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Soviet Foreign Policy

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SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY

THE PROBLEM

To examine recent trends in Soviet foreign policy and their bearing on the situation within the Soviet leadership, and to estimate the course of the USSR's policies over the next year or two.

SUMMARY

A. The Soviets have registered no really significant foreign policy success in recent years. It is true that there has been an increase of their influence in certain areas, especially in states on the USSR's southern periphery and in the Middle East, and that they have been able to make some progress in the pursuit of their aims in Western Europe. But Sino-Soviet relations have continued to deteriorate, the trend toward declining Soviet authority in the Communist world has not abated, and Soviet policy in the Third World has met with few particular triumphs and has encountered a number of setbacks.

B. The present collective leadership has survived for three years and no early return to one-man rule seems in prospect. We do believe, however, that there are persistent disagreements within high councils. Some of these involve domestic issues, such as the problem of resource allocation and of relations between the political and military leaderships, which have an important bearing on the USSR's international position. Others sometimes arise directly from questions of foreign policy, such as Soviet conduct during the 1967 crisis in the Middle East.

C. The Soviet leaders have not outgrown a dogmatic attitude that the world should conform to the Soviet image of it, but their foreign policies often reflect an understanding that there are definite limits to their ability to shape and exploit the course of international events. We believe that this ambivalence will persist for some time and will be

evident in the way in which the Soviet leaders grapple, or fail to grapple, with the issues of Soviet foreign policy. Toward the US, for example, it will probably be evident in the USSR's anxiety to avoid crises which could lead to a confrontation, but, at the same time, its disinclination to seek a significant improvement of relations, its reluctance to accept extensive arms control and disarmament measures, and its probable refusal to try to bring any real pressure on Hanoi to modify its terms for a settlement in Vietnam. Elsewhere, it is likely to be evident in a prudent approach to China, ambiguous policies in the Arab States, and an active though wary campaign to expand Soviet influence in the Third World.

DISCUSSION

1. The present period of Soviet history has assumed much of the character of a stable but uninspiring interregnum. No single figure has been able to dominate the political scene as Khrushchev once did, and the country has had to function without the kind of forceful direction of policy that such a figure can provide. The present leaders, repudiating Khrushchev's excesses of style and extremes of policy, have chosen to reign as a committee and to govern through compromise and consensus. They seem to recognize the complexity of the problems facing them and generally to appreciate the limitations placed by time and circumstance on their ability to seek new ways or to find new purposes. It is true, in any case—in contrast to the notable series of changes which occurred in the aftermath of the death of Stalin—that the main lines of Soviet doctrine and policy have remained substantially unaltered in the roughly three years since the fall of Khrushchev. And nowhere is this more apparent than in the USSR's approach to the great issues and events of world politics.

I. THE POST-KHRUSHCHEV RECORD

2. To most of the Soviet leaders, the view from Moscow could not have seemed very good in the early fall of 1964. Khrushchev was still seeking in the main to recover from past failures—China from 1960 onwards, Berlin in 1961, Cuba in 1962—and he exhibited few signs of having in mind any very promising proposals for the future. Many of his approaches to problems must have seemed to his colleagues to be not only unorthodox but unrewarding. His determined efforts to rush toward the formal excommunication of China were actually losing ground for the USSR within the international movement. His flirtation with West Germany in the summer of 1964 was worrying his friends at home and alarming his allies in East Germany. And his apparently growing willingness to abandon Vietnam to the Chinese and the Americans smacked of a retreat which would not only violate the concept of doctrinal brotherhood but also damage the USSR's standing as a great power.

