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They were prepared “to commit any crime, to lie, to cheat.”<sup>46</sup> But he also agreed with Winston Churchill whom he quoted on the occasion of a visit to the UK: “I do not believe that Soviet Russia desires war.”<sup>47</sup> In his infamous address to the Annual Convention of Evangelicals in March 1983 Reagan, in the tradition of Cold War rhetoric, called communism “the focus of evil in the modern world” and the Soviet Union “an evil empire.” But it should be noted that in the same speech he looked back to “the time of the cold war,” obviously meaning an earlier period of East-West confrontation.<sup>48</sup> It is not this differentiation that was reported. It was the “evil empire” that hit the headlines. When Reagan depicted communism as the “focus of evil,” he appealed to an audience who wanted to hear just this and held a Manichean view of the world with a clear and simple distinction between “right and wrong and good and evil.” Reagan’s rhetoric, in turn, induced his opponents to perceive him as an irresponsible politician and as a maker of “the second Cold War.”<sup>49</sup> Historiography is still influenced by this contemporary view.

Détente did not result in a stable structure of peace. But neither did the harsh rhetoric of the early 1980s lead to a Cold War “structure.”<sup>50</sup> The adversaries were compelled into a peaceful coexistence, but they also deliberately preserved the main achievement of détente: the diplomatic technique of communication was never discarded. Both sides continued to meet at conference tables. Arms control negotiations proved to be difficult and were sometimes interrupted. But the negotiating process as such survived. SALT II was not ratified, but de facto carried out. The CSCE follow-up conference in Belgrade made the dissenting positions perfectly clear, but the institution of the CSCE was not destroyed. In spite of the tensions at the turn of the 1970s to the 1980s the Madrid CSCE follow-up meeting took place between 1980 and 1983. In short, what is often called the breakdown of détente or the rise of a second Cold War was in fact the continuation of the East-West antagonism that was an essential part of the long détente.

<sup>46</sup> Press conference, January 29, 1981, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=44101>.

<sup>47</sup> Speech delivered in London, June 8, 1982, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=42614>.

<sup>48</sup> Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, March 8, 1983, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=41023>.

<sup>49</sup> Halliday, *The Making*.

<sup>50</sup> Stephanson, “Cold War Degree Zero,” 40. Carole Fink stresses the “ambivalent nature of détente” but admits also: “Détente succeeded in establishing some permanent ground rules of U.S.-Soviet behavior that lasted until the end—and even beyond—the Cold War” (*Cold War*, 169).

## The Long Détente and the Soviet Bloc, 1953–1983

*Csaba Békés*

There are several interpretations of détente, but the prevailing idea in mainstream scholarship is that it was the period between 1969 and 1975 when the relaxation of tension in East-West relations produced spectacular results. This included the settlement of relations between the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the Soviet Bloc states; U.S.-Soviet agreements on arms limitation and bilateral cooperation; and the convening of a pan-European conference on security and cooperation, eventually culminating in the signing of the Helsinki Final Act.

### Détente Revisited

There is formidable evidence to argue that détente started in 1953 and ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The short period between 1953 and 1956 was a major landmark, after which the Cold War meant something else than before. During these formative years the most important trend in East-West relations was the mutual and gradual realization and understanding of the fact that the two opposing political-military blocs and ideologies had to live side by side and tolerate one another in order to avoid a Third World War, one waged by thermonuclear weapons, which would certainly lead to total destruction. Therefore the main characteristic in the relationship of the conflicting superpowers and their political-military blocs after 1953 was—despite the ever increasing competition in the arms race—the continual interdependence and compelled cooperation of the United States and the Soviet Union while imminent antagonism obviously remained. Ideological antagonism, competition, conflict, and confrontation remained constant elements of the Cold War structure but now they were controlled by the détente elements: interde-



pendence and compelled cooperation with the tacit aim of avoiding a direct military confrontation of the superpowers.<sup>1</sup>

It could justifiably be asked, why should 1953 be considered a watershed year? Arguably, even earlier, the leaders of the superpowers, including Stalin, did not actually plan to launch an attack on the other side, but they did not rule out the possibility of their opponent starting a war. Thus the fundamental change was not due to Stalin's death but to technological developments. In 1952, the H-bomb was tested by the United States; the Soviets followed in 1953. The experience of the unprecedented destructive power of the atomic bomb in reality did not drastically change strategic thinking on future warfare. Even after the Soviet Union became a nuclear power in 1949, it was assumed that even in the case of widespread use of A-bombs on both sides in an armed conflict, the enemy could be defeated in a Third World War.<sup>2</sup> The alarming idea that such a conflict could result in the total annihilation of human civilization by destruction and long-lasting nuclear radiation emerged only after the invention of the H-bomb. Between 1952 and 1955 H-bombs with an ever-increasing yield were tested on both sides, proving that these new weapons meant a drastic and therefore qualitative change in the nuclear arms race.<sup>3</sup> All this made it apparent to policy-makers that a new world war waged by thermonuclear weapons could not be won. The shocking idea of MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction) which was "invented" by John Neumann in the mid-1950s now seems reasonable. The combination of these circumstances led to the realization that, the other party simply could not want to launch a war, and soon, as the most important result of the Geneva Summit in July, 1955 it became evident that neither party really wanted to start a war.

