

'High Noon for the Western world?' from Der Spiegel (28 January 1980)

Caption: On 28 January 1980, German weekly publication Der Spiegel examines East-West relations following military intervention by the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in December 1979.

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High Noon for the Western world?

For 20 years, détente was regarded as an unshakeable principle of East-West relations. Then, however, in the wake of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the prospects for fruitful cooperation between the superpowers deteriorated almost overnight. A new Cold War loomed on the horizon, all too reminiscent of the confrontation after 1945.

The dinner guests in the East Room of the White House laid down their knives and forks. The invited guests, eighty Senators and Representatives, leaned forward expectantly. President Jimmy Carter, enthroned in a Hepplewhite armchair, surveyed his audience.

Earnestly, with a rigid, mask-like expression, he began to speak: ‘The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan poses the most serious threat to peace since the Second World War.’

This is how he mostly appears now to the nation on television. Gone is the wide grin of the peanut farmer so often portrayed by cartoonists. As in every cowboy film, the affable hero, having been subjected to extreme provocation, has come out fighting. High Noon for the West and for the entire world, unexpectedly and absurdly.

Within four weeks, the two superpowers had entrenched themselves so firmly in portentous positions that they could not have shifted an inch without losing face. From there, they traded blows that testified to dangerously narrow, emotional horizons and, at least sometimes, demonstrated utter irrationality.

Just over half a year after the conclusion of the SALT II Treaty that it had so strongly craved, the Soviet Union, an established superpower, territorially the world’s largest state, deemed it necessary for security reasons — however it might define its security requirements — to realign a corner of its enormous land mass by adding the Asiatic mountains and deserts of little Afghanistan.

For the sake of what it evidently perceived as an immeasurable gain, it was prepared to incur the wrath of the Third World nations, especially the Arab and Muslim nations, which swung round sharply to position themselves solidly against the self-styled First Workers’ and Peasants’ State that had always claimed to have such sympathy for the victims of injustice in the world. What had happened to Socialist morality and rationality?

A wave of largely uncontrolled emotions also swelled up in the opposite camp. The United States, which had looked on helplessly and acquiesced almost humbly as Ayatollah Khomeini seized power in the large oil-rich country of Iran, saw the Soviet conquest of the small oil-less country of Afghanistan as an assault on the vital interests of the West or at least as evidence of unbridled aggressiveness of a party that the West thought it knew from the countless rounds of negotiations between the two sides during the détente era.

And so the United States felt deceived and saw itself compelled to draw a line in the sand: thus far but no further. Why this line had not previously been drawn or had not been recognised remains a mystery, and the very thing that nobody expected has now happened: misinterpretation has led to misunderstanding and, ultimately, to the defiant attitude adopted by both sides that there is no longer a need for understanding anyway.

Europe in 1914? The world in 1980.

Accordingly, the United States responded to Soviet aggression by imposing penalties that inflicted damage on American interests too. Although it was anxious to sell grain and technology, it banned the export of grain and technology to the Soviet Union.

Although its sportsmen and sportswomen were looking forward to a large haul of medals at the Olympic Games in Moscow, it seems set to boycott the Olympics — a heavy blow to Moscow’s investment of the century in Soviet prestige. This outcome is all the more likely since President Carter coupled the threat with

an ultimatum: withdraw from Afghanistan by 20 February, or the global festival of sport, supposedly a profoundly noble instrument for the promotion of world peace, will degenerate into an extended version of the *Spartakiada* of the Eastern-bloc countries.

Statements in the form of ultimatums, which were not essentially designed to elicit a response but rather to serve as a unilateral reaffirmation of an unbroken claim to power, were constantly the order of the day. If ever the fashionable political term ‘escalation’ seemed appropriate, it was this January.

The United States renewed its guarantee of assistance for Yugoslavia after Tito in the light of reawakened Western fears that Moscow might ‘do an Afghanistan’ there, too.

The USSR targeted the most prominent Soviet dissident, the nuclear physicist and Nobel prizewinner Andrei Sakharov, who has been in possession since 1977 of a sort of safe-conduct in the form of a letter of commendation from the President of the United States.

A year ago, exiling Sakharov to the closed city of Gorky, east of Moscow, would have been seen by many in the West as a legitimate act of self-defence by the Soviet system, such a strong force in the world at large but internally volatile, as an act no different to the expulsion of Alexander Solzhenitsyn in 1974.

After Afghanistan and the threat to boycott the Olympics, however, it had the effect of a trumpet blast, signalling that the Soviet superpower was not going to bow to any pressure. Infuriated, the President of the French Parliament, Jacques Chaban-Delmas, broke off his scheduled ten-day tour of the Soviet Union after two days.

The French parliamentary leader had tried to identify signs of willingness on the part of Leonid Brezhnev to relax the tension, but he sought in vain. Instead, as Chaban-Delmas sat with Brezhnev, Moscow launched Operation Sakharov, thereby offending the French, too, whose Government had hitherto distanced itself more than any other US ally in Europe from Washington’s hard line.

