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Peace is not a process for impatient people

by Joe Ferullo

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The celebration of Martin Luther King Jr's birthday is still a fresh American tradition -- it seems to be evolving into something like a "peace day," an occasion when schools, religious groups, and commentators pause from their routines to cast an eye on the question of non-violence. Here's my contribution to the dialogue, thanks to a dear college friend:

Back in October when President Obama's Nobel Peace Prize was first announced, I wrote here about my 1979 interview in Moscow with Nobel Peace laureate Andrei Sakharov. My friend Mitch Martin and I were editors then of the daily student newspaper at Columbia University; Suzanne Moore was a reporter. We arranged the trip and interview on behalf of a consortium of Ivy League papers, which helped cover the cost. I tried to track down the original interview for my previous blog, but couldn't find it. Mitch did.

Here's the link -- to the Harvard Crimson's website archive. Forgive the interview: we were young. And Sakharov's command of English was also in its early stages. (He'd begun studying it just a year before.) Still, he was extraordinarily generous with us, and remarkably eloquent, especially regarding the best path to peace: that road, he said, is one of political evolution, not revolution. A step-by-step process that builds consensus for change at a safe pace, a pace that saves lives and creates change that lasts. As I wrote in October, peace-making is not a career for impatient people.

Still, as you'll read, even he did not predict the pace of change that was to come in less than ten years: by the late 1980s, the Soviet Union would be on its way out, and most of the oppressive regimes of Eastern Europe would be gone. This would have shocked but pleased Sakharov: few shots were fired; half a continent, it seemed in that moment, has simply "evolved."

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