It must be made clear that the antagonism between the two world systems existed from the Bolshevik revolution in 1917 until the demise of the Soviet Union.<sup>4</sup> During the Cold War era—from the end of World War II

<sup>1</sup> I first published this theory in Hungarian in 1997; see Békés, "Hidegháború, enyhülés," and later in English in Békés, "Cold War, Détente," and then in several other English-language publications. An updated and extended version of my argument will be published in: Békés, *Cold War, Détente, (R)evolution*.

<sup>2</sup> Holloway, "Nuclear Weapons," 380–82.

<sup>3</sup> Castle Bravo, the biggest U.S. H-bomb tested in 1954 had a yield of fifteen megatons of TNT, which was approximately 1,000 times more destructive than the A-bomb dropped on Hiroshima in August 1945. Soviet H-bombs tested in this period had an even greater yield, the climax being the 50 megaton Tsar Bomba, which exploded in 1961 and in fact had the capacity of 100 megatons.

<sup>4</sup> See Engerman, "Ideology and the Origins."

until 1991—based on their mutually exclusive ideologies, each side regarded the other as an eternal enemy. In the long term, both sides believed that in the competition between capitalism and communism, their respective system would eventually triumph and the other consequently perish. What made the Cold War so dangerous, however, was not ideological but military antagonism, in which field there was no dénouement, not even during the years of high détente. On the contrary, from 1945 until 1987 an ever-increasing arsenal of nuclear and conventional weapons were deployed on both sides. NATO and Warsaw Pact military plans alike regarded each other as lethal enemies to be destroyed—even if this meant the total annihilation of the population of their opponent—in the case of an armed conflict waged by thermonuclear weapons. Both NATO and the Warsaw Pact countries conducted military exercises and war games against the other bloc. More important, the enormous number of intercontinental and medium-range ballistic missiles with a nuclear capacity to make human life impossible on Earth were targeted at each other's military facilities and major cities until the end of the Cold War in 1991. While the leaders of both superpowers did everything they could to successfully avoid a military clash, a Third World War *ad absurdum* could have broken out by accident exactly during the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in August 1975, at the time of the triumph of détente.

The mechanism of compelled cooperation, however, was not visible to contemporaries. We know now that it was the tacit recognition of the European status quo and spheres of influence that explain American inaction at the time of all the Soviet Bloc's internal crises, which consequently can be regarded as only pseudo crises in the East-West relationship. More important, the real crises of the time, particularly the second Berlin crisis and the Cuban Missile Crisis, could be resolved peacefully via secret diplomacy. In the latter case this included neglecting and even deceiving allies on both sides—using the mechanism of compelled cooperation, aimed at finding a compromise solution and even directly helping the opponent to save face, in order to avoid the escalation of the crisis. Raymond Garthoff has pointed out the continual presence of coexistence and competition during the Cold War.<sup>5</sup> Yet this new theory posits that the mechanism of compelled cooperation played an important role not only in periods when the element of cooperation was dominant in East-West relations, but was also a crucial means of solving the crises exactly at the time of gravest confrontations.

<sup>5</sup> Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 3–4.



All this means is that détente was not a simple tactical move resulting in the temporary easing of tension in superpower relations but it was a system of serious and permanent interdependency based on mutual responsibility for the preservation of human civilization that forced the superpowers to cooperate in order to avoid direct military conflict. Détente was thus a new model of East-West coexistence based on the compelled cooperation of the two blocs, characteristic of the second phase of the Cold War after 1953—controlling and determining the actions of the political leaders on both sides. While détente was an integral part of the Cold War international structure that disappeared only after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union in 1991, détente and the Cold War international structure were not mutually exclusive. Therefore we cannot speak about détente “overcoming the Cold War,”<sup>6</sup> as the former did not replace the latter; the two simply coexisted. Examples of the omnipresent mechanism of compelled superpower cooperation can be found throughout several stages of the East-West relationship from 1953 to 1991.

### Peaceful Coexistence, Détente, and the Soviet Bloc

The new strategy of peaceful coexistence was introduced by the old-new Soviet collective leadership emerging after Stalin's funeral in March 1953. This lends remarkable credence to the idea that this policy was not initiated at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in February 1956, as most studies on the topic claim. At that forum it was elevated to the level of a long-term doctrine based on the thesis that war between the socialist and capitalist camps was not inevitable; indeed, it was in force until the dissolution of the Soviet Union.<sup>7</sup>

This meant a much more flexible foreign policy aimed at radically easing tensions in East-West relations and the continual deepening of political and especially, economic cooperation with the West, with the obvious aim of reducing the cost of the arms race and thus improving the Soviet Union's chances of surviving the intensifying competition between the two opposing blocs.<sup>8</sup>

“Peaceful coexistence,” a term still widely used by scholars, was introduced and then propagated by Soviet politicians. One may easily argue that the term “compelled coexistence,” describes the nature of this relationship more accurately. The coexistence of the two camps was in reality peaceful only in Europe, while in many other parts of the world clashes and military conflicts between the representatives or proxies of the two blocs occurred regularly until the end of the Cold War era.<sup>9</sup>

