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Beyond the Wall

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Ces mystères nous dépassent. Feignons d'en être l'auteur! as Cocteau said. When events take an incomprehensible and unforeseeable turn, the best thing to do is pretend that you planned it that way all along. It is always a tempting exercise—and quite an easy one—to interpret *ex post facto* and from some distance in time an accumulation of disjointed and complex events like those of 1989 by placing them within a coherent framework, a sort of rational application grid. And this tendency is of course even more natural when the observer is a Frenchman, trained in the Cartesian tradition.

Today everywhere one reads about “the end of the Cold War” (as it has been said by the participants at the Malta Summit), “the final stages of communism” (Francis Fukuyama¹ and his French and European imitators), and “the advent of a new, finally free Europe” in a world that is already, or in the throes of becoming multipolar. The tragic events of the Peking Spring, followed by the joyous and liberating events in Central Europe culminating on November 9 with the peaceful opening of the Berlin Wall, appear *a posteori* as almost natural developments. “Ah, but how obvious it all is!” one is tempted to say, faced with the scale of economic and social crisis which has been brewing for so long in these countries and which has suddenly come into broad daylight.

What is disturbing is that none of these events had been predicted, no more by analysts than by the governments, not even by the protagonists themselves: the crowds of East German refugees in Budapest, the masses in Leipzig, Berlin or Prague. The events were no more predicted by the very one—Mikhail

Gorbachev, of course—who through his initial reforms had set in motion the chain reaction which bore along the whole of Eastern Europe. No one today can say where this chain reaction will end.

Lucidly, and therefore modestly, not only the certitudes and the variables of the line of today's events must be recognised, but also the fact that today is a period—indeed an historic period, as the international system begets under everyone's nose a new order, or disorder—which runs its course beyond the control of any government.

As it always happens in great revolutionary phases, it is the people who make history—and the politicians (and analysts) who trot panting behind. Less comfortably logical certitudes: more paradoxes, and often incoherence. Looking at the balance sheet of 1989, examples come immediately to mind.

The year of paradoxes

Ahead of everything is the Soviet paradox, or rather the Gorbachev paradox. 1989 was, and will probably remain, in retrospect, Gorbachev's year. From his speech to the UN in December 1988, announcing the first major unilateral reductions in the Red Army, up until his triumphant visit to the Federal Republic of Germany in the summer, followed by crowds in East Germany shouting his name and proclaiming Gorbachev "liberator", the number one Soviet has literally been "making" history as far as East-West relations are concerned—at least in appearance. And yet inside the USSR itself, his position could not be more precarious: a ruined economy, a party which resists his attempts at change every inch of the way, a multi-national state which is showing signs of crumbling, a bordering-on civil war in the southern republics, secessionist claims in the Baltic States and a Soviet people whose standard of living has steadily deteriorated.

"Gorby superstar", the man who made the 1989 revolution in Central Europe possible, is well and truly on the brink of an abyss, or as depicted recently on the cover of *The Economist*,² about to fall into the jaws of a shark, and as he painfully tries to keep the jaws open with his legs, he offers his hand to the American president with an imperturbable smile on his face.

The second paradox is an American one: the paradox of a superpower that has lost all its certitudes. Surrounded by a team of advisors known both for their

professionalism and conservatism—and indeed their suspicions about the Gorbachev experiment—the Bush Administration, when elected a year ago, made it understood that although Republican and seemingly prepared to carry on the “Reagan Revolution”, it would be a sort of anti-Reagan. It was said that there would be no more improvisation à la Reykjavik, no great embrace of Moscow, no rushed summit without tangible results, no extravagant, slightly delirious military programme (SDI-style). On the contrary, there would be the maintenance of a sustained rearmament effort with genuine policy choices, notably strategic ones, and no revision was in sight, particularly with regard to the maintenance of troops in Europe, as Bush presented himself as being the greatest supporter of the Atlantic Alliance, in the tradition of the 1960’s.

