

From Cold War to Cold Peace?

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We have just marked important memorial days: the 100th anniversary of the beginning of the First World War, 1914-1918. Last weekend, we marked the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, which was the beginning of the end of the Soviet Union and the removal of the ‘iron curtain’ which had split Europe and the world since the end of the Second World War. The Warsaw Pact was dissolved, but not the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the West’s military organization.

There are many things to remember and mark as regards the political and military events in our time. We can mark the events, remember those who suffered and died, on both sides of conflict lines. But we shouldn’t celebrate wars. Peaceful solutions should be sought and celebrated. I am worried about the way we mark wars in Europe, and indeed the way the Americans mark their wars, with the Veterans’ Day and the Memorial Day, every year on 11 November. Wars must not be glorified. Alas, regimes do that, especially those with imperialistic aspirations.

In this article, I shall summarize a few aspects from the recent history and reflect on the current escalation of the East-West tension. The relations are more strained than ever in the last 25 years. Are we in broad daylight moving towards a ‘Cold Peace’ situation?

WWI is long gone. It belongs to history now. Memories are getting faint and ordinary people’s understanding of the war is limited. The main lesson to be drawn is important, though, notably that the loser that time, Germany, was treated in a way that had elements of humiliation. That is part of the explanation for why the WWII happened.

When WWII ended, Germany was again the loser, or, more precisely, the Nazi regime. The Soviet Union in the East was on the winning side together with the Allied Forces in the West. But then there were the two political and economic systems, the communist and capitalist systems, and they could not work together and find reasonable and logical ways of cooperating. Europe was split in two, which may have been in USA’s interest, but hardly in the interest of Europe and the countries which then fell under authoritarian Soviet influence, the Eastern Bloc.

WWII was not only about the Nazi ideology in Germany, made even more extreme by the way it was addressed by the Allied Forces. WWII was as much about world leadership, trade and industry, as about ideology. It was about USA’s world leadership and supremacy – fought on European soil. And the peace treaties were all made with USA in the chair. In hindsight, it seems absurd that the two political and economic blocks were established with an ‘iron curtain’.

And then, in 1989-90, the Cold War ended. Last weekend, people in the West, and the former Soviet Union, marked it, yes, the majority celebrated the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall.

I also celebrate the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War. But I am not sure I celebrate the collapse of the Soviet Union. True, there were many dictatorial and authoritarian aspects in-built in the communist system, led by Russia from Moscow, controlling the Soviet Republics all the way from central and south-eastern Europe to Vladivostok, near China and Korea, in the east, and the Central Asian countries, yes, Afghanistan, too. Further away, the sphere of interest included many developing countries worldwide. They were (loosely) unified in the Non-Aligned Movement. Other countries were West-oriented and received support from USA and other major Western powers. The Cold War was a

world war about political ideology, influence, control and economy. At the time, there were also many direct wars, including the Vietnam and the Korea wars, with scars on the world map till this very day.

Are we again at the brink of another war, or a Cold Peace, with similar frontlines as those of the Cold War? And if so, what have the world leaders been doing – or rather, not been doing – for the last 25 years since the end of the Cold War, which we so boldly celebrated last weekend? And what is the purpose and aim of the behavior of the West, indeed USA, which is in the driver's seat, as regards what can be seen as aggressive policies towards what is left of the former Soviet Union, the Russian Federation, led from Moscow? Is the West not humiliating Russia? Why does it bother the West so much that members of the Russian Federation want to loosen – or strengthen – their cooperation with Russia? Are they not, after all, in the Russian geopolitical sphere of interest?

Imagine if some of the Western countries would have wanted to go the other way, to seek ties with the Russian Federation. We can use Cuba as an example: America cannot even accept that a little developing country has a different ideological, political and economic system than the Big Brother.

As the world is, there are certain ways that the great powers behave towards the countries in their spheres of interest. They shouldn't be vassal states, but some form of close cooperation within a region is also necessary. Direct military force must not be used, also not economic force. But it is not only Russia's behavior towards Ukraine and Crimea that is wrong; it is also USA's behavior towards Cuba and many other countries in its Latin American backyard. In most cases, the West's wars today are subtle and indirect, supported by media propaganda. Therefore, many people don't see the true face of what goes on.

Today, it is not logical that there are 'walls' between East and West. Could not Ukraine and other countries be both Eastern and Western? Could not the West, indeed USA, begin to admit that there were positive aspects, too, to the former Soviet Union, and Cuba today? Could we not begin to realize that it is wrong 'that the winners take all', that the strong always decide?

President Mikhail Gorbachev was the leader of Soviet Union's communist party from 1985-91, and president for two years from 1990-91. It was during his time that the regime changed and the Berlin Wall fell. He had not foreseen that it would be the end of the Soviet Union, but had wanted a liberalization and change of the system, with openness to the West, even with a positive assistance from the West. I was glad to hear that he this week warned against the West's current hawkish and hostile policies towards Russia. Also, a former Norwegian minister of defense and foreign affairs, Thorvald Stoltenberg (83), who is the father of Jens Stoltenberg, the fresh NATO chief, expressed similar opinions at a meeting of Nordic foreign affairs leaders in Stockholm last week.

If the word *realpolitik* does have a substantive meaning, we should try to make that practical and real today. We must sober up after 25 years upon the fall of the Berlin Wall, and more than two generations since the end of WWII, and three generations since WWI. We must develop inclusive policies that can accommodate countries and groups of countries that have some differences, and different alliances, without forcing all to wear the same straightjacket and swear allegiance to West's capitalism, under America's and NATO's leadership.

History will judge us all. Now it is our time to make sure that we don't fall deeper into a Cold Peace, and perhaps, too, push Russia and China too close together – in future, maybe against the old Europe. Shouldn't we all focus on increased cooperation, reduction of military arsenals, including nuclear weapons? Can we not in our 'modern' time transform wasteful military expenses, and conflicts, into development, and create real openness on a level playing field on all sides of the walls that we still build?

At a graduation ceremony at a Pakistani university last year, a candidate who received her degree in engineering said about her professional aspirations: *I want to pull down walls and instead build bridges*. What a wise young woman!

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