3. Khrushchev's successors set about immediately after his removal to restore convention, consistency, and momentum to Soviet foreign policy. Their first concern was to curtail the spread of disarray within the Communist world and to restore the good name of the USSR as the leading Communist power. To these ends, they called off the clamorous campaign against Peking and strongly proclaimed renewed interest in Vietnam. They surely understood that these actions might lead to some deterioration of relations with the US, but did not seem to believe that they would greatly increase the risks of confrontation. On the contrary, while probably impatient with Khrushchev's intermittent appeals for detente with the US, the new Soviet leaders also clearly disliked his impulsive and occasionally risky behavior and hoped that a more prudent course would enable them to avoid international crises directly involving both the US and the USSR. They believed that Khrushchev had been insufficiently "revolu-

tionary" in his handling of Communist affairs but at times overly provocative in his dealings with the West, and they hoped somehow to redress the balance.

4. The early hopes of the new leadership for improved Soviet fortunes abroad have scarcely been fulfilled, and the record of Soviet foreign policy since 1964 must now be viewed in Moscow with, at best, mixed feelings. In the area of first concern, relations within the Communist world, there has been considerable improvement in the USSR's relative status vis-a-vis China. This has come about partly because of Moscow's insistence on unified Communist support of Hanoi, a policy which has contributed to the willingness of several Asian parties to move away from Peking. But the improvement in the Soviet position has been the consequence mainly of China's own conduct rather than because of any appreciable increase in the USSR's international standing. Sino-Soviet relations have, in fact, continued to deteriorate and the problem remains a serious one for the Soviet leaders. Moreover, the commitment to support North Vietnam involved a miscalculation, i.e., the Soviet leaders' expectation of an early Communist victory in the South and their failure to foresee direct and massive US involvement in the war. And though, as seen from Moscow, the war in Vietnam has had its advantages, particularly in terms of what the Soviets perceive to be the increasing isolation of the US, it has had its adverse effects as well. Chances of future difficulties and dangers, especially vis-a-vis the US, almost certainly appear to the Soviets to be growing.[1]

5. Elsewhere in the Communist world, the trend toward declining Soviet authority, already well underway in Khrushchev's time, has not been arrested. There have been conspicuous absences from Soviet-sponsored international Communist conferences, and enthusiasm in other parties for Moscow's handling of its Middle Eastern policies has been noticeably subdued. Rumania's demonstrations of independence have continued, major examples being its diplomatic recognition of West Germany and its deviant policy toward Israel. And the USSR's problems with Castro's Cuba—particularly concerning the proper "revolutionary" policy to follow in Latin America—persist and have become more open.

6. Soviet policy in the Third World can claim few particular triumphs in the post-Khrushchev period. The campaign to normalize relations and lay the basis for expanded influence in neighboring states has made some progress, especially in Iran and Turkey; efforts to bolster the USSR's international prestige were well served by Moscow's success in arranging a cease-fire between India and Pakistan in 1965. But the Soviets have also suffered a number of serious setbacks in the Third World, as in Ghana and Indonesia. Moreover, while it had once appeared that the present Soviet leaders were approaching their Third World problems with greater caution and selectivity than Khrushchev, their judgment was called into question by the role they played in the Middle East crisis of 1967. Moscow apparently could not resist the opportunity to manipulate Arab-Israeli tensions,

[1] For a fuller discussion of Soviet policies concerning Vietnam, see SNIE 11-11-67, "Soviet Attitudes and Intentions Toward the Vietnam War," dated 4 May 1967, SECRET.

but the war which followed, and the defeat of the Arab forces in that war, were developments which the USSR did not desire, initially did not foresee, and, later, could not forestall.

7. It is in Western Europe that current policies have appeared most promising. The Soviet leaders have come to appreciate the grave risks involved in Soviet threats and demonstrations of power—as in Berlin—and to comprehend that such tactics only serve to consolidate the Western alliance and the American presence in Europe. Their aims have remained the same—to isolate West Germany, disrupt NATO, and severe the close ties between Europe and the US—but they have in recent years generally refrained from bellicose behavior. They have sought instead to exercise influence through more active participation in conventional European politics and diplomacy, through the cultivation of de Gaulle and France, and, in general, through emphasis on the desirability of an all-European detente and security system. And largely because these tactics have coincided with a changing climate of European opinion, there has been, in fact, a rising interest in Western Europe in some form of settlement with the USSR.

