

Insight and Outlook By Joseph Kraft

The Shape of Detente

PARIS—The French have a saying that nothing is dead until something takes its place. But, in that case, what about the Cold War?

It may be dead, as Gen. Charles de Gaulle keeps insisting. But what has taken its place?

Not, certainly, political agreement on the major outstanding issues among the two great powers. Still less, a withering away of the blocs.

On the contrary, any effort at such ambition is almost certain to end in failure, even in counter-reaction. For the time being, if there is to be motion toward detente, it will have to come below the political surface at the level of economic, social and cultural affairs.

The immobility of the great powers has been dramatically underlined in the past weeks. Washington is plunging still deeper into the Vietnamese war, but with almost no prospect of bringing a truce. Indeed, a North Vietnamese official here told me:

"You put a sword to our throat and you say, negotiate, or else. That is not negotiations; that is an ultimatum. And we will not surrender to an ultimatum."

But, while it does not end the war, the increasing American concentration on Vietnam weakens all moves toward improving relations with the Communist world—witness, notably, the Administration's inglorious failure to achieve even the scantiest congressional interest in a proposed improvement in East-West



Kraft

trade. In addition, the American concentration on the Asian battlefield increases the Soviet exposure to Chinese charges that Moscow is prepared to sell out the Communist revolution so long as Russia itself is not harmed.

THE RUSSIANS, however guarded their actions in Southeast Asia and whatever their real hopes, are not prepared to take in bold daylight serious steps toward detente with the United States. For one thing, such measures would give further color to the Chinese charges. For another, any steps toward relaxation in Europe pose a threat to the East German regime—a threat which might affect Communist rule all over Eastern Europe.

Because of this great power deadlock, there has actually taken place, despite all the talk of detente, a recent hardening of the lines. At Bucharest this week, the Russians have firmed up the Warsaw Pact. Last week they moved to cut off debates between East German Communists and West German Socialists. And, in the disarmament negotiation at Geneva, they have raised their asking price for a treaty to prohibit the spread of nuclear weapons.

The United States has not only intensified the war in Indochina. It has also kept the Atlantic alliance intact despite a French challenge dimly supported by many other states. And in the Geneva talks it has not moved to favor a nonproliferation treaty by giving new assurances that there would be no German access to nuclear arms.

IN THESE CIRCUM-

STANCES, the tendency is to suppose that the Cold War is back in force, that detente was only a mirage. But, if that is the direction of the big and visible events, especially in Asia, it is not at all the spirit of things here in Europe.

On the contrary, the spirit of things remains very much the spirit of detente. The events of Indochina seem distant to the point of unreality in Europe. Almost everywhere, on both sides of what used to be the Iron Curtain, in homes, offices, factories, universities, laboratories—there is an itch to multiply contacts, to increase trade, to augment travel—more simply, as one German put it to me, "to get to know one another."

Thus, I have to conclude that, while detente is far off at the supreme level of politics, the forces that underlie the push toward detente are still in play, indeed still on the rise. Whatever the immediate political exigencies, I have no doubt that the future in Europe belongs to the almost submerged forces of trade, culture, scientific development and plain curiosity that are more and more bringing Europeans together. And the prospect, it seems to me, is that for the next five years or so the complex of those submerged forces will constitute the shape of detente.

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