

Victory without Blood

*John Hyde*

I have lived most of my 53 years with some level of threat from totalitarian thuggery. My youngest memory is of my mother telling my father of a news flash to the effect that war had been declared. Before World War II ended I was in primary school and I remember being caned for jumping the slit trenches our fathers had dug for us. I waved a flag in Hay Street when victory and peace were declared in 1945 and have vivid recollection of American servicemen jitterbugging on the car roofs.

The Berlin airlift in 1948 dashed that euphoria---even a child saw that all the dangers were not over. Later there were to be Korea, the Russian tanks in Budapest, the withering of the Prague spring, Indochina and Afghanistan to keep me reminded of it.

For the last forty years we have lived with the fear of being forcefully dominated or killed by communists who, like the Nazis, claimed it was their destiny to dominate the world. World War III has, so far, been averted, but probably only because of mutually assured (nuclear) destruction---acronym, MAD. The Petrov affair showed us that even Australia was not immune from the communist fifth column. And, of course, communist propaganda---sometimes called its sixth column---permeated the free world.

For forty years we were told that the governments in Russia, Poland, North Korea, Vietnam etc were popular, that the communist utopia was just around the corner, and that communism offered us no threat. The naive among us, wanting to believe in peace and often mistaking nice communists for nice communism, believed Communist lies, much as many of our parents had believed the National Socialist and Fascist lies. The freedom our fathers had fought Hitler for was undermined, although not quite handed it over to the rulers in the Kremlin, by those of us who morally equated our capitalist, democratic societies with their communist ones.

Those were the dangers we lived with, yet now that there is perestroika, incipient democracy in Hungary, holes in the Berlin wall and a communist debacle, we are parsimonious with our Joy---no jitterbugging on car roofs for us. While we check

that our powder keeps dry, we should be rejoicing. The world remains dangerous and indeed there are some new dangers inherent in current uncertainty. The Communist states have not overnight become liberal democracies and recidivism at various points, such as that evidenced in the Tienamen Square episode, is not only possible but likely. So long as the apparatus of terror remains intact, the men who control the guns can still, if they are so minded, revert to old ways, but, in Eastern Europe at least, the apparatus is falling apart. There are still some communist states---Rumania, North Vietnam, Ethiopia, Albania, and North Korea, for instance---which have recanted nothing. Some of the newly liberalising states, but probably not Hungary, Poland and East Germany where free speech is becoming habitual, could still clamp down tomorrow.

Even so, the communist states are less dangerous now than they were before they made the liberalising concessions, because the state no longer controls the flow of information to the populace, because their ordinary people have had a glimpse of the free world, because some of their leaders seem to believe in some limits to government authority, and because Moscow's mandate, still to be feared, carries less authority than before. On top of all this, the communist world is economically a mess.

At the same time, the capitalist world is ideologically stronger. The refugees, the East Germans dancing on the wall, and hard evidence from western TV cameras behind the iron curtain are all testimony to the failure of communism. Communism can no longer find starry-eyed recruits in our universities and communist propaganda which appeared regularly on our TV is now laughable. Moscow is losing its fifth column and its sixth is discredited.

We should rejoice because the present eye-opening ideological disorder is a step, albeit an early one, on the way to liberal democracy in what is now the Soviet Empire. We need not fear liberal democrats, however strong their economies. Democracies have never fought democracies.

Most obviously of all, unless we are complete hypocrites, we should rejoice that many millions of people have gained a measure of freedom.

What is more, they gained it without bloodshed. If present trends continue, the United States and its allies will have won freedom without the slaughter of their youth, without placing themselves in moral jeopardy by fire bombing any Dresdens and without any Faustian deals with the likes of Stalin. In historical terms, that is not bad!

Communism is collapsing because its economy is collapsing and because President Reagan raised the ante. In doing so he applied no more than the lesson of 1938---totalitarians interpret appeasement as weakness. At a time when the Soviets gained a wise, courageous and relatively young leader, Reagan made it plain that world domination was beyond the reach of the Eastern bloc economies.

It does not matter whether the Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI or Star Wars) would have worked or not. The fact was that the Soviets believed that it would. What is more, such is the precision of modern weaponry, that it could be employed to kill relatively more generals than soldiers. Indeed, even the politburo would not be safely behind the lines in a future war. Totalitarian leaders of all stripes who put such a notoriously low value on human life, often value their own lives.

The world now has the best hope in this century of lasting peace. It would not have it, if the United States had not said to the Soviets. "You may go no further at any price you can afford". Reagan's firmness, firmly founded on relative strength, gave Gorbachev his chance within the Soviet Union, where only elite opinion counts, to say to his people, "We cannot win and must try another way". Bush must now employ both carrot and stick---how much of each will be difficult to judge. The West must not lower its guard now, but the fact that we have come thus far safely is a reason to rejoice.

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ENDS

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