

## CHAPTER 9

# Detente

### Relaxation in the East-West Tension : 1962-75

The period between 1945 and 1962 is identified with the Cold War. However, it does not mean that during this period there was a constant rise in the level of tension between the two power blocs. There were also interim periods of easing of tensions. For example, the period 1953-56 showed improved relations between East and West. There were signs of detente during the Camp David summit in 1959, but sudden increase in the temperature from 1960 (U-2 incident) to 1962 (the Cuban Crisis). After the Cuban Crisis, the world experienced an extended period of relaxed tension, called detente, for about 12-13 years.

Improved relations were evident in several areas after Stalin's death in 1953. In July 1953, a cease fire was declared in Korea. Next year, peace agreement was concluded for Indo-China at Geneva. In 1955, the Austrian question was resolved, her neutral status was recognised and Soviet Union withdrew troops. The USSR also withdrew from Porkkala in Finland. There were signs of easing of tension between West Germany and the Soviet Union. The German Chancellor, Konard Adenauer was invited to Moscow, and diplomatic relations were established between USSR and West Germany. Next year Japan and USSR also established diplomatic relations. After a gap of ten years, the Four Power Summit was held in 1955 at Geneva. It was attended by U.S. President Eisenhower, soviet leader Khrushchev and Prime Minister Bulganin, British Prime Minister Anthony Eden, and Edger Faure Prime Minister of France. Nothing much came out of the Summit, but it demonstrated improved relations between East and West. The Soviet leaders now recognised in principle the existence of two Germany's—Federal Republic of Germany (West), and German Democratic Republic (East). The year 1956 was significant for international communism. Stalin was denounced by his own successor Khrushchev. This was interpreted by the West as liberalisation of communism.

**Meaning of Detente.** Detente may be described as a situation of reduced international tension. Detente is not normalcy. The term was used for relaxation in East-West conflict. During the period of detente, Cold War had not ended, but the level of temperature had gone down and there were signs of understanding. The reduced tension, or fall in the temperature, could not be measured. It was an environmental change for the better in East-West conflict. According to Coral Bell (*The Diplomacy of Detente*), "detente supposes a conscious and deliberate reduction of tension..." The idea is that reduced tension is an intentionally achieved situation; it is not accidental, it is by choice. She adds: "Cold War assumes a conscious maintenance of tension at relatively high level." Therefore, detente is the outcome of conscious efforts for eased relations. Henry Kissinger defined detente as "a mode of management of adversary power." Thus, for him detente is the outcome of effective and deliberate management of the opponent in the interest of relaxation of tension.

Coral Bell's analysis of detente underlines relaxations not only between Soviet Union and the United States, but also between these two Powers and China. She says that if it takes two to make a quarrel, it takes two or three to maintain detente. "I propose to look at detente as an American diplomatic strategy consciously deployed within a triangular power balance, *vis-a-vis*, both China and the Soviet Union." Further, according to Bell, "detente with China was a more notable achievement than the detente with the Soviet Union", because "level of tension with China had been far higher...than with the Soviet Union." We will also examine detente not only between two power blocs but between US, USSR and China.

The then Soviet Party Chief (and for many years President of USSR) Brezhnev used the Russian word *Razryadka* for detente. Literally, the word, *Razryadka* means "to discharge a weapon." In the context of Cold War it was used to mean "to slacken the tension." Brezhnev explained the meaning of detente (1977) thus: "Detente means first of all overcoming the Cold War and then a transition to normal, stable relations among states. Detente means willingness to resolve differences and disputes not by force, not by threats and saber rattling, but by peaceful means at the conference table. Detente means a certain trust and the ability to consider each other's legitimate interests." This long quotation from Brezhnev's statement explains very lucidly how detente means a situation of transition from Cold War to normal and stable relations among states. When Kissinger talks of management of adversary power

he implies that detente is a mode of living with or offsetting the adversary power.

D.K. Simes (*Detente and Conflict*) says that as defence was the primary need of USSR, it used both cooperation and conflict as tools of security. This is the essence of detente as practiced during the reduced tension phase of the Cold War. Commenting on the international situation in 1976, George Kennan had said : "In this complicated world there could be no international relationship which was one of total antagonism or total identity of interest." President Nixon of the United States (1969-74) has been described as the 'the author of detente'. This is more appropriate in connection with US-China relations. It was Nixon who ensured expulsion of the Republic of China (Taiwan) from the United Nations and secured representation of the People's Republic in the World Body. It is he who sought an end to the Vietnam War. Therefore, conscious efforts were made to ease the tension for eventual end of the Cold War.

