

Appendices

Appendix 1 The Soviet Union Does Not Initiate Armageddon

Introduction

Finally, the prophets told us that a great northern confederacy will launch an all-out attack on the Middle East and Israel in particular (Ezekiel 38 and Daniel 11:40-45). For two centuries, Christian and Jewish scholars have identified this northern power as being Russia.¹

The above statement by Evangelical writer Hal Lindsey describes a widely accepted futurist point of view. I believe it is a caricature of the angel's intent in Dan 11:40-45 but it is an easy one to relate with for a number of reasons: There is a modern state of Israel today, its existence has caused political tensions in the Middle East, and the Soviet Union is now one of the world's great military powers. These are facts and no one would wish to challenge them. The question is whether they have any useful bearing on what Daniel or Ezekiel wrote. Below I argue they do not.

What the Current Political Changes Do Not Mean

If we are going to talk about the prophecies of Dan 11:40-45 and Ezek 38-39, we must begin by discussing what they say.² Unfortunately Lindsey has placed almost exclusive emphasis on current events. He has exegeted the newspapers. The problem with doing this is that a model cannot avoid being dated by its sources. When the direction events were taking previously changes, any model based on them must be reevaluated. Lindsey's popular apocalypticism is essentially a prophetic reading of the Cold War, which is largely over now. The current of history in 1980 has been set in reverse by recent developments in Eastern Europe and elsewhere. But even if it had not been, no merely human war-- with or without Russia--is Armageddon.

On p. 81 of his book, *The 1980's: Countdown to Armageddon*,³ Lindsey lists some thirty-one countries which fell to communism between 1924 and 1980. The list begins with Mongolia (1924) and ends with Zimbabwe (1980). In between, along with other countries, it includes Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania (1940); Albania (1944);⁴ Yugoslavia (1945); Bulgaria (1946); Hungary, Poland, and Romania (1947); Czechoslovakia and East Germany (1948); South Yemen (1969);⁵ Afghanistan and Grenada (1979). Shortly after the book was published Nicaragua could have been included. This list has a very modern ring to it now in 1990. Each of the above countries, with the exception of Zimbabwe, has been in the news very recently--but for the opposite reason. Each has either thrown out or voted down its former communist political leaders or is otherwise moving toward a market economy.⁶

A decade ago, Soviet power appeared to be gaining everywhere. The Soviets solidified their hold on Angola and Ethiopia, acquired new client states in Nicaragua and Cambodia and launched their invasion of Afghanistan. Massive demonstrations by communist-backed "peace" groups in Europe led President Jimmy Carter to drop plans for deploying the neutron bomb in West Germany. Government officials on both sides of the Iron Curtain believed that America was suffering a severe loss of will. Communism's advance seemed inexorable.

But by 1989, the Soviet troops had retreated from Afghanistan. In Poland, the independent trade union Solidarity-formed nine years earlier-toppled the communist regime. It took less than nine months for dissidents to bring the Hungarian government to its knees; nine weeks for East Germany; nine days for Czechoslovakia; five for Romania.⁷

Things have changed since "then Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko declared that 'the world outlook and the class goals of the two social systems [East and West] are opposite and irreconcilable.'"⁸ Soviet policy makers are now taking the opposite position that "stability is intrinsically worthwhile."⁹ Nor do recent events suggest that these are empty words.

From pursuing socialist victories in civil conflicts they have moved to supporting the process of national reconciliation, which generally leads to internationally supervised elections with fair representation for all feuding factions. They have explicitly proposed this approach for Afghanistan, Cambodia, Nicaragua, South Africa, and, apparently, in a quieter way for Angola.¹⁰

These changes did not occur spontaneously. The Soviet Union has good reason to spend more of its resources on domestic problems rather than pursuing its earlier vision of global ideological conquest. Already Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia have declared their independence from Moscow and such other provinces as Georgia and Azerbaijan would like to.¹¹

The genie that glasnost released isn't going to be bottled up again, at least not short of a civil war. And while we can't fathom the purposes of the Soviet leadership, we're inclined to believe they'd prefer not to play the Tiananmen card in Vilnius. In our view that leaves one option: Let the empire go. They simply cannot hold on to it without losing Stalinist coercion from its crypt.¹²