8. Soviet emphasis on detente in Europe has not been accompanied by any comparable emphasis on a resolution of differences with the US. On the contrary, Soviet leaders have publicly asserted that no such resolution is even conceivable so long as the US is involved in the war in Vietnam. But they have also indicated (and, during the Middle East crisis, demonstrated) a strong desire to keep the lines open to Washington. And though they have at times insisted that US-Soviet relations must remain frozen for the duration, they have been willing to conclude specific agreements (e.g., on the peaceful uses of outer space) and to negotiate about others (e.g., nuclear nonproliferation) when they saw larger advantage to Soviet policy. Thus, if Khrushchev demonstrated his ambivalence toward the US by sometimes speaking as a friend while more often behaving like an enemy, the present leaders have perhaps demonstrated a similar state of mind by tending in some ways to do the opposite. In any case, it is clear that the leadership has been unable to resolve the contradictory demands of a policy which seeks, on the one hand, gains against the US in Europe and Southeast Asia and elsewhere and, on the other, a tacit understanding with the US to avoid measures and countermeasures which would seriously risk major international crises.

II. FOREIGN POLICY AND THE LEADERSHIP

9. It has never been possible to assess the precise impact of Soviet foreign policy on the course of internal Soviet politics, or vice versa; the intertwining of domestic and international policy questions with purely internal politcal concerns is too intricate. Individual leaders seize on particular policy issues as a pretext to embarrass or defeat political rivals, and questions of policy often become only incidental to the struggle for power. It is also obvious that some of the top Soviet leaders become identified with a point of view and a set of policies and that

their political fortunes can rise or fall partly on the basis of the success or failure of these policies. Certainly among the circumstances responsible for Khrushchev's downfall were the failure in 1962 of his boldest foreign initiative, the Cuban missile venture, and the apparent failure in 1963 of his greatest domestic program, the campaign to raise agricultural production.

10. The collective leadership has survived longer than many observers anticipated. It has done so in part, perhaps, because it works; the leadership has for the most part been stable and its policies, though mostly undramatic, have generally achieved some measure of success. It has also done so because none of the leaders has as yet displayed the power, fortitude, or even the desire to upset existing arrangements. It has almost certainly not done so, however, because of any dearth of controversy within high councils. On the contrary, there appear to be at least four or five major areas of debate and discontent within the leadership, some of which involve, either directly or indirectly, major questions of foreign policy.

11. Economic questions, many of which have an important bearing on the USSR's posture abroad, have been the subject of disputes within the Soviet elite for some time. Indeed, such questions as how much emphasis to attach to one or another economic program, and how best to proceed with the allocation of investment priorities, were central to much of the debate and rancor which surrounded Khrushchev. In order to advance his favorite domestic programs, especially in agriculture, Khrushchev was willing at one point to risk considerable controversy by seeking to cut back investment in defense and, as a corollary of this, to ease relations with the US. Khrushchev's successors are much less willing to provoke controversy, more prone to bureaucratic compromise, and less inclined to search for quick and dramatic solutions to complex problems. Nevertheless, they too are plagued by disagreements over how best to divide the nation's material resources. Thus, they have not as yet been able to agree on the final version of the Five-Year Plan for 1966-1970, and they have continued to dodge a number of painful decisions simply by assigning high priorities to a broad variety of competing goals, including defense, heavy industry, agriculture, and the consumer.[2]

12. Relations between the Soviet military establishment and the political leadership appear to have been relatively harmonious in recent years, largely because the politicians have been responsive to the opinions and budgetary claims of the military. But the scope of military authority in managing the armed forces and the role of professional military opinion in framing policy are questions which remain sources of potential discord. There have been occasional signs that the resource allocation issue remains a focal point of tension. The current question of the nature and extent of future Soviet antiballistic missile (ABM) deployment, and whether to discuss this and other arms control issues with

[2] For a more extensive treatment of economic issues and of Soviet economic policies generally see NIE 11-5-67, "Soviet Economic Problems and Prospects," dated 25 May 1967, SECRET.