At this point, to be sure, the French position no longer mattered to the Soviet leaders. Greater political importance now attached to the development in Washington of a geostrategic response to the Afghanistan coup to accompany the demonstrative punitive action. This was the ‘Carter Doctrine’, which was called a ‘doctrine’ by deliberate analogy with the attempts by two of Carter’s predecessors, Presidents Truman and Eisenhower, to curb Communism.

The Baptist Jimmy Carter had always followed a doctrine — that was common knowledge — but his doctrine had been moral and moralising. Now, he was venturing with another kind of doctrine into the stormier waters of *realpolitik*.

The world was confronted with a different Jimmy Carter. In London, *The Times* compared him with the incensed Neville Chamberlain when he discovered, in September 1939, that Herr Hitler was not the reasonable statesman that he had seemed to be.

Before both Houses of Congress last Wednesday, his threats to the Soviet Union were more dire than any US President had made since the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. ‘An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region,’ he said, ‘will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States.’

After a brief pause, he added, ‘and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.’

Washington’s global policy planning now seems to have returned to where it was in the immediate post-war years, and confrontation with the Soviet Union is once again the dominant factor.

As a result, the countries of the Third World, in which US National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski

once recognised the ‘growing importance of rising powers’, are now likewise back in their old place in the Washington equation, namely as spheres of influence and deployment areas for the superpowers.

Nations such as South Korea no longer need fear the withdrawal of American forces. Islamic dictators such as Pakistan’s Zia ul-Haq can rely on US aid because of the strategic importance of their countries. Jimmy Carter, the former human-rights crusader, no longer asks them about their human-rights record.

He has become generous, too, when it comes to the proliferation of nuclear weapons — provided they end up in the right hands, in other words under the control of pro-Western governments.

Only last year, an aid embargo was imposed on Pakistan because it was suspected of working on the production of a nuclear bomb. Today, President Carter is more or less forcing arms and money on to the Pakistanis. As one senior Pakistani officer mockingly remarked, ‘Allah denied us any oil fields of our own, but he has made up for it by sending the Russians to Afghanistan!’

In order to appease Pakistan’s arch-enemy, India, the Americans are now supplying the Indians with the nuclear fuel that they have long been requesting, thereby enabling them to hasten the development of their bomb.

Only six months ago, following their defeat by Cuban-Ethiopian forces in the Ogaden, the Somalis virtually had to beg the United States to establish a military base in their country; now, however, American diplomats are arriving in swarms to check out ‘military facilities’ that Somalia, Kenya and Oman have offered to make available.

This seems to herald a change, a reversal, of US policy, a change so radical that it scarcely seems conceivable, or at least seemed inconceivable until quite recently.

In 1977, Jimmy Carter declared that one of the aims of his Administration was to make the Indian Ocean a ‘sea of peace’. Now Washington is celebrating the fact that the British have authorised it to turn its Diego Garcia atoll in the Indian Ocean into a superbase.

Now the would-be Sea of Peace is awash with warships of the two superpowers. Indeed, to demonstrate the long reach of the United States, a squadron of B-52 bombers took off from Guam last week and came thundering in over the Soviet ships in the Indian Ocean.

It emerged last week that the Soviet naval reconnaissance vessel *Taman* had been lying at anchor at the eastern mouth of the Strait of Hormuz since 25 November, three weeks after the occupation of the US Embassy in Tehran and more than a month before the Russian invasion of Afghanistan.

More than 60 per cent of the Western world’s entire oil supplies are transported through the Strait. According to US Administration sources, the *Taman* had taken up this position long before the first American vessel, the aircraft carrier *Kitty Hawk*, completed its long voyage from the Philippines to the Persian Gulf.

At home, too, the United States was now mobilising. The grain embargo alone is likely to cost the American taxpayer 20 billion dollars a year, while the ban on the supply of high-tech goods will add another four billion to this total.

The same President who, on the campaign trail, had promised to cut the defence budget by seven billion dollars proclaimed, in his State of the Union Address, ‘I am determined that the United States will remain the strongest of all nations.’

The military budget which he presented to Congress showed a five-per-cent increase, and he prepared the American people for the reintroduction of compulsory military service. He also gave notice of plans to introduce a system of draft registration which would enable the authorities to register all male US citizens of

draft age.

Under the law as it stands, it is not possible to operate such a registration system, and, for this reason alone, military mobilisation would be difficult. Jimmy Carter told Congress that the United States must be prepared for such an eventuality.

Radio Prague provided an immediate response: 'The Carter Doctrine is the gravest step ever taken in the direction of Cold War and towards a precarious existence on the brink of Hot War.'

And so, after about two decades of détente, the Cold War seemed to be looming again, with all the attendant dangers of further escalation, unless the growing tension could be rapidly defused.

For two decades, war was something that could still happen in faraway places, but not, or so the proponents of détente believed, between East and West and certainly not on account of an almost traditional-style occupation of foreign territory as perpetrated by Nazi Germany in Czechoslovakia or by Italy in Abyssinia in 1935.

There was even talk of an outbreak of real or 'hot' war. President Sandro Pertini of Italy saw 'war clouds' gathering ominously on the horizon. The French newspaper *Le Monde*, an undoubted advocate of détente, took the view that the Soviet offensive towards the Persian Gulf and the resulting confrontation between the superpowers would 'most probably mark the beginning of the Third World War'.