More recently the Russian Federation itself has declared sovereignty. This is not the same thing as independence but it is a momentous change. "The declaration asserts the supremacy of the Russian Constitution and laws over Soviet laws on Russian territory, which covers two-thirds of the Soviet Union's land and more than half its population."¹³ This legislation passed by a vote of 907-13 and was followed by a long ovation. Boris Yeltsin, the new president of the Russian Federation, has touched a nerve of popular sentiment.¹⁴

One very practical implication of sovereignty has to do with the coining of money. A report broadcast by National Public Radio on or about June 4 quoted Yeltsin as calling for a separate currency in his republic. The Soviet economy is not presently in robust health. "A new rule took effect yesterday in Moscow that allows shops to sell food only to people who can prove they have city residency permits."¹⁵ A similar law has been in place since February in Leningrad.

Streets and sidewalks [in Leningrad] have not been cleaned all winter, . . . food is available only through a rationing system and most purchases require proof of residence in the region.

Rationing tickets were issued after the Baltic republics curtailed food shipments to Leningrad. Rationing, in turn, has prompted the neighboring city of Novgorod to initiate a boycott against Leningrad. The rush towards autocracy so visible in relations among the national republics is now reproducing itself within predominately Russian areas as well.¹⁶

All cities have problems--those in the United States and Western Europe are not immune--and so we must keep a sense of proportion when discussing those mentioned above. But one point is especially significant. The author speaks of "various proposals for Leningrad's economic autonomy (including one formal proposal that all of its economic activity be conducted either in U.S. dollars or in a new local currency, the *Peterburgets*)"¹⁷--the same type of solution Yeltsin is now considering.

Problems like these are a major distraction.¹⁸ Again we must try to keep matters in perspective.¹⁹ And yet after all the disclaimers have been made, it is still true that the Soviet Union is in much less of a position to provoke a major war in the Middle East now than it was before Afghanistan.²⁰ Any decision to attack Israel would be particularly ill advised, not only because from a military point of view Israel equals Israel plus the United States, but also for financial reasons. The Soviet Union needs and wants very much to move into the world economy, where it is not a major player now.²¹ The challenge is no longer how to conquer the world for socialism but how to avoid outright disintegration.²² With what success or by what means the Soviet Union will rise to this challenge I do not know. Prophecy offers no insight into such things. That is not its subject matter.

What the Current Political Changes Do Mean

Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon (Rev 16:16).

Rev 16:16 is the only passage in the Bible that uses the word "Armageddon."²³ All agree that Armageddon is associated with conflict. Please notice, however, that the main verb in the sentence is not "fight," but "gather." This fact either is significant or is not. If it is not, we should be discussing something else. If it is, then the news stories to watch are not those which speak of nations fighting but those which speak of nations gathering.

I do not wish to be misunderstood. There is nothing wrong with world peace or the desire to move into a global economy and enjoy the greater prosperity that is possible under such a system. The problem is that conformity is so easily confused with peace. When it appears that world peace could be genuinely attainable if only there could be at least some token degree of religious conformity--in the matter of Sunday sacredness for example--human laws will be widely enacted requiring the divine law to be set aside. Those who are loyal to God under such circumstances can expect to see persecution revive. This is something the Scriptures do talk about.

Conclusion

The need to rescue His people from the concerted assault of a world hostile to His law is what brings Christ back to earth again leading all the armies of heaven. This is the other side in the battle of Armageddon. On the one hand we have Christ and His Father with their angels ("the kings of the East" [Rev 16:12]) and on the other hand the kings of the earth--the kings of all the earth, united in opposition against God in the person of his saints. Here is conflict on a scale we can scarcely imagine--an offended God infinite in power versus the whole world. Armageddon is the second coming of Christ from the perspective of those who have no reason to welcome it. The Soviet Union does not initiate Armageddon.

Note: All Scripture quotations in this paper, except when noted otherwise, are from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*. Copyright (c) 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society.