Yet now the same administration which this summer balked at the idea of committing itself to providing massive aid to Eastern Europe announced with the embraces of Malta a “new era”, encouraging American business to invest heavily in the USSR (“Go East young man” seems to be the new motto of American capitalism), and for good measure announced, through the intermediary of the Department of Defence, a 180 billion dollar slash in future defence budgets, that is to say more than half the present budget. Without any transition Reagan in effect passed from “the Evil Empire” to Reykjavik. President Bush has been doing as much, in his own way, during the first year of his mandate. Typical American pragmatism, or is this the unnerving drifting on the winds of opinion polls, of newspaper editorials and of a Congress whose main concern, over and above anything else, has become to save on defence spending in a country whose “enemy number one” is now Japan and not the USSR?

Land of certainty, America seems to have come to the conclusion, along with Fukuyama, that communism is dead for good and that the world has arrived at the “end of history”.

Surprise!

The third paradox is a German one: for the 40 years that it has existed, the West has feared that the Federal Republic may gradually slip its anchor in the West (NATO and the EEC) in order to attain its ultimate objective: reunification with its East German second half. These fears and suspicions were brought to the surface this year after the dual events of spring: the surprising refusal of the Bonn Government (out of keeping with its previous



The Communist snake: the longer it sleeps, the thicker it grows.

commitments) to ratify the modernisation of the Lance missiles, and Gorbachev's triumphant visit to the FRG. Nothing was then left unsaid regarding this "drift" towards the East which seemed, moreover, to be confirmed by the procrastination of Bonn with regard to the building of Europe, namely with regard to the process of monetary unification.

As the irony of history would have it, the "drift" that actually took place—and what a drift!—was from East to West, from the GDR, just as was least expected. The height of this irony is that the Wall be knocked down, not in the name of national unity, but simply in the name of elementary freedoms, of the right of the East Germans to travel and to meet with their cousins of the West.

And now these refugees from the East who in spring had started to worry West Germany because of the burden they were going to be on the economy, had

become heroes in autumn. The same refugees which were then perceived as a demographic and economic godsend for the FRG, became in winter, a serious enough threat to create a voters' backlash in favour of the opposition party.

The West German political class, at first caught unawares, has rapidly begun to pounce on the breach in the Wall, no longer simply calling for the right to self-determination of the East Germans, but as in the case of Chancellor Kohl, calling for no less than the reunification of the two German entities in one state—and all this without affecting the Atlantic Alliance or the Community.

The German problem is thus again at the centre of debate. But this time the problem is posed by the East to West and will undoubtedly determine the stakes in the elections which will be held in this year in both Germanys: immediately in the East, and in December in the West.

Disarmament creates a fourth paradox. Never before has history seen such an acceleration. There was a time when governments determined their security priorities on a long-term basis and when diplomats negotiated for many years the finer details of facts, verification, ceilings and the like. Those times seem well and truly passed. Today, diplomats are called upon to establish treaties within six months or a year (as was said by President Bush at the Brussels summit last May), whereas the negotiating process, though working at maximum speed, will nevertheless still be unable to keep pace with the political changes which are speedily occurring both in the East as in the West.

Only six months ago, NATO was calmly negotiating the modernisation of its short-range missiles. Things have since moved so quickly that even the idea of introducing new nuclear weapons seems today incongruous, no doubt to the Germans, but to many others, as well. Modernised Lances? But to fire at whom? At the government soon to be democratically elected in the GDR? Or at Lech Walesa, or democratic Hungary?

Just over a year ago, when Gorbachev announced to the UN a unilateral reduction of 500,000 men in the Red Army, many in the West feared it to be a tactical manoeuvre aimed at a further destabilisation of Western consensus, a consensus already shaky as far as defence was concerned. Nobody would have imagined for one moment that the Soviet Union would accept NATO's proposals for the CFE negotiations in Vienna, for they were aimed at an almost unilateral disarmament of the Warsaw Pact, reducing its potential to the

greatly inferior level of Western forces. And yet, not only did Gorbachev accept NATO's terms at the opening of negotiations in January 1989, but he also proposed at the beginning of May—just before the difficult NATO Summit focussing on the modernisation of Lance missiles—"the removal of all nuclear munitions from Warsaw Pact territory, on the condition that the United States take analogous measures".

We know what followed: in reply to the increasing bids of the Soviets, the Bush Administration took a leap forward in Brussels. It pushed forward the CFE Treaty, now to come into force by June 1990; aircraft were included (as requested by the Soviets and granted by Bush over the heads of the French and British) and 30,000 American and 300,000 Soviet troops were cut.