**Progress of Detente.** The Cuban Crisis had convinced world leaders that it had the "potential" of a third world war. Both the Super Powers were convinced by that time, that a nuclear war would be fatal for both of them. It was realised that wisdom was a better part of valour. The Cuban Crisis had demonstrated the need for swift contacts between American and Soviet leaders to avoid recurrence of similar crises. A hot line was, therefore, installed to link Washington with Moscow. It would enable direct contact between leaders of two Powers when time was of essence.

In the post-1962 period a number of agreements were concluded and several contacts established to ease the tension. One such agreement was the Partial Test Ban Treaty. It was signed in July 1963 by Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union. Negotiations for test ban were carried out since 1955. The Cuban crisis hastened the agreement. The nuclear tests were causing serious damage to the environment and threat to mankind. The Partial Test Ban Treaty banned all nuclear tests in the atmosphere, on the ground and under water. But, it proved impossible to agree on a control system to ban underground testing. Thus, underground testing and nuclear weapons manufacture continued. But, the three Powers who originally signed the treaty agreed to limit the possession of nuclear weapons to the 'bare minimum'. France refused to sign the treaty. By 1964 China had exploded her first bomb, and she also refused to sign the treaty. In spite of Partial Test Ban Treaty, France and China continued with their tests in the atmosphere. The continued

French nuclear testing in the Pacific region even in 1995 caused grave anxiety. In 1967 Super Powers agreed to ban nuclear testing even in the space. A separate agreement the same year banned nuclear weapons in Latin America. Talks for a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty to ban even underground testing resulted in the conclusion of CTBT in 1996, though India refused to sign it.

In 1968, a Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) was signed by UK, USA and USSR. The nuclear Powers promised to refrain from transferring nuclear weapons to countries not having them, and the non-nuclear Powers, in turn, promised not to accept or develop such weapons. France and China did not sign the NPT for many years. It was only in 1992 that China signed the NPT. India has not signed it on the ground that it is discriminatory. It allows the nuclear Powers to retain the weapons, but bars other countries from developing them. India is willing to sign only a non-discriminatory NPT.

The central element in the policy of detente was normalisation in Europe. The tension began to ease towards the end of 1960s. The most significant was the problem of two Germanies and of Berlin. The change of West German Government in 1969 helped in relaxation of tension. Under the Chancellorship of Willy Brandt, West Germany initiated *Ostpolitik*. This German word is used to indicate a 'policy for the east.' Brandt Government renewed normal relations with Poland, Hungary and Bulgaria. Treaties with USSR and Poland were concluded in 1970. Other agreements were finalised in 1971-72. Both German States recognised each other and were recognised by the Super Powers. The German *Ostpolitik* could not be pursued without a certain amount of support from the United States and other Western allies. To begin with, West Germany tried to extend relations with countries of Eastern Europe. The Soviet Union and West Germany by their treaty of August 1970 promised not to use violence to alter the existing boundaries in Europe. This was a major concession by West Germany which had always maintained that these boundaries were not final.

The four power agreement on Berlin was concluded in 1971. Neither East nor West abandoned its formal position on Berlin, yet many complicated questions were sought to be regulated. Access to West Berlin from West Germany was approved by providing easier rail, road and water communication, and West Berlin to East Berlin and East Germany was improved. However, the Berlin Wall remained intact as dividing line between two parts of Berlin. West Germany (F.R.G) also

secured other advantages by means of *Ostpolitik*. West Germany became Soviet Union's largest western trading partner. In fact, relations with other east European countries were also improved. No other country received so much of benefit from detente as West Germany. Both Germanies became Members of the United Nations in 1973.

Several East-West Summits were held during the period of detente. US President Kennedy and Soviet leader Khrushchev had met only once in Vienna in 1961. Similarly, President Johnson and Prime Minister Kosygin met once at Glassboro in 1967. During 1970s summits became annual feature. The biggest success was Nixon's visit to Moscow in 1972, where SALT-I and a number of other agreements were signed. One of these agreements was 'The basic principles of mutual relations between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.' In 1973 'The agreements on the prevention of nuclear war' was also concluded. Both the agreements were aimed at drawing up the rules for mutual contact and prevention of future conflicts. Nixon and Brezhnev met again in 1973 and 1974, and after Nixon's resignation his successor Ford met Brezhnev at Vladivostok in November 1974. That was the last summit for a few years, except the Helsinki Summit of 1975.

