Rethinking the Role of Ideology in International Politics During the Cold War

Nigel Gould-Davies

Ideology is back. The interpretation of newly available materials from the archives of former socialist countries has prompted the revival of a venerable, but of late neglected, theme in the study of the Cold War. The inconclusive debates of the first two decades of that struggle are being revived, as scholars armed with fresh sources ask again the familiar questions: Was ideology important? If so, in what way? How was its influence manifested? What was the relationship between ideology and interests? Nearly every work that draws on such materials refers to these issues, and most offer a judgment on them. The arguments are no less keen now than when they informed the conduct of the Cold War itself.

Yet there is a danger that the limitations of those earlier debates are being rediscovered and their mistakes repeated. As before, there is little sense of progress, let alone resolution of the arguments. What takes place is less a fruitful collision of contending views than a reiteration of entrenched posi-
tions—parallel monologues rather than genuine exchange. The opposing sides proceed from incompatible premises about the way international relations works and thus draw on different evidence to support their arguments. Sometimes, they even interpret the same evidence in different ways. These underlying assumptions, however, are rarely made explicit. Even those who argue for the importance of ideology do not typically state the principles governing their use of evidence: what kind of data tend to increase the plausibility of their position and why. Those who do not believe in the role of ideology usually give clearer reasons than those who do.

In short, the problem is theoretical incoherence. Only when the rival structures of explanation on each side are exposed and clarified will it be possible to show what divides them, what is at issue in the disagreements, and how one might decide between them in any given case. Conceptual as well as archival work is necessary, otherwise, new sources will merely provide more to disagree about. That this is so is demonstrated by the historical controversies that continue to surround other periods for which abundant sources have long been available. Arguments about the causes of the First World War, for example, hinge on rival judgments about the motives of states and the nature of the international system, which not only apportion different weights to the various forces and factors at work, but also organize the evidence to support their accounts in different ways. This also reminds us that the significance of the theoretical questions raised by the study of Soviet ideology goes far beyond this particular case: It is only one instance of a large class of analogous cases concerning the role of ideas (not only ideologies) in international relations, all of which are framed in the same terms as the Soviet one. Whether the issue is the role of Jacobin ideas in the policy of revolutionary France, Nazism in the causes of the Second World War, Islam in Iranian policy, moralism and legalism in America’s foreign relations, or culture in any state—to mention only a few examples—the same characteristic divisions arise between those who assert the importance of ideas and those who argue for the primacy of power and security. The debates are usually no less inconclusive.

In this article, I will examine arguments commonly advanced about the role of ideology in Soviet foreign policy. I will argue, first, that a series of widely held misconceptions, with no basis in either logic or fact, has hindered thinking on this subject. These fallacies arise because we have no clear concept of ideological agency to counterpose to the Realist approach that discounts the role of ideas in foreign policy. Having disassembled these erroneous assumptions, I will then construct an approach on surer foundations that addresses three related questions: first, what is to count as an ideological factor and how this is to be distinguished from nonideological ones like
security; second, what kind of evidence would tend to show that ideology is or is not an important influence in any given case; and third, how we may think about the interaction of security imperatives and ideological motives in state behavior.

It would be misleading, however, to suppose that the recently available Soviet bloc sources, in all their richness, play a purely passive role in their own interpretation—that their significance lies only in their availability for incorporation into theories. Newly discovered facts alone can cast doubt on the adequacy of existing arguments, raise new kinds of questions, and suggest patterns and connections that invite theoretical development. The relationship between theoretical and empirical development is a dialectical one.

There is also one very specific way that new evidence bears directly and unequivocally on the question of ideology in Soviet policy. It is sometimes argued that the Soviet leadership did not really believe Marxism-Leninism, and that the ideology was rather a means of legitimating, in the eyes of the population, power wielded and policies pursued for self-interested reasons. This view was always inherently implausible. It assumed that elites, intensively socialized into the official ideology during a long career in the party-state apparatus, were less likely to have internalized it than the 90 percent of the population who were not even party members. It also begged the question of why the regime should choose to base its claims to authority on beliefs so incongruent with Russian culture and tradition rather than draw on others, such as nationalism or religion, with deeper roots.

The new sources have largely settled the matter. They show that Soviet officials and leaders, in forums never intended for public scrutiny, took ideology very seriously. There was, as Vojtech Mastny puts it, “no double bookkeeping.” They articulated ideological principles and on occasion even cited the classics of Marxism-Leninism to support a position. To read declassified documents of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) is to enter into a conceptual world whose basic assumptions and categories are fundamentally different from our own. Many examples could be given. Two of them are worth noting here.

