

LITTLE OF SUBSTANCE came out of the November summit in Geneva, but Reagan and Gorbachev were right to assert that it was significant because it happened. The summit marked a remarkable change in rhetoric, particularly on the part of the United States. Reagan's insistence that the US does not want nuclear superiority, his new peace movement line about non-nuclear defence and the unacceptability of mutual assured destruction are an extraordinary shift from the earlier crusades against communism and the mumblings about limited nuclear war.

Of course, Reagan still wants Star Wars, still wants the MX, the binary nerve gases, and new deep strike weapons for NATO. He still supports the contras in Nicaragua and is less than wholehearted about ending apartheid. But the changed rhetoric does make it harder to justify these policies and does open up opportunities for alternatives.

Gorbachev pinpointed the paradox in his press conference after the summit. According to Gorbachev, Reagan, at one point, asked him why don't you trust us to share our technology with you. Gorbachev, in turn, asked him why don't you believe we don't want to attack you with our nuclear missiles. The friendliness between the two leaders in itself rests uneasily with Cold Warist attitudes.

Detente is fundamentally a change of mood. During the old detente in the 1970s, the arms race did not slacken and the bloc system remained intact. A number of cultural and economic agreements were signed, although these affected Europe more than the United States. A number of arms control agreements were signed and the term 'cosmetic' was coined by Alva Myrdal to describe them. The agreements did not halt new developments in armaments and did not dismantle existing arsenals; they merely channelled military technology in directions thought at the time to be less destabilising.

Moreover, for both sides, detente was predicated on the continuation of the bloc system; it was seen as a safer and easier way of managing bloc relations. The so-called Sonnenfeldt doctrine and the Basic Principles of Detente drawn up by Kissinger and Gromyko in 1972 represented a kind of mutual guarantee of non-interference in each others' spheres of influence. The Soviet Union saw the importance of detente in a confirmation of the political/territorial status quo in Europe while the USA saw political benefits in stabilisation at a time of domestic dissent over Vietnam.

Detente was, however, contradictory.

**A crack has appeared in the Cold War.  
The summit gave a glimpse of new possibilities.**

# THE NEW DETENTE?

## EAST-WEST RELATIONS AFTER THE SUMMIT

Gerard Holden and  
Mary Kaldor

Since the bloc system and the arms race are justified by the threat of the 'other', a lessening of hostility does provide political space for new social movements or new initiatives which challenge the political status quo. It can be argued that the emergence of Solidarity in the East and of various Western radical movements that preceded the new peace movement, to give two important examples, was made possible by detente. US-Soviet detente also allowed for the intensification of intra-European detente expressed initially in Willy Brandt's Ostpolitik and later in the Helsinki agreement.

But moods can come and go. Detente was easily reversible. The renewed Cold War of the early 1980s provided a mechanism for reimposing bloc discipline and a rationale for a new round of the arms race.

Is this the beginning of a new detente and will a new detente be any different from the 1970s? In our view, this depends on how the peace movements and left political parties exploit the change of mood. The summit was the outcome of the democratisation of the debate about security issues which has taken place in the West over the last five years. The debate has to be sustained and deepened.

### The outcome of the summit

The joint document signed by the two leaders called for the acceleration of the arms negotiations in Geneva. The leaders

agreed to the principle of 50% cuts in strategic arsenals, and the 'idea of an

*photo: Camera Press*



interim INF agreement' (ie, an agreement on medium-range nuclear systems in Europe). They also referred to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, the talks on chemical weapons, the Vienna talks on conventional force reductions and the continuation of the Helsinki process in Stockholm. Minor agreements were reached during the run-up to the summit on North Pacific air safety, to prevent a repeat of the Korean airliner disaster, on the exchange of consulates in New York and Kiev, on broadening exchanges and contacts and increasing co-operation in such areas as environmental protection, cancer research, and fusion research. The leaders also agreed to intensify the dialogue and to discuss regional issues and humanitarian cases.

The sticking point was, of course, the Strategic Defence Initiative or Star Wars. The Soviet Union will not agree to the 50% cuts in strategic systems without a halt to the Star Wars programme, though it is possible that the Soviet Union will agree to a limited definition of research since it has its own ballistic missile defence research programme. Because of the American intransigence over Star Wars, Gorbachev appeared to be the more sincere of the two

leaders about arms limitation. However, it is not clear that an agreement in 50% cuts could easily be reached even if the Americans were willing to give up Star Wars. The two sides have very different definitions of what is to be cut.

