

OPINIONS

The Eagle and the Bear, in restrained Harmony

by Walid Abdul-Massih

The United States and the Soviet Union — symbolically known as the Eagle and the Bear — seem to be in a period of restrained harmony.

The visit of former Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze to NATO headquarters in December 1989 was a sign of the times. NATO (the North Atlantic Treaty Organization) was formed to counter Soviet pressure on Western Europe in those faraway days of Joseph Stalin and Harry Truman.

The biggest story on the world scene these past 45 years has been the jockeying of the two superpowers. But now, things have changed.

What can we expect next in the superpower relationship? The phrase Cold War, coined in 1947, reflected frustration that the temporary alliance between the Soviet Union and the United States was unravelling. America's pledges to Eastern Europe about their right to national self-determination clashed with Soviet security needs.

U.S. policy makers knew what the general public did not. Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin strongly indicated that he would withdraw the USSR from the fledgling United Nations organization if Soviet choices as to the legitimate new government of Poland were not installed.

This distressed Western allies greatly because Adolf Hitler's invasion of Poland — with Stalin's connivance — had caused World War II.

Sixteen of 20 leaders of Poland's World War II underground movement languished in a Soviet jail despite heated Western protests.

The Soviets countered U.S. misgivings by saying American moves to fortify the islands of the Pacific paralleled what Moscow was doing in Eastern Europe. Roughly, this was true.

But clumsy Russian diplomatic moves gave Washington planners the image of an intransigent bear, surly about having to move from lands it had occupied after victories in the war.

Soviet pressure on Iran and Turkey led to U.S. President Harry Truman's decision to dispatch an aircraft carrier to Istanbul.

When Canadian authorities exposed a Soviet spy ring, evidence came in of Soviet looting in Manchuria, and U.S. and Soviet diplomats made no headway on a post-war settlement of the German question, Washington had had enough.

In vain, apologists for Soviet behavior pointed out the almost pathological Russian fear of outsiders and mistrust of Western intentions. The fact that invaders that raped Mother Russia 14 times since 1800, and 20 million Soviet citizens and soldiers died in World War II, was all counterbalanced in most Western minds by Soviet intransigence and their foreign minister Molotov's blustering.

On March 5, 1946, Truman shared the stage in Fulton, Missouri, as Winston Churchill delivered his "Iron Curtain" speech (a keen analysis of Soviet intentions). "I do not believe that soviet Russia desires

Are we seeing a new era of peace?

war. What they desire are the fruits of war and the indefinite expansion of their power and doctrine."

The United States, it has been argued, almost had to intervene in Korea when North Korean troops launched an invasion against the American-supported regime in South Korea.

The precedent of unopposed communist forces pouring over the border of a divided country sent chills throughout the world. Securing South Korea's borders was an understandable American war aim, but the fateful push across the 38th parallel into the communist North was not.

The seeming success of limited war doctrines in Korea convinced U.S. advocates of intervention in

South Vietnam that success could be achieved through graduated escalation.

Meanwhile, the Bear was taking advantage of the Eagle's Vietnam debacle. In 1971, at the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT), Washington accepted a bare 3-2 Soviet lead in intercontinental ballistic missiles. By 1974, the United States possessed only half the destructive power of the Soviet Union.

The Watergate Affair, the induction of three Presidents from 1974 to 1977 and a mood of narcissism characterizing the "Me Decade" of the 1970s — all of this distracted many westerners from the new, and ostensibly defensive, Soviet military buildup.

Then came December 1979, when the Bear moved south: The Red Army invaded Afghanistan (an event to prove economically disastrous for the Soviet Union).

Detente died as President Jimmy Carter implemented a military buildup that mushroomed dramatically under the Ronald Reagan administration. More than one-trillion dollars poured into the U.S. military budget in the early 1980s.

Meanwhile, storm warnings emanated from Western Europe: the continent was becoming disillusioned with both the Eagle and the Bear.

Cracks in NATO were evident in 1982 and 1983 as the United States installed short-range rockets to counter Soviet SS-20 missiles. Enormous Western-European peace rallies had a distinctly anti-American tinge.

"Euronotralism" was in the air. The continent, awash in painful re-triggered memories of World War II,

rejected its role as meat in the nuclear sandwich.

The anti-American rallies and protests of the early 1980s were followed by 1989's anti-communist demonstrations in Budapest, Prague and Bucharest. The Eagle and the Bear seemed to stand on the sidelines transfixed.

So what is next? Are we seeing a new era of peace?

One perceptive but unoptimistic European prime minister observed: "When the ice breaks up, it can be very dangerous."

The duel between the Eagle and the Bear helped bring about the unity of Europe. But can such unity resolve superpower differences?

Tragically, any economic storms among the United States, the European Community (EC), Japan and lesser powers are simply clouds compared to the geopolitical storms ahead.



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