In 1952, Josef Stalin published what was to be his last theoretical work, Economic Problems of Socialism, which was intended to settle the debate on a number of issues that had arisen during the preparation of a new textbook on political economy. The treatise by Stalin envisaged, among other things, the eventual abolition of money in favor of “products exchange.” Stalin himself had derived this idea from Marx’s Critique of the Gotha Program, which

he read in a 1951 edition. His personal copy of the book shows that he had read it closely. Heavily underlined sections of text correspond to Stalin’s own subsequent proposals. The absolute leader of a superpower, in his seventies, in ill health, and with two years to live, found time to study a polemical tract written by a German émigré living in London in the previous century. It defies belief that someone for whom ideology was irrelevant could have done this. It is one more piece of evidence among many that a man so often depicted as a cynical practitioner of Realpolitik was immersed in ideology.

The second example comes from the rule of Stalin’s successors, whose revisions of official ideology are often seen as representing a concession to nonideological security concerns. From 1958 to 1961, a commission appointed by the Central Committee of the CPSU drafted a new party program, only the third in the party’s history. It represented the most wide-ranging ideological debate until the late Gorbachev era and, unlike the latter, was largely conducted privately. Although specialists at the major academic research institutes took an active part in the debate, top party and state officials played the leading role in this process, notably Andrei Gromyko, who had recently been appointed foreign minister; Otto Kuusinen, a CPSU Presidium member and leading ideological official, and Boris Ponomarev, the head of the CPSU International Department. Nikita Khrushchev himself was consulted and offered his comments. These discussions make fascinating reading. They vividly convey a sense of genuine effort to interpret the principles of Marxism-Leninism in the light of prevailing domestic and international conditions. The writing of the program was a serious, time-consuming, and comprehensive process of collective rethinking of the party’s understanding of the world and of its mission in it.

3. Russian Center for the Preservation and Study of Records of Recent History (RTsKhIDNI), Fond (F.) 558, Opis’ (Op.) 3, Delo (D.) 207; and K. Marx, Kritika Gotskoi Programmy (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1951). Stalin’s proposals on this issue are in J.V. Stalin, Ekonomicheskie problemy sotsializma v SSSR (Moscow: Politizdat, 1952), pp. 12–13, 82–84. Several other works of Marx are also cited there. The eventual abolition of money continued to be advocated by Vyacheslav Molotov in his dotage, although he proposed replacing it with units of labor time. See Feliks Chuev, Molotov Remembers (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1993), p. 212.
6. The materials for the preparation of the program are in RTsKhIDNI, F. 586. See, for example, the protocols of the meetings for the preparation of theoretical questions, F. 586, Op. 1, D. 66.
This is not to argue that ideology was always believed to the same extent by all leaders in all periods, nor is it to argue that ideology was always faithfully implemented in policy. (The latter issue is an interpretative question that will be examined in due course.) It is, however, to insist that they took ideology very seriously indeed. The evidence is overwhelming.

This proves something, but not much. The most sophisticated arguments against the importance of ideology have always addressed not what the Soviet Union wanted to do, but what it was capable of doing. An implicit Realism underlies nearly all of these arguments. In its earlier formulations, the argument held that states seek to maximize their power. The more theoretically secure “neorealist” variant holds that states are compelled by the competitive pressures of an anarchic international system to seek security above all other goals. If they do not, they will become weaker, lose influence, and suffer setbacks, defeats, and ultimately the loss of independence. An important implication is that states’ choice of alignments will depend on the way those alignments contribute to security. In particular, states will tend to ally against other states that threaten to become hegemonic and thus a common danger to all other members of the international system. A balance of power is supposed to emerge as a systemic consequence of individual security-seeking behavior. It follows from this view that ideology must either yield to the demands of power politics or hinder its pursuit. At best, ideology will be abandoned or overridden; at worst, it will be an irrational distraction. There is no place in the Realist view for ideology—or any other goal apart from security—to make a sustainable difference to a state’s foreign policy.

It is no small irony that while Realism as a theory has been increasingly challenged by other approaches, notably liberalism and institutionalism, since the apogee of its influence in the 1950s, the same period has seen the steady growth of its influence in the interpretation of the principal feature of international relations during the Cold War. After the early orthodoxy that assigned responsibility for the conflict to militant Soviet expansionism and the revisionism that laid the blame on America’s aggressive search for markets, a more balanced—and, it was argued, more sophisticated—explanation emerged of the Cold War in international-systemic terms. This approach argued that the causes of the conflict were to be found not in the domestic systems of one or another superpower, but in the dynamics of their interaction. The so-called security dilemma, sharpened by the zero-sum logic of bipolarity, generated action-reaction cycles that inevitably brought the two sides into confrontation. Their behavior, forced on them by the international system, was fundamentally similar. Postrevisionism, the interpretation of the Cold War in Realist terms, consequently stressed the tragic and inevitable character of the conflict.
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Postrevisionist accounts frequently argued not only that Realist terms of explanation fit the evidence well, but that ideological ones do not. Yet their treatment of the latter reveals a mistaken conception of what it must mean to pursue ideological goals. This in turn generates a series of false oppositions between the pursuit of security and the pursuit of power. There are at least four such fallacies:

