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## **Celebration of America's Supremacy was Premature**

**Solidarity America**

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When the Soviet Union collapsed a few decades ago, there was virtual celebration in the streets and Americans claimed victory over the behemoth that seemed to pervade our every place and time for a half-century.

In the minds of many, if not most Americans, there were communists everywhere: they were in the State Department, they were in the workplaces, they were in the universities, and they were in the entertainment industry, they were under our beds.

The Cold War fears were energized anew most days of the week and the people were kept in a state of high anxiety. This condition became a way of life as we became steeped in fear and paranoia over possible nuclear attack or the imminent foreign takeover of the U.S.

Our great industries turned their productive capacity to the building of weapons systems and defense systems - whether they worked or not. The cost did not matter, since our national life was at stake. The "American way of life" was at stake and it needed to be defended at all costs.

For long years, the U.S. seemed to be able to do it all: provide an ever-larger budget for defense and military and give the country its opportunity to provide that American

way of life for more and more people. It was possible because of an increase in productivity of American industry, new technologies, and American superiority in continuing to supply the nation and its people with the cheapest energy, mostly from oil, whether it was of domestic or foreign sources.

As far as the American people knew, the Soviet Union wasn't doing badly, either, since their people were not rising up against the system and their defense and military sectors seemed to be growing at the same (or greater) rate than ours.

Things are not always as they seem.

The Soviets went into Afghanistan and became much hated by the occupied people, almost instantly. They were there for 10 years. Our intelligence agencies didn't seem to pick up the signs that they were leaking their economic lifeblood at a great rate, and then we helped create what became Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda to finish off the Soviets in that rugged country. Defeated, the Soviets pulled out of Afghanistan.

Collapse of an empire such as that of the Soviets should have been a warning to others, particularly to the U.S., which was the only other "superpower," the other empire.

The Berlin Wall came down and the Soviet Union collapsed and became, once again, Russia and its friendly (a few not-so-friendly) satellite nations. Americans rejoiced at their "victory" of capitalism over communism. Many of them seemed to think there would be a shift in foreign policy and the nation's budget and that the American people would be the beneficiaries of a "peace dividend."

That is, they would see a change in the priorities of the nation, that human needs would, for the first time in a half-century, take precedence over weapons and the military. That was an unrealistic expectation. The Soviet Union, now Russia, was forced to admit that they had bottomed out, but the U.S. would not make such an admission.

Instead, what we've seen is an ever-increasing military and defense budget, a sharply reduced concern for the vulnerable members of the society and of wage-working men and women, and a sharply-increasing disparity in wealth between the top five percent of Americans and the rest of us. Unemployment - real unemployment - stands between 10 and 20 percent. The people are suffering.

When the Soviet Union fell and there was a party atmosphere across the nation over American "exceptionalism," it was almost as if many thought that the victory over communism was a foregone conclusion.

The new Russian leaders allowed the "free market" to rule, apparently under the impression that, since capitalism and free markets defeated their economic form, a and some form of capitalism. The result was a disaster. Members of a rapacious class of entrepreneurs set out to become rich and powerful - fast. And, they did, but the people suffered greatly and the government stepped in - in their own inimitable fashion - to allay the suffering of the people.

At the time of the collapse of the Berlin Wall, celebration seemed a bit premature. The Soviet Union and the U.S. were like the two sides of an isosceles triangle, which, in

effect, held each other up. What would happen if one of the sides fell? The remaining side, it seemed, having no visible means of support, would start its inevitable fall.

Each empire has its own unique trip to the ground. We've seen Russia's. It's possible that we're seeing the last stage of the other side of the triangle. It's not Russia that is now in Afghanistan, the "graveyard of empires, it's the U.S. Some of the same problems of post-Cold War Russia exist in the U.S. and it seems that the peace dividend is farther from our grasp than ever. While it's true that Americans have a tradition of democracy, the people seem to feel they have lost control - just as the Russian people felt that they had little or no control over their own lives.

Corporate America has emptied the land of every form of enterprise that can be moved somewhere else where there are weaker labor and environmental laws and they're rewarded for doing so. A class of people who are strangers to the American ideal of citizenship have taken over the economy, the society, and the country's politics.

There isn't much that can not be bought or influenced by money, but working people don't have spare money to contribute to the coffers of the powerful.

America has taken on the role of "the last empire," as Pentagon budgets in recent years have shown. The expansion of our wars and the maintenance of our military might across the globe show that there isn't going to be a peace dividend in the foreseeable future. Rather, we're going to keep spending on things that explode and on recruiting people who will be required to kill or be killed, all in the name of peacekeeping.

Being the only superpower can be bad for a nation's health. It certainly is deadly for its people, for they are left out in the cold, literally. Their prospects are not good, unless they organize to make fundamental change in their economic, political, and governmental structures, which have become what the founders of America would not recognize.

A nation's people who are polarized will not solve society's problems. We have lots of angry people and those on the right don't even seem to know what they're angry about. These are not rich people. They are working people, and they have been whipped into frenzy by the radio and television noisemakers, who dispense their particular brand of vitriol and hate for hours every day, in every part of the country.

We'll find no solutions to our problems until there can be rational discussion and debate. There can be no discussion or debate of our problems among the people if they continue to be polarized. People are hurting in America because the "of the people, by the people, and for the people" part of Lincoln's speech at Gettysburg has been forgotten.

Those who act out of ignorance and allow themselves to be led by demagogues, who are paid 1,000 times as much per year as a wage-worker, should be examining the motives of the people who daily stir their most base instincts. It should not be news that their interests are not the same. Still, they follow.

The U.S. may be close to the ground after the fall of its prop (the other superpower) a couple of decades ago, but, low point or not, the people need to stop listening to the demagogues, educate themselves about the reality of their lives, and understand that

the second side of the triangle was never going to stay up by itself. The people are going to have to do the heavy lifting and make the changes themselves.

**BlackCommentator.com** Columnist, John Funiciello, is a labor organizer and former union organizer. His union work started when he became a local president of The Newspaper Guild in the early 1970s. He was a reporter for 14 years for newspapers in New York State. In addition to labor work, he is organizing family farmers as they struggle to stay on the land under enormous pressure from factory food producers and land developers. Click [here](#) to contact Mr. Funiciello.



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