The Soviet Union defines strategic weapons as all nuclear systems which can reach the other side's territory. This includes forward-based US systems like Cruise and Pershing II missiles, F-111 bombers in Britain, or sea-based Cruise missiles and bombers in the Pacific. But it does not include equivalent Soviet systems, like the SS-20, which are largely

### will the new detente be any different from the 1970s?

based in the Soviet Union and can hit Europe but not the USA. The United States prefers a technical definition of strategic systems, based on range characteristics. The United States also distinguishes between different types of systems and would set separate ceilings for each type. The Soviet Union prefers to allow each side to choose its mix of systems,

although in the latest proposal tabled at Geneva, it was suggested that not more than 60% of strategic systems after the cuts should be land-based.

Negotiating a compromise could be a lengthy process. It is worth recalling that the Soviet Union was unwilling to dismantle 30-40 SS-20 missiles in order to prevent a Dutch decision to deploy Cruise on November 1, 1985. One explanation might be that the Soviet Union was unwilling to be seen to concede to a small country. Another explanation might be military resistance. If this was important, then it is difficult to imagine that the Soviet military will acquiesce easily in 50% cuts.

### Other areas

More importantly perhaps, an agreement to cut strategic arsenals by 50% will not stop the arms race. It would be much more important to freeze new development and production of armaments since the arms race is primarily a technological phenomenon. In the past, the Soviet Union has expressed support for the bilateral freeze concept. A Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, for which the Soviet Union is pressing, could be a significant step in this direction. If one can anticipate military resistance in the Soviet Union to quantitative cuts, however, American defence industrial resistance to attempts to halt new research and development would be just as important in thwarting an agreement which would slow down the pace of qualitative military-technological changes such as Star Wars.

An agreement to limit medium-range missiles might be possible despite the impasse over Star Wars. The document was unclear on this point although media reports suggest that this is the case. Such an agreement is likely to authorise present nuclear arsenals in Europe, although it is not clear precisely how a separate agreement would deal with the question of British and French weapons and the Soviet definition of US forward-based systems as 'strategic'.

In other words, even if the hurdle of Star Wars can be overcome, and even if compromises can be found - both of which are big 'ifs' - it is most unlikely that these agreements will be any different from the agreements of the 1970s. It is most unlikely that they would represent the start of a genuine process of disarmament and demilitarisation.

In a sense, the proposals for cultural, scientific or technological exchanges are more interesting since they could potentially embed the detente process in human

*'What! You don't believe me?' Gorbachev and Reagan's tete-a-tete.*



contacts, and create a vested interest in good relations. How sincere Reagan is here, given US withdrawal from UNESCO, remains to be seen.

### US interest in detente

What are the politics of the summit process? How far do the US and Soviet governments have a real interest in continuing the process?

For the US, the alternation between periods of Cold War and detente has always been as much a matter of managing relations with its own spheres of influence as of handling a changing relationship with the Soviet Union. Even the narrow 1970s-

words of Ronald Reagan, to make America 'stand tall again'.

President Reagan's Strategic Defence Initiative, or Star Wars, was an offspring of the new Cold War in a dual sense, since it requested an attempt both to reassert US leadership and to respond to the peace movement's challenge to US nuclear policies. Reagan's version of Star Wars, or Star Wars I as Edward Thompson calls it in his new book,<sup>1</sup> was, at least in the imagination, an effort to construct an astrodome protecting the USA. The corollary was that once invulnerable, the USA would be able to use its military forces abroad without fear of retaliation. Weinberger has said

tional weaponry and 'raising the nuclear threshold' (ie, lengthening the time before nuclear weapons would have to be used in a conflict in Europe), when the Star Wars project began to seem more than just a Reagan fantasy.

### Reagan's contradictory position

To placate West European governments, Star Wars II was invented, according to which the astrodome is no longer leak-proof, but merely a way of reducing the number of Soviet missiles; hence, it is supposed to reinforce deterrence rather than replace it. European governments were also offered the bait of participating

## Reagan's Strategic Defensive Initiative... was an offspring of the new Cold War

style detente concept, in which superficial arms control agreements are reached, is problematical for the US. The old detente did, after all, allow what one might describe as a decomposition of the US sphere of influence, a questioning of Pax Americana in both Europe and the Third World. The 1970s witnessed revolutions in the Third World, in Southern Africa, Indo-China and Brzezinski's so-called arc of crisis, as well as growing independence in foreign and economic policy on the part of West European countries. Of course, there were deep-rooted structural causes for these developments. However, the USA's defeat in Vietnam, and its relative economic decline, made it much more difficult to manage or contain such developments.

The American Right argued that the erosion of US influence was due to the Soviet military build-up and that all defiant behaviour towards the USA could be attributed to Soviet manipulation. They pushed for increased military spending, together with nuclear and conventional war-fighting strategies in order to reinstate, at least psychologically, the US ability to intervene and control political destinies. The new Cold War, initiated in the last years of the Carter administration and adopted by Reagan, was a way of reasserting US global leadership. Combined with an aggressive economic policy - high interest rates, voluntary restrictions on Japanese, West European and NIC (newly industrialising countries) exports, the export of monetarist philosophies - these Cold War policies helped, in the



*A salute! A wave! No, it's a signal to the press. Gorbachev and Reagan brave the 'cola' summit.*

that Star Wars would take us back to the situation of the 1950s when the USA was the 'only nuclear power'.