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The nuclear question was postponed until 1991-92, or until after the German elections ... which is to say indefinitely. Since then, political events in the East are moving at a ever-increasing pace: Hungary's announced wish to leave the Pact, Czechoslovakia's negotiations of Soviet troop withdrawal. Gorbachev has proposed a further reduction of American and Soviet troops to under 200,000 men, and the Soviets have even hinted that they could accept a reunified Germany inside NATO. One could indeed wonder whether a Warsaw Pact worthy of that name will still exist at all by the time the CFE Treaty is signed and ratified! Or for that matter, whether by then Congress will not have unilaterally withdrawn the greater part of the American contingent from Europe?

The height of the irony is that several observers (this author included) who not long ago feared the progressively erosive effect of disarmament notably on Western cohesion, today see in these negotiations the ultimate legitimacy, the final barrier maintaining these almost disintegrated alliances. And all this to such an extent that following the Malta Summit, NATO heads of state, during a recent meeting in Brussels, felt obliged to insist on the necessity of maintaining both NATO and ... the Warsaw Pact. Thank you NATO!

Finally, the last paradox is that of the world system. It is in fact noteworthy that the extraordinary changes underway in Europe are central to both the future of Europe and the future of East-West relations, and yet relatively marginal in comparison with the extensive underground changes seen within the whole international system. What a contrast, in fact, between the tremor caused by 70 million East Europeans and the stifling of 1.2 billion Chinese (but for how much longer!)?

And is not the notion of the bipolar world of Malta already part of the past: the meeting between an economically ruined USSR and an America crippled by debt, financially and technologically dependent for a large part on Japan? While still discrete, Japan is nevertheless a power emerging as one of the dominant strengths for the beginning of the next century.

Will not the world of tomorrow be found more in the images of confused and bloody convulsions in a militarised Third World and completely out of control, as are already a series of countries, from El Salvador to the Philippines, not to mention Iran and Lebanon?

A word to the wise

Here ends the list of paradoxes, the main purpose of which was simply to stress the extraordinarily confused nature of the events of today and to deflate the windbags who sometimes hastily offer rational explanations and forecasts. There is, however, something to be learned from these events, from these paradoxes, something which could be helpful in throwing some light on the security policies that should be adopted for the future. It can be summarised in five points.

The first, absolutely obvious observation is that the present is the era of the decline (and the West will in some way have to help orchestrate it) or perhaps

even the historic dismantling of the Soviet empire, beginning with Eastern Europe, and possibly in the near future moving on to the disintegration of the Soviet Union itself. At first glance, this phenomenon can be considered a victory—also historic—perhaps of Western ideology over communism. But is communism dead? Will the Western model such as it is today be adopted tomorrow by the whole planet?³ It is nevertheless a victory for both the Western style of running modern societies and their resulting prosperity, and for its collective security system, a system which is founded in the alliance with the United States, in the permanent presence of a strong American contingent in Europe and in the implementation of a strong nuclear deterrent.

From this point of view, the common security net provided by NATO was almost the lifeblood of the EEC, whose development and subsequent success have been a determining factor in its attraction for Eastern Europe.

From now on the question is what will be the *raison d'être* of such a system, once the system in question has attained its goal, or more precisely, once it is considered as having done so by its members. In other words, is there a possible alternative to “containment” once the direct military threat which justified it has disappeared or is perceived as having disappeared? And how will the centrifugal forces be contained which will inevitably come into play from Bonn to Washington, once the mobilisation of the “Allies” no longer seems to be necessary?

The strongest doubts are legitimate regarding the chances of NATO to survive the “betrayal”, if such a term is applicable, of its enemy. G. Arbatov was correct in warning one or two years ago that the USSR was going to play the worst possible trick on the West, namely, it was going to deprive it of an enemy. In fact, it is doubtful that the cohesion of the alliances can be maintained, should they be transformed into political organs whose task it is to negotiate peacefully among themselves.

The second observation is that the process taking place in the East is qualitatively different from anything that has been seen before, on the one hand, in Eastern Europe, where it is a question of the *exit of communism*, and on the other hand, in the USSR, where the logic of reform is a question of the *modernisation of communism*, from its references to Lenin and onward. For the West, the result of these processes has major consequences on the scope of possible future strategy.