1. Ideologues must have a master plan (or blueprint or timetable), by which is presumably meant (it is never made explicit) a detailed strategy of action. However, to characterize a state as ideological is to make a statement about the nature of its goals; it is not to impute comprehensive knowledge about how it will achieve them. A “master plan,” were such a thing possible, would signify omniscience rather than ideology (indeed, in principle the security-maximizing state of Realist theory could equally well have such a plan). A commitment to bring about change, even transformation, of the international system is fully compatible with acknowledged uncertainty about the policies that might best serve this end in a complex and unpredictable environment.

2. Ideologues must be inflexible. This assumption, sometimes related to the “master plan” view, holds that changes of policy are ipso facto evidence of ideology’s yielding to orthodox security concerns. There is no warrant, however, for holding that a given end, even a radical one, must always, and under all conditions, be pursued in the same way. Policy change can equally signify what Joseph Nye has called “simple learning”—the adjustment of means around ends. Behavior can be supple in its use of methods, adaptive to circumstance, and yet remain principled. Flexibility does not entail pragmatism.

3. Ideologues must be unremittingly aggressive. It is often assumed that cautious or defensive behavior must signify the primacy of security over ideology. Yet the antonym of cautious is reckless, and there is nothing about ideological goals that requires them to be so pursued. Similarly, an ideologue’s desire for peace need not override his or her belief. The preference for peace over war is an entirely instrumental decision. There is no reason that ideological goals must be, or are


even most effectively, pursued by war. Only militarists inherently prefer war; ideologues need not.

4. Ideologues cannot cooperate with adversaries. Even more than peace, active cooperation is taken as prima facie evidence of doctrinal bad faith. However, there is no reason to suppose that ideologues cannot sincerely wish to cooperate with those with whom they are engaged in long-term principled struggle. How can voluntary agreement, by definition beneficial to both parties, assist the prosecution of an underlying zero-sum political conflict? One way is through unequal distribution of joint gains. A good example is a state's need for recovery after a major war, especially if it has suffered more severe losses than its adversaries—something true of the Soviet Union after both world wars. In such cases, both sides will be better off in absolute terms by agreement (e.g., not to commit aggression), but the gains of the more weakened state will be greater, and thus its relative position will improve. A second way, which may complement the first, arises from differential time horizons. One side may intend to honor an agreement only in the short term and renege when cooperation has conferred all the benefits it can or when conditions change in ways that make other methods more effective. Many Soviet agreements with capitalist states in the 1920s were made with such expectations. A third way is through long-term selective cooperation in areas of weakness that rein in an adversary's strength while leaving the state free to conduct its rivalry in areas and on terms favorable to itself. The Soviet concept of détente can be understood in this way. Finally, states can engage in long-term cooperation, even within the larger context of fierce political rivalry, to avert outcomes disastrous to both. The most obvious example of such an outcome is nuclear war, and the Soviet doctrine of peaceful coexistence can be understood in part as an adaptation, not a renunciation, of ideological struggle in a nuclear world.

The common error of these criteria is to conflate arguments about ends with assumptions about means. To put it another way, they mistake extremism for irrationality. There is no necessary connection between the radicalism of ultimate objectives and the choice of means to achieve them. A policy can be more or less well conceived, aggressive, inflexible, or uncooperative irrespective of whether it is directed at the pursuit of values or interests. Yet

9 See, for example, Margot Light, *The Soviet Theory of International Relations* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf, 1988).
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advocates of a Realist approach demand far more exacting standards of proof for the former than for the latter. The logical conclusion of such a view is that a genuine ideological state must declare total war against its adversaries; anything less would be a betrayal of principle. Not only is this intrinsically implausible, but such a caricature depicts a kind of agency so clearly unsustainable that no example of it could long exist in the world. Yet it is an assumption that commonly underlies arguments against the importance of Marxism-Leninism in Soviet foreign policy. To be sure, some ideologues have sometimes behaved this way, but it is not inherent in the pursuit of principled goals.

Two additional fallacies concern the relationship between ideological and nonideological factors rather than the criteria for assessing the presence or absence of the former:

5. Ideology and security are mutually exclusive. Even if a state's policies do reflect considerations other than ideology, or if ideology itself changes in ways that clearly indicate a concession to other factors, this need not mean that ideology has ceased to play an important role. It may merely indicate a new balance of influences on policy. To prove that it is not everything is not to prove that it is nothing; it is not a matter of either-or. Even if compromised or circumscribed in certain ways, ideology can still be present and can exert an influence on behavior. The insistence on ‘testing’ ideational and Realist theories against one another to determine which is valid is thus misconceived. In almost every case, elements of both will be present, and the task of the analyst is to assess their relative contribution.