For West European governments, the concept was alarming because it contradicted the concept of deterrence, in the name of which West European populations had been asked to accept the deployment of Cruise and Pershing II. The argument was that a Soviet attack on Western Europe was exactly the same as an attack on the USA, and the USSR would know that such an attack would trigger an all-out nuclear war. The deployment of Cruise and Pershing II was supposed to express that unity of purpose. Even so the security consensus which had existed for many years was seriously undermined in the course of the debate over Cruise. NATO governments were just in the process of trying to patch up the shaken consensus, with talk of increased conven-

in Star Wars research. But Star Wars I continues to be spouted by Reagan, as was evident at the summit.

Star Wars, a project invented by the Right and propelled forward by the US defence industry, was clothed in the language of the peace movement - non-nuclear defence, the immorality of deterrence, and so on. This has to be understood as a response to public pressures. The uneasy peace-loving garb and the transformation of the USSR from 'evil empire' to responsible summit partner exposes the degree to which East-West relations are a matter of manipulating public opinion. The Soviet threat comes and goes according to the exigencies of the moment. Cold Warism has helped to mobilise public support for Reagan's economic and military policies. But it can be quickly dismissed if the domestic political situation seems to require a different approach. In doing

so, however, Reagan has put himself in a highly contradictory position. Does not the new mood lead to a change of policy? If Star Wars is seen as the primary obstacle to an agreement which would reduce Soviet offensive missiles, the rationales for both Star Wars I and Star Wars II are removed.

Reagan was able to shift rhetoric because he is a right-winger. Like Eisenhower and Nixon before him, he may be able to ignore at least some of the protests from the Right. But to placate the Right, he has to stick to Star Wars. The irrationality of his position offers a marvellous opportunity for an effective and imaginative opposition to exploit.

### Soviet interest in detente

The Soviet interest in detente has been much more consistent. Traditionally, the Soviet Union has pursued the goal of military 'parity' with the United States and has attempted to reduce the risks of war while maintaining the ideological competition with the West.

In some senses, the East-West conflict is more 'real' for the USSR. Detente confirms a political status of equality with the United States, and offers real possibilities for improving the Soviet economic situation. But the East-West conflict also has domestic functions. Official Soviet attitudes to the United States are thus contradictory. On the one hand, the USA is seen as a technologically advanced society to be emulated. On the other hand, the West is portrayed as a bankrupt social system which nevertheless presents a military, political and economic threat to the USSR.

The language of Soviet foreign policy is less militant today than it was under Khrushchev, but some of the same considerations still apply. Gorbachev has expressed his concern to stabilise relations with the USA so as to be able to devote more attention to the problems of the Soviet economy, although this does not mean that Gorbachev will abandon 'parity'. Moreover, detente is paradoxical for the Soviet Union as well. How does the Soviet Union establish friendly relations with the West when cohesion against the West is an important part of the Soviet social fabric? Gorbachev's obvious energy and competence, and his confident handling of the summit, give him a credibility which his immediate predecessors lacked. It remains to be seen, however, whether Gorbachev's break with the fossilised Brezhnev era will lead to any unexpected developments in Soviet politics.

Gorbachev's commitment to detente and arms control has been indicated by

some significant initiatives of unilateral restraint, of which the most important is probably the nuclear test moratorium. Up to now, Gorbachev has focused on the need to halt SDI as the precondition for further progress on arms control. But even though Reagan could not be detached from his Star Wars project during the summit, the affability was maintained. Such are the perceived benefits of the 'new detente' process, that the USSR might even be persuaded eventually to go along with some partial SDI system as long as detente and arms control are simultaneously pursued.

It is evident that Gorbachev has made

## the principle of democratisation of the security debate should be reasserted

political use of West European anxieties about SDI. This was indicated by his visit to Britain in December 1984 (before he became general secretary) and the use of his trip to Paris in October 1985 as a platform for his arms control proposals. Gorbachev may well attempt to initiate separate detente processes with Western Europe (as well as China and Japan). This is suggested by the readiness to reach a separate interim agreement on Intermediate Nuclear Forces; the offers of bilateral negotiations with Britain, France, and (too late to forestall the Cruise missile deployment decision) the Netherlands; the proposal for bilateral contacts between COMECON and the EEC; and articles in the Soviet press dealing with the common cultural heritage of Europe, including the USSR.

Indeed, there is a remarkable overlap in the attitudes of the Soviet Union and Western European establishments. They share an interest in 'deterrence plus detente' or, as the Soviet Union might put it, parity plus peaceful coexistence.

