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## BASIC FACTORS AND MAIN TENDENCIES IN CURRENT SOVIET POLICY

### NOTE

This paper considers in broad perspective the principal factors which underlie the USSR's external policies at present and its aims and intentions with respect to certain key areas and issues. As such, while it suggests the limits within which Soviet policies are likely to operate, it does not estimate likely Soviet conduct and positions in detail. In view of the intimate interaction between Soviet and American policies, this could not be done in any case without specific assumptions about American policy and actions.

### PRINCIPAL OBSERVATIONS

A. Ideology in the Soviet Union is in a certain sense dead, yet it still plays a vital role. This paradox explains much about the nature of Soviet society and the USSR as a world power today. While the regime's doctrines now inhibit rather than promote needed change in the system, the leaders continue to guard them as an essential support to their rule. They also view developments at home and abroad mainly within the conceptual framework of the traditional ideology. This fact will continue to limit the possibilities of Soviet-American dialogue.

B. Changes in the system and the society have probably made collective leadership of the Party Politburo less vulnerable to new attempts to establish a personal dictatorship. This seems particularly true so long as the men who now comprise the leadership remain. Nevertheless, a crisis within the present leadership, accompanied by high domestic tensions and greater unpredictability of external policy, could occur at any time without warning. If stability of the leadership continues, a relatively deliberate, bureaucratically compromised manner of decisionmaking will also continue.

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C. The Soviet leaders face severe problems at home. A decline in the rate of economic growth is tightening the perennial squeeze on resource allocation. Dissidence and alienation in the professional classes is of growing concern to the Soviet leaders. Generally speaking, however, they are not at this time constrained by domestic problems from continuing the general line of foreign policy they have followed in recent years.

D. The leadership believes that the USSR's net power position in the world, as affected by both military and political factors, has improved in the years since the Cuban missile crisis. But this is qualified by instability in its main security sphere in Eastern Europe and by increased strains in the Soviet economy and society. This appraisal by the Soviet leaders probably argues for continuing an external policy of cautious opportunism and limited pressures, perhaps with some increased watchfulness against the development of uncontrolled risks.

E. There is a tendency in Soviet foreign policy to give increased weight to geopolitical considerations as against the traditional conception Moscow has had of itself as the directing center of a world revolutionary movement. This is evident in the concentration of diplomatic and aid efforts in recent years on countries around the southern periphery of particular strategic interest to the USSR. It is seen also in the guidance given to most Communist parties to pursue moderate tactics, which are now more compatible with Soviet foreign policy interests.

F. Soviet aims to bring about a European settlement which would secure the USSR's hegemony in Eastern Europe, obtain the withdrawal of US forces, and isolate West Germany have suffered a severe setback because of the action taken to suppress Czechoslovakia's attempt to follow an independent course. For the present, the Soviets are unlikely to be responsive to any new Western initiatives to promote a European settlement, unless the West seems willing to contemplate recognition of the Soviet sphere in Eastern Europe and of the division of Germany.

G. The Soviets have a double concern in the Middle East at present: to keep their risks under control and to do this in such a manner as to avoid diminishing the influence they have won with the Arab

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States. Should renewed hostilities occur, the USSR might be drawn into assisting the defense of the Arabs, but it would not want to run the political and military risks of joining in attacks on Israel or actually threatening its survival. At that stage, the Soviets would probably collaborate tacitly with the US to control the situation.

H. Beginning as an attempt to move into the vacuum left by the end of Western colonialism, Soviet policy in Asia in recent years has been geared increasingly to the containment of China. Nevertheless, the Soviets still act in particular situations, including Vietnam, basically on the premise that the Soviet-American relationship in Asia is competitive. The major risks which may eventually arise from the growth of Chinese power, however, may persuade them to move toward some tacit collaboration.

I. Though the inducements to reach a strategic arms limitation agreement with the US are probably stronger at this time than ever before, Moscow's policy-bureaucratic argument over this issue is not resolved. The Soviets probably hope that talks themselves, even if no agreement is reached, will ease the pressures of the arms race by slowing US decisions on new programs.

J. Even though the Soviet system appears ripe for change because it is now poorly suited to managing a complex industrial society, its rulers remain tenacious in defending their monopoly of power and acutely fearful of adaptive change. The wider involvement of the USSR in world affairs and possible shifts in world power relations may eventually generate stronger pressures for change. Short of this, the outlook is for chronic tensions in Soviet-American relations, perhaps caused more frequently by events over which neither side has much control.

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