A Moment of Thaw in the Cold War Climate

(Editor's Note: For three decades Henry Shapiro, chief of the United Press International bureau in Moscow and dean of western correspondents in the Soviet capital, has watched the ebb and flow of Kremlin politics—at home and on the international scene. In this dispatch, drawing on his personal experiences and observations, he analyzes the current "thaw" in the cold war.)

By HENRY SHAPIRO
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Moscow — (UPI) — "Peace," said a prominent American diplomat, "It's wonderful."

And a Russian military band played the Gershwin tune, "Love Walked Right In."

SIGN TREATY—U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, and British Foreign Secretary Lord Home, left to right, seated, are shown in Aug. 8 picture signing the nuclear test ban treaty, the first major East-West agreement in almost eight years. Behind the three, left to right, are Sen. George Aiken, R-Vt.; Sen. William Fulbright, D-Ark.; Sen. Hubert Humphrey, D-Minn.; U.S. Ambassador to the UN Adlai Stevenson; UN Secretary-General U Thant; and Soviet Premier Nikita S. Khrushchev. (UPI)

The occasion was the Kremlin ceremonial signing of the partial nuclear test ban agreement between the Anglo-American allies and the Soviet Union.

This diplomat's experience in Soviet affairs, like my own, has covered some 30 years of American-Soviet history. He was far from convinced that the millenium had arrived or that a period of sweetness and light was guaranteed. But he was acknowledging what was apparent:

Moment of Thaw

It was a moment of thaw in the murky climate of the cold war which at times in the past 18 years reached such points of danger that world war seemed inescapable.

Whether the thaw will develop into a spring flood remains to be seen in the course of the succeeding months when East and West will be discussing the melancholy realities of a profoundly divided world.

It does not take much to change the attitude of the Russian man-in-the-street from hostility to friendliness toward Americans. The hostility, in spite of years of bitter propaganda warfare, has been only skin-deep.

Although as an American I am a citizen of the Soviet Union's number one antagonist and as a journalist a member of a much suspected and distrusted profession here, my life in this country has been in serious danger only once in the past 30 years—and then not for reasons of hatred, but the reverse.

Happened In 1945

It happened on May 9, 1945, when Stalin's voice suddenly boomed from a thousand loudspeakers on Moscow's principal thoroughfares announcing the victorious end of the war.

Within minutes hundreds of thousands of Russians appeared on the streets and began to surge towards Red Square, the traditional Russian center for popular demonstrations.

When I appeared on the square dressed in an American war correspondent's uniform somebody in the crowd shouted "Vot Amerikanets" — There goes an American.

A dozen arms seized me and tossed me into the air three times while others shouted "Long live Soviet-American Friendship" and "Long Live Peace."

I was pressed, squeezed and man-handled as I joined the throng which suddenly changed course and marched toward the American embassy on Makhovaya Square, five minutes from Lenin's tomb. I was grateful to be back on my own feet, and in one piece.

Wanted Ambassador

At the embassy a one-armed soldier shouted, "We want the American ambassador," echoed by hundreds of voices of men, women and children.

In the absence of Ambassador Averell Harriman, the charge d'affaires, George Kennan, appeared on the embassy balcony and, addressing the crowd in flawless Russian, hailed the victory and urged, "Now let us work for peace."

It looked then as if the successful wartime coalition, contrary to all lessons of history, might become a permanent alliance for peace and progress.

But only two years later, after the breakdown of the Moscow conference of foreign ministers of 1947, the cold war was on full blast. In 1952, the gentle and scholarly Kennan, who had returned to Moscow as ambassador, was declared persona non-grata and not allowed to remain in the Soviet Union.

Bitter Campaign

In the bitter anti-American propaganda campaign that followed, Harriman became one of the principal targets of ridicule and hate, a favored subject for cartoonists' caricatures of a "warmongering American imperialist."

It was more than ironic poetic justice for Harriman to return to Moscow last month as President Kennedy's special envoy and help to successfully negotiate the first major East-West accord since the Austrian treaty of 1955.

The changing mood was best reflected in a photograph, taken last week, showing a happy and beaming Khrushchev and Harriman in a bear-like embrace.

On May 9, 1945, in the glow of a victorious conclusion to war, I witnessed a rare, genuinely spontaneous popular demonstration — and it was pro-American. But in the succeeding years there were at least four other demonstrations outside the American embassy — all angrily hostile. The worst were on the occasion of the landing of U.S. Marines in the Lebanon, and the time of the Bay of Pigs invasion.