6. Ideology and security are alternative terms of explanation. This is perhaps the deepest fallacy, and its correction has the broadest implications for international relations theory. Even the preceding argument accepts that ideological and Realist assumptions about motives are incompatible, if not mutually exclusive. That is, a state that becomes more concerned with security by definition becomes less preoccupied with beliefs and principles. However, these two objectives not only may be compatible, but also may be mutually implicating. The prospects of ideologies depend on the success of the states that espouse them, and the purposes to which state power is directed are typically informed by beliefs and principles.

10. In formal terms, ideology is a continuous, not a dichotomous, variable.
On the one hand, the state is the most effective vehicle and resource for the propagation and implementation of an ideology that it embodies. A threat to its security is therefore by extension a threat to its ideology, and the stronger the state is, the more effectively it can spread its values and prosecute its mission. On the other hand, it has become steadily less true in the past century that power and security are pursued as ends in themselves. Rather, they have increasingly been used as preconditions for the achievement of ultimate ends denominated in principled terms—be these ideologies, moralities, or identities. As Raymond Aron has put it: Who prefers life to the reasons for living? Power, then, presupposes purpose, and purposes require power. The two naturally complement one another.

State interests—like particular forms of state behavior that may promote them, such as caution, flexibility, and cooperation—are instruments available for ideological uses. This was certainly how Vladimir Lenin—an astonishingly successful as well as unquestionably authentic Marxist-Leninist—understood the nature of Soviet foreign policy and of revolutionary strategy more generally. He condemned those who tried to implement ideological principles in reckless and irresponsible ways as fiercely as he did those who departed from the principles themselves. His critics in the early Soviet days of lively intraparty debate expounded many of the fallacies discussed here. Lenin repeatedly and relentlessly exposed the illogic of these “left-wing” communists and “heroes of the revolutionary phrase.” To opponents, for example, of the crushing peace of Brest-Litovsk with Germany in March 1918, who wanted to continue a “bare-handed war,” he declared:

Anyone who cares to think a little, or even to recall the history of the revolutionary movement in Russia, will quite easily realize that resistance to reaction helps the revolution only when it is expedient. During half a century of the revolutionary movement we have experienced many cases of resistance to reaction that were not expedient. We Marxists have always been proud that we determined the expediency of any form of struggle by a precise calculation of the mass forces and class relationships…. We have often condemned the most heroic forms of resistance by individuals as inexpedient and harmful from the point of view of the revolution.12

To those who insisted that war should be used to give revolution a “push,” he remarked that

such a theory would be tantamount to the view that armed struggle is a form of struggle that is obligatory always and under all conditions. Actually, however, the interests of the world revolution demand that Soviet power, having overthrown the bourgeoisie in our own country, should help that revolution, but that it should choose a form of help that is commensurate with its own strength.\textsuperscript{13}

The importance of Soviet state interests for the revolutionary cause was made even more explicit a few months later in May 1918:

\begin{quote}
It is precisely in the interests of “strengthening the connection” with international socialism that we are in duty bound to defend our socialist fatherland. Those who treat frivolously the defense of the country in which the proletariat has already achieved victory are the ones who destroy the connection with international socialism.\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

Lenin’s concept of political strategy was most fully expressed in “Left-Wing” Communism: An Infantile Disorder, written in May 1920 and intended as a guide for the international communist movement and not merely a response to domestic critics. He insisted that “it is necessary to link the strictest devotion to the ideas of communism with the ability to effect all the necessary practical compromises, tacks, conciliatory maneuvers, zigzags, retreats, and so on.” To this end, he distinguished between “different kinds of compromises”: between one “enforced by objective conditions . . . which in no way minimizes the revolutionary devotion and readiness to carry on the struggle . . . and, on the other hand, a compromise by traitors who try to ascribe to objective causes their self-interest.” In conclusion, he argued that Communist parties must “display the utmost flexibility in their tactics.”\textsuperscript{15} As Lenin pointed out, such advice had served the Bolsheviks well in prerevolutionary Russia, and he frequently drew analogies between the party’s strategies before the revolution and those of the Soviet state afterward to illustrate the point.\textsuperscript{16}


\textsuperscript{15} V.I. Lenin, Detskaya bolezni: “levizny” i kommunizm (Moscow: Politizdat, 1940), p. 68.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., pp. 21, 46–49. 77. Emphasis in original.