¹Hal Lindsey, *The 1980's: Countdown to Armageddon* (New York: Bantam, 1980), p. 46.

²See Hardy, "Who Did Daniel See and Speak With in Dan 10?" *Historicism*, No. 10/Apr 87, pp. 2-17; "Historical Overview of Dan 11:2-15," No. 11/Jul 87, pp. 2-27; "Historical Overview of Dan 11:16-22," No. 14/Apr 88, pp. 2-49; "Historical Overview of Dan 11:23-28," No. 15/Jul 88, pp. 2-61; "Historical Overview of Dan 11:29-35," No. 18/Apr 89, pp. 2-58; "Some Comments on Dan 11:36-39," No. 19/ Jul 89, pp. 2-47; "Ezekiel's Prophecy Against Gog," No. 20/Oct 89, pp. 2-48.

³See n. 1 above.

⁴Until recently Albania and South Yemen were among the very most radically withdrawn and ideologically pure of the world's communist nations. Now Albania says that it wants "to join the East-West Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, a 35-nation process begun in 1975 covering military security, human rights and economic aid" (*Wall Street Journal*, May 9, 1990, p. A1). On May 10 there was a similar report stating that Albania was changing its definition of laws against the state and was freeing travel restrictions for its citizens.

⁵South Yemen is especially interesting because Lindsey makes a point of its disproportionate military strength and its links to both the Soviet Union and Cuba (see *The 1980's*, p. 61). Now we learn that, "North and South Yemen merged to form a single nation, the Republic of Yemen. The new Arabian Peninsula country, unifying the pro-Western north with the socialist south, recently has located oil reserves and occupies a strategic entrance to the Red Sea" (*Wall Street Journal*, May 23, p. A1).

⁶Some such movement has been painful and slow. Bulgaria is apparently voting its former communist leadership in rather than out. So far they have won 172 of 319 parliamentary seats contested. Unfortunately, there is a question about the means by which these votes were obtained (see, "U.S. Cites Reports of Intimidation in Bulgaria Vote," *The [Baltimore] Sun*, June 15, 1990, p. 6A). And Romania's Ion Iliescu appears willing to imitate the methods of his predecessor (see, "Romanian Chief Vows to Crack Down on Anti-Government Protesters," *ibid.*). But some limited progress has perhaps been made even in these cases.

⁷Fred Barnes, "Communism's Incredible Collapse: How It Happened," *Reader's Digest*, March 1990, p. 105.

⁸Steven Kull, "Burying Lenin," *Foreign Policy* 78 (1990): 184.

⁹Stanley Kober, "Idealpolitik," *Foreign Policy* 79 (1990): 3.

¹⁰Kull, "Lenin," p. 182.

¹¹By contrast we find East Germany seeking reunification with West Germany and in another hemisphere Puerto Rico is currently debating whether to seek membership in the United States. "An amendment to the United States Constitution which authorizes a plebiscite

concerning the political situation of Puerto Rico has recently been 'recommended favorably' by the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources of the North American Senate. According to unofficial sources, quick approval is expected, . . ." (Lloyd Potter Meléndez, "Puerto Rico y el ciclo de la dependencia" [Puerto Rico and the Cycle of Dependency], *El Latino*, May 25, 1990, p. 3). At this point the debate can begin in earnest, but in any event the question at issue is whether to come in, not how to get out.

¹²"Tiananmen in Vilnius?" *Wall Street Journal*, March 27, 1990, p. A20.

¹³Scott Shane, "Russia Declares Sovereignty," *The [Baltimore] Sun*, June 13, 1990, p. 1A. "In a major concession to conservatives, a clause was changed to state that rather than having immediate legal force, the declaration will become the basis for a new Russian Constitution and a treaty of union with the other Soviet republics" (ibid., p. 7a).

¹⁴"What Yeltsin is doing is entirely audacious. "Although Russia takes in half of the Soviet Union's population, it makes up three-quarters of its land mass and provides almost all of its oil, natural gas and minerals. An independent Russia would be as big as the United States and China combined, stretching across 11 time zones with 148 million people. . . . 'It is one thing for a Lithuania or a Latvia to secede, with only a few million people,' said another Moscow resident. 'But if Russia leaves, what is left?'" (Jonathan Kaufman, "Russian Nationalism Hits at Core of Soviet System," May 29, 1990, p. 4).