### Prospects for the peace movement

It is much more difficult to sustain ideas about the continuation of East-West conflict and the bloc system in periods of detente than in periods of Cold War. The US, Soviet, and Western European establishment views still envisage the continuation of the East-West conflict in some form. The peace movement approach implies a challenge to the conflict. Does this situation provide opportunities for the

peace movement to stimulate a substantial process of disarmament, to ensure that the US administration cannot renege on its altered rhetoric and that the more detente-minded forces in the USSR are encouraged at the expense of more conservative factions?

It is ironic that the only pre- or post-summit commentary so far in the British press to deal seriously with the peace movement relationship to the summit process has been by Peter Jenkins in the *Sunday Times*. Journals of the Left have conspicuously failed to do this, treating the peace movement largely as an irrelevance. Jenkins' argument is close to one already being put forward by David Owen - now that multilateralism/superpower negotiations look likely to bear fruit once more, let's have no more of this nonsense about unilateralism. This argument should not be dismissed out of hand, for it is likely to have some appeal for right-ish Labour voters who have never been happy with CND's unilateralism as adopted by Labour. Moreover, the arms control process of the 1960s and 1970s did help to demobilise the peace movement. Nevertheless, the Owen position grossly overestimates the possibilities for disarmament resulting from the present process (as Jenkins himself, to be fair, recognises). Precisely because of the experience of the 1960s and 1970s, when little was achieved, we need to formulate clearly our own strategy for the New Detente.

In the first place, the principle of democratisation of the security debate should be reasserted. Disarmament can only be achieved through irresistible popular pressures. During the campaign against Cruise and Pershing II, we established that security issues cannot be discussed only in narrow elite circles; we should not now hand the terms of the debate back to David Owen and the representatives of a discredited consensus on defence policy. We need to assert the right to campaign freely for peace and to press for institutional changes so that security policy is more accountable to public opinion.

Secondly, it is important to press for European countries to take advantage of the changed atmosphere and undertake unilateral initiatives to further the detente process and insulate it from the vagaries of successive US administrations. Labour's non-nuclear defence policy, for example, is much more thinkable in the current

<sup>1</sup> John Cartwright MP and Julian Critchley MP - Cruise, Pershing and SS-20; *The Search for Consensus: Nuclear Weapons in Europe* (Brassey's 1985).

climate of opinion. West European countries have to be prepared to act independently of the dictates of bloc policy, even if this does not go as far as formal withdrawal from NATO. The Kinnock-Chernenko talks on Soviet responses to British unilateralism, the SPD-SED talks on a German-German chemical weapons free zone, and the Balkan Nuclear Weapon Free Zone talks are all examples of the kind of initiatives that could be developed.

It is important, particularly in view of the role of Third World issues in the previous retreat from detente, that European states should be able to engage independently and progressively with attempts to solve crises in Central America and Southern Africa, free of the dictates of US policy. CND's recent commitments to campaigning on North-South issues indicate that peace movement opinion is moving in this direction in any event.

A possible agenda

Thirdly, we should underline our commitment to 'detente from below' as a way of changing attitudes to the Cold War and taking detente beyond the confines of bloc politics. If we are serious about overcoming the East-West conflict, the peace movement has to address the question of

liberalisation of Eastern Europe. Oppression in Eastern Europe will always provide

## the peace movement has to address the question of the liberalisation of Eastern Europe

an argument for reversing detente and a legitimation for Cold War. A commitment to the Helsinki process, including its humanitarian provisions, is very important. Detente between states makes possible grassroots political exchanges and, as in the 1970s, could allow greater pluralism in the East as well as the West.

Finally, we ought to specify what kind of agreement we would like to see come out of the Geneva talks. This could be a good moment to revive the concept of 'freeze and withdraw'. This is the demand for a freeze on the development, testing, production and deployment of new nuclear weapons systems combined with withdrawal of nuclear weapons from foreign territory. For the strategic talks, we would thus propose a freeze and, for the talks on medium-range missiles, we would propose

a true zero option, ie, the withdrawal of all US and Soviet nuclear weapons in Europe. To further the freeze proposal, it would be important to campaign against SDI.

In particular, we should be demanding that the British government should withdraw from participation in the SDI programme, and we should demand a parliamentary debate. We should also continue to demand a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and to put pressure on the British government to halt testing. To further the withdrawal proposal, we need to continue our activities against Cruise deployment, at Greenham and Molesworth and through Cruisewatch. This proposal does provide a basis for co-operation with the American freeze movement, which is important, without committing the peace movement to an anti-unilateralist freeze.

These four principles - democratisation, independence or unilateralism, detente from below, freeze and withdraw - constitute a possible agenda for the peace movement if we are to sustain the New Detente. The Geneva summit has not ended the Cold War, but it has given those of us in the peace movement or on the Left the chance and the responsibility to bring about more than a change of mood. D

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