For the Soviet Bloc leaders it meant a competition between the two blocs, which they believed they would eventually win. This did not mean giving up the class struggle as such: it only meant that the focus of the class struggle was redirected from Europe—their most important territory for attempting to advance communism so far—to the Third World, where supporting mostly indigenous liberation movements and postcolonial governments created a chance for the Soviets to expand their influence.<sup>10</sup> Penetration into these countries started as early as 1953 and not in the late 1950s or the early 1960s as assumed by many. Nor did “peaceful coexistence” mean giving up the arms race, as the main Soviet goal was to achieve and then maintain nuclear parity at any cost with the United States, thus providing the Soviet Union with their long dreamed-for status as an equal superpower. To be sure, peaceful coexistence was truly peaceful in the sense that Soviet Bloc leaders wanted to preserve peace between the superpowers by all means and as far as available sources indicate, they never wanted to start a war with the West. Therefore from the mid-1950s one may say that Moscow was trying to consolidate the territorial gains of World War II by offering the West a deal on achieving the *de jure* acceptance of the European status quo established in 1945 and in turn providing a guarantee for Western Europe against a potential Soviet Bloc attack, while tacitly also denouncing any further aspirations for using the communist parties in the West to work toward a takeover.

The multinational archival evidence now available to scholars proves convincingly that not every crisis that occurred during the Cold War era was attributable to the Cold War. After World War II, and especially until the mid-1960s, both Eastern and Western public opinion were determined by an ideological and strategic East-West opposition, thus automatically labeling all major internal crises within the Eastern bloc as well as other conflicts of the East-West relationship without differentiation as East-West, that is Cold War crises. Scholarship has more or less agreed with

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Loth, *Overcoming the Cold War*.

<sup>7</sup> Békés, “East Central Europe, 1953–1956.”

<sup>8</sup> For a recent survey of Soviet policy after Stalin's death, see Mastny, “Soviet foreign policy.” See also Békés, “East Central Europe, 1953–1960.” Another important recent collective work on the topic is Larres and Osgood, *The Cold War after Stalin's Death*.

<sup>9</sup> On global conflicts during the Cold War, see Westad, *The Global Cold War*.

<sup>10</sup> On Soviet policy toward the Third World, see *ibid*.



this narrative, incorporating these conflicts into the general history of the East-West relationship. It should be made clear that most of these conflicts were not real crises in the sense that they did not exceed the above outlined cooperation framework of the superpowers, despite what their propaganda said; namely, they did not cause a real threat to the interests of the opposing political-military bloc. They in fact did not challenge the post-World War II European status quo and consequently did not disturb the East-West relationship in the long run. Such apparent East-West crises that had their effect only at the level of public opinion and propaganda were all crises of the Soviet Bloc: the 1953 Berlin uprising, the events of 1956 in Poland and Hungary, the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and finally the Polish conflict in 1980–81.

The Soviet leaders were fully aware of this distinction from the outset and they never expected any serious Western response to their crisis management within their own sphere of influence. Their only miscalculation was the invasion of Afghanistan—regarded by Moscow as a logical and legitimate move along the above lines, yet on the Western side deemed a grossly illegitimate expansion of the Soviet sphere of influence.

### The Soviet Bloc and the Helsinki Process

The Soviets had originally raised the idea of creating a collective European security system in the 1930s under Stalin. Twenty years later, the post-Stalinist leadership created a “new” initiative that failed again as Western powers regarded it as a mere propaganda trick aimed at avoiding West Germany’s entry to NATO. But Moscow did not give up. Ten years later, in December 1964 it resurfaced as a Polish initiative at the UN General Assembly. A month later the first call for a pan-European security conference was included in the communiqué published after the Warsaw Pact Political Consultative Committee (WP PCC) meeting in Warsaw in January 1965.<sup>11</sup> In the second half of 1965, the issue of a potential European security conference was taken over by Soviet diplomacy. From that point this question—in close correlation with Moscow’s endeavors to settle the German question—became the central problem of the period and lasted until the middle of the 1970s.

<sup>11</sup> For a detailed account of the Soviet Bloc’s policy vis-à-vis the issue of European security, see Békés’s “The Warsaw Pact and the Helsinki Process,” “The Warsaw Pact, the German Question,” and “Hungary, the Soviet Bloc.”

The Bucharest session of the WP PCC in July 1966 was devoted to the issue of the security conference. The Bucharest Declaration issued at the end of the meeting called upon the leaders of the states to start preliminary talks on the staging of a conference on European security. At the same time, however, the Eastern Bloc’s preconditions were also established: The West was to accept the existence of the two German states, and the FRG was to give up the claim of sole representation of the German people and recognize the existing Eastern borders. This appeal, nevertheless, constituted the Eastern Bloc’s first serious initiative concerning the institutional settlement of East-West relations, while also being the first important step on the road to the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in 1975.

As for convincing the political and governmental circles in Western Europe, the Soviets resorted to the tools of a decentralization policy. After the Warsaw Pact’s Bucharest appeal, Moscow began firmly urging the member states of the pact to engage in bilateral negotiations with the Western European countries to convince them how significant this initiative was with respect to the development of East-West relations. The main goal of this campaign was to promote the Soviets’ most important strategic goal: convening a pan-European security conference in order to confirm the European status quo that had been established after World War II.