As far as time requirements are concerned, in Eastern Europe, managing in the short term for the reformers is absolutely vital, even the very short term, as the main problem at hand is to diminish the necessarily high social costs of a transition to democracy, and therefore to protect the non-Communist groups which are forming. In this respect, it has to be noted that Western aid is coming at an extremely slow pace and remains very insufficient, especially if compared with the costs of some sophisticated arms (the equivalent of a few B-2 bombers!). Yet still at this stage nothing can be excluded, even if a return, pure and simple, to Stalinism seems to be a long-concluded impossibility. Going deeper into the analysis, it has to be observed that although Western aid measures may have a determining role to play in helping the transition to democracy in Poland and Hungary, the extent to which such aid can influence



Germany setting the tune

the Soviet economy is infinitely smaller, considering the size and particular history of this country. The timespan the USSR sets itself is also much longer (at least one generation, as set by the economic officials in Moscow).

If the preceeding points are accepted, then as a third observation, it is in the strategic interest of the West as a whole to ensure that Gorbachev remains in power and continues with his reforms, and this despite the inevitable resulting difficulties for Western cohesion. There are three reasons for this. First, with each passing day, a brutal reversal becomes more difficult. Second, the process already underway will allow a substantial reduction in the strength of the Soviet military machine. Third, with the closure of the gulags and democratisation, the move of the centre of gravity in East-West competition from military matters towards the fulfilment of economic and social aspirations is to Western advantage and corresponds with the West's own values.

The fourth logical observation stemming from the five paradoxes is that the crux of the problem will be more West-East than East-West. The hardest challenge for the Western democracies—always racing against the clock and electoral deadlines—will be the need to take their time, resisting tendencies to get carried away, and resisting political or electoral game-playing.

The processes underway, as it has been seen before, are long-term, for it is a question of whole economies to transform, immense military forces to dismantle, new managers to train: this among those who have worked along the lines of the "old school" for generations.

Nevertheless, in light of all this, the deadlines that have to be met in the very short term, notably those for 1990, are also absolutely crucial. First, for Gorbachev himself, who will have to face the test of key local elections in the spring prior to carrying out the modernisation of the CPSU before next autumn's Congress, and what is more, will have to both stock the shelves and bring under control the centrifugal forces in action within the Soviet republics. Furthermore, crucial short-term problems have to be solved as regards East-West relations and disarmament: three treaties having been promised (on conventional arms, chemical weapons and START missiles), to which has to be added the great 35-member conference on the future architecture of European security. Finally, short-term deadlines are absolutely crucial for the two Germanys, as there will be elections in both the FRG and the GDR. This will inevitably have a bearing on the general situation, as German public opinion is

already reunited on this point by what could be called a common political fabric, with little difference any longer between "inter-German" politics and pure internal politics.

Accepting Oder-Neisse, and more

The fifth observation is that the crux of all these processes—and therefore of the future shape of Europe—will necessarily lie in the results of the German debate. For his own reasons, Chancellor Kohl has chosen to lead the debate straight away along the sole lines of state reunification, picking up along the way and at the same time transforming the movement within East Germany, which at least at the outset had no nationalistic connotations.

No one can say how the East German and inter-German debate will evolve, each reciprocally affecting the other. Certain elements are already evident. The final shape of German reunification will in the end depend upon the Germans themselves. Any opposition to this would only fan the flame of resentment beyond the Rhine, and in the final analysis, would produce the sort of Germany everybody wishes to avoid, including the Germans themselves. Whatever Chancellor Kohl says, it is difficult to conceive that a reunified Germany would be more compatible with the EEC as it is today, than it is with NATO. It is indeed difficult to imagine American and Soviet troops face to face on the territory of one Germany. It is equally difficult to imagine an economically dominated EEC by a Germany solely comprised of its Western member.

Everything in this situation is a matter of process and method. Clearly, if reunification is an inalienable right of the German people, then the weight of international treaties—the weight of history—means that the form taken by the unification process is nevertheless also a concern for all Europeans, as it is for the Soviets and for the Americans. This implies at least both the maintenance of an active German role within Western Europe, and Germany's definitive acceptance of the borders of Europe, most notably, of the Oder-Neisse line.

References

¹ - "La fin de l'Histoire"—*Commentaire*, Fall 1989.

² - December 4, 1989.

³ - Contrary to F. Fukuyama.