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Russia, Cuba, USA: putting an end to the Heritage of the Cold War

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« The historical announcement » of a rapprochement between the USA and Cuba is good news, on the face of it.

Provided it is followed by real concrete measures, like the lifting of the US embargo on trade with Cuba and the release by the Cuban regime of people imprisoned for their opinions and exercise of civil rights, it could serve to erase at least some of the consequences of the Cuba Missile Crisis - the crisis provoked by the secret stationing of Soviet missiles in Cuba, which nearly plunged the world into a nuclear war in October 1962. Perhaps it will also enable us to come close to the truth about this historic episode still subject to widespread disinformation, and about its dramatic sequels: the assassination of John F. Kennedy in November 1963 and the fall of Nikita S. Khrushchev in October 1964.

One thing is certain: we are far from having erased the effects of the Cold War.

First, the "climate warming" announced between Cuba and the US is accompanied by a serious "cooling" between Russia, the USA and the West in general. There is not one embargo to lift, but two: that against Cuba, and that against Russia, struck with economic and financial sanctions that are pushing her towards the abyss, and us with her.

Secondly, this deplorable situation results not from chance but from a conflictual attitude common to the main players. If Vladimir Putin bears heavy responsibility through his policies in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, the West is at least equally responsible, through an aggressive policy towards Russia: betrayal of the pledge to dissolve NATO as a military structure, when Germany reunited and the Warsaw Pact was dissolved; the expansion of NATO eastwards, bringing in ex-members of the USSR or ex-allies of the Warsaw Pact; the unilateral withdrawal by the USA from the ABM (Anti-Ballistic Missile) Treaty, which was the cornerstone of the « balance of terror » during the Cold War; and the planting close to Russia's borders of bases for the « anti-missile shield »... Thus these players, and the Western ones first, have in common their retention of the Cold War Mentality.

Finally, the « tools » that could turn this mentality into acts, and turn the cold (or locally warm) war into general hot war, are still present. Admittedly there are fewer nuclear weapons than at the height of the Cold War in the mid-1980s when the count exceeded 70 000. Now there are "only" 16 300, it seems. But those are infinitely more numerous and powerful than in October 1962 (when the USSR - though they carefully hid this fact - could launch only one or two missiles per day from its territory). Today, the 7 billion humans can be annihilated five to ten times over...

Furthermore, this situation opens a playground to all kinds of terrorists. For the barbarism of the throat-slitters and child-murderers draws inspiration and authority from the white-collared Heads of State who are threatening "Others", of all lands and races, with the most appalling massacres.

How can we get out of this? By abolishing nuclear weapons: that's the only way to put an end simultaneously to the weapons of crimes against humanity and the spirit. And how can we do that? By allowing the people to speak, since none of the world's peoples wants to be massacred, or to commit massacres (an obsession of a tiny minority of fanatics). The people are almost unanimous in wishing to live in *a world without nuclear weapons*. Thus, in 2008, a poll carried out in 21 countries by the agency WorldPublicOpinion found that on average 76 % of people polled were favourable or very favourable to a treaty banning nuclear weapons. The figure in France was 86 %, and an IFOP poll in 2012 found 81 %. Most of the 158 States represented in Vienna at the 3rd *Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons* on 8-9 December 2014 expressed the same desire.

It remains for us to convince the governments of the nuclear states. France, absent from Vienna - unlike the USA, the UK, India and Pakistan - could have a key role in this process, provided President Hollande and the government think

again about their policy of « vertical proliferation » - maintaining and modernizing France's nuclear weapons.

As for the Church of France, it should first draw inspiration from the message Pope Francis gave in Vienna - he formally condemned nuclear weapons, advocated their abolition, and affirmed that « *a world without nuclear weapons is truly possible* ». From his practical attitude too, since it seems that the thaw between the USA and Cuba results significantly from his mediation, although neither Obama nor Castro revere him as Holy Father. That assertion may seem exaggerated, and yet it is true: the ending of the Cold War depends to some degree in the attitude that the *Conference of French Bishops* needs to take on the question of all nuclear weapons and also, of course, those of France.

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