The results of the campaign could be seen in almost three years’ time: the “Budapest Appeal,” issued at the WP PCC meeting in Budapest on March 17, 1969, has become known as the document that actually did initiate the preparatory process for the European security conference.<sup>12</sup> While the Soviet Bloc’s position did not change in the meantime, the crucial factor for the breakthrough was a changed attitude on the Western side (NATO’s Harmel report, the new approach of the incoming Nixon administration and significant changes in the FRG). Nevertheless, by this time, unknown to the outside world, serious internal debates jeopardized the hitherto unified position of the Warsaw Pact. Therefore the main achievement of the Budapest meeting was the acceptance by all parties of the Soviet-Hungarian proposal (supported by Romania) that there should be no preconditions for the convening of a European Security Conference. The inclusion of this clause in the Budapest Appeal would prove to be a crucial factor in bringing about the CSCE process. While for outsiders the unanimous Warsaw Pact position looked only too logical, in reality this

<sup>12</sup> For the text of the declaration, see Byrne and Mastny, *A Cardboard Castle?* For a detailed account of the dramatic behind the scenes talks during the WP PCC meeting, see Békés, “The Warsaw Pact and the Helsinki Process.”



decision was made after unprecedented harsh debates among the WP members. By the mid-1960s the Soviet Bloc was clearly divided into a *security concerned* and an *economy oriented* sub-bloc as far as the German question was concerned. The members of the latter group, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Romania, had no serious unsettled issues with the FRG and were therefore interested in economic cooperation, increasing trade and taking over cutting-edge technologies. The members of the security concerned sub-bloc (the GDR, Poland, and Czechoslovakia), while also interested in economic cooperation with the West, were primarily interested in guaranteeing their security by acquiring assurances from the FRG to recognize their post-1945 borders. The Budapest appeal then clearly meant the victory of the economy-oriented sub-bloc over their opponents. However, the ongoing struggle between the two groups characterized the Warsaw Pact decision-making process until the settlement of the FRG's relations with the Soviet Bloc at the end of 1973.

Bilateral negotiations by the Warsaw Pact member states that went on uninterruptedly until the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in 1975 contributed to easing international tensions, gradually increasing confidence between the representatives of the two sides and promoting the development of a common European conscience in the long run. As a result, the European allies of the Soviet Union participated in the preparatory negotiations for the Helsinki Conference not simply as mere executors of Soviet policy—or Moscow's proxies—but in several cases acted as independent actors, often playing an important role in shaping the overall process.

The signing of the Helsinki Final Act was seen as a long-awaited legal guarantee for the legalization of the European status quo, and was naturally regarded as a huge success and victory by the Soviet Bloc leaders.<sup>13</sup> The price for the historic compromise was accepting Basket III with a promise that the freer movement of people, information, and ideas would be made possible in the Soviet Bloc as well. It should be remembered, however, that in Yalta in February 1945 Stalin had signed the Declaration on Liberated Europe, explicitly promising free elections in Soviet-occupied East-Central Europe—the result of that promise only too well-known. Indeed, the Soviet Bloc leaders, while aware of the problem, were confident that their authoritarian regimes and closed societies would effectively block attempts by both the West and the internal opposition in

their countries at using the Basket III for undermining their regimes.<sup>14</sup> The principle of noninterference in the internal affairs of other states, also included in the Helsinki Final Act at the Eastern side's pressure, gave them a convenient legal basis for rejecting any undesirable intervention.

While it is widely believed that Basket III and later the U.S.-led human rights campaign crucially contributed to the eventual collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe, these factors, in reality had only marginal impact on developments in the region. Conversely, the role of Basket II is generally underestimated—although the ever-broadening economic cooperation between the Eastern and Western parts of Europe eventually led to a serious economic and financial dependency from and indebtedness to the West. We can argue that the economic cooperation originally seen in the East as a vehicle for consolidating the Soviet Bloc economies—especially by the transfer of developed technologies—would, by the end of the 1980s, become a catalyst in the collapse of the communist systems.<sup>15</sup> The collapse itself, however, was due neither to the economic nor to the human rights factor; but it occurred as a consequence of the collapse of the Soviet Union itself—underway since the middle of 1988. To be sure, between the two factors the economic one was much greater. While credit is generally given to U.S. policies for ending the Cold War on the Western side, the role of the FRG is usually underestimated. As the number one Western economic partner of most Soviet Bloc states, the role of the FRG in destabilizing the East European countries was much greater than previously assumed. History's irony, however, is that all this was not intentional; on the contrary, Bonn was interested in reforming and stabilizing the communist regimes as late as the summer of 1989.<sup>16</sup>

For the Soviets, the Helsinki process was explicitly a European project. This is important to emphasize, as the U.S. involvement in the CSCE led to a general misperception that stabilizing the status quo between the superpowers was a deal effective worldwide, not just in Europe. For the Soviets, however, détente was absolutely compatible with their penetration in the Third World especially as in most cases their military and economic support was given for indigenous revolutionary movements. Mos-

<sup>13</sup> For two recent collective works on the Helsinki process, see Niedhart and Bange, *The CSCE 1975*; Wenger, Mastny, and Nuenlist, *Origins of the European Security System*.