The efforts made by Nixon Administration, and particularly the steps taken by Secretary of State Kissinger eased the tension between United States and China. Kissinger paid a secret visit to China in 1971. On October 26, 1971, People's Republic of China was allowed representation in the United Nations, and Taiwan was expelled. As Coral Bell says, this part of detente was more important because there was much greater conflict between the United States and China than between the Super Powers. In fact US-China detente did not normalise relations between the two largest communist countries—China and USSR. The Sino-Soviet rift cannot be fully discussed in this chapter, yet a brief reference will be made in a subsequent section. After China was allowed representation in the U.N., President Nixon himself visited China in February 1972 and helped in the relaxation of US-China tension. With continued 'Cold War' between China and the USSR, a third pole appeared to be vaguely emerging in the international system. China's large size and population and a clear ideological assertion made her 'a natural rebel' against the comfortable bipolar situation. China did not any longer speak of 'duopoly' or Great Power Condominium. She virtually gave up

her ambition of becoming the leader of revolutionary forces and began interacting selectively with all Powers including the two Super Powers.

### The Helsinki Conference and its Final Act

The Cold War had subsided when on the first day of annual session of U.N. General Assembly in 1973 both the Germanies were admitted. The famous Helsinki Summit of 35 countries in 1975, and the signing of its Final Act, was regarded, for the time being, as burying the Cold War. Lundestad refers to achievements of the Helsinki Conference as a symbolic culmination of detente in Europe. The principal concern of West European countries in 1970s in the field of security was to combine the western alliance (with USA) with the improved relations with the Soviet Union. Improvement in relations meant a more relaxed mood, more cultural and commercial and personal exchanges, and a reduction in the forces deployed by both sides. The Soviet Union also had similar aims. The USSR proposed a European Security Conference. The West European countries agreed to attend the Conference provided the United States and Canada also participated in it. The Conference met at Helsinki (Finland) between 1972 and 1975. The deliberations lasted in all about 15 months and resulted in the signing of Helsinki Final Act. This European Conference on Security and Cooperation (ECSC) was attended by 35 countries, including 33 European nations, Canada and the United States, Albania was the only European country which did not attend the Conference. Those who attended were from both the Power Blocs as well as Yugoslavia, the non-aligned.

The apparent aim of the Soviet Union was to secure general endorsement of the post-Second World War frontiers of the European nations, and *secondly*, to discuss the security issues. The approach of the Western Bloc countries, to begin with, according to Peter Calvocoressi, was "a mixture of boredom and cynicism." But, later they tried to achieve maximum concessions from the USSR. The West and non-aligned insisted that the European frontiers could not be declared final, but the Conference declared that they should not be altered by force. The Helsinki Final Act signed in 1975 by all the 35 countries, contained declarations not legally binding, yet formal and normative. The Final Act contained ten principles. These were: (i) sovereign equality of all nations; (ii) respect of right of all, implied in national sovereignty; (iii) neither to use nor threaten the use of force; (iv) inviolability of frontiers and territorial integrity of states; (v) peaceful settlement of international disputes; (vi) non-

interference in the internal affairs of each other; (vii) freedom of expression and of faith and worship and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; (viii) equality and people's right of self-determination; (ix) cooperation among states; and (x) observance of responsibilities implied in international law. The Final Act established certain principles for economic and cultural cooperation. The participants promised to promote basic human rights and contacts across the national borders were to be made easier. The critics pointed out the promises that USSR and East European countries had made they could hardly keep.

The leaders of both the Super Powers promised to respect and observe the Helsinki Final Act. They hoped that the Cold War would be buried and that East and West would become friends. British Prime Minister Harold Wilson talked of the 'spirit of Helsinki.' The Helsinki Conference was hailed as the end of Cold War, just as Churchill's Fulton speech was the 'declaration' of the Cold War.

It was agreed at the Conference that there would be periodic reviews of the implementation of its undertakings. The first review took place at Belgrade in 1977, but the general atmosphere had changed for the worse. It achieved nothing except an agreement to meet again. The next review took place in Madrid (Spain) during 1980-81 after several Soviet attempts to abort it. By this time the spirit of Helsinki had been replaced by the New Cold War and Soviet forces were in occupation of Afghanistan.

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