CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION
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After the October Revolution (1917), the new system that emerged in Soviet Russia was socialist and thus ideologically opposed to capitalism generally and Western capitalism in particular. The socialist-cum-communist world view was based on Marxism-Leninism and particularly on Lenin's understanding that Western capitalism was inherently exploitative and imperialist, which is why it attempts to control the destiny of other states and people of the world.

Naturally, the West perceived this new system as a threat to their capitalist existence; hence it had to be nipped in the bud. The hostile Western forces encircled Soviet Russia and put all kinds of pressure on it. However, at the domestic front, Russia was also initially faced with chaos and civil war. At this juncture the very survival of the new system (Russia) was at stake; it needed what Lenin called a "breathing space"; a period of peace from outside forces. Despite its opposition to Western capitalism, the Soviet socialist system-cum-state needed to survive. It was, therefore, necessary for it to avoid any direct confrontation with the West and thereby to protect socialism from the imperialist onslaught. It was Lenin's idea that, despite the existence of two contradictory and opposing systems, it was still possible for them to co-exist peacefully and avoid any direct confrontation. Thus, Lenin's emphasis was on peace in dealing with the hostile West; and his concept of peaceful
co-existence was enshrined into the principle of peaceful co-existence which became the cornerstone of the Soviet foreign policy, especially Soviet relations with the Western countries generally and the USA in particular. The principle of peaceful co-existence was designed to ensure the survival of the newly established socialist state and system in the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc states, in an international environment that was hostile. From the Soviet perspective, it was deemed imperative to ensure the existence and maintenance of an international climate that was conducive to the consolidation and building of socialism and communism in the "Soviet Motherland", while, at the same time, promoting and supporting world socialist movements and struggles, including national liberation struggles waged by the colonized and oppressed people's of the world. The strategy was to support all anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist forces, including within the capitalist countries - while co-existing and competing peacefully with them - until the eventual overthrow of world capitalism.

While Lenin was somewhat flexible in his approach, Stalin was rather dogmatic. Stalin believed that the world was divided into two "hostile camps" and the contradictions between them were "irreconcilable". His views were mechanically deterministic. For example, he propagated that the crisis in capitalism would lead to its collapse. While E Varga, a noted Soviet economist, condemned by Stalinists for being "soft on capitalism", argued that a capitalist economic
crisis might be deferred through state intervention. In reality this is what has happened.

After World War II, the US emerged as a dominant Western power in world politics. As a leader of the "democratic world", the U.S. was determined to contain the expansion of communism. The objective behind the reconstruction of war torn Europe and the formation of NATO was to check the growing influence of communism in Europe. Evidently, these policies partly shaped the nature of Soviet-US relations and, in fact, lend the era its characteristic features.

Along with the US, the Soviet Union also consolidated its position. Having formed the COMECON in 1949, the WARSAW PACT came into being in 1955 in the name of safeguarding East European Security. However, the immediate cause of the formation of WARSAW PACT was the accession of Federal Republic of Germany to NATO.

The formation of two militarily antagonistic alliances heralded a new era in international politics leading to a spiralling arms race with dire consequences for the economy of the world. The drive for hegemony led to the outbreak of wars within the Third World. The general militarization of the Soviet Union and the US were set in this historic period. Though significant shifts occurred in the 50's to the 1980's, the basic course of events had been set during
this period, influencing international events for years to come.

Having been excessively concerned with the likelihood of a third world war, Khrushchev emphasised peaceful negotiation, and thus gave a new dimension to Soviet Policy. He put the Soviet Union on the path of wider internationalism which signified a break from Stalinist's isolationist policies. The 20th Congress of the CPSU was a turning point in the Soviet policy. Here peaceful co-existence acquired a doctrinal importance with respect to relations with the West, primarily the US. However, this was not a new concept, it was based on Lenin's perspective of building alliances with the colonized world.