<sup>14</sup> Savranskaya, "The Logic of 1989"; see also Savranskaya and Taubman, "Soviet Foreign Policy"; and Zubok, "Soviet Foreign Policy."

<sup>15</sup> I fully support the argument recently put forward by Juhana Aunesluoma to this effect in Aunesluoma, "Finlandisation in Reverse."

<sup>16</sup> Békés, "Back to Europe."



cow did not really expect the harsh resistance or criticism they received from the United States because some of the countries they targeted were among the poorest in the world (e.g., Afghanistan, Ethiopia) and in most cases their geopolitical location was also peripheral in the nuclear age. We can add that in retrospect, U.S. leaders actually should have been happy to see how the Kremlin was wasting their rather limited resources without any sensible reward. The Soviet leaders, indeed, maneuvered themselves into a trap by not being able to resist the temptation to expand their influence, while by now they should have concentrated all their efforts on saving their failing "internal empire," including Eastern Europe. Such decisions were made partly as a consequence of the absurd secrecy about the real state of the Soviet economy. We now know that even in the early 1980s, under Andropov, the state budget of the USSR with the real figures, including the military costs was unavailable even to key Politburo members, including future General Secretary Gorbachev and future Prime Minister Ryzhkov.<sup>17</sup> Thus Moscow had to pay a high price for the unprofitable (over)expansion of the Soviet empire (including the war in Afghanistan) as it became a crucial factor in the subsequent fall of the Soviet Union—together with the enormous costs of the arms race that used up the reserves of the state and the expenses of subsidizing their allies in Eastern Europe. During the Cold War, on average, the United States spent an estimated 5 percent of its GDP on military costs, while the corresponding Soviet figure was an estimated 25 percent.

### Surviving Détente and the Emerging Common European Consciousness, 1979–1983

The new interpretation of détente, outlined at the beginning of this chapter, emphasizing the role of compelled cooperation and interdependency also explains how it was possible that just a few years after the alleged "death/fall/failure of détente" at the end of the 1970s an unprecedented rapprochement between the superpowers occurred with the coming of Gorbachev beginning in 1985. Despite the view held by many, there was no (there could not have been a) "second Cold War" between 1979 and 1985<sup>18</sup> as this term implies that a first Cold War had ended sometime ear-

lier. Such widely accepted but erroneous interpretations assume that by the "victory" of détente between 1969 and 1975 the Cold War disappeared and then, at the end of the decade it resurfaced again until it completely melted away under Gorbachev.

Such explanations can be attributed to a linear and exclusive interpretation of the relationship between Cold War and détente. These interpretations basically apply a model according to which—with some simplification—at a certain time there was either Cold War *or* détente. That is, when the superpower relationship was bad, one can refer to this period as the Cold War, when it was good, it was détente. In fact, this relationship—as explained earlier—was not linear at all, and the two categories were certainly not mutually exclusive. They could not and did not replace each other. It is worth noting that the traditional interpretations essentially—unintentionally—follow the logic of politicians of the Cold War era. After 1953 and especially following the Geneva Summit of July 1955 Moscow and its allies were convinced that the Cold War was over at that time and that peaceful coexistence had no alternative. That is, they clearly used the two categories in an exclusive way. This is well demonstrated by cases when in their internal discourse they identified East-West conflict situations with the Cold War and they often argued that the Western powers wanted to bring back the Cold War or Cold War style into the East-West relationship.<sup>19</sup> The same logic was perceivable on the other side as well: in June 1969, when a new wave of Soviet-American rapprochement was unfolding, Henry Kissinger also spoke of the Cold War as a category belonging to the past, compared to which relations would now enter a constructive phase.<sup>20</sup>

It is therefore difficult in the conventional sense to evaluate the period between 1979 and 1985 as it was both preceded and followed by détente. It has been described as a period when the element of confrontation was dominant again, and has been "logically" named the "second Cold War," "little Cold War," or "mini-Cold War" using old reflexes, since this logic links a Cold War to a time when the superpower relationship was struggling. In reality, however, this was not the case. First, previously, in peri-

<sup>19</sup> At the Soviet Bloc states summit meeting on July 31, 1972, in the Crimea Brezhnev argued that in case the opposition won the early elections to be held in the FRG in the fall, that would mean a return to the Cold War. Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára (MNL OL; Hungarian National Archives), M-KS 288f. 5/ 587. ő. e. Report by János Kádár at the meeting of the HSWP Political Committee, August 2, 1972.

<sup>20</sup> Keefer, Geyer, and Selvage, *Soviet-American Relations*, 64: Memorandum of conversation (Kissinger-Dobrynin), Washington, June 12, 1969.

<sup>17</sup> Blanton, Savranskaya, and Zubok, *Masterpieces of History*, 570. On the absurd nature of state secrecy in the Soviet Union see also Zubok, *Failed Empire*, 299.

