

The Transitional World Order

NEW HORIZONS WERE opened up by the end of the Cold War and of military confrontation between the two camps, as well as by the limiting of the arms race in general, the complete cessation of the arms race in a number of areas, and the normalization of international affairs. It seemed possible that a new system of international relations could be created based on the principle of equality in all dealings among nations. Of course this would not rule out a certain degree of rivalry or conflict of interests, but it would allow for the resolution of all the main problems exclusively by civilized political methods. It also seemed possible that a new atmosphere for economic development could be created. The preconditions for truly free, open, and much more extensive exchange of cultural values were emerging. In short, the new situation was laying the basis for all countries to participate in truly worldwide development. To a significant degree it seemed that the prospects then emerging surpassed the opportunities that had arisen after 1945 in the post-World War II era, opportunities that had been missed.

After 1945, despite the ending of World War II, wars continued (or were revived) in several parts of the world, including wars involving the great powers. Many regional hot spots appeared. But in the perestroika era, when worldwide confrontation was ending, the process of eliminating such regional conflicts began. It is no accident that after 1989 an idea that began to be widely circulated in the world was the establishment of a new world order that would rule out war and confrontation and create peaceful cooperation among all nations.

But time has passed, and instead of the euphoria of 1989–90 pessimism has set in. The new world order is being considered either a myth or a utopian idea. What happened may be explained by several factors. Problems that had been suppressed or pushed into the background in the era of

confrontation now came to the fore. New sources of tension emerged. Political leaders were confronted with new problems for which they were unprepared and had no solutions.

Further, the geopolitical map of the world had fundamentally changed. The confrontation of opposing blocs had ended, the Warsaw Pact organization had dissolved, and many new independent states had appeared. Consequently the bipolar structure of the international community disappeared. The world became truly pluralistic. It had lost the system of relations that had previously held it together and organized it, however defective that system was.

Freed from the threat of a nuclear nightmare that hung over everyone's head during the Cold War, and freed from the discipline imposed by each of the rival blocs during that time, every country found that it now possessed a new freedom of action. Each one sought to find its own place in the changing world and to identify its own true interests on a new basis.

To these factors of geopolitical change, one more factor must be added: the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which changed the "geometry" of relations, especially in Europe, but by no means in Europe alone. In the years of perestroika the Soviet Union had become a solid counterweight against any attempt to impose hegemony, but now it had disappeared. Accordingly, all those who in their hearts had been nurturing egoistic plans of whatever kind now had much greater scope for action. The world became less predictable, more uncertain.

The independent states, including Russia, that were formed in place of the Soviet Union became the objects of self-seeking plans and schemes by major foreign powers. This became evident essentially as soon as the Belovezh decisions had been made. A great chase began for possession of parts of the Soviet inheritance. This found expression in the selective policies pursued by Western governments in relation to each of the new states of the former USSR.

The dissolution of the USSR contributed to the revival of nationalistic and centrifugal forces in Europe and other regions. Western policies in a de facto way helped activate these forces, beginning with the hasty recognition of Slovenia and Croatia, which further propelled disintegration of the former Yugoslavia and ruined chances for a peaceful divorce among the former members of the Socialist Federated Republic of Yugoslavia (once this divorce had become inevitable).

All the processes and events referred to above undeniably complicated

the international situation substantially. Still, as I see it, that was not the main problem. The main problem was that the policies and political leaders—both on the national and the world scale—failed to perceive or plan for the processes that unfolded or, still worse, had no program of action to neutralize the negative consequences of those processes and ensure a smooth transition to new relations, to that new world order people were talking so much about.

Was there a real possibility for us to find our way to a new world order after the end of the Cold War? Objective *prerequisites* for a transition to new world relations undoubtedly had taken shape by the end of the 1980s. But prerequisites alone do not constitute a real possibility.