\textsuperscript{17} See, for example, his remark that “the entire history of Bolshevism, both before and after the October Revolution, is full of instances of changes in tack, conciliatory tactics, and compromises with other parties, including bourgeois parties.” See Detskaya bolezni: “levizny,” p. 49. His favorite examples were participation in the Third Duma and cooperation with the Mensheviks. For a list, see pp. 51–52.
Compromise, retreat, flexibility, avoidance of war, protection of the Soviet state—none of these was alien to Lenin. Rather, he treated them as revolutionary obligations. Emphasizing the complexity and variety of conditions that render dogma and axiom (and presumably master plans) useless and the need for a thorough understanding of objective circumstances, he combined an acutely realistic orientation to political action with an unswerving commitment to revolutionary goals. This served him extraordinarily well, both in the improbable achievement of power by his tiny party in October 1917 and in the survival of the new Soviet state in an intervention-minded sea of capitalism thereafter. Indeed, Lenin’s historical significance lies chiefly in his genius for political strategy.

The Basis for Comparison

The tests commonly applied to ideology to show its practical irrelevance, then, are flawed. The framing of sounder tests requires a concept of ideological agency that has hitherto been lacking. The contest between Realist and ideological interpretations has been inherently unequal. The former is a parsimonious and explicit theory of international behavior that has been applied to the widest variety of historical and geographic circumstances; it is the default option in the field of international relations. The latter consists of ad hoc criteria detached from any systematic account of ideological behavior. Yet without an understanding of what it means to pursue ideological ends, we can hardly tell what this would look like.

It would be wrong to replace an interpretation of all behavior in terms of interests with one in terms of ideology. This would merely replicate Realism’s own conceit in symmetrical form. If the error of Realists has been to depict ideological behavior so restrictively as not to be plausibly sustainable, the error of some who have stressed the role of Soviet ideology has been to define it so broadly as to be compatible with any observed actions. There must, however, be limits to the cooperation, flexibility, and protection of state interests that an authentic ideological regime can exhibit. The pursuit of power and the implementation of principle may be compatible to a degree, but there must be a point at which the two pull in different directions and imply alternative policies. That is, it must be possible to show that ideology makes a difference. If it does not, if the prescriptions of ideology and interest merely reinforce one another, then ideology adds nothing to an explanation of behavior. The purpose of a concept of ideological agency is thus to suggest evidentiary criteria for evaluating the role of ideology and to enable comparison on equal terms of ideological and nonideological explanations. Such a concept will not remove all disputes or ambiguities of interpretation, but it will clarify what is at
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stake and where the sources of disagreement lie. To put it another way, the remaining disagreement will concern not the appropriate terms of explanation, but which ones the evidence best fits.

Because Realism proceeds from and derives implications from the assumption that states seek security, the starting point of any account of ideological agency must be that certain states seek to propagate and implement ideology. It is thus a second-level explanation of state behavior by a domestic variable, but of an unusual kind. Such explanations usually refer to the domestic systems of states, typically arguing that different structures of interest aggregation generate characteristically different foreign policy outcomes. An ideological approach, however, holds that states’ foreign policies vary according to the content of their belief systems rather than their political and economic systems. Because the latter typically embody the former, it may be hard to separate them in practice, but the distinction is clear in principle. An ideological explanation is denominated in terms of regime values and principles rather than domestic interests.18

Furthermore, ideologies are values and principles of a specific kind, distinguished by being both political in character (unlike, say, moralities) and universal in scope (unlike, say, identities). The object of ideologies, especially in this century, has in the first instance been the reordering of the polities, economies, or racial composition of other states, and only derivatively the transformation of the international system. This can be understood as the practical corollary to Martin Wight’s famous argument for “why there is no international theory.” Just as there are traditions of normative discourse about ideal forms of domestic but not of international organization, so the ideologies of states are directed outwardly at the characteristics of other states rather than of the international system.19 More specifically, an ideological state seeks to bring about internal changes in other states that it has already achieved in its own domestic sphere. Ideologies in international relations are thus second-level phenomena in two distinct senses. As sources of behavior, they are located within a state; as behavioral prescriptions, they demand the transformation of other domestic systems in their own image.

18. For the original formulation of the “levels of analysis” argument, see Kenneth N. Waltz, Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959). Two variants of the “democratic peace” thesis illustrate the distinction between institutional and ideological second-level arguments: One stresses the role of decision-making structures, the other that of democratic norms.

19. Ideas for reform of the international system typically concern the management of power within it rather than its transformation. The more radical they are, the more likely they are to be associated with change within states. This was especially true of Woodrow Wilson’s League of Nations, which was to “make the world safe for democracy.” The United Nations has to a lesser extent been associated with the principle of self-determination.
However, not all ideas, even those that pertain to the domestic properties of other states, can be said to be ideological. Even those who assert the importance of ideology in foreign policy are sometimes insufficiently precise in their usage on this point. It is sometimes argued, for example, that Stalin’s personality was responsible for the Cold War and that this constitutes an ideological explanation. Even if the causal claim is true, it is an argument about an individual’s beliefs and dispositions, not about ideology. Conversely, there are those who look to the deep cultural roots of Soviet animosity toward the West. This, though, is an argument about the values of an entire people. Ideologies are properties of regimes. They are longer lived than individual leaders, but shorter lived than historical traditions. An argument about Stalinism as ideology cannot explain why the Cold War continued after Stalin’s death. An argument about the cultural causes of Russian expansionism cannot explain why the Cold War has ceased. Personality, ideology, and culture are different kinds of ideational influence, carried by different vehicles and enjoying different life spans. This is not to say that the interpretation of ideologies is not influenced by personality traits or shaped by cultural context. However, they are in principle distinct kinds of ideational factors, best kept analytically separate.

