

## ***End of the Cold War***

*The Cold War ended when one or both the superpowers recognised the sinister absurdity of the arms race, the impotence of nuclear weapons and the inability of both to gain by conflict in the developing world. Both superpowers overstretched and distorted their economies by a massive and enormously expensive competitive arms race. Meanwhile China, Japan and the European Community began to assert their claim to “take some of the ‘super’ out of superpower”. The USA recognised its decline in the international economy and had to treat Japan and Western Europe in particular with respect. Yet it was the Soviet Union that was in the deepest trouble as the Brezhnev regime had begun to bankrupt itself by plunging into an armaments programme which raised defence expenditure by an annual average of 4-5 per cent (in real terms) for twenty years after 1964. The Soviet economy could not bear this strain. So is it true in respect of the United States economy. But the world capitalist system could absorb the three trillion dollars of debt—essentially for military spending—into which the USSR plunged the USA till then the greatest creditor-state. In case of the Soviet Union there was nobody, at home or abroad, to take the equivalent strain on Soviet expenditure. Both superpowers were in the mood for a deal, if only to salvage something from the once-exalted status.*

*The advent of Mikhail Gorbachev as the new leader in 1985 led to the adoption of major reforms in the country's domestic and foreign policies. Gorbachev recognised that the arms race was not only costly for the Soviet economy but dangerous for humanity. The fearful state of the Soviet economy called for more amicable relations with the West. The imperative need was, Gorbachev declared, to “terminate the material preparation for nuclear war”. On the initiative of Gorbachev the Cold War ended at the two summits of Reykjavik (1986) and Washington (1987), followed by another on board ship in Maltese waters (1989). At the Washington summit the two superpowers signed the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty—the first agreement actually to reduce stockpiles of nuclear weapons. Soviet troops were withdrawn from the bloody involvement in the Afghan civil war. Some forces were also withdrawn from the territories of East European states. Bidding goodbye to the “Brezhnev Doctrine” (i.e. the right of the Soviet Union to maintain socialism in East Europe even by force), Gorbachev pursued a policy of non-intervention as the Berlin Wall, the material symbol of the Cold War, fell and the Soviet-directed “socialism” in East Europe collapsed. Early in 1991 the Soviet-controlled military alliance, the Warsaw Pact, and the economic grouping, Comecon, were disbanded.*

*American President Reagan dropped his “civil empire” style of rhetoric, while his successor, George Bush, emphasised his readiness to work cooperatively with both the Soviet Union and countries of Eastern Europe, even to the extent of providing economic assistance for the restructuring of their economies. The end of the Cold War was formally recognised at a meeting in Paris in November 1990. The twenty-two heads of Government of state of the NATO and Warsaw Pact alliances issued a Declaration, stating that “in the new era of European relations which is beginning they are no longer adversaries”, and that they “will build new partnerships and extend to each other the hand of friendship”.*

*The ending of the Cold War brought in its trail a series of the most spectacular, most dramatic and the most unbelievable events (1989-90) that were unprecedented in its scale and repercussions for the world of social and political institutions and the ideas shaping them and being shaped by them. These events climaxed in the collapse of a “new” social and political edifice built after Ten Days that Shook the World” event in October 1917 by the people of Russia with their sweat and blood under the leadership of the Communist Party claiming to read the “march of history” armed with the “invincible” principles of Marxism-Leninism.*

*It began with the sudden collapse of the “real existing socialist” regimes established under the guidance and control of the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe, except Yugoslavia which refused to accept Soviet control: first Hungary in May 1989, then Poland, East Ger-*

many, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and eventually Rumania. The fragile communist systems in these countries suddenly collapsed like a house of cards once the Soviet protective "umbrella" was withdrawn after more than forty years. The world witnessed the happenings of the seemingly impossible: the dismantling of the Soviet style one-party communist regimes and the emergence of pluralist system. The one-party communist regime built in Yugoslavia by Tito and in Albania by Hoxa also could not remain immune from these changes.

The effect of these changes on members of communist parties throughout Europe was traumatic. In the Soviet Union itself the Communist Party (CPSU) was abolished and outlawed in 1991. In Eastern Europe the remnants of the once dominant parties sought new identities by changing their names and adopting more pragmatic programmes. Similar reactions were to be seen in West Europe's largest communist parties, the French and Italian.

The disintegration of the Soviet "camp" led to the re-establishment of independent nation-states. However, because of the mixed distribution of nationalities, the problem of minorities became a serious flaw in the new East European system, with terrible consequences in the former Yugoslavia and clear dangers in the Baltic states, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Rumania and the former Soviet republics. Thus the Cold War ended the Soviet type of socialism that had claimed to be a global alternative to the capitalist world system.