The process of dialogue and negotiation was followed by marked improvement in the relations between the Soviet Union and the USA. But the latent distrust between them continued to exist. This resulted in the Cuban Missile crisis of 1962. Here two rival powers found themselves face to face. After the overthrow of the Batista regime the U.S. was unable to maintain Cuba as its backyard. So it tried to isolate Cuba through a trade embargo and various other pressures. But the Soviet Union sought to protect Cuba because of its overall policy towards the Third World. This led to a situation of confrontation between the Soviet Union and the U.S., especially when the Soviet Union threatened the US by placing its missiles in Cuba. It was construed as a war preparation.
against the U.S. which created a situation of direct confrontation between the two nuclear powers.

The Sino-Soviet rift was not just a result of personality clash between Mao and Khrushchev, rather there were certain ideological-political differences, including a clash of national interest which resulted in debates on strategic and political issues. The Chinese leadership categorically denounced destalinization and the concept of peaceful co-existence. They demanded access to nuclear technology which the Soviets held back. The Sino-Soviet rift eventually led to a split in the International Communist movement. The U.S. could take advantage of this split, especially in issues concerning the Third World.

One of the issues that inflamed and widened the rift between the Soviet Union and China was their position regarding the U.S. Interestingly, in the 70's the U.S., one time arch enemy of China, drastically changed its policy towards China. The Americal policy makers could not resist policy changes because of the temptations of a huge size of the Chinese market. The opportunity to widen the rift amongst the communist powers was also an irresistible offer. Obviously this prompted many Americans to call for a rapprochement with China.

The emergence of a group of militarily uncommitted, non-aligned states in the 1950s posed a dilemma for the Soviet theorists. They were not ready to accommodate the
existence of non-aligned States and their free involvement in the competitive ideological and political struggle between East and the West. No wonder, they dismissed the very concept of non-alignment. It acquired positive connotation in the Soviet Union only after the 20th CPSU Congress. After that the growing organizational cohesion and influence of the non-aligned movement was seen to be quite compatible with Soviet strategic objectives in the Third World. Its motive force was found suitable for the Soviet Union to initiate diplomatic offensive in the Third World to undercut the preponderant influence of the Western powers.

In a bipolar world order, the Third World emerged as a major arena of superpower competition and conflict. To counter the influence of the "other" power, they made friends and allies throughout the Third World and each projected their own system as the correct one. This was done in an effort to legitimise, maintain and expand their own system.

From Khrushchev to Brezhnev, there was a remarkable continuity in Soviet policy. Even Khrushchev's ouster did not bring about any change in terms of sharp break in the Soviet policy. Though Brezhnev laid emphasis on strategic parity, peaceful co-existence still continued to be the principle of Soviet foreign policy. In fact, under his leadership, there was a general tendency toward military detente with the U.S. and a general desirability for greater co-operation.
Though the Soviet Union abandoned the policy of direct confrontation with the U.S., it continued with a major rearmament programme, using the opportunity to catch-up with American military strategic superiority apparently to gain recognition as an equal superpower. The Soviet leadership also viewed a military showdown with the U.S. as an inevitable outcome of ideological-political conflict between the two powers. This made the Soviet Union spend huge amounts on arms build up which proved disastrous for the Soviet economy.

Khrushchev was not very supportive of the Vietnamese cause. Because he thought that the Soviet involvement might escalate into a World War. Brezhnev however provided necessary military and economic assistance, without which Vietnam would not have been able to resist the pressure unleashed by the U.S. However, Brezhnev simultaneously kept stressing on a negotiated settlement.

Admittedly, the Soviet Union managed its affairs well during the Vietnam War. It supported Vietnamese cause without directly confronting the U.S. In fact, the War served well to Moscow; it kept the U.S. pre-occupied, making anti-Soviet moves elsewhere less likely. It also exposed the U.S. design and tarnished its image. However, the relations between the two superpower during the Vietnam War were rather amicable. That is why the critics of the Soviet Union put a question mark on its anti-imperialist credentials.
Following the Cuban Missile crisis, the Soviet-U.S. relations entered a new phase. The U.S. adopted a policy of bringing the Soviet Union to the negotiating table instead of isolating it. The U.S. seems to have anticipated that detente would increase Sino-Soviet differences which in effect would strengthen the West. It was a method of diplomatic manoeuvring, a means of inducing "Soviet Self-Containment". Certainly detente was a desirable state for both powers which meant a status quoist balance of power position. Also, both powers had a common interest in avoiding a nuclear contest. Both found it necessary for consolidating their own position vis-a-vis the other. This contradiction remained, though the SALT I and ABM agreements were signed, and did not resolve the latent contradictions in their relationship. The Soviet Union wanted to safeguard their influence by maintaining detente, while the U.S. wanted it to cover up for the elimination of Soviet influence. This ultimately eroded the very basis of detente. A section of the Americans perceived detente as a one way street in Moscow's favour and a tragic sell-out of U.S. interest. Moreover, the U.S. military-industrial complex was never interested in detente. Further, Soviet intervention in Afghanistan dealt a final blow to detente in 1979.