the US, seems to have led to apprehension within the military and perhaps some dissension within the leadership as well.[3]

13. Concerning specific questions of foreign policy, disagreement within the leadership probably tends in the main to focus on particular issues and events as they arise. The leadership's handling of the Middle East crisis, for example, was severely criticized during the June meeting of the party Central Committee. We do not know whether the critic, Nikolai Yegorychev, who subsequently was dismissed from his important party position, had charged the senior leadership with failing adequately to support the Arabs, or conversely, had complained that the USSR had been overextended and overcommitted to the Arab side. Rumors in Moscow at the time suggested the former, perhaps because Yegorychev has long been identified with a group in the party which seems in general to have favored a harder line both at home and abroad.

14. We believe that in Soviet politics there are, in fact, those who normally respond to issues as traditionalists, i.e., with ideological rigor and bureaucratic conservatism, and others who are willing to stretch doctrine and entertain certain unorthodox departures in policy. But we do not think that all Soviet leaders can be placed in one or the other category or that such a division reflects so simple a matter as a split between militants and moderates.

15. Discontent with Soviet actions during the Arab-Israeli war may indeed have been strongest among the traditionalists, some of whom apparently fear that a US-imperialist tide is sweeping over the earth and that—as in the Middle East—Soviet policies and Soviet power have been inadequate to check or reverse its spread. But the principal architects of Soviet policies—the dominant senior group in the Politburo, i.e., Brezhnev, Kosygin, Podgorny, and Suslov—could by no means be lumped together simply as antitraditionalists. Though these four men apparently were united in their determination to avoid Soviet embroilment in the Arab-Israeli war, disagreements among them on other issues are probably not uncommon. None of these men, however, appears to be an extremist and they all seem to be near the middle of the Soviet political spectrum.

16. Probably in part because of this, the present Soviet leadership has so far managed to avoid the kind of intense debate over policy issues and maneuvering for political advantage which leads to irreconcilable factionalism and wholesale political purge. But the recent reduction of status of Politburo member Aleksandr Shelepin and some of his closest followers testified to the continued existence of political tension at top levels. And if the economy should once again falter, or if the present leadership should encounter serious reverses abroad, the chances would increase of intensified quarrels which could bring changes at the top.

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[3] For a fuller account of political-military relations in the USSR, see NIE 11-4-67, "Main Trends in Soviet Military Policy," dated 20 July 1967, pp. 13-14, SECRET.

III. CURRENT ISSUES OF POLICY

17. Like Khrushchev and Stalin before them, the present leaders would like to see Soviet power and ideology become dominant on a world scale. This, at any rate, is a goal which the Soviets continue implicitly to maintain and an achievement which they no doubt continue to promise themselves. As a real prospect, however, the notion of a worldwide Soviet triumph has long since lost much of its substance and virtually all its immediacy. Too many things have happened in recent years—too much trouble with the economy, too many rows with the Chinese and within the international movement, and too few gains against the West—to permit any responsible Soviet leader to view the future with the kind of simplistic optimism once expressed by Khrushchev.

18. But if the Soviets now understand that there are definite limits to their ability to shape and exploit the course of events abroad, they have not as yet shown signs of accepting this appreciation gracefully. They sometimes seem most reluctant to match their ambitions to their means; old habits and old doctrines apparently die hard in the USSR, as elsewhere. Consequently, Soviet foreign policies now seem to reflct both a new sophistication (a more realistic and flexible awareness of national interests) and an old simplicity (the dogmatic insistence that the world conform to the Soviet image of it). We expect, in general, that this ambivalence will persist for some time and will continue to be evident in the way in which the Soviet leaders grapple—or fail to grapple—with the international issues certain to confront them.

