



Extract of Le Journal des Alternatives

<http://journal.alternatives.ca/spip.php?article1812>

Mr. Bush and the Riga axioms

- EN - Our organisation - Our Publications - Analysis and Articles -

Publication date: Thursday 12 May 2005

Description:

His attack on Yalta shows the U.S. is not interested in cooperative security.

Copyright © Le Journal des Alternatives - All rights reserved

His attack on Yalta shows the U.S. is not interested in cooperative security.

HISTORIANS OF the Cold War will not have missed the significance of President George W. Bush choosing Riga as the venue for his speech on Saturday repudiating the 1945 Yalta Agreement.

Before the United States extended diplomatic recognition to the Soviet Union in 1933, it was the American legation in the Latvian capital that served as the State Department's observation post on Moscow. The three Baltic republics were independent from 1921 until their absorption into the Soviet Union in 1940 following the rapid collapse of the Low Countries and France and the fear in Moscow that Hitler would soon turn his attention eastward.

In the 1920s, Riga was where Kremlin watchers like Loy Henderson and George F. Kennan cut their teeth. Other members of this group, which drove U.S. foreign policy towards the Soviet Union in the pre-war period, were James Forrestal, the Dulles brothers, and William Bullitt. Deeply suspicious of Stalin, they advocated the creation of a cordon sanitaire around the USSR. And despite the imminent threat posed to Europe and the world by Hitler, they ruled out the possibility of cooperating with the socialist state in dealing with the Nazi menace. When Hitler invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, the U.S. was forced to come out in support of Moscow. This support was grudging and tactical; elements of the influential Riga group thought it would be better to let Hitler and the Soviet Union destroy each other and it was perhaps this thinking that led to the unconscionable delay in the Western Allies opening up the Second Front.

Notwithstanding Washington's desire to limit the scope of Russia's influence in Europe, the fact that the Red Army played a decisive role in smashing the Third Reich and liberating a dozen countries meant the "Riga axioms" gradually gave way to a more realistic assessment of the Soviet Union and the position it occupied in the world as a Great Power. This realism reached its apogee at Yalta, a small town in Crimea where Stalin, Churchill, and Roosevelt met from February 4 to 11, 1945, to discuss the post-war scenario.

The Yalta axioms envisaged a cooperative security framework in which the three Great Powers agreed to work together to destroy the last vestiges of Nazism and Fascism by demanding the unconditional surrender of Germany and ensuring its leadership was prosecuted for war crimes. They also undertook to enable the liberated peoples of Europe to create democratic institutions of their own choice and enshrined the principle of unanimity amongst the Great Powers (i.e. the veto) as a procedure for the smooth functioning of the proposed United Nations and its Security Council. Finally, Yalta was where it was decided that the USSR would enter the war against Japan three months after Germany's surrender and that the U.S. and Russia would jointly occupy Korea below and above the 38th parallel respectively.

Soon after Yalta, the big three reached an impasse over the fate of Poland with the U.S. and Britain going back on their commitment that the pro-communist government already in place in that country need not be disbanded but merely made more representative. Twelve months later, Kennan sent his famous Long Telegram from Moscow and Churchill made his Fulton, Missouri speech on the Iron Curtain. The Riga axioms, as the historian Daniel Yergin points out in *Shattered Peace: The Origins of the Cold War and the National Security State*, were back in business.

But when Mr. Bush said in Riga that Yalta was "one of the greatest wrongs of history" because it traded the freedom of small nations for the goal of stability in Europe, he was not merely echoing Cold War dogma. He was also sending out a message to the world - and particularly to Great Powers like Russia and China - that the era of collective security established at Yalta and later, at the United Nations, is decisively over. And that if the restraints placed by

this system ever come in the way of U.S. national interests, they will be brushed aside. "We will not repeat the mistakes of other generations - appeasing or excusing tyranny, and sacrificing freedom in the vain pursuit of stability," Mr. Bush declared.

Spirit of Yalta

Speaking to a joint session of Congress on March 1, 1945, Roosevelt hailed the spirit of Yalta. "The Crimea Conference was a successful effort by the three leading Nations to find a common ground for peace. It ought to spell the end of the system of unilateral action, the exclusive alliances, the spheres of influence, the balances of power, and all the other expedients that have been tried for centuries - and have always failed. We propose to substitute for all these, a universal organisation in which all peace-loving nations will finally have a choice to join."

That universal organisation, of course, was the U.N. Sixty years later, Mr. Bush has little time for universal organisations. Instead, he believes in unilateral action. At Riga, he has served notice to the world that he is ready to take the good fight against "tyranny" beyond Iraq. Stability be damned.

PS:

© Copyright 2000 - 2005 *The Hindu*