¹⁵"Moscow Shopping Closed to Outsiders," *Boston Globe*, May 29, p. 4.

¹⁶Blair Ruble, "The New Siege Of Leningrad: Rationing and Rumors Abound as A Great City Veers Toward Collapse," February 18, 1990, p. B5. These are not the casual impressions of a tourist. "I was in that city from Jan. 21-27, at the invitation of the Leningrad Polytechnical Institute, to discuss my research on the city's economic and political development over the past 40 years. During my stay, I met with elected officials, representatives of informal groups and various organizations developing plans for their city's future. Simply put, I found the current situation in Leningrad to be catastrophic" (ibid.).

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸There are others as well. See Marshall I. Goldman, "Gorbachev at Risk," *World Monitor*, June 1990, pp. 34-40.

¹⁹Writing in 1987 with reference to broad economic issues Paul Kennedy urges drawing conclusions with restraint. He states, "This does *not* mean that the USSR is close to collapse, any more than it should be viewed as a country of almost supernatural strength. It *does* mean that it is facing awkward choices" (*The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* [New York: Random House, 1987], pp. 513).

²⁰One illustration of waning Soviet military influence is that, "The Warsaw Pact formally abandoned its Soviet-dominated structure in Eastern Europe. The 35-year-old alliance, meeting in Moscow, also committed itself to democratic change, saying the group would be composed of 'sovereign and equal states.' Members also declared their 'readiness for constructive cooperation' with NATO" ("World-Wide," *Wall Street Journal*, June 8, 1990, p. A1).

²¹See Helmut Schmidt, "Global Geometry," *World Monitor*, January 1990, pp. 42-44. And consider "the cold observation by *The Economist* that in 1913 'Imperial Russia had a real product per man-hour 3 1/2 times greater than Japan's [but it] has spent its nigh 70 socialist years slipping relatively backwards, to maybe a quarter of Japan's rate now'" (Kennedy, *Rise and Fall*, p. 513). This is a tragedy for the Russian people. There is no reason why the Soviet Union, under a market economy, could not excel in business just as it has in athletics, music, ballet, chess, and other areas. One discipline that comes especially to mind is computer science. The editor of *BYTE* magazine remarked recently that "the Soviets do have a vast hunger for computer products and a tremendous untapped resource of world-class programming talent" (Fred Langa, "Taiwan, The Soviet Union, and You," *BYTE*, June 1990, p. 10). One example of this is Tetris, a game program written by Messrs. Pazhitnov and

Gerasimov and subsequently pirated by Nintendo (see "Off the Screen," *Wall Street Journal*, June 8, 1990, p. A1). It has been wildly successful in the West.

²²The victory of socialism is now pursued more locally by others. Let the example of Peru suffice. "Now, in 1989, the *Partido Comunista del Perú en el Sendero Luminoso de Mariátegui* (Communist Party of Peru in the Shining Path of Mariátegui) possesses real military might. As a result of Senderist violence, the death toll for this year alone numbers 1,016 civilians and 289 soldiers" (Eliab S. Erulkar, "The Shining Path Paradox," *International Review*, Winter 1990, p. 43). Their revolution, which has divided the country, is almost completely self-contained. "Gonzalo and the *Sendero Luminoso* hierarchy wanted to keep their ideology 'pure,' and had built a following by denouncing the 'revisionist tendencies' in Cuba, the Soviet Union and modern China" (*ibid.*, p. 44).

²³For recent discussion of the word "Armageddon" see William H. Shea, "The Location and Significance of Armageddon in Rev 16:16," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 18 (1980): 157-62; Hans K. LaRondelle, "The Etymology of *Har-Magedon*," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 27 (1989): 69-73; Roland E. Loasby, "'Har-Magedon' according to the Hebrew in the Setting of the Seven Last Plagues of Revelation 16," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 27 (1989): 129-32. Of these papers, the first is the most comprehensive.