The results of an opinion poll published last week showed that no less than 48 per cent of West Germans thought it possible that a Third World War could break out within three years. Ten per cent even considered it probable, while only 41 per cent regarded it as improbable.

The icy chill that has gripped the world so unexpectedly is not inexorably predestined to lead to a cataclysmic eruption of hostilities, but the invasion of Afghanistan, with all its repercussions, was certainly more than a technical hitch or mere scaremongering along the lines of the 'war in sight' crisis of the Bismarck era, even if the fallout from the present crisis does prove to be containable.

At that time, in April 1875, Bismarck responded to a programme of military reform in France by having an article published in the newspaper *Die Post* under the heading *Ist Krieg in Sicht?* ('Is War in Sight?'). The French Foreign Minister, Louis Décazes, then made overtures to London and Saint Petersburg for help in the event of a German attack. Not until the German Ambassadors and Bismarck himself had given assurances was the explosive situation defused, but the Franco-German Cold War continued.

It became apparent last week how little the allies of the United States could do to reduce tension in the present 'war in sight' crisis. Chancellor Helmut Schmidt in Bonn and the French President, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, shaken by signs of piecemeal planning and emotionalism in Washington, have certainly been trying particularly hard to save détente, or what is left of it.

In so doing, however, they only aroused bitter feelings in the United States that the Americans had been abandoned in their hour of need, in spite of all their allies' solemn pledges. The headline on the front cover of the *US News & World Report* magazine referred to America's lonely role and was printed next to a picture of a powerful US eagle perched on the bare branch of a wintry tree.

Such feelings could have a detrimental effect on the security of Europe, because they might just awaken false hopes in Moscow of an impending demise of the Western Alliance as well as narrowing still further the emotionally distorted view of the world from Washington, thereby drawing both sides into a revival of the old-style Cold War with which they learned to live in the years following the Second World War and which never erupted into armed hostilities.

The Cold War — that term described the confrontation between two ideologies and systems of government which had fought together to defeat Hitler's Germany and Japan in World War II but which, at the end of

the war, suddenly found themselves locked in bitter enmity, sometimes only visible to each other through the observation slits of their heavy tanks.

The Cold War — no gunfire was exchanged between the two adversaries, but it was nevertheless a conflict of global dimensions, with battlefields in Greece and Korea, Germany and Turkey, Berlin and the Middle East.

The Cold War — it was about Truman and Stalin, Dulles and Molotov, Eisenhower and Khrushchev. And Konrad Adenauer was soon to become one of the protagonists, too.

The Cold War — it was about the Marshall Plan and Cominform, the Berlin Blockade and ‘massive retaliation’, NATO and the Warsaw Pact. And it surely marked the end of US isolationism — probably for ever.

Until then, according to the American historian Robert A Divine, although the United States had been involved in all major wars, as soon as the wars were over, it withdrew into relative isolation and kept out of international rivalries — until the next major conflict broke out. Alternation between involvement and withdrawal, said Divine, became the national pattern.

And that pattern, in fact, was supposed to be repeated after the Second World War, too. The US Congress spontaneously cut the defence budget by 25 per cent, and demobilisation proceeded more rapidly than ever before: of the 3.5 million US troops serving in Europe alone in May 1945, a mere 400 000 were left only ten months later.

Why the new Number One World Power nevertheless contrived shortly afterwards to become embroiled, or to embroil itself, in a new war, albeit a cold war, is a matter of controversy today, even among American historians.

Was it the Soviet Union’s fault for being coldly determined, as US General George C. Marshall suggested, to spread Communism at that time?

Was the world experiencing ‘fascist aggression and imperialist expansion’ by the US as the Soviet Union claimed, while its leader, Joseph Stalin, accused the ‘forces of international reaction’ of planning a new war?

Or was Zbigniew Brzezinski, once a professor of politics and now, as Jimmy Carter’s chief pot-stirrer, the originator of the idea to boycott the 1980 Olympics in Moscow, correct when he wrote in the following vein in 1972?

The Cold War, said Brzezinski, was more the fruit of long-term and probably inescapable historical forces than the result of human error or evil intent. Two great powers, separated by divergent historical experiences and divided by sharply differing ideologies, he argued, could scarcely avoid engaging in fierce competition.

One thing is sure: the illusion of a golden age of peace had taken root in the minds of the peoples of the world, bled dry and exhausted by years of all-out global warfare. The statesmen — the terminally ill Roosevelt as well as his successor, Truman, Winston Churchill as well as Stalin — knew quite some time before the end of the war that any respite that they might be granted would be brief.

As early as September 1944, for example, Averell Harriman, Roosevelt’s Ambassador to Moscow, cabled Washington to say that, unless the United States took a stand against current Soviet policy, all the signs pointed to the Soviet Union tyrannising the whole world in the future, wherever its own interests were at stake.

And Roosevelt, close to death, became so animated on 24 March 1945, his last day in Washington, on

reading another alarming Harriman cable that he angrily punched the armrests of his wheelchair and raged, 'Averell is right. We cannot become involved with Stalin. He has broken every promise that he made in Yalta.'