The possibility of such a transition presupposes the subjective willingness of the main actors on the world political stage to carry through such a transition. Considering past history and the events that have unfolded quite recently, it can be said that the Soviet Union was willing to find a way to arrive at genuinely democratic and peaceful international relations. In the West, particularly in the United States, no such willingness existed. In the Soviet Union the new thinking and the foreign policy based on it had already put the new approaches into actual, material practice and had already applied the corresponding methods for resolving problems. In contrast, when the United States spoke about the new world order it essentially meant a continuation of its previous policy with some corrections in methodology. The United States viewed the end of the Cold War as the removal of many substantial obstacles on the road to achieving long-standing goals of American policy. The American conception was essentially limited only to making certain corrections in its international policies. The existing order in world economic affairs was essentially to Washington's liking. The strengthening of the free-trade system was considered desirable given America's solid position in relation to its competitors. Problems of civilization as a whole remained on a subsidiary or tertiary level as unpleasant matters that could be managed by taking measures of a partial nature that would not be burdensome for the United States.

The other Western powers had their own special interpretations of the conception of a new world order. Germany, for example, having achieved reunification, quite cautiously at first (and later more openly) adopted a policy aimed at reviving its former dominant influence in Central and Eastern Europe. This was reflected in other aspects of Bonn's foreign policy.

In other words, at the end of the Cold War, many, if not all, governments were in favor of a new world order, but there were different conceptions of what that order would be. Even if everything in the world had remained as before, these fundamentally different views would inevitably have resulted in disagreement and divergence among the world powers in a fairly short time. It is not just a matter of natural disparities in national interests among different countries—that is a constant factor in world politics, which can be taken into account in the course of finding a mutually acceptable balance of interests and reasonable ways of compromising. What was involved was an essential dissimilarity in the goals being set, in the very vision of the world and of its needs and prospects.

We must say, therefore, that along with the many unforeseen problems of world politics there were different strategic orientations and different political intentions.

The dominant conceptions, in fact, did not point toward the future but in many respects were anchored in the past; the past was their source of nourishment. In the best of cases, the question was how to renew or refurbish the traditional approaches. No new outlook really came to light, although that was exactly what was needed if we were to speak of a genuinely new world order.

Whatever the reason, in late 1991 and especially in early 1992 the course of world events began to flow along a different channel. In speaking of the events of recent years, what has become evident, above all, is that while the Cold War on the whole passed into history, its legacy and many of its elements have persisted, although in changed form. A certain estrangement between the former opponents, who now call themselves partners, still exists. It is expressed, for example, in the version of events that we have already mentioned and that is stubbornly repeated—namely, that the Western side was victorious and the East was defeated. This version of events is accompanied by a certain condescending attitude and sometimes even arrogance, as expressed in Western policies.

To a considerable extent the old image of the enemy no longer exists in its old form. But today, especially in recent times, attempts have been made here and there to create new variants of that old image in modified form. For example, the idea of various “dangers” coming from the East is expressed now and then in Western publications and sometimes in the speeches of Western political leaders.

In our view, there are three dangers today that pose the greatest threat. The first is the alarming signs of a new division of the world, the emergence of new trouble spots. These are apparent particularly in Europe, where there is an obvious attempt to consolidate what is supposed to be recognized as Western. Granted, the dividing line is now drawn in new areas. Still, we cannot help but view with concern the attempts to construct on European soil a new system of security exclusively based on NATO, including Eastern European and Central European states in this alliance, while in effect ostracizing Russia. It is true that at the same time there is a lot of rhetorical recognition that European security is unthinkable without Russia.

Another fairly evident danger is what may be termed a *new arms race*. The most dangerous types of military technology continue to spread throughout the world. There is a creeping expansion of the technological capability for the production of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. What happened in India and Pakistan should oblige the international community and the UN Security Council to take action. Military technology is being refined and perfected, and conventional weapons are acquiring the capacity to function as “absolute weapons.” In the more developed countries, new techniques for killing or paralyzing the enemy are being developed, including psychotropic, electronic, and laser weapons.