<sup>18</sup> Dálóc "Why Was There No 'Second Cold War'?"



ods of confrontation, confrontational intentions (at least at the level of propaganda) were mutual, that is they prevailed on both sides. Now, however, it appeared only on the American side, while the Soviet leadership strongly insisted on the preservation of the results of détente. Second, it was the first time that in a confrontational stage the European allies of the United States did not follow Washington loyally in a united front, and indeed they sought to keep the East-West dialogue and cooperation alive. Moreover, the alliance system reacted similarly on the Eastern side as well: the Eastern Bloc countries—Hungary, primarily—driven by their special interests that were by now becoming increasingly independent of the intentions of Moscow sought to do everything they could to preserve the achievements of détente.

Between 1979 and 1985 the new confrontational U.S. policy (both under President Carter and in the first term of the Reagan administration) materialized primarily at the propaganda level while the mechanism of compelled cooperation continued to work perfectly. The need to avoid a clash between the superpowers was no less compelling than before. Reagan's policy between 1981 and 1983 can be compared to the Eisenhower administration's dual policy between 1953 and 1956, when the real aim of U.S. policy was to find a *modus vivendi* with the Soviet Union, but this was coupled comfortably with a high-sounding rhetoric promising the liberation of the East European "captive nations" which, as is now well-known, had no real basis at all. At the time and even for several decades, this secret could not be documented with primary sources.

Most documents from Reagan's first term will only become available in the next few years but they will in all likelihood reveal an American foreign policy line following the main direction of realism, a traditional policy based on the strategy of containment, which realized the need for compelled superpower cooperation in the same way as its predecessors did. This pragmatic attitude is clearly demonstrated in a speech by Secretary of State George Shultz on U.S.-Soviet relations in the Senate Committee for Foreign Relations on June 15, 1983, where he declared that "we are ready to respect legitimate Soviet security interests and to negotiate equitable solutions to outstanding political problems." He also deemed it important to emphasize that "our policy begins with the clear recognition that the Soviet Union is and will remain a global superpower."<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> U.S.-Soviet relations in the context of Foreign Relations, Speech of Secretary of State George Shultz on June 15, 1983, in the Senate Committee for Foreign Relations. National Security Archives, Washington D.C. End of the Cold War collection, Box 1.

Thus accessible sources together with indirect evidence strongly support the above hypothesis, while from 1983 on it is already clear that the Reagan administration was seeking the resumption of superpower cooperation. While the spring of that year is mostly remembered by the public for Reagan's "evil empire speech" and the launching of SDI, newly available archival sources reveal that almost just about the same time, behind the scenes, at Reagan's initiative a special channel was established for the improvement of U.S.-Soviet relations between Secretary of State George Shultz and Soviet ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin.<sup>22</sup>

A deterioration of the Soviet-U.S. superpower relationship certainly occurred following NATO's double-track decision and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. However, for the first time during the Cold War era, this was not followed by an automatic worsening of the overall East-West relationship.<sup>23</sup> Mutually interested in preserving the results of détente, the two parts of Europe began to gravitate toward each other rather than obediently following the superpowers' confrontational line. The Soviet leaders themselves—with a short period of hesitation in the first half of 1980—were keen on preserving the results of détente.

With the invasion of Afghanistan the Soviets had calculated a certain level of criticism from the West, but had expected that after a short period of time it would be accepted as a *fait accompli*, similarly to the case of Czechoslovakia in 1968. They also believed that further improving East-West relations had no alternative so the crucial issue of keeping up the results of détente would overshadow the problem of Afghanistan fairly soon.

However, the West—especially the United States—reacted differently this time. For they rightly evaluated the situation as the first time since 1945 that the Soviet Union had militarily occupied a country that did not belong to the Soviet sphere of interests tacitly recognized by the West. While at the time of the East-Central European crises of 1953, 1956, and 1968 the West rationally recognized the Soviet Union's right to restore order within its empire, they considered the Afghan invasion to be a unilateral and aggressive expansion of the Soviet sphere of interests. According to Western interpretation, Moscow had breached the tacit agreement based on the European status quo policy which had functioned well since the end of World War II. Considering Afghanistan's geostrategic position, the acquisition of that territory violated only potential Western interests,

<sup>22</sup> Memorandum of Conversation (Reagan, Shultz and Dobrynin), February 15, 1983. Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> For a recent edited volume on this period, see Villaume and Westad, *Perforating the Iron Curtain*.



and the intensity of the international crisis caused by the Soviet aggression did not ever reach the level of the Berlin and Cuban crises at the beginning of the 1960s.

American countermeasures announced at the beginning of 1980—the restriction of the sale of fodder grain to the Soviet Union, freezing of cultural and economic relations, the ban on transfer of advanced technologies—had not yet caused too great a trauma for the Soviet leaders. Similarly, the fact that the UN Security Council put the Afghan question on the agenda on January 5, 1980, and then the Soviet step was condemned at a special General Assembly session did not cause any change in Moscow's foreign policy. Although the possibility of the UN keeping the "Afghan question" permanently on the agenda could later have contributed to the reinforcement of the confrontational trend within Soviet leadership, Brezhnev's speech of January 16 still unambiguously emphasized the need for the maintenance of East-West cooperation. At the same time, however, President Carter called on the whole world to boycott the Olympic Games to be held in Moscow in the summer of the same year. Because this was the first time that the Olympics were to be held in a socialist country, this event had been viewed as an important prop in gaining international prestige for the Eastern camp.