19. *Military Policy.* The Soviet leaders have always conceived of military power as an essential element of their foreign policy and, since World War II, have viewed the balance of forces with the US as a factor of major influence on the course of world politics. But the present leaders, while no less concerned with the USSR's military posture than their predecessors, apparently now recognize that the impressive buildup of Soviet strategic strength will not necessarily bring gains in foreign policy. They may already have decided that, however essential to national security, the achievement of a rough strategic parity with the US is unlikely in itself to bring them appreciably closer to the fulfillment of their international objectives, and that, especially for their purposes in the Third World, greater attention will have to be paid to the development of ground and naval forces.[4] Soviet military leaders have been displaying grow-

[4] Brig. Gen. P. D. Wynne, Jr., for the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, USAF, believes this paragraph seriously underestimates the positive relationship between growing Soviet strategic capabilities and the foreign policy of the USSR, and implies a lack of Soviet appreciation for the significance in international affairs of a markedly improved Soviet strategic posture. He would, therefore, delete the second and third sentences and substitute the following:

> "The present leaders, no less sensitive than their predecessors to the relationship between the USSR's military posture and their freedom of action in dealing with the West, apparently recognize that a continuing buildup of Soviet strategic strength will support foreign policy objectives. They may already have decided that achievement of a credible counterforce, damage-limiting capability against the US would be worth the effort in view of the strong backup this would provide for more aggressive pursuit of objectives in other areas of the world utilizing specialized ground, naval, and tactical air force elements."

ing interest in broadening the range of Soviet military capabilities, and the leadership as a whole evidently has become increasingly concerned with the problems of how best to meet contingencies short of general war.[5]

20. *Arms Control.* The USSR does not view arms control as a problem of great urgency. It does see, however, some political profit in disarmament negotiations and in US-Soviet agreement on certain limited forms of control, such as a nuclear nonproliferation treaty. Concerning measures which might prove to be politically disadvantageous, the Soviets are likely simply to stall or reject. Thus, for example, proposals to restrain the world arms trade are not likely to appeal to the Soviets since such trade and aid is clearly regarded in Moscow as the USSR's primary political tool in the Third World. And concerning measures of greater scope, such as the control of strategic weapons, the Soviets are likely to proceed with great caution, suspicion, and reluctance. It is possible that they might decide to negotiate about such matters (including the ABM question), but for the present we think the chances are slight that they would be willing to agree to any comprehensive program of strategic arms control.

21. *Vietnam.* A prime concern of the Soviet leaders about their involvement in the war in Vietnam is simply that they might become embroiled in situations which they could not control. Neither the US nor North Vietnam, the principal actors in the conflict, is very susceptible to Soviet influence; either of them could behave independently in a way which could test the USSR's resolve, strain its resources, and risk its direct involvement. But, if uncomfortable about the degree of their commitment to an ally which has a strong and difficult will of its own and which pursues a cause (control of the South) which is not of vital concern to the USSR, the Soviets nonetheless see no acceptable alternatives to their present policies. Almost certainly, they hope Hanoi or Washington, or both, will some day make a political solution to the war possible. In the meantime, they will seek to persuade the US not to escalate the conflict any further and to agree to terms for a settlement which would be acceptable to North Vietnam. But they will probably not try to bring any real pressure on Hanoi to modify its terms for such a settlement; they are not anxious to present themselves in the role of an "appeaser"—in this way jeopardizing whatever influence they have been able to build up—and they are certainly aware that such pressure would probably be ineffective in present circumstances.

22. *China.* The USSR's delight at the way China was able to dissipate its resources in the Communist world by behaving bizarrely at home seems to have been succeeded by concern over China's rabid hostility, bewilderment over the course of events inside China, and apprehension over what might happen next. Over the last few years, the Soviets have strengthened their armed forces along the Sino-Soviet frontier and in Mongolia and—though probably anticipating only border skirmishing—are probably preparing for more serious contingencies. But we do not know whether the Soviets have plans for direct intervention in

[5] See NIE 11-4-67, "Main Trends in Soviet Military Policy," dated 20 July 1967, pp. 3, 20-21, SECRET.

China in the event of anarchy or civil war. We believe that the present Soviet leaders, who have been relatively restrained in their approach to the Chinese problem to date and who have been fairly prudent in their handling of world affairs generally, would seek to avoid direct involvement.

