

Not so long ago, an observer mused that the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe marked the end of history. Talk of victory, "peace dividends" and a "new order" quickly yielded to a sense of pessimism. The rise of authoritarianism and ethnic repression on a wide scale in some parts of the former Soviet Union and problems in Yugoslavia -- and the advent of a prolonged economic recession in the West -- led to comparisons with the world of the 1930s and even with 1914.

Victory celebrations seemed somewhat premature.

But there are some more encouraging forces at work. A network of international institutions, predicated on the rule of law and the art of compromise, has been carefully built since the end of the Second World War, and the end of the Cold War has increased its potential. Now the United Nations (UN) can proceed without threats of constant vetoes, and the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) can launch important fact-finding and confidence-building missions in the former Yugoslavia with the support of virtually all of its members. Canada is actively involved in this process as a reflection of the priority we put on international security.

The Emerging Security Environment

The global context -- the emerging security environment into which Canada fits and functions -- is, to a certain extent, a rather Hobbesian world of brutality and nastiness. We sense this most of all when we look at Europe and compare the hope and optimism of 1989 and 1990 with the reality of 1992.

Setting the unconscionable destruction and death in the former Yugoslavia aside for a moment, if that is possible, scanning a Russian daily finds the following headlines: "Nagorno-Karabakh: the war goes on"; "Radio-active accident in Belarus"; "Hostilities continue between Georgia and Abkhazia"; "Rouble falls to record low"; "Peacekeeping forces possible in Tajikistan"; and "Russia will continue to defend the rights of ethnic Russians in Baltic States."

It is apparent that the space of geography that once contained the Soviet Union is a source of festering and fierce conflicts, economic, social, and political. This focuses the minds of those who live close by -- from the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe, and thus Western Europe, to China, Pakistan and India -- not to mention Turkey and Iran.

If we concentrate on this corner of the world for a moment, we find a microcosm of the emerging global security environment.