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SOVIET FOREIGN POLICIES AND THE OUTLOOK FOR SOVIET-AMERICAN RELATIONS

SUMMARY

The USSR's View of Its World Position

A. Developments of recent years have given the USSR increased confidence in its security and strategic posture, in its capacity to engage its adversaries on favorable terms, and in the prospects for the long-term growth of its international influence. The Soviets have thus begun to pursue a more vigorous foreign policy and to accept deeper involvement in many world areas.

B. The attainment of rough parity in strategic weapons with the US has contributed more than anything else to the USSR's self-confidence. The Soviets have also been encouraged to see the US suffering a loss of influence in certain areas, facing economic difficulties at home and abroad, and coming under domestic pressure to curtail its world role. Largely on the basis of these considerations, Moscow believes that the US no longer enjoys a clear international predominance. It does not appear to have concluded, however, that US power has begun a precipitate or permanent decline; US economic, military, and technological capabilities continue to impress the Soviets. Thus, while they may be tempted to conclude that the US will no longer be the competitor it once was and may therefore be inclined as opportunities

occur to use their greater strength and flexibility more venturesomely, they can still see themselves getting into serious difficulties with the US if they press too hard.

C. The China problem is another factor which limits Soviet confidence. It has become increasingly clear to the Russians that China is capable of seriously undermining their international positions, keeping them off balance ideologically, and in the longer term, constituting a serious strategic threat. It unquestionably concerns the Soviets that China's ability to challenge them in all these ways would be all the greater in circumstances of Sino-American rapprochement.

Domestic Political and Economic Factors

D. The present Soviet leadership has been notable for its stability, and this has resulted in continuity in the decision-making process during most of the seven years since Khrushchev's overthrow. Brezhnev has clearly emerged as the principal figure in the regime and has been taking a vigorous lead in the area of foreign policy; he now has a personal stake in the USSR's current policy of selective détente. Decision-making, however, remains a collective process. Indeed, there are occasional signs of stress over the content and implementation of foreign policy. And maintaining a consensus behind a more active Soviet foreign policy, in circumstances of greater international complexity, may become increasingly difficult over time.

E. The USSR has been able to achieve rates of economic growth which are high by international standards and to maintain a military effort roughly equal to that of the US. But the Soviet economy is still backward in some sectors and it faces serious problems stemming from low productivity, the declining effectiveness of investment, and technological lag. Economic constraints do not *oblige* the Soviets to reduce military spending, however. While an agreement on strategic arms control would relieve somewhat the heavy demands which military programs impose on high quality human and material resources, agreements of the sort now contemplated would not enable the Soviets to increase the rate of economic growth appreciably.

The Strategic Weapons Relationship with the United States

F. We believe that the USSR has concluded that the attainment of clear superiority in strategic weapons—i.e., a superiority so evident

that the Soviets could be assured of success in a confrontation and even "win" should they press the issue to nuclear war, say, by a first strike—is not now feasible. Nevertheless, there are no doubt those in Moscow who believe that it may still be possible to obtain a meaningful margin of advantage in strategic weapons which would give the USSR increased political-psychological leverage. The Soviet leaders must, at the same time, reckon with the possibility that any attempt to gain such an advantage would look to the US much the same as an attempt to move toward clear superiority and would produce the same counteraction. The course they have chosen, at least for the immediate future, is to attempt to stabilize some aspects of the strategic relationship with the US through negotiations, and they appear to believe that a formal antiballistic missile agreement and an interim freeze on some strategic offensive systems, on terms they can accept, are within reach.[1]

G. Assuming such an agreement is reached, the Soviets would continue serious negotiations on more comprehensive limitations. But the Soviet leaders are probably not clear in their own minds as to where these negotiations should lead. They may fear that too comprehensive an agreement might involve disadvantages they could not anticipate or foreclose developments which might eventually improve their relative position. And the more complex the agreement being considered, the greater the difficulties the Soviet leaders would face in working out a bureaucratic consensus. Thus, their approach to further negotiations would almost insure that these would be protracted.

