After the Meltdown of Soviet-Type Socialism: Presenting the Issues

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According to mainstream wisdom a few years ago, the collapse of communism signified that free market capitalism now represented the pinnacle of social evolution. However, since the end of the ‘Cold War’ which occurred in conjunction with the implosion of Soviet-type socialism, serious difficulties and problems have emerged in the capitalist world system.

Until the beginning of the 1990s, the post-1945 world order was deeply influenced by the antagonism between the Soviet bloc and the American-dominated alliance. This hostility notwithstanding, relations between them paradoxically contrived to create a certain stability and predictability in international politics. Thus, regardless of the upheavals and turbulence in the post-colonial world, security existed at the level of inter-state relations between the first and second worlds. In geopolitical terms, an element of collusion could be observed behind the ostensible collision between the USA and the USSR. The confrontation/co-existence of this ‘imaginary war’, as Mary Kaldor (1991, 28) called it, was instrumental in strengthening superpower hegemony in their respective spheres of influence. This bipolarity which mobilized and wasted astronomical resources, however, failed to resolve fundamental problems. Besides the costs to their societies, especially if the ecological and economic dimensions are considered, the Cold War era created or exacerbated problems for the rest of the world. These problems are presently coming into the open.

Viewed in this way, one of the results of the demise of state socialism/victory of market capitalism has been the creation of a more open international system bereft of the previous hegemonic guarantees for stability. The reintegration of the former command economies into the international division of labour produces tensions within these societies with a danger of spill-overs into ethnic conflicts or regional inter-state
hostilities. At the same time, Western capitalist nations facing economic difficulties of their own are in no position – were they so inclined – to make the East European transition easier. The idea of a new Marshall Plan, briefly discussed after 1989, has disappeared from Western discourse. In view of the difficulties affecting the capitalist nations, the question of *quo vadis* is relevant not only for the countries east of the Elbe but is presently acquiring much more general significance.

To conceptualize the challenges to security, it is necessary to comprehend not only the destabilizing tendencies at work, but to undertake an effort of clarification of conflicting theoretical constructions and guidelines. A framework is needed to provide a basis for meaningful discussion of the possible options in the search for international and regional stability, with special focus on the European situation. This may be achieved by singling out major destabilizing factors of potential significance.

While the breakdown of Soviet-type socialism came as a surprise to the mainstream schools of international politics, the end of the Cold War likewise demonstrated the weakness of Western strategic thinking. Neither the academic world nor the foreign ministries seemed prepared for 1989, let alone the ensuing events. The West had no viable strategy as how to use its victory unless, of course, a chaotic post-Cold War period was the objective. The time is becoming ripe for a novel frame of reference to describe the present situation. A dynamic has been created demanding new concepts and new terminology. As James Kurth (1994, 3) points out, how long can we talk in terms of post-Cold War? Post-post-Cold War will not do!

### THE HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE OF THE MARKET

Whereas the reintegration of Soviet-type economies into the capitalist world system was in fact a component part of the so-called peaceful competition between East and West (Frank, 1977; Brun and Hersh, 1978), the ongoing internal transformation of post-command economies constitutes the major new element in the international political economy.

From a historical point of view, Immanuel Wallerstein years ago defined the entire Soviet experiment as a late-comer’s attempt to attain core status ‘by using the classic technique of mercantilist semiwithdrawal from the world economy’ (Wallerstein, 1979 [1980], 31). In fact, in the early years after the revolution, the question of whether or not to participate in the capitalist world economy gave rise to heated disa-