

The Helsinki Accords Viewed in Retrospect

Ten years ago, the heads of 35 eastern and western states, including the US, Canada and the USSR, gathered in Helsinki, Finland, to deliberate unresolved issues that had arisen in the aftermath of World War II and the ensuing cold war era. The signing of the final document at the Helsinki conference marked the beginning of detente. The signatories solemnly pledged to exert all efforts to make detente a steadily growing process.

US opposes European cooperation

Even before the dust of World War II had settled, the US opted for strengthening capitalism in western Europe through the Marshall Plan of 1949. The US initiated the establishment of NATO to form these countries into a block against the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union, in line with socialist policy, did not hesitate to call for close cooperation between the western and eastern European countries, despite the US moves. As early as 1954, the Soviet Union called for facilitating the entire continent's cooperation and security by holding a conference of the heads of all European states. The US looked upon this call with suspicion and did everything in its power to block such a conference. It distorted the Soviet intentions, claiming that they aimed at driving a wedge between the NATO countries.

Eventually the US did agree to attend the Helsinki conference due to the objective changes in the global scene, but it did so only after inventing the thesis of human rights, interpreted in a bourgeois, individualist manner. The US insisted that this idea merited a place on the conference agenda. This was a malicious maneuver, intended to interfere in the socialist countries' internal affairs and weaken socialism, on the pretext that the European people have a common history and values.

The essence of Helsinki

All in all, holding the Helsinki conference and hammering out the final document was an ideological, political, diplomatic and propaganda victory for the socialist countries. It marked success for their policy of peaceful coexistence. The tone for this has been set in 1972, when the Federal Republic of Germany signed bilateral treaties with the Soviet Union, Poland, Czechoslovakia and the German Democratic Republic, respectively. These treaties inaugurated a new era since they acknowledged the political outcome of World War II. They put an end to or froze border disputes and territorial demands between the signing countries.

Ideological premises

To put things in perspective and grasp the motives for the signing of the Helsinki accord, we ought to examine the ideological theses from which the signatories proceeded. The US had started to review its conflict with the socialist countries in terms of the ideological, military and propaganda aspects, in the light of the new international developments. As of the late fifties, the socialist community had emerged as a force to be reckoned with; the global balance of forces had changed; the colonial system had collapsed and the role of the national liberation movements increased. Moreover, starting in the early seventies, the US had been unable to attain its goals and had suffered heavy blows, especially the defeat in Vietnam and the failure of Vietnamization. These changes created a situation conducive to detente.

The new conditions forced Washington to reassess its political strategies in international relations. However, there was first a heated debate among US theorists. The debate raged between two political lines. The first was that of ultraright hardliners who opted for continuation of the cold war: maintaining acute international tension and encouraging the outbreak of regional and local wars. This school of thought refused to acknowledge the existing reality, for this was considered a betrayal of the vital national interests of the US and western Europe.

The second political line proceeded from the necessity of acknowledging the new reality at least partially. Proponents of this line called for seeking a fresh line of reasoning for waging the ideological conflict.

For the US, detente equals interference

When the US ostensibly acknowledged detente, it was not due to conviction in the policy of peaceful coexistence. The US had no choice but to sign the Helsinki accords. Having done so, it attempted to capitalize on detente by turning it into a weapon in its hands. Thus, the US proceeded to try to foment internal disputes in the countries of the socialist community. The goal of this campaign was curbing these countries' influence, halting their economic growth, diverting them from the principle of proletarian internationalism, and forcing them towards further armament, consequently diverting economic resources from meeting humans' needs under socialism to meeting defense requirements.

Detente and socialism

Lenin developed the thesis of peaceful coexistence in accordance with socialist theory. In 1915, he called for doing away with war, bringing about peace between nations and curtailing plunder and exploitation. According to this theory, detente is a combination of cooperation and struggle. Countries with opposing social systems preserve their respective principled, class stands on economic, political and ideological questions. At the same time, it is incumbent on these countries to join efforts to eliminate «hot spots» on the international scene and seek a halt to armament, leading to disarmament, in the common interest of international peace and security. Countries, across the board, should strive to avert the threat of nuclear war.