Foremost among the promises to which Roosevelt was referring was the pledge given by Stalin at Yalta that there would be a 'free, independent and democratic Poland' at the end of the war.

In fact, he imposed a puppet government on Poland — which was, after all, the country that the West had originally gone to war to defend — and thus clamped it in Soviet chains from the outset.

For the Russians, Franklin D. Roosevelt, after such a long comradeship-in-arms, had become a known quantity. But how, Stalin asked his visitor, Harriman, could they convince Roosevelt's successor, Harry S. Truman, of their desire to go on cooperating closely with the United States?

Harriman advised him to send the Foreign Minister, Vyacheslav Molotov, to the forthcoming San Francisco Conference on the founding of the United Nations instead of sending only the Deputy Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Andrei Vishinsky.

Molotov did travel to the United States, only to be snapped at by Truman: 'Why don't you people behave? Why don't you respect your obligations?' Cooperation with the United States could not be a one-way street. Molotov is reported to have said, 'I've never been talked to like this.'

Immediately before the beginning of the conference, the United States successfully tested its first atomic bomb. The United States would press ahead with the plans for the United Nations, said Truman to a small gathering. 'If the Russians do not want to join in, they can go to hell.'

Relying on Roosevelt and his almost unflinching faith in human nature, the Kremlin had already synchronised its strategy with the day by which the last US troops were to leave Europe — in Yalta, Roosevelt had given to understand that they would leave in two years at the latest.

'Marshal', said Averell Harriman to Stalin at the time of the Potsdam Conference, 'this must be a great satisfaction to you after all the trials that you've been through and the tragedy that you've been through — to be here in Berlin.' Stalin hesitated for a moment, then replied, 'Tsar Alexander got to Paris!'

According to Harriman's analysis, Stalin presumably hoped to push on to the Atlantic. The prospects for a Communist takeover simply seemed too good.

And, indeed, a bitterly cold winter had almost entirely paralysed Britain, while on the continent, one strike followed another; in France, a quarter of the electorate were already voting Communist. 'What is Europe?' Winston Churchill wrote in 1947. 'A rubble heap, a charnel house, a breeding ground for pestilence and hate.'

But then, none other than Harry S. Truman, the man who had become President of the United States through a quirk of fate, decided, presumably against the expectations of almost every Soviet leader and certainly of all but a few Americans, to carry out what is perhaps the most revolutionary change of course in the history of US foreign policy: instead of withdrawing into isolation within its own borders, as it had done after the First World War, the United States became a new actor on the world stage.

Alarmed by Soviet pressure on Turkey and an externally orchestrated Communist uprising in Greece, Truman made it the maxim of American policy 'to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.'

This 'Truman Doctrine' entailed millions of dollars in assistance for Greece and Turkey and emergency reconstruction aid for the rest of Europe under the Marshall Plan, called after Secretary of State George C. Marshall.

To assist them in overcoming ‘hunger, poverty, despair and chaos’, Marshall offered generous assistance to the Europeans, including the Soviet Union and its satellite states.

Soviet representatives — Foreign Minister Molotov and 89 experts — were among the delegates at a preparatory conference in Paris. But they did not want to accept the only condition attached to the Plan — European cooperation in the reconstruction effort.

They put forward a counter-proposal that the Americans should simply make the total amount available, and the Europeans would then divide it up among themselves in proportion to the damage sustained by each during the war, and every state would see to its own reconstruction.

On the basis of such a distribution formula, it was clear who would receive the lion’s share of the funds. The rest of Europe therefore rejected the proposal; the Soviet delegation walked out and forced their satellites to leave the conference too, including Czechoslovakia, whose government had previously voted unanimously in favour of the Marshall Plan.

In the view of the Kremlin, the recovery programme was henceforth derided as an ‘American imperialist conspiracy to subjugate Western Europe’. For the United States, on the other hand, the Marshall Plan became the keystone of a new strategy towards the Soviet Union, based on the concept of ‘containment’.

‘The main element of any United States policy toward the Soviet Union must be that of a long-term, patient, but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies.’ This explanation of the new strategy was given in the prestigious journal *Foreign Affairs* by an anonymous ‘Mr X’.

The pseudonym concealed the identity of one of the United States’ foremost authorities on the Soviet Union, George F. Kennan, who was deputy Head of Mission under Harriman and later became Washington’s Ambassador to Moscow himself.

The main concern of Soviet policy, according to Kennan, is to ensure that the political action of the Soviet Union ‘has filled every nook and cranny available to it in the basin of world power.’

Containment, of course, does not mean containing the military threat by military means but rather containing the political threat by political means.

From the Soviet perspective, this was hair-splitting. The Soviet Government regarded the Truman Doctrine and containment as one and the same provocation, as an encirclement tactic, to which it did not fail to respond:

- In February 1948, in a surprise coup, it imposed a new pro-Moscow government on Czechoslovakia.
- In June it sealed off the access route from Western Germany to Berlin, which was never the subject of any written agreement until 1971, but eventually abandoned the blockade after an Anglo-American airlift had kept the marooned city supplied for 321 days.
- In June 1950, presumably with Soviet approval or encouragement, North Korean troops invaded the southern part of the divided country but were surprised, like their mentors, when the United States and the United Nations not only protested but responded by sending in an American-led UN force.