23. *Europe.* The Soviet leaders appear to be convinced that their generally conciliatory approach to Western Europe is a promising one and seem to recognize that they would have much to lose and little to gain by reverting to a harsher policy. They will probably continue for some time their present line of trying to persuade the West Europeans that the US is beginning to disengage from Europe and that detente with a benevolent Soviet Union is an ever growing possibility. While a formal multilateral conference on European security is not likely in the near future, an increase of bilateral contacts and negotiations between West European countries and the USSR seems probable. The Soviets will almost certainly continue publicly to treat West Germany as a pariah, but will privately seek to explore the possibility of movement in Bonn toward acceptance of the status quo in Germany.

24. The USSR's efforts to convince the Eastern European States to follow a uniform Soviet-devised foreign policy have encountered resistence in recent years, and the Soviets have had to tailor some of their own policies to meet the needs of relations between Warsaw Pact States. Soviet tactics in negotiations with the West on such issues as nonproliferation occasionally show evidence of delays imposed by consultations and frictions within the Pact. At the same time, the Soviets have scored some successes, most notably in slowing down the movement in Eastern Europe toward broader and freer contacts with West Germany and other West European States. In addition, as a result of the crisis in the Middle East, they have been able to establish unusually close rapport with Yugoslavia concerning policies toward the Arab World. But gains such as these may prove to be transitory; there appears to be little that Moscow can do to prevent the East Europeans from behaving in increasingly independent ways when their national interests so dictate. Rumania—which has already formally recognized West Germany and which publicly refused to align itself with the USSR vis-a-vis the Arab-Israeli war—is by now the classic case in point.

25. *The Middle East.* In the wake of the Arab-Israeli conflict, Moscow appears to be taking stock of its policies in this area. The decisions taken at once to start some replacement of military equipment were probably provisional, intended primarily as a political holding action and not as an encouragement to continued Arab militancy. But the Soviets must recognize that, if they wish to enlarge their influence in the area, an aim they are very unlikely to abandon, they have no alternative to continuing to work with the radical Arabs. Probably as they move to repair this relationship, they will try hard to gain more direct influence over client governments and military establishments. But it is still unlikely that they will wish to do this by entering into actual military alliances or acquiring military bases in Arab countries. The ambiguities in Soviet-Arab relations will remain. Moscow will continue to exploit anti-Western attitudes in

Arab countries, but it will not run the military risks or accept the political costs of identifying itself with Arab aspirations to destroy Israel. It follows also, however, that—barring a major change in Arab attitudes—the Soviets will not give very much help to diplomatic efforts to move toward a basic settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.[6]

26. *The Third World.* Partly as a result of their recent experiences in the Middle East, the Soviet leaders may have undertaken a new and more searching look at their policies in the Third World. Indeed, there may be considerable discontent with the commitment of Soviet resources and prestige to clients whose interest may be essentially different from those of the USSR and whose conduct can be both unpredictable and uncontrollable. Some may argue that more caution should be exercised in involving Soviet policy with the great variety of so-called "national liberation" forces in the Third World. The question has probably arisen as to what degree of risk—military and political—to assume in honoring Soviet commitments, or what Soviet clients may think are commitments. But, even if such questions are under review, it seems very unlikely to us that the Soviet leaders would as a consequence make any very dramatic changes in policy. Any abrupt cutback in the USSR's material support of and political relationships with the Third World would jeopardize the heavy investment already made. Moreover, the Soviet leaders are almost certainly convinced that, as a great power, the USSR has a legitimate interest in practically all areas of the world and a political need to assert that interest.

[6] A long-range view of Soviet policies and aims is contained in NIE 11-6-67, "Soviet Strategy and Intentions in the Mediterranean Basin," dated 1 June 1967, SECRET. Although completed before the June 1967 hostilities, the main judgments in this paper remain valid. See also SNIE 11-13-67, "Probable Soviet Objectives in Rearming the Arabs," dated 20 July 1967, SECRET.

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