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THE SOVIET ASSESSMENT OF THE US

KEY JUDGMENTS

Paragraphs 1-42 of this Estimate are an examination of the Soviet assessment of US strengths and weaknesses as these affect both the international "correlation of forces" and US attitudes toward the USSR in the context of detente. The major implications of this assessment for Soviet policy are as follows:

- Soviet leaders, comparing their own domestic and international positions with those of the US, believe that the balance sheet is changing in the USSR's favor. Despite problems of their own and the greater realism in Soviet thinking that has accompanied the USSR's expanded involvement in world affairs, Soviet leaders remain convinced that their system will, by degrees, ultimately predominate. But there are important areas—economic, technological, military, and diplomatic—in which they continue to believe the US has great strengths and the capacity to maintain vigorous competition with the USSR. They recognize that US leaders remain determined to sustain the international role of a superpower, and they suspect that recent setbacks, especially the collapse in Vietnam, may strengthen this determination and public support for it. Thus they do not accept, as a basis for policy making, that the US is in permanent decline.
- The Soviet leaders perceive the present US-Soviet relationship in strategic nuclear weapons to be one of rough balance. Although they may now entertain hopes—and, in the view of some

Agencies, already believe—that US resolve as a strategic competitor is weakening, they know realistically that the US need not concede the USSR a superior position in the next decade. Thus they believe that in areas unconstrained by agreement they will have to compete vigorously to deny the US any strategic nuclear advantage it might seek by exploiting its technological strengths, and also to keep open the possibility of advantages for the USSR.¹

- The Soviet leaders recognize that US-Soviet relations are particularly sensitive to developments in Europe, and the USSR's policy toward Western Europe aims at a steady buildup of its influence without arousing alarm in the US and Western Europe. The Soviets seek in MBFR a reduction in American military presence and influence and limitations on West German armed forces. The Soviets have rejected Western proposals for substantially asymmetrical ground force reductions. They will continue to argue for a limited, mostly symbolic, agreement as a first step. They evidently anticipate a Western offer of nuclear elements and are probably prepared to bargain about trading asymmetrical reductions of ground forces in return for reduction in American nuclear forces.
- There is constant conflict in the minds of the Soviet leaders between the temptation to seize tactical opportunities as they arise, in Europe and elsewhere, and their desire to preserve profitable relations with the US and the West generally. If the Soviets perceive a decline in US readiness to react against developments such as those in Portugal, if the benefits of detente should appear to be diminishing drastically, or if more militant attitudes should become dominant among the new leaders soon to emerge, these tensions could be resolved in favor of a more assertive policy. But at present the Soviets remain concerned to preserve the benefits of the detente relationship, and to avoid arousing negative US reactions.
- Because the Soviet leaders can foresee China's remaining indefinitely a fairly useful lever in US hands, they will be conscious of the need to be somewhat more considerate of US attitudes and interests in certain policy areas than they would otherwise be. It will be clear to them that in some areas, such as

¹ A more extensive discussion of the Soviet view of strategic competition with the US, including substantive differences within the intelligence community, will appear in NIE 11-3/8-75, "Soviet Forces for Intercontinental Conflict Through the Mid-1980s."

Southeast Asia, the weakening of the US role is more likely to provide opportunities for the Chinese than for themselves.

- The Soviet leaders may believe that the growth of their own strategic power and constraints limiting the US capacity for armed intervention abroad will give them more room for maneuver in support of their clients. This, however, is a proposition that the present leaders would want to, and as occasion arises well may, test incrementally. They recognize the dangers in challenging US resolve in such areas of major US strategic interest as the Middle East or Korea, or in the delicate case of post-Tito Yugoslavia.
- While regarding the US as their adversary, the Soviet leaders do not welcome those American political divisions that threaten the bilateral relationship Moscow has cultivated with Washington in the 1970s. They will be hoping for the election in 1976 of the presidential candidate, whatever his party affiliation, who is in their view most committed to US-Soviet detente and best able to secure a firm consensus behind this policy. Between now and November 1976 they will be giving some thought to the possible impact of their own policy actions on the election's outcome. Their decisions in this regard will depend on whether they estimate that detente as a contested political issue will be affected by the voting results. If this is its reading, Moscow might make some extra effort to improve the atmosphere surrounding US-Soviet relations.
- As for Brezhnev's position, while his colleagues agree with him that detente now provides the most advantageous general framework for relations with the US, he probably feels a greater stake than they in achieving specific successes, the more so as he sees time running out on him and looks forward to his last Party Congress as General Secretary next February. The strength that he can muster behind this line depends upon both policy factors and political relationships. With regard to the latter most of the changes in Politburo membership in the last few years have worked to strengthen his personal authority. But as he grows older and less energetic, old loyalties and dependences may be eroding as his colleagues cast their minds forward to a post-Brezhnev period. With regard to policy, there is some evidence that he was embarrassed and weakened last winter by the US Trade Act affair. If so, he subsequently recovered,

only to suffer another setback with the 1975 harvest, which is a much more potent political issue than the ups and downs of dealing with the West.

- We believe that Brezhnev will approach a decision on SALT II, and thus the Summit, anxious to record a success, but with his political freedom of action more circumscribed than before. On balance, considering both the USSR's larger strategic and political interests in a SALT II agreement and what the Soviets would probably see as the consequences of failure, we think the USSR will be prepared to make some further concessions in the bargaining, although by no means to the extent of meeting all outstanding US demands. All agencies except CIA