When the Korean War finally ended in stalemate in 1953, Joseph Stalin had already been laid in his tomb in Moscow, but the Cold War continued unabated with new men and fresh slogans.

The main player henceforth was John Foster Dulles, Secretary of State to the new US President, Dwight D. Eisenhower.

The puritanical and vehemently anti-Communist lawyer branded the policy of containment a modern form of appeasement and postulated that 'the ability to get to the verge without getting into the war is the necessary art. If you try to run away from it, if you are scared to go to the brink, you are lost'.

The 'rollback' of Communist gains, 'massive retaliation' and 'brinkmanship' were his recipes for success in the Cold War. Only a week after taking office, he made a public pledge to the 'captive nations' behind the dividing line christened by Winston Churchill in 1946 as the 'Iron Curtain', telling them 'You can count on us'.

This message, reinforced over the airwaves by US propaganda stations such as Radio Free Europe, was heard throughout the East and was interpreted by many as an incitement to revolt. But, when they then rebelled, it emerged that John Foster Dulles had misled them:

– In 1953, when demonstrators in the German Democratic Republic were killed or injured by hails of gunfire from East German and Soviet troops, Dulles did not unleash 'massive retaliation' but merely set up field kitchens for East Berliners at the boundary between the American and Soviet sectors.

– In 1956, when Soviet tanks crushed an uprising in Hungary, Dulles did not 'roll them back'; the United States merely took in a few tens of thousands of Hungarian refugees.

Indeed, documents dating from his term of office show that Dulles never seriously considered driving back the Soviet Union by military force or sparking off an armed uprising in the Eastern bloc. His explicit warnings to the effect that such an uprising would be worse than futile, however, were drowned by the resonance of his rhetoric, as was the fact that he was essentially a defender of the political *status quo* who was merely pursuing the strategy of containment under a new name.

Both sides now developed their alliance systems and rearmed their German friends to make them into military powers — the Federal Republic in the West and the Democratic Republic in the East.

For one moment the ice seemed to be melting when Eisenhower met up again with his former Soviet comrade-in-arms, Marshal Georgy Zhukov, at the Geneva Conference in 1955, gave him a wedding present for his daughter and proposed that Washington and Moscow exchange plans of all their military facilities and conduct airborne inspections. During his speech, the power grid was struck by lightning, and the lights went out, which, according to the French eyewitness André Maurois, 'lent the moment a touch of pathos'.

In the same year, Nikita Khrushchev made a political gesture: from one day to the next, the Austrians obtained their peace treaty which restored their national sovereignty, although Moscow had always linked it to a simultaneous settlement for Germany.

But then the chill set in again. The Soviet Union rejected Eisenhower's Geneva proposal and exploited Western disunity during the 1956 Suez crisis to establish a foothold in the Middle East, too. As Jimmy Carter is now doing, Eisenhower proclaimed a doctrine enshrining the Middle East as an American sphere of influence. Khrushchev in turn issued an ultimatum threatening to denounce the four-power agreement on the status of Berlin. And every set of ministerial negotiations seemed to lead to yet another stalemate.

In May 1959 came the death of John Foster Dulles, who, more than anyone else, symbolised the Cold War. And, suddenly, the Cold War seemed to be over. Khrushchev sent his first Deputy Premier, Anastas Mikoyan, to the United States, and he returned to Moscow with an invitation for the Soviet Premier from Eisenhower. The little impulsive Russian landed in Washington on 15 September 1959. He came with an

open heart, he said, and quickly won the sympathies of yesterday's enemies.

Khrushchev assured his hosts that he had come to end the Cold War. Addressing the United Nations, he proposed 'worldwide comprehensive disarmament'. On American television he addressed his 'American friends'.

He waded through the crowds like an American electioneer, dined in Hollywood with Marilyn Monroe, Frank Sinatra and Bob Hope, was shocked by the cancan ('They showed their arses like pigs,' he said later) and played with Eisenhower's grandchildren on the President's farm in Gettysburg.

Sitting by the fire at the presidential retreat in Camp David, the two genial grandfathers seemed to incarnate a guarantee that the Cold War had finally come to an end.

In the 'spirit of Camp David', Khrushchev urged his host to make a return visit as soon as possible to Moscow, where Eisenhower, as a victorious general in July 1945, had once been enthusiastically cheered in the huge Dynamo Stadium when he attended a football match together with Zhukov.

But Eisenhower's grandchildren were keen to visit Khrushchev's grandchildren, and so the Soviet leader suggested that they wait until after the spring thaw in 1960.

That, however, was a long time away.

Khrushchev wanted peaceful co-existence between countries with different social orders, because he feared a nuclear war and also wanted to offer the Soviet people a higher standard of living in order to reconcile them with their unpopular government.

Khrushchev proposed that ministries of war and general staffs should be dissolved and that the manpower of armed forces should be reduced virtually to zero, leaving countries only with units equipped with light firearms.