The site of the Cold War was Europe and its ending led to the transformation of the political order in Europe. The fall of the Berlin wall rendered obsolete the enormous military concentrations in central Germany, led to the toppling of East European regimes, and set in motion a stormy process of accelerated development in the European Community. It also led to the unification of Germany, an event with profound consequences for Europe. West Germany already had a central role in the European Community economy. But by absorbing East Germany, a unique state came into being that straddled the division between capitalism and post-communist systems. As the largest European state, Germany came at the centre of European political arena.

The end of the Cold War however did not usher in a unified Europe, free from divisions as was expected. Europe was still divided, not into two halves, but into several regions at different stages of development. In broad terms, two opposite forces appeared on the surface. In the West, the process of integration, driven initially by economic forces, acquired political momentum after 1989. The EC member states were already pooling elements of state sovereignty and implementing Community legislation into national law. The proposal to form the European Union worked out at Maastricht in December 1991 was a further step towards closer integration.

In the east, by contrast, the disintegration of the old political and economic system was still working out. The East European Governments severed their ties with the Soviet Union and sought to forge political and economic ties with the West. In the Balkans previously frozen ethnic and national conflicts fanned into flame, leading to bloody civil war in Yugoslavia which ended in its dismemberment. Czechoslovakia divided peacefully. In the former Soviet Union the collapse of the Centre led to the plunging economic output, accompanied by struggles for power within and between the constituent republics. The breakdown of the Cold War thus produced in Europe a new system of international relations of considerable complexity and fluidity.

Despite the new sources of instability the central feature of the new European security system was the diminution of external threats between the big powers. This was reflected in the several arms control agreements after 1989: withdrawal of 80 per cent of the US nuclear weapons deployed in Europe (October 1991); agreement between American President Bush and Russian President Boris Yeltsin in June 1992 to reduce the number of strategic warheads in their arsenals from 10,000 to 30,000 each side by 2003 and several new confidence-building measures; Open Skies Agreement (March 1992) permitted all NATO members, five former East European Warsaw Pact members and Russia, Ukraine, Belarus

and Georgia to fly observation flights over one another's territories; the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty (1990). In addition to these military agreements all the European states including the new ones, together with the republics of the former Soviet Union, USA and Canada, agreed to abide by CSCE agreements which effectively codified the rules and norms of the "international society" in the wider Europe. These rules included the ten principles of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act.

The end of the Cold War has led not only to new patterns of international relations between Western and Eastern Europe but also to a much more fluid system of international relations. On the one hand, there has been a tremendous development of international institutions and transnational contacts in which the US and the European Community dominate (GATT, IMF, G-7, etc.). This is however balanced by the fragmentation brought about by the creation of new states in Eastern Europe and the resurgence of nationalism. The interaction between these opposing forces is likely to shape the prospects for conflict and cooperation in the post-Cold War years.

The ending of the Cold War marked a major change within the international system. The Soviet American duopoly of power that had set the context and temper of international relations from about 1945 to 1989 came to an end. The props which had held up the international structure and the structure of the world's domestic political systems suddenly collapsed. And what was left was a world in disarray and partial collapse, because there was nothing to replace them. Since the late eighties there was emerging in Europe a five-power framework comprising the superpowers along with Germany, France and Britain and in Asia, Japan and China were experimenting with their own versions of multipolarity. In the Middle East, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was met by the United States with the cooperation of the Soviet Union and other great powers. The defeat of Iraq in 1991 would not have been possible had the United States had to act alone.

As the Soviet Union collapsed in 1992 the United States was left as the sole superpower though the US economic position was in relative decline. The idea, entertained by the American President Bush and his advisers in 1990, that the old bi-polar order could be replaced by a "new world order", with the United States acting as a kind of global policeman under the auspices of the United Nations, rapidly proved unrealistic. There could be no return to the world before the Cold War, because too much had changed, too much had disappeared. International alignments have changed not only in Central Europe, Baltics and the Balkans but also in the Middle East, Asia and other parts of the world. The collapse of the bi-polar system have not only led to regionalisation in Europe and other parts of the world, it has brought into prominence the era of instability that surrounds Europe, ranging from North Africa, through the Middle East, to Central Asia and the peripheral areas around Russia, which have weak economies and rapidly rising population. As the management of Western interests moves from US leadership (during the Cold War) to a partnership of large industrial powers, policy-making may be less clear-cut and more subject to disagreement which is coming to the surface. The cohesion and primacy of the American-European partnership cannot be assured. The future relation between the United States and Russia are unpredictable.

In short, the consequences of the Cold War had been enormous. Events since 1989, the upheavals in Europe, brought about not only distribution of power and territories, but a deeper change in the relationships between international institutions, societies and states. The old had ended but there was utter uncertainty about the nature and prospects of the new. The end of the Cold War enabled the United States and the Soviet Union to collaborate in reducing or ending conflict in many places, including Afghanistan, Cambodia and South-West Africa, (Angola and Namibia). They also combined efforts to bring greater peace and justice in the Middle-East. All in all, the end of the Cold War signified the end of an era but it did not prove to be the end of international conflict. Only the nature of the conflict has changed.