At the end of January, the situation became even more critical. Although the majority of the West European countries were not unambiguously and in every field joining the American campaign aimed at the "punishment" of the Soviet Union, the question of European security was now viewed in a completely new light as a result of the Afghan invasion. Based on NATO's double-track decision passed at the beginning of December 1979, it was still principally possible that, in the case of successful East-West talks, the deployment of the so-called Euromissiles would not take place in Western Europe. However, under the new circumstances, it became increasingly obvious that the NATO member states could not be dissuaded from the deployment of U.S. missiles aimed at the strengthening of their security. While in a number of West European countries there had been a strong anti-missile movement including not just communist sympathizers but large parts of the societies, now Moscow could no longer count on this wide scale social resistance.

In late January 1980, after the boycott of the Olympic Games was announced and especially when it became clear that there were no more chances to avoid the deployment of the "Euromissiles," Moscow became offended and decided to take countermeasures. During this campaign Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and the GDR were ordered to cancel imminent

high-level talks with Western politicians. This unexpected move caused a serious clash of interest between the Soviet Union and the East European communist states, as by this time these countries were—in different degrees and in different ways—interested in developing their own relations with Western Europe.<sup>24</sup> The Hungarian leadership, while loyally canceling their planned visits to the FRG and the United States, urged Moscow to hold a multilateral consultative meeting on the consequences of the situation in Afghanistan on East-West relations. They argued that in the present situation the allies must be consulted regularly on the joint policy of the Soviet Bloc in international politics, and the results of détente must be preserved. They also argued this would be possible only by maintaining and strengthening the relations of the East European countries with Western Europe. Further they felt this would help avoid American influence prevailing in these countries.

### A Victory for Hungarian Diplomacy and the Soviet Bloc

Brezhnev was permanently ill at that time and internal fights intensified between the lobbies within the Soviet leadership. The Hungarian proposal for consultation, however, was accepted and a meeting of the CC secretaries for foreign affairs of the "closely cooperating socialist countries" (the Warsaw Pact states without Romania) was summoned in Moscow on February 26, 1980. At the conference Boris Ponomarev, CPSU CC secretary for international affairs, not only adopted the above mentioned—and rather shrewd—Hungarian position, but he also put forward this thesis as the current CPSU line, emphasizing that "the socialist countries should make the maximum use of the possibilities contained in existing relations with the Western-European countries to counter-balance the United States' foreign policy line."<sup>25</sup>

This was a great victory for Hungarian diplomacy as well as for the whole Soviet Bloc.<sup>26</sup> First, because they were given a green light to go

<sup>24</sup> For the history of the intra-bloc crisis caused by the Soviet move, see Békés, "Why Was There No 'Second Cold War.'"

<sup>25</sup> MNL OL, M-KS. 288. f. 47/764. ö. e., Memorandum of conversation between Vadim Zagladin, first deputy head of the International Department of the CPSU CC and Gyula Horn, deputy head of the HSWP CC Department of Foreign Affairs on debates inside the Soviet leadership on issues of international politics, July 16, 1980.

<sup>26</sup> On the history of Hungarian foreign policy in this period, see Békés's *Európából Európába* [From Europe to Europe]; "Hungarian Foreign Policy in the Soviet Alliance System"; and "Hungarian Foreign Policy in the Bipolar World."



ahead with strengthening Western relations that were more than crucial for the country's economy by that time. If relations between the West and Hungary had been frozen in 1980, it would have potentially blocked Hungary's acquiring a crucial 1.7 billion dollar Western loan in that year. This—we now know—would have led to the country's insolvency.<sup>27</sup> From a historical perspective it is even more important that Hungarian leader János Kádár's firm personal intervention and the effective Hungarian diplomatic initiatives eventually helped the liberal forces in the Soviet leadership—mostly key members of the Central Committee apparatus—who were interested in maintaining détente, to overcome their adversaries, led by Foreign Minister Gromyko, representing a more belligerent attitude toward the West.<sup>28</sup>

In parallel with the letter sent to Brezhnev, Kádár sent explanatory messages to SPD Chairman Willy Brandt and West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt. In these, he apologized for the cancellation of the visit of the Hungarian foreign minister at such short notice and subtly explained the difficult situation of the Hungarian leadership. He also stressed that his country was strongly committed to maintaining the results of détente and to fostering East-West cooperation. In his reply, Helmut Schmidt, the first German Chancellor to visit Hungary a year earlier, formulated the historical challenge facing the European states in the following way: that it depended on these states—"whether they let themselves be drawn into the cold war, instigated by the two superpowers or not! Neither the FRG, nor any other West or East European coun-

<sup>27</sup> MNL OL, M-KS. 288.f. 5/791. ő. e., Minutes of the session of the HSWP Political Committee on January 29, 1980. Published in Békés, "Miért nem lett második 'hidegháború'."