In January 1960, he even ordered the demobilisation of 1.2 million Soviet troops, including 150 000 officers. This was bound to displease the Soviet military, who had frequently meddled in political affairs.

When an American U-2 spy plane was shot down over Sverdlovsk on 1 May 1960, the military compelled Khrushchev to engineer the collapse of the Paris summit and to withdraw his invitation to President Eisenhower.

When the East German Government demanded the elimination of the problem of West Berlin, which was a thorn in its flesh, Khrushchev recommended its establishment as a Free City but ultimately settled for the construction of the wall between East and West Berlin. That was certainly a form of co-existence, but, in the eyes of the Soviet 'hawks', it was a sign of unforgivable weakness.

Those hawks in the Kremlin had their own dreams of global power, dreams that were incompatible with Khrushchev's utopian visions of disarmament. In their areas of responsibility — armaments, space and the combat strength of the army and navy — their dearest wish was to catch up with and overtake the West. The inferiority of the Soviet Empire in all other domains was outweighed in their eyes by the most important badge of a global power: its military potential.

Khrushchev's boldest venture in the realm of foreign policy, the deployment of Soviet missiles in Cuba, took the world to the brink of a major war in 1962, but it ended in a conciliatory arrangement between the two superpowers, the first instance of a rational resolution of an irrationally overheated stand-off.

Two years later, the Moscow hawks succeeded in having Khrushchev replaced as First Secretary of the Central Committee by one of their own kind, Second Secretary Leonid Brezhnev. Alexei Kosygin, First Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers, who had formerly had special responsibility for consumer

industries, was chosen from among the 'doves' to serve as Premier.

In 1968, Kosygin vainly opposed a motion tabled in the Politburo by the military that the attempt to reform the face of Communism by the Czechoslovak Government in Prague be crushed by Warsaw Pact tanks. Thereafter, however, he convinced even Brezhnev of the value of a policy of détente, which would safeguard Moscow from developments such as those that had occurred in Prague. The nuclear physicist Andrei Sakharov, for example, was already calling for the reform of the Communist system in the Soviet Union, too.

The benefits of détente, from the Eastern European perspective, were that it could curb the arms race, release more resources for mass consumption and generate Western economic assistance, preferably in the form of loans. In this way, the Soviet people could be kept docile.

The West, for its part, saw opportunities for the peaceful settlement of international conflicts; in particular, the West Germans hoped for an easing of restrictions for the benefit of ordinary people in their sister state, the German Democratic Republic.

Accordingly, the Bonn Government concluded a non-aggression pact with Moscow and a mutual recognition treaty with the GDR, while the four former wartime Allies agreed to create a legal basis which guaranteed the *status quo* in Berlin for the first time.

And at the European Summit in Helsinki, 35 Heads of Government pledged themselves to the pursuit of peace. The Final Act includes a provision that reads as follows: 'The participating States will respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion.' And Brezhnev signed up to this.

Moscow and Washington agreed to keep each other informed in the event of rising tension, and, in 1972, they signed the first Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT), even though the United States had just mined the Vietnamese port of Haiphong. In its enthusiasm for détente, the Kremlin let that provocation pass.

Gaining prestige was more important, and even the opponents of détente in Moscow took delight in the equal ranking accorded it by the number-one global power, particularly since the Soviet dominion was spreading from one year to the next without major risks to the Soviet Union itself and without the need to send Soviet troops into battle.

North Vietnam was able to conquer South Vietnam and reinforce its position in Laos before overrunning Cambodia. In 1975, the year of the Helsinki Conference, Cuban forces helped the pro-Soviet Angolan Head of State Agostinho Neto to seize control of the government. In 1978, an invasion of Shaba (formerly Katanga) Province in Zaire from Angolan soil came to grief, but this was more than offset by the entry of Ethiopia into the Soviet sphere of influence.

Soviet ideologists had convinced their leaders that the international balance of power had now swung in favour of the Soviet Union. Faint hearts in the West believed this, too, overlooking the fact that the Kremlin had lost its influence in Chile and Portugal, Egypt, Somalia and Uganda during the same period.

Only President Jimmy Carter irritated the Soviet leadership. His human-rights crusade encouraged the opposition within the USSR, he successfully argued the case for NATO force modernisation, he made overtures to China, and he did nothing to promote East-West trade.

The Soviet bloc had incurred debts of 100 billion Deutschmarks, but, in 1974, the US Congress had made the granting of loans and special trading terms conditional upon the granting of exit visas to Soviet Jews, whereupon Moscow simply denounced its trade agreement with the United States. Deals worth billions had to be cancelled.

This fed the hawks in the Kremlin with fresh arguments against détente. They blocked Brezhnev's attempt

to boost the growth of consumer-goods production at the expense of arms-orientated heavy industry.

Viktor Kulikov, then Chief of the General Staff, now Commander-in-Chief of the Warsaw Pact forces, went public with his calls for 'greater mobilisation potential within the national economy'. Defence Minister Andrei Grechko, in a departure from the traditional formula about the Soviet Army serving only to defend the Motherland, declared his readiness to intervene 'in any region of our planet, however distant'.

Soon afterwards, the Kremlin staked its claim to a general right of intervention, proclaiming that détente was not a licence for rotten regimes.