Once it has been established what is to count as an ideological objective, the next question is how such a goal causes a state to behave. As mentioned earlier, neorealists argue that states will seek to increase their power up to the point at which the marginal benefits to security cease to exceed the marginal costs of doing so. Beyond that point, a state’s power may invite countermeasures from others and so contribute to its own insecurity. Ideological states will seek to increase their power, too. To be achieved, all goals require power, but the kinds of power that are used and the way they are used depend on the specific nature of those goals.

Ideological states seek power to spread their domestic system rather than to enhance their own security, though in one respect this may be a misleading way of putting it. It is not a contrast that such states themselves typically recognize. Rather, they define security in terms of the expansion of their domes-

tic system and threat in terms of the expansion of their adversary’s domestic system. This is not to say that a state’s security can be subjectively defined and is not in fact rooted in objective circumstances that resist ideological fiat. Perception and reality of security can differ, and this can put pressure on a regime in ways that will be discussed below. However, it is to say that in their own eyes ideological leaders do not implement values in reckless disregard of safety. Rather, to achieve the former is to enhance the latter. A corollary is that such states see the basic dynamic in international relations not as a competitive interaction between discrete sovereign entities, but as a conflict between two camps defined in terms of their domestic systems. Alliance relations are based not on temporary convergence of state interest, but on long-term solidarity of regimes, and international change takes the form not of a shifting balance of power that responds to common threats, but of a stable “balance of faith” affected only by conversion or defection between camps.

It is sometimes argued that ideological states are characteristically expansionist. Much debate about whether Soviet foreign policy was genuinely Marxist-Leninist has been conducted in these terms. Those who argue the case for ideology have done so by adducing evidence of expansion; those arguing against have pointed to instances of Soviet caution. Both positions are misconceived. It was shown earlier that caution need not entail pragmatism; it is equally true that expansion does not entail ideology. Expansion is a very traditional policy, quite compatible with Realpolitik; most great powers in history have done it. What distinguishes ideological states is the form that their expansion takes. Because their ultimate goal is not to increase their relative power in the international system but to transform its members, they do not seek primarily to expand their own territory—as traditional states do—but to replicate their domestic system. The projection of military force may turn out to be the most effective way to do this, but it is the consequences of such projection that distinguish ideological from traditional states. The former are not satisfied with hegemony over a sphere of influence as the latter are; they take the considerable trouble of reordering the domestic structures within that sphere. This illuminates two differences between the Tsarist and Soviet empires. The tsars expanded by territorial absorption but did not impose uniformity over their conquests. The Grand Duchy of Finland, for example, enjoyed special privileges unavailable even to Russian subjects. The Soviet Union, by contrast, absorbed very little of the territory over which it acquired control in Eastern Europe, yet it remade the region in its own political and economic image, imposing the same structures of one-party control and state planning in every country. Indeed, the Soviet Union subsequently saw the internal liberalization of Czechoslovakia, whose leaders constantly reassured Moscow of their loyalty during the Prague Spring,
as a greater threat than the drift out of the Soviet sphere of a highly repressive Communist Romania.

The expansion of ideological states is thus expansion of a special kind. One might say it is not geopolitical but geoideological. This is also true of the conflicts to which such policies give rise. The Cold War was a most unusual war. There were no territorial disputes or grievances between the two major parties, with the partial and temporary exception of the status of Berlin with respect to the occupation regime in Germany. Furthermore, the end of the Cold War was accompanied by no redistribution of land between the antagonists. At stake, rather, was the regime form, capitalist or Communist, that members of the international system would take.

In addition to using traditional forms of power in untraditional ways, ideological states develop new forms of it. Chief among these are ways of directly intervening in the domestic processes of other states. They are not the only states to practice what Andrew Scott in his fine study calls “informal penetration,” but they are the ones that have done so most systematically. The goal of transforming other states’ domestic systems naturally leads to a search for ways of manipulating the forces within those systems. Although radical states since at least Calvinist Geneva have made this a major instrument of statecraft, it is characteristically twentieth-century conditions—the mass politics of posttraditional societies—that have in this, as in other respects, been conducive to the influence of ideology on international relations. Social groups have become available for mobilization around universal, future-oriented ideals rather than local identities that celebrate the past. This can mean that, much like the ultramontane Catholics of an earlier age, their primary loyalties lie not with their own state, but with another that embodies their political principles. Consequently, the battle lines of an ideologized international system run not only between but through states and “blur the distinction between domestic and foreign policy.”