The Sino-Soviet Conflict

H. The Soviets understand that their difficulties with China are in many ways more urgent and more intractable than their difficulties with the US and that, as Chinese military power grows, the conflict may become more dangerous. Moscow no doubt expects that the approach to normalization in US-Chinese relations will strengthen Peking's international position and will make China even more un-

[1] For separate statements of the views of Lt. Gen. Jammie M. Philpott, Acting Director, Defense Intelligence Agency; Vice Adm. Noel Gayler, Director, National Security Agency; Rear Adm. Earl F. Rectanus, Director of Naval Intelligence, Department of the Navy; and Maj. Gen. George J. Keegan, Jr., Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, USAF, see their footnotes to paragraph 28, page 16.

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willing than before to consider concessions to the USSR. It has also occurred to the Soviets that the US may gain some increased freedom of maneuver against them and that Washington and Peking will in some situations follow parallel policies to Moscow's detriment. The new US-Chinese relationship could, in addition, make a military solution to the Sino-Soviet conflict seem to the Soviets an even less attractive alternative than before.

I. Sino-Soviet relations will not necessarily remain as bad as they are now. At some point, the two sides might arrive at a *modus vivendi* which would permit them to "coexist" more or less normally. But to obtain any deep and lasting accommodation the Russians would have to pay a price they would consider unacceptably high, including a lifting of military pressures, some territorial concessions, disavowal of Moscow's pretensions as the paramount authority among Communists, and acknowledgement of a Chinese sphere of influence in Asia.

J. The Russians are likely to want to establish a wider role in Asia in the next few years. Consolidation of the Soviet position in South Asia, with the focus on India, will be one feature of this effort. The Russians will also continue to work to prevent an increase in Chinese influence in North Korea and North Vietnam. In the case of the latter, this will mean that Moscow will remain staunch in its support of Hanoi's effort to obtain a favorable settlement of the Vietnam war. The Soviets will, as a further objective of their policy in Asia, try to increase their influence in Japan, and an improvement in relations has already begun. Soviet prospects in this regard are, however, probably limited by Tokyo's greater concern for its relations with the US and China.

Soviet Policy in Eastern and Western Europe

K. Although Moscow has made progress in restoring order in Eastern Europe, it has not come to grips with the root causes which have in recent years produced unrest or even defiance of Soviet authority there—in Romania, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. Many East European leaders still hope for greater national autonomy and wider political and economic intercourse with the West. The USSR's task of reconciling its efforts to consolidate its hegemony in Eastern Europe

with an active policy of détente in Western Europe can therefore only be complicated and delicate. If it came to a choice between erosion of their position in Eastern Europe and détente in Europe as a whole, the Soviets would choose to let the latter suffer.

L. The USSR's security concerns in Eastern Europe, its own economic weaknesses, and growing preoccupation with the Chinese have turned it away from a policy of crisis and confrontation in Europe. At the same time, the changing pattern of US-West European relationships and trends within Western Europe itself have evidently convinced Moscow that its long-standing European aims—including a reduction of the US role and influence there—have become more realizable than ever before. A conference on European security represents for Moscow one way of encouraging the favorable trends in Western Europe and slowing the adverse ones. The Soviets also hope that a conference would open the way to a definitive and formal acknowledgement of the status quo in Germany and Eastern Europe. Rejection of the West German-Soviet treaty by the West German Bundestag would deal a setback to Soviet confidence in the viability of its German policy and possibly of its wider European policy. We believe, however, that in these circumstances Moscow's inclination would still be, perhaps after an interval of threatening talk, to try to salvage as much as possible of these policies rather than to reverse course completely.

M. The USSR's position on force reductions in Europe appears to stem mainly from its overall European tactics rather than from economic pressures or from military requirements related to the Sino-Soviet border. Moscow has doubts about the desirability of reducing its forces because of its concerns about Eastern Europe and about its military position vis-à-vis NATO. We believe, nevertheless, that Moscow is coming to accept that, assuming continuation of present trends in East-West relations in Europe, it could safely withdraw some of its forces from Eastern Europe, particularly from the large contingent in East Germany. This does not mean the Soviets have decided on any reduction or soon will. But, if they should decide to move beyond their present position, they will presumably see advantage in thoroughly exploring the possibilities of a negotiated agreement rather than acting unilaterally. On the other hand, if they should

conclude that such negotiations are unpromising, they might make limited withdrawals on their own, mainly because they would judge that this would lead to more significant US withdrawals.