<sup>28</sup> As Vadim Zagladin, first deputy head of the International Department of the CPSU CC told Gyula Horn on July 16, 1980, "for several months in the CPSU Politburo, there had been heated debates about the Soviet Union's specific foreign policy steps, the general evaluation of the international situation and the situation of the communist movement. He emphasized that in this debate Comrade János Kádár's message to the Soviet leadership played an important role"; MNL OL, M-KS. 288. f. 47/764. ő. e. Memorandum of conversation between Vadim Zagladin, first deputy head of the International Department of the CPSU CC and Gyula Horn, deputy head of the HSWP CC Department of Foreign Affairs on debates inside the Soviet leadership on issues of international politics, July 16, 1980. The English translation of the document was published as part of a collection of Hungarian archival sources on the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in Békés, "Why Was There No 'Second Cold War' in Europe? The Hungarian Leadership and the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan in 1979."

try can keep out of this [cold war] alone. This is possible only by the collaboration of all states concerned."<sup>29</sup>

Thus the invasion of Afghanistan, in which the Warsaw Pact states were not involved, in fact helped amplify the notion of an East-Central Europe, pursuing its own interests and having a special identity, significantly different from that of the Soviet Union. All this, paradoxically, contributed to the gradual establishment of a *common European consciousness* that had been formulated since the late 1960s: this slowly emerging virtually united Europe would surely include East-Central Europe, but not necessarily the Soviet Union.

Soviet crisis management during the Polish crisis of 1980–81 also demonstrated that Moscow was keen to avoid another Soviet invasion in order to preserve the chance for East-West dialogue. From the outset they sought to apply the Mikoyan doctrine,<sup>30</sup> first trying to find a political solution and then a military solution executed by local forces. While Mikoyan's proposal was voted down by the CPSU Presidium in October 1956, the Soviet leaders learned their lesson and instinctively sought to use his doctrine in 1968 in Czechoslovakia and later in Afghanistan in 1979. The first successful application of the doctrine occurred in December 1981 when General Jaruzelski introduced martial law in Poland.

The Soviet leaders learned other lessons as well. During the Euro-missile crisis in December 1983 Moscow did not repeat the 1980 mistake; namely, applying a general line of retaliation against the West. According to a guideline sent from Moscow to the Soviet Bloc leaders: "under the new circumstances it is important to approach the development of relations with the different western countries in subtle ways. The countries that agreed to the deployment of the missiles should experience the political consequences of this move. Naturally, priority should be given to countries in which no such missiles will be deployed. It seems to be useful

<sup>29</sup> MNL OL, M-KS. 288. f. 11/4512. ő. e., Information bulletin for the Political Committee and the Secretariat concerning the oral reply of Chancellor Helmut Schmidt to the message of János Kádár, February 14, 1980.

<sup>30</sup> At the time of the Hungarian revolution in 1956 it was Anastas Mikoyan, a respected member of the Soviet leadership and the one who knew the Hungarian situation best who proposed a solution using local forces only: "There is no way of mastering the movement without [Imre] Nagy and so this will make it cheaper for us as well. . . . What can we lose? Let the Hungarians restore order for themselves. Let us try political measures, and only after that send our troops in." For the first publication of the Mikoyan doctrine, see Békés, "Az 1956-os magyar forradalom," 85.

<sup>31</sup> MNL OL, M-KS. 288. f. 5/897. ő. e.

to intensify our relations and contacts with the neutral countries of capitalist Europe in every respect and area."<sup>31</sup> The Soviet policy of differentiation was now clearly aimed at maintaining dialogue with as many partners as possible in the West.

This same commitment by the Soviet Bloc states to continue the policy of détente and indeed improve East-West cooperation was demonstrated by their attitude toward the CSCE follow-up conference in Madrid from September 1980 to September 1983. As the meeting was convened in the rather strained international climate following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, it was to be expected that the harsh attacks launched at the Eastern states for their human rights violations at the first follow-up conference in Belgrade in 1977–78 would now be multiplied and supplemented by the charge of Soviet aggression. From a publicity perspective it appeared a lost case for the Soviet Bloc. In such a situation it would have been logical to try to postpone or even boycott the conference to avoid a serious loss of prestige. Yet the Soviet leadership decided to follow the original agenda and enter the fight. During the conference the introduction of martial law in Poland in December 1981 further exacerbated the situation. However, by September 1983, the conference produced tangible results with agreement on several issues including religious freedom and family unification. Most important, the participants agreed on convening three important conferences: on human rights in Ottawa in 1985, a cultural forum in Budapest the same year and on human contacts in Bern in 1986.

## Conclusion

The period of the long détente from 1953 to 1991 was a continual struggle for survival for the Soviet Bloc. For outsiders this struggle seemed to be temporarily successful in the 1960s, but for the Bloc's leaders it became increasingly evident from the middle of that decade that the extremely ineffective economic system of their regimes would not make it possible to keep up the competition with the West.

For the Soviet Bloc states, détente as a new model of East-West cooperation after 1953 was not "just" a means of avoiding a direct and fatal clash of the two blocs. Paradoxically, it was also a must for them in order to survive in the historic competition exactly with the help of their oppo-

nents. Relying on Western advanced technology and loans, especially from the mid-1970s on, became a crucial driving force behind the Soviet Bloc's enormous efforts to preserve the results of the Helsinki process at any price even in the turbulent period following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

<sup>31</sup> MNL OL, M-KS. 288. f. 5/897. ő. e.