One striking illustration of the scale that transnational ideological loyalties can reach is that more French citizens were executed as Nazi collaborators after the Second World War than were killed during the war itself. This was the logical culmination of a prewar situation in which a substantial minority had believed “better Hitler than Blum,” a situation that had enervated the country’s capacity to mount a national response to threats to its security.

These conditions were most fully exploited by the Soviet Union, in part because it applied the “organizational weapon” of party control that had

proven so effective in gaining power in Russia and in part because the open polities of its democratic adversaries provided ample opportunity to exercise influence. In this respect, the Soviet Union enjoyed a systematic advantage. Through organization and propaganda it could direct parties and influence movements that served its objectives. By contrast, being a closed system, it was far less susceptible to penetration itself. During most of the Cold War, Western countries could do little more than transmit ideas and images by radio and television to the Soviet bloc.

It would be wrong to assume that such methods can legitimately be used only to foment revolution and that otherwise they are not being used for genuinely ideological purposes—though revolution was undoubtedly the original goal of the Comintern, the first attempt to harness Soviet sympathy abroad. Such an assumption would be the counterpart of the fallacy that ideological states must go to war against their adversaries. Where objective circumstances render revolution infeasible or inexpedient, instruments of informal influence can still be used to support a long-term ideological strategy aimed at undermining adversary regimes—for example, by strengthening “peace-loving” elements or weakening anti-Soviet forces from within the state. Although the methods and effectiveness of this effort varied, it was so significant that it is possible to speak (as one can to a lesser extent about other ideological states) about a “dual foreign policy” conducted simultaneously through two channels: the official diplomacy of state-to-state relations, for which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was responsible, and the “class-to-class” relations directed by the CPSU International Department. Opinions vary about the relationship between these two strands of Soviet policy and the relative importance of their respective institutions; in neither case can generalizations easily be made. What is indisputable is that both played a significant role in the implementation of Soviet objectives and that this is a mark of the ideological character of the Soviet approach to world politics.

If a dual foreign policy is characteristic of ideological states, the corresponding response of their adversaries is a policy of linkage. Whereas the former simultaneously pursue limited cooperation at the state-to-state level and seek a free hand to conduct the underlying struggle between regime types, the latter work to make cooperation in the one area contingent on re-

straint in the other. The history of Soviet-Western relations, from the negotiations over diplomatic recognition in the 1920s and 1930s to the détente of the 1970s, is replete with examples of these two strategies in competition with one another. In each case, the Soviet Union sought the benefits of agreement—trade, recognition, arms control—without giving up propaganda, “active measures,” aid to national liberation movements, and other means of undermining capitalism. Conversely, the West repeatedly sought guarantees against such activities as a condition of agreement. For this reason, the term containment does not bring out what is distinctive about Western strategy. Rising powers have always expanded, and dominant ones have always tried to restrain them, but the ideological character of the Cold War meant that both took special forms. The distinctive nature of this period of international relations is better understood if we think in terms of linkage rather than of containment.

Criteria for Assessment

We now have a clearer sense of the distinctions and relationships between two models of international behavior: the security-seeking state and the ideology-implementing regime. Each implies a set of criteria for the interpretation of evidence. If the false criteria for distinguishing Realist and ideological policies, analyzed earlier, were based on a misleading contrast between the pursuit of power and the pursuit of principle, the true criteria are found in an understanding of the differences in the characteristics of the power associated with security-seeking and ideology-implementing states. Power and ideology are not inherently antagonistic goals; they may even be mutually reinforcing. It is all a matter of how much power is pursued, what kinds are exercised, and how it is used.

Other things being equal, a state can be said to be more concerned with security the more that it is observed to (1) accumulate power up to the point at which further increments would bring countervailing power against it; (2) conduct its relations with other states primarily through official channels sanctioned by established international norms and conventions; and (3) seek influence only over the foreign policies of other states. Other things being equal, a state can be said to be more concerned with ideology the more that it is observed to (1) accumulate power beyond security needs, even if this incurs the risk of retaliation from others; (2) systematically and directly influence the internal political processes of other states; and (3) seek to replicate its domestic system in other states.
It might be said that the accumulation of power has two distinct effects: a capacity effect and a direction effect. The building up of state strength means that more resources are available for ideological ends, but it also means that there is more to lose through a policy based on principles rather than security. Success gives a state a “stake in the system,” creating incentives to accommodate to the status quo rather than work for its transformation.77 Power, then, strengthens both the capacity to pursue regime values and the temptation to put state interests above them.