Mass At Embassy

In these riots thousands of Russians massed in front of the American embassy breaking windows, disfiguring the walls with ink bottles and shouting such slogans as "Down with American imperialism," and "Shame to the American warmongers." In the angriest clashes only last minute intervention by regular Red Army troops protected the embassy from mob invasion and bodily injury to diplomatic personnel.

Yet as I mingled with the street crowds during the Lebanon demonstration I detected more sorrow than anger among the demonstrators. One remark I overheard came from a middle-aged woman who said, "You cannot blame the American ambassador (Llewellyn Thompson) who loves his children as much as we do and he believes in peace."

The strange truth is that during the worst years of the long Stalin era nightmare few individual Americans resident here were subjected to personal indignities. I live in a large apartment house inhabited entirely by Russians. During the Stalinist period many of my neighbors stopped talking to me, except to greet me politely but coldly when we came face to face. But no children threw stones at my car or apartment windows, no one bothered me in the streets.

Directed Politely

Visiting foreigners looking for my apartment on a small obscure street in mid-Moscow were always directed politely by children on the street or by neighbors to my door.

The enormous reservoir of good will for foreigners generally and particularly for Americans was never drained here even by cold war bitterness.

Nevertheless the wartime comradeship and cordiality cannot be easily restored unless "the first swallow"—the nuclear treaty—results in substantial East-West agreements on wider fronts. There is every indication both sides hope this is the real beginning.

I have seldom seen a more beaming and cheerful Nikita Khrushchev than when the Soviet Premier emerged from a Kremlin side room on "treaty day" heading a parade of about 100 Soviet, British and American leaders into the Kremlin's magnificent St. Catherine hall to witness the ceremonial signing.

Escorts His Guests

Bathed in kleighlights, with cameras whirring and 80 Soviet and foreign correspondents watching, Khrushchev escorted his guests to the middle of the vaulted hall to take their places behind a rectangular table covered by a cream colored velvet tablecloth.

As Khrushchev, President Leonid Brezhnev, six American senators and high ranking members of the American and British delegations stood in front of the malachite and marble walls, host Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko showed his opposite numbers, U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Britain's Foreign Secretary Lord Home, to their velvet and gold framed chairs.

After the signing, the gathering broke into applause — led by Khrushchev — when the smiling ministers rose from the table to shake hands with each other, with Khrushchev, with U.N. Secretary General U Thant and others.

Then, the 5 feet, 4 inch Khrushchev led his guests past a long, oak, panneled corridor to the adjoining magnificent St. George's hall for a diplomatic reception.

Procession Is Applauded

About 2,000 diplomats and a cross section of representatives of Soviet society, politicians and marshals, writers and scientists and leaders of the Russian Orthodox church, Moslem and Jewish religions applauded the procession as it moved past tables groaning with delicacies to the end of the ballroom.

They walked to the tune of George Gershwin's "Love Walked Right In," played by a 100-man military band.

There were more and endless toasts to peace and friendship, broad smiles and strong handshakes and mutual congratulations.

In the course of my Moscow years I have attended dozens of brilliant and gay Kremlin receptions. But with the exception of the welcoming parties for the Soviet astronauts I have never seen such conviviality especially between leaders of the Eastern and Western worlds.

Conspiciously missing from the celebrations were the Chinese, North Korean and North Vietnamese ambassadors.

The spirit of detente is in the air and seems to be growing almost in direct proportion to the deterioration of Soviet relations with Communist China. What the future may bring I cannot say, but I've never seen the cold war warmer.

Chamber Action Results In Refund to Resident

Action by the Medford Chamber of Commerce helped secure a refund amounting to more than $140 for a Jackson county resident, who had been "duped" into a sales order for magazines, the chamber has reported.

The customer, who complained to the chamber of commerce, said the sales crew member promised return of an amount signed for by the customer as soon as results of the competitive sales program were calculated.

The chamber called the matter to the attention of Central Registry, a self-policing organization of magazine publishers and circulation companies in New York City. The circulation company involved promptly returned the check to the attorney representing the complaining party and dismissed the crew manager.

Don McNeil, manager of the Medford Chamber of Commerce, in reporting the case, issued a warning to local residents who wish to buy magazines from traveling sales crews, urging them to check the chamber to determine whether or not the company is a member of Central Registry.

If they are not members of Central Registry, he emphasized, "there is no recourse."

There are local people, he added, who make their living through the sale of magazine subscriptions, and their names are in the telephone book.

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