The disastrous consequences of the arms race that was part of the Cold War are well known. That arms race not only oppressed everyone with its state of mutual fear and terrible tension; it also drained the economic potential of the participating states. It had extremely negative political and psychological consequences as well, strengthening the positions of the most military-minded elements in society who are well known for their intolerance and cruelty.

A third element has become evident in recent years—a notable revival of traditional power politics, a preference for military methods in solving problems. The most striking examples in recent years (although they are by far not the only ones) are in Yugoslavia and the second Persian Gulf crisis. In both cases the political behavior of the parties to the conflicts and of some other countries showed that they saw the resort to arms as the only way of resolving problems. These events constitute a serious warning.

Along with these relapses into the power politics of the past, which are especially dangerous in today’s new conditions, other phenomena exist that can be regarded as the early shoots of a future renewal of the world. For example, world public opinion has been activated to some degree to infuse

universal human values and principles of morality into world affairs and the resolution of major problems. An example was the conference of government leaders on environment and development held in Brazil in 1992, and subsequent conferences on demographics and women's rights. Another example may be seen in actions the United Nations has taken since the end of the Cold War in which for the first time it played the role of peacemaker and defender of the peace, the role for which it was originally intended. Another sign of things to come may be seen in the enhanced role played in international relations by a new element in politics—major nongovernmental organizations which in generalized form reflect the sentiments of world public opinion.

These new phenomena have a meager influence in world affairs, but even so they are quite important. In the light of everything said above, can we assert that the trend toward eliminating confrontation is powerful enough now to be irreversible? Unfortunately we can only answer that confrontational elements are still very much woven into the fabric of world politics. The grounds for this view are especially compelling in light of the fact that the confrontational approach is consistent with political traditions having deep historical roots, traditions based on the notion of a world balance of power, the desire to assert hegemony, to establish spheres of influence, to identify one's own interests with those of the world as a whole. These tendencies continue to exist, although often in disguised form.

In view of all this, how do we see the world today? Is there a "Cold Peace," so to speak? Or has there been a reversion to confrontation, granted that it is not full-fledged?

In my view, what we see now is a unique period in world development that can only be described as transitional. It has its own special features and distinguishing characteristics. What is involved, apparently, is not just a transitional period but a special kind of transitional world order, one that could exist for a long time, one that is characterized by instability, conflict, and the predominance of uncontrolled spontaneous forces in world relations.

How long this transitional period lasts will be determined by the interaction of many factors. One factor is the choice that the more advanced countries will make—whether they will favor equal cooperation or domination in international relations. This in turn will affect the resolution of problems related to the elimination of the socioeconomic and technological gap between North and South, between the rich and backward countries.

Another factor will be the direction taken by developments in several major regions of the world. These are Europe, particularly the post-Soviet space; the Asian-Pacific region, particularly China; and the Arab world and the Mideast. Developments in the United States and on the American continent as a whole will be of essential importance, particularly the success or failure of Pan-American integration processes. The countries of sub-Sahara Africa represent the biggest unknown factor in the overall equation.

Another important factor will be the way that worldwide problems are solved given that military power will play a reduced role and economic power will have an increased role, along with competitiveness on the world market and a change in the correlation of forces in the world community.

A great deal, of course, will depend on the internal development of the Western countries as a whole.

Much will depend on whether individual countries and the international community display the necessary understanding of the importance of global problems. The issue is not only that the deepening of these problems would create increasing elements of tension in society but also that it could cause new conflicts between states, such as a struggle for natural resources, beginning with oil and gas and ending with water and problems of uncontrolled migration.

This list is by no means exhaustive. It is a deliberately incomplete listing of the circumstances that will determine the duration of the transitional world order and the emergence of a truly new and genuinely peaceful world order. But basing our expectations on what we know today, we can assume that this time frame will be fairly prolonged.

What must not be forgotten is that the preconditions for the absolutely necessary changes in the future will not take shape only in the realm of world politics and economics. The decisive role ultimately will be played by fundamental processes that affect the very foundations of existence of the worldwide human community.