At home, too, the military were commending themselves as a pillar of order. At a time when the policy of détente enabled corrupting Western ideas of freer lifestyles and higher levels of consumption to infest Soviet society, *Pravda* praised the armed forces as the school of the nation. 'The armed forces,' it wrote, 'form the collectivist, the individual with broad horizons, with firm moral principles.'

The intellectual conflict that was waged in old Russia between cosmopolitan 'Westernists' and the 'Slavophiles' who sought to preserve the Russian way of life was revived in the controversy between the advocates and the opponents of détente. The motivation of the anti-Westernists is described in a novel that appeared in Moscow in 1969 and provoked heated debates. The recurring message may be summed up as follows:

If we get the Western 'democracy' with which the Western propagandists try to entice Russians, including young Russians, it will not by any means bring you shops stocked full of consumer goods; first and foremost, it will bring the destruction of your peoples, the destruction of your state, the destruction of Russia.

Russia's conservatives aspire to higher values. They would like to ensure that the young people of the Soviet Union are educated without being tainted by consumerism; by shielding them from foreign influences, they want to ensure that the young people cannot draw comparisons; they want them to be imbued with military virtues and imperial ideals.

Such aims are less well served by détente than by a policy of making the Soviet Union a closed commercial state and engaging in constant confrontation with the outside world, even at the cost of domestic stagnation.

According to official figures, the growth rate for Soviet industrial production fell to 3.4 per cent last year, as against 5.7 per cent in the economic plan. In the provinces, meat is sometimes not available for months on end, and, at the end of last year, people were fighting over cabbages, a staple food, in some Soviet cities. Sometimes, in Moscow, there were not even any potatoes to be had.

The Soviet Government has taken a hard line against growing discontent. Anyone who changes employers twice in one year will now lose his pension rights. This is reminiscent of the wartime economy. Such a harsh sanction has only ever been applied once, from 1940, the year before the Soviet Union entered the war, to 1955.

The mood in Soviet society, according to observers' reports, is extremely changeable; the spring could bring an outbreak of mass protests as visible as those that have already occurred in Poland and Soviet Lithuania and, occasionally, in Ukraine too.

The Muscovites evidently believed that the most dangerous situation was to be found in the Muslim Soviet republics, where it was feared that the Islamic chauvinism in the neighbouring countries of Iran and Afghanistan might spill over into Soviet territory. Three days before the invasion of Afghanistan, *Pravda vostoka*, the organ of the Soviet Communist Party in Central Asia, resumed its scathing attacks on Islam after a respite of several months.

Some intelligence sources underestimated the reactionary role of the Islamic faith, said the newspaper report, designed for internal consumption; there was confusion between the national and the religious, and the mullahs believed that Communist and Mohammedan moral codes were compatible, but there could be no co-existence on an ideological level.

The 'Helsinki committees' that were formed in Moscow, Leningrad, Riga and Kiev to campaign for human rights were rooted out. The Nobel Prize winner Andrei Sakharov was now their only remaining free representative.

Apart from Jimmy Carter's letter of commendation, which, in the eyes of the authorities, was no longer a valid guarantee of safe conduct, Sakharov still enjoyed the protection of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, of which he was a full member; being a non-governmental body, the Academy had not expelled him, which safeguarded him from arrest and allowed him to continue his one-man campaign.

But an even more significant development than Sakharov's banishment to the city of Gorky, which was closed to foreigners, was the resignation around the same time of the 67-year-old Deputy Premier Vladimir Kirillin.

Kirillin, a professor of thermodynamic engineering, was the only true scientist in the Kremlin leadership. A former Vice-President of the Academy, since the start of the Brezhnev/Kosygin era he had headed the State Committee on Science and Technology, which cultivated foreign contacts, submitted reform proposals and provided specialised information in pursuit of its mandate to modernise the Soviet economy.

Kirillin, who also very probably shielded the leading dissident, Andrei Sakharov, represented the academic elite of the USSR, without whose willing cooperation the Soviet state can scarcely flourish. His protest — he stepped down 'at his own request' — is an alarming sign.

Kirillin's mentor, Alexei Kosygin, one-time author of the policy of détente, has been out of the public eye since last October. There are indications that party leader Leonid Brezhnev was outvoted on Afghanistan in December. The London-based *Observer* stated that the decision to invade was taken at a meeting of an inner circle of Politburo hardliners and military representatives. This circle, according to the report, presented the ailing leader with an ultimatum to approve intervention or resign.

The main argument of the advocates of integration is that some fifty Soviet citizens were murdered last April in the western Afghan city of Herat — the same as the number of US citizens currently being held hostage in Tehran.

In mid-December, shortly before the invasion decision was taken in Moscow, two more Soviet citizens were beaten to death while shopping in a bazaar in the centre of Kabul. And it is possible that General Paputin, a Soviet deputy Minister of Police, also met his death there around the same time.

After the decision to invade was taken in Moscow, not a single member of the Politburo showed his face in public over the next few weeks. It was a different story with the military: the military newspaper *Krasnaya Zvezda* ('Red Star') reported that the top twenty brass hats, the entire High Command of the Soviet armed forces with the exception of Defence Minister and Politburo member Dmitry Ustinov and Marshal Sergei Sokolov, who had left for Afghanistan, had gone to Mongolia for a celebration.

