). But Moslems would have their own sense

of history. There is an ideal society run by the mullahs and the bazaari, in other words by church and capital in western terms. The state would just be a part of this, as something inseparable from the mullah-bazaari alliance. And the Good society has an economy that would be agriculturally based with a commercial structure on top of that, with strict rules as to what constitutes honest business. In other words an idealized version of society as it was at the time of the Prophet. "Development" or "modernization" added to this, or opposed to this, would not necessarily be against the Quran, but not necessary either. Purification rather than social change would be the rule. And this rule is clearly contrary both to liberalism and to marxism, the off-springs of Christian thought on progress, under the eyes of God.

And equally ahistorical would be people who could even be said to be anti-historical, such as the Greens. A capitalist who believes in capitalism, and prefers to fight for it and against socialism, is performing his role within the Stufengang. A Green who believes in neither, denying the whole logic of the Stufengang is committing a crime against history. And thus it is that during the German federal elections March 1983 both the social democrats and the conservatives had access with their election convoys through the German Democratic Republic to Berlin, but the Greens not. An anti-historical phenomenon should not be seen rolling on the (actually somewhat anti-historical) highways of socialist Germany, a green bus--die Grüne Raupe (auf Suche nach Kohl....).

And that leads us to the final question: are these images compatible or contradictory? Of course they are contradictory to the extent that the US has the Soviet Union as Enemy Number 1 and the Soviet Union has the US as (imperialist) Enemy Number 1. Much of the energy of the east/west conflict derives exactly from this phenomenon.

But the myths are not that static. Only the structure of the myths are rather stable. The idea of an enemy, and the basic contours of an enemy, may not change; the precise identity of the enemy could change. The US had the Soviet Union as enemy number one up to Nazi Germany replaced the Soviet Union. But that lasted only to the end of the Second World War, in May 1945. Shortly thereafter the Soviet Union was reconstructed as Enemy Number 1. And that, in turn, lasted only until sometime in the 1960s when the *détente* made the Soviet Union recede into the background and "Red China" took its rightful place as Enemy Number 1. The country was populated not by human beings but by hordes who were not walking but swarming; their communism was not only red but yellow. And yet China was able to get out of that position and become something close to a center country with the predictable consequence that the Soviet Union had to take its place again as Enemy Number 1, a place it has occupied until recently where it is challenged by Islam and terrorism, or more particularly Moslem terrorism, as a worthy successor. This process is still going on.

Are there corresponding career patterns on the Soviet side? The United States was replaced by Nazi Germany which, in turn, was replaced by the United States until China took that position during the *détente* period which to some extent coincided with the period of the cultural revolution in China. The basic question to be asked would be to what extent the United States, which quickly occupied the position left vacant when China was less of a threat because the cultural revolution was not only over but dead and buried, could be challenged by something corresponding to Islam and terrorism, and more particularly Moslem terrorism, in the Soviet imagery of the world?

It is difficult to say. The Soviet Union has much of Islam inside its borders, in the five Central Asian republics. However, it remains to be seen whether that will develop in the direction of the Moslem fundamentalism known in West Asia and North Africa. The demographic challenge is well known and has been pointed out very often. The terrorist threat in that connection seems to be negligible, at least so far.

But the conclusion from Table 1 is obvious: the United States (and the Soviet Union could make peace preserving their world myths, and that is absolutely essential since such myths change but slowly) if they promoted each other from the position as most Evil country to something less threatening at the same time, and agreed on a common enemy. The candidates are obvious: the Moslem threat,

the Yellow Peril and the Greens. Of course, both China and Japan can be cast in the roles as Yellow Peril. Mongolia cannot possibly fill this historical role, having been well emasculated by the Soviet Union as a client country. There are also strong reasons why both the United States and the Soviet Union might like to preserve both China and Japan as friends, or at least as non-enemies, but these reasons are not so strong in connection with Islamic countries (provided oil can be supplied from somewhere else).

So the conclusion is as follows, as a recipe for peace-making between the two super-powers.

First, the Soviet Union makes peace with the United States saying that the United States is a leading country in the world, asking for more services from the US in all kinds of fields, for instance modernization of agriculture, where the US due to the depressed nature of the US agriculture, would have a lot of free floating expertise available. In addition to that the Soviet Union confesses its sins but makes use of the Chinese method of claiming that whatever was bad was due to very few people (the Chinese formula was four persons, the gang of four; the Soviet formula seems to be three persons, Breshnev, Andropov, Chernenko; and mainly due to the fact that they were too old when in office). On top of that the Soviet Union offers to the United States a joint fight against Moslem terrorists, perhaps with a focus more on "Moslem" than on "terrorism".

Second, the United States makes peace with the Soviet Union, offering to remove the Soviet Union from the position as Enemy Number 1, moving the country into a more compatible position. But then the United States does not have to make so much of a confession of sins, the Soviet leadership being less Christian in that sense, only in the more fundamental cosmological sense. Some confession might be useful though and it is quite obvious, right now, on whom evil can be blamed: the Reagan Administration. And finally the United States would agree with the Soviet Union that the danger now is "Moslem terrorism", in this case with the focus more on "terrorism" than on "Moslem". The Greens might also come in conveniently as disorderly movements outside the mainstream of politics; ahistorical in the East, apolitical in the West.

In short: the usual occidental formula, peace between two of them at the expense of a third party. In other words, unacceptable. But the rest of the formula, minus the appointment of a new enemy, could be acceptable--but hardly workable unless both parties start examining their myths more carefully. So, maybe that is our major cultural task in the years to come: to examine and re-examine our myths. And the question remains: are we courageous enough to do so?