The USSR's Position in the Middle East

N. In order to protect their close political and military ties with Egypt, the Soviets have been willing to increase their direct involvement and to accept larger risks in the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict. A full-scale renewal of the Arab-Israeli war would, however, be unwelcome to the Russians and the present situation causes them some anxiety. There is thus some chance that Moscow will come to see the desirability of urging the Arabs to accept a limited, interim agreement which would diminish the dangers of renewed hostilities, while still allowing the Soviets to enjoy the fruits of continued Arab-Israeli animosity. The Soviets are, however, unlikely to be amenable to an explicit understanding with the US limiting the flow of arms to the Middle East, though they might see advantage in some tacit restraints.

O. The Russians are probably generally optimistic about their long-term prospects in the Middle East, believing that radical, anti-Western forces there will assure them a continuing role of influence and eventually an even larger one. But the Soviets are uncomfortable because their present position is tied so closely to the exigencies of the Arab-Israeli conflict. They have also seen that radical nationalism can occasionally take a violently anti-Russian turn and with increasing involvement they will probably encounter greater difficulty in following a coherent and even-handed policy among the diverse and quarrelsome states of the area. In order to put their position in the Middle East on a firmer foundation for the future, they are likely to try both to forge stronger political ties with the "progressive" Arab parties and to develop their diplomatic relations with the moderate Arab states.

The Third World

P. The USSR's policies in the Third World are greatly affected by its urge to claim a wider world role for itself and by the need to protect its revolutionary credentials, especially against the Chinese challenge. In addition to its strong position in the Middle East, the USSR

has over the years won for itself a pivotal role in South Asia. It has also gained wider influence in Latin America. In Africa, the Soviet record is considerably more mixed and Soviet activities there now have a relatively low priority. In the Third World as a whole, partly because of some serious setbacks in the past, the Soviets are now inclined to view their prospects somewhat more soberly than they once did. Their approach is in general characterized by opportunism and a regard for regional differentiation. Nevertheless, by virtue of its acquisition in recent years of a greater capability to use its military forces in distant areas—a capability which is likely to continue to grow—Moscow may now believe its options in the Third World are expanding.

Future Soviet-American Relations

Q. The USSR has compelling reasons for wanting to keep its relations with the US in reasonably good repair, if only in order to control the risks arising from the rivalry and tensions which Moscow assumes will continue. It realizes that the larger world role it seeks is unrealizable except at the expense of the US. Whether the USSR will in particular circumstances lean toward sharper competition or broader cooperation with the US will naturally depend on the interaction of many variables. Crucial among these will be Moscow's appraisal of US intentions and its assessment of developments in the triangular relationship involving the US, China, and itself.

R. Progress in talks on strategic arms limitations might, by buttressing the USSR's sense of security, help to wear away some of its suspicion of US intentions. But problems in other areas where the political interests of the two countries are deeply engaged may prove to be of a more intractable sort. The conflict of interests in the Middle East seems likely to be prolonged. This may be true also in Europe where the Russians have an interest in the kinds of agreements which contribute to the security of the Soviet sphere but not in a genuine European settlement.

S. Whether the future will bring a more meaningful modification of the Soviet international outlook seems likely to depend ultimately on the USSR's internal evolution. And here the crucial question may be how the Soviet leaders deal with the problem of adaptive change in

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Soviet society, including the problem of economic modernization: by minimal measures or by serious reform. The entrenched bureaucratic oligarchy now in charge is resistant to change. Among the younger men in the Politburo who now seem most likely to take over from the aging top leadership there may be some who harbor reformist views. But such tendencies, if they exist, are not now in evidence.

T. Thus, for the foreseeable future at any rate, Soviet policy, for reasons deeply rooted in the ideology of the regime and the world power ambitions of its leaders, will remain antagonistic to the West, and especially to the US. The gains the Soviets have made in relative military power, together with the heightened confidence these gains have inspired, will lead them to press their challenge to Western interests with increasing vigor and may in some situations lead them to assume greater risks than they have previously. At the same time, their policies will remain flexible, since they realize that in some areas their aims may be better advanced by policies of détente than by policies of pressure. They will remain conscious of the great and sometimes uncontrollable risks which their global aims could generate unless their policies are modulated by a certain prudence in particular situations.