They gathered in the Soviet Embassy in Soviet-occupied Mongolia to receive commemorative medals for a battle against the Japanese that had taken place in Central Asia in 1939.

Those who voted for the Afghan adventure obviously did not understand the political implications. The machinery of diplomacy and propaganda was not used in the preparations for the operation. It seems as if the people responsible for mobilising this machinery were not involved.

There was no campaign of solidarity with Afghanistan as there had been in the past for Vietnam and Cambodia. To this day, the Soviet press has not published a single photograph of Soviet troops in the field and has not informed its readers of the murder of Soviet advisers, which was one of the reasons for the invasion.

It was three weeks before Brezhnev informed the Soviet people, in a *Pravda* interview, of the 'serious threat to the security of the Soviet Union'. He did not present himself as a victor but continued to invoke the 'peace programme' of the last two Party Congresses, saying that the 'will of the people' would 'overcome all obstacles'.

He put most of the blame for the whole debacle on US President Jimmy Carter, whom he called 'absolutely duplicitous', a 'totally unreliable partner' who allowed himself to be ruled 'by moods and whims or emotions'. After the signing of SALT II, said Brezhnev, the US Administration had discredited the Treaty and obstructed its ratification and had compelled its allies to accept automatic increases in the NATO budget 'until the end of the 20th century' and then the INF modernisation.

These were undoubtedly the arguments of the hawks in Moscow. 'We shall naturally manage without this or that link with the United States, and, at all events, we have never tried to force our friendship on the Americans,' said Brezhnev, almost in a tone of resignation, before going on to defend his life's work:

The situation in Europe is far better than it was, say, at the start of the 1970s ... We are resolutely in favour of consolidating and expanding all the good things that have been achieved over many years.

These good things may already have been discarded, because Kremlin hardliners think that they have been confirmed in their view that the whole détente process was worthless and has only made Russia insecure. Now they may well have ensured that Western economic aid will be stopped, that the arms race will escalate, that new US bases will be established, that the United States and China will ally themselves and that 700 million Muslims will turn against Russia.

A new era of confrontation? In the view of the Moscow-based foreign-affairs magazine *Novoye Vremya*, 'the peace is poised to revert to Cold War'.

Apparently, not even Brezhnev, whose policies have been guided by the desire to preserve the peace, is still wary of such a reversion. 'In the years of the "Cold War",' he said, 'which brought the world to the edge of the abyss, ... we were put to the test. But even then no one was able to make us falter. It is useful to remember that.'

It may be remembered that the Soviet Union also abandoned positions in those days if they became untenable, irrespective of any loss of face or power. Cautious Stalin stopped the Berlin blockade, halted the civil war in Greece and withdrew Soviet troops from northern Iran. Incautious Khrushchev ordered the withdrawal from Cuba and climbed down from his maximalist position on West Berlin.

Such U-turns cannot be ruled out today either, once power in Moscow is back in the hands of politicians who appreciate that imperialism has always come back to haunt its exponents.

The United States had digested the African adventures of Soviet protégé Cuba with increasing embitterment. Washington saw signs of a more aggressive Soviet approach last summer, when it believed it had discovered an entire Soviet combat brigade in Cuba.

At the beginning of November, when the staff of the US Embassy in Tehran fell into the hands of fanatical Khomeini supporters and the United States found itself deeply humiliated, Soviet radio stations broadcast blistering anti-American tirades to Iran. That has not been forgotten in the United States either.

When they invaded Afghanistan, however, the Russians overstepped the limits of American tolerance. As President Carter said in his address last Wednesday, 'The Soviet Union has taken a radical and an aggressive new step.'

American analyses have subsequently focused time and again on the 'quantum leap' in the nature of Soviet foreign policy, on the fact that, for the first time since the Second World War, the Soviet Union has occupied a country that has not, or at least not directly, been part of the pro-Soviet camp. For the Americans, this is nothing more or less than a manifestation of what the State Department spokesman, Hodding Carter, called the fact of Soviet imperialism.

Even a diplomat of the old school like Secretary of State Cyrus Vance put it succinctly when he said that there was no point in engaging in psychoanalysis to discover which of the various possible motives ultimately induced Moscow to intervene. The simple fact, he said, was that the Soviet Union was committing an act of naked aggression.

The refusal even to acknowledge the other side's motives has characterised what is at least a temporary collapse of détente. Communications have broken down in a way that would have seemed impossible only a few months ago.

Every crisis is manageable, understanding is always possible to achieve, interests are reconcilable, and conflicts are avoidable — this axiom of politicians who, like Henry Kissinger, believe in the power of reason could so easily be extinguished for ever, even if rapid action were to be taken now to halt the slide into Cold War.

Last week, at any rate, there were perceptible signs of a new siege mentality, especially in Moscow. Long-distance phone calls and telex links with foreign countries were interrupted more often than usual, and the Soviet wives of resident aliens were secretly warned that nothing is so easy as betrayal of the Motherland.