Although the criteria listed above for assessing the presence of security and ideological goals are in principle clear, their application can only structure debate, not resolve it. Disagreements will still arise over the best interpretation and the relative importance of different pieces of evidence. As with any comparison of theories, judgments will be based less on single events than on patterns of them. Occasionally, though, “natural experiments” may arise that pit them starkly and directly against one another. A striking example is offered by the historian Chen Jian who argues, contrary to the claim that America not only “lost” China to Communism but also lost the opportunity to establish early diplomatic relations with the People’s Republic of China, that it was in fact Mao Tse-tung who refused to agree to this. He did so because nonrecognition would “deprive the Americans of a means of sabotaging the Chinese revolution.”78 The Realist view is that Mao primarily sought the restoration of Chinese power and concluded an alliance with the Soviet Union only because the United States (for unRealist ideological reasons!) was hostile to Communism. It now emerges that Mao was in fact prepared to sacrifice Chinese state interests, which would surely have been furthered by U.S. recognition, in order to protect the revolution. Security and ideology implied very different choices, and China chose the latter.79

Most cases, however, are less clear, not either-or but more-or-less. Interpretation is a matter of detecting the trade-offs between conformity to the security imperatives of the international system and assertion of ideological commitment to transforming the domestic systems of its members. At one extreme one can imagine, as Lenin did, the pure ideological state that optimally organizes power around the pursuit of regime values. Such a state pre-

serves its own security to the extent that this further the interests of the ideology and uses all appropriate means to conduct a long-term struggle against rival political-economic systems. At the other extreme lies the deideologized state, which, whatever creed it still avows, behaves in ways indistinguishable from the conduct of its orthodox counterparts. The deideologized state has come to decline opportunities to expand its power on the grounds of safety, and it intervenes in the domestic processes of other states only to enhance its own security. As Vernon Aspaturian claims about the Soviet Union, from trying to transform the international system such a state became transformed by it into an objectively status quo power.

Conclusions

Widespread misconceptions about the way to evaluate the role of ideology in foreign policy have arisen because of the lack of a coherent concept of ideological agency. The development of such a concept clarifies the nature of ideological objectives and permits a proper comparison of Realist and ideological explanations of state behavior. In particular, the basis for such comparison is not, as has typically been assumed, whether or not states are rational, power-seeking agents. Instead, the proper criteria are how much power states seek, what kinds of power they use, and how they use it. The important and understudied concept of fungibility—the relationship between goals and forms of power—would repay further study in this as in other aspects of international relations.

The analysis presented in this article was prompted by reflection on how scholars have treated the Soviet experience in international relations. It is hoped that the use of new materials enriching the study of Soviet foreign policy will be more theoretically informed as a consequence. The argument advanced here is also in principle applicable to the study of other ideological states. Comparative analysis may help show how the specific content of an ideology affects the nature of the relationship between the vectors of ideology and security as well as the trade-offs between them. Some historical antecedents have briefly been mentioned, but it may be argued that during the Cold War itself the Soviet Union (or the Communist world more generally) was not the only ideological actor.

Here we can dispose of a final fallacy: Resistance to arguments about ideology sometimes appears to be motivated by the assumption that they are necessarily indictments of the Soviet Union. Even if we compare the two “devil theories” about the origins of the Cold War, the orthodox and revisionist views, we find an asymmetry. The former imputes responsibility to Soviet beliefs; the latter usually blames the American capitalist system. Yet evidence is emerging that the United States in its own way was hardly less ideological than the Soviet Union. Like its adversary, the United States frequently measured security in terms not of power relations but of the global fortunes of regime types. This accounts for its willingness to grant the Soviet Union a sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, but not a sovietized one. It also accounts for the measures adopted to undermine Soviet control there, the involvement in Vietnam, and the subversion of Chile, among other events. 

This ideologized view was founded on antipathy toward Communism not as an economic system, but as a political project. Perhaps, then, we should understand the Cold War as a conflict not between the interests of two superpowers—what Arthur Schlesinger terms a “Greek tragedy”—but between their ideologies, its inevitability arising from the clash of faiths on both sides, making for a “Christian tragedy.” And when both sides see the world in this way and act accordingly, the distinction between the pursuit of security and the implementation of ideology can objectively be said to disappear.

32. On the CIA’s Office of Policy Coordination, which was set up in 1948 to conduct a counterofensive against Communism, see Mamir, The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity, pp. 79–85. On American psychological warfare against the Soviets more generally, see Walter L. Hixson, Parting the Curtains: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945–1961 (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), especially chap. 1. The supposedly neopolitische Kissinger is on record as stating in 1975 that the United States would not tolerate a Communist Portugal aligned with the Soviet Union. Realist critics of “democratic peace” theory sometimes cite American subversion of Chile as a counterexample. Yet as an instance of offensive behavior unmediated by traditional security concerns, this case effectively undermines Brahms in a different way.