

Part One: THE SETTING - HISTORIC MOMENT OF OPPORTUNITY

THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

New World Disorder

Hopes were high in 1989-90 that the collapse of communism in East Europe would mean the dawn of a new world order based on international law and the UN Charter, that we had a clean slate. Who can forget the euphoria of those first months after the dismantling of the Berlin Wall? There was, briefly, a sense that we were living in a time fundamentally different from the benighted past: the present enlightened, the future boundless.

It hasn't turned out quite that way and in fact history shows us that we have been here before and have known other false dawns. (The Congress of Vienna, the League of Nations and UN Charter were, in their own time, believed to be ushering in a new era for all peoples.) The early excitement and optimism in East Europe has been replaced by disappointment and the cold realization of what hardships must be endured - what Václav Havel called "the tunnel at the end of the light" - as inefficient command economies are transformed slowly and painfully to the free market, and democratic pluralism becomes, uneasily, the order of the day.

Further, ancient ethnic hatreds submerged by 45 years of totalitarian rule have been violently unleashed in what was once Yugoslavia and in Central Asia, creating widespread instability throughout the Balkans and the former Soviet Union, confounding the world's hopes for a peace dividend. Chaos and fragmentation, warlordism and banditry: there are those who have even become nostalgic for the Cold War.

In fact, the sudden end of our familiar, relatively stable bipolar world has been disorienting and what will replace it is still unclear. The landscape of international relations has changed dramatically in the past four years, and whether or not what emerges from the present state of flux is a more complex multipolar configuration based on regional groupings and alliances - as seems possible - it is likely to prove far from simple. At the same time we are witnessing unprecedented global threats and challenges: rapid environmental degradation, nuclear proliferation and dangers from unsafe reactor systems, growing poverty and overpopulation leading to civil strife and mass migrations, and epidemics of drug addiction, AIDS, and new strains of malaria and tuberculosis.