Though the SALT II Treaty was an important attempt to regulate the strategic arms race, it was not believed to be a substitute for strong defence. The expectation was that the superpower competition would be safer and their relations
healthier. This expectation was not fulfilled since the distrust between was too deeprooted. Both powers feared being superseded by each other leading to spiralling conflicts. Even when they talked of parity, each was actually striving to become the "number one". Moreover, the U.S. always treated the Soviet Union as a junior Superpower.

The forces opposed to the SALT II treaty intensified their campaign against the ratification of the treaty. Within U.S. itself there was strong opposition to the ratification of SALT II. The Soviet activity also compounded the non-ratification of the treaty, i.e. Afghanistan.

Ronald Reagan entered the office with a goal of reasserting the American pre-eminence which, he believed, had eroded during the period of detente. Reagan's militarization programme was aimed at pushing the Russians to the highly expensive arms race and thereby cripple the Soviet System from within. The SDI programme was clearly aimed at a reassertion in of American influence and maintainance of strategic superiority.

The Soviet Union over extended itself in the military sphere in order to catch up with U.S. and neglected other crucial sectors of its economy. As a result of this distorted development the Soviet economy reached a "pre-crisis situation". Naturally the successive leaderships had to re-examine the policies in almost all spheres. Both Andropov and Chernanko were dissatisfied with the performance
of the "Socialist System" and wanted to reform it within the socialist framework.

Gradually, a new political ambience was created in the Soviet Union. With Gorbachev's accession to power, in 1985, the very nature of the Soviet leadership underwent a radical change. Gorbachev became a symbol of change. The April 1985 plenary meeting and the 27th CPSU Congress in 1986 are two landmarks in the recent history of the broader democratization of the Soviet Union.

Gorbachev's "new thinking" was a clear departure from orthodox Marxist positions. His interpretation of "security", "peaceful co-existence", and "mutual interdependence" signified a sharp break from the Soviet past. Since Gorbachev maintained that the Soviet international strategy was based on flawed assumption which was nothing but an over simplification of the complex world, he discarded the hitherto existing Soviet perception of "security" and the "two camp" theory. He argued that security can only be universal which can be achieved by universal disarmament. This emphasis on an "above class approach" was directly linked with his idea of de-ideolization, demilitarization, democratization and humanization of the entire international system.

Gorbachev realized that in order to revitalize the stagnant economy it was necessary to reduce the defense budget. For that he initiated a peace offensive which had its roots in the weakening of Soviet global economic position
and the stagnation of the Soviet society. Gorbachev's arms reduction proposals aimed at creating the external conditions for Soviet economic restructuring which could be realized only by lessening the tension with the U.S. Consequently became the focus of superpower relations, which began to shift from confrontation to co-operation. The INF treaty was the first stepping stone towards a constructive relations between the two superpowers. However, this was clearly not enough to prove his intention. Gorbachev then turned to the area of regional conflict, i.e. Afghanistan and withdrew Soviet troops from there.

The fast moving events of the Gorbachev years have opened the chapter of a new age of international relations in which the Soviet Union and the U.S. seem to have mastered their forty years old conflict. To some extent this became evident during the Gulf War. The mastery over this conflict was, however, also linked to Soviet collapse. The emergence of new independent countries in the erstwhile Soviet Union and the existence of a unified powerful Germany demand closer relations between Russia and the U.S. In the ultimate analysis US-Russian relations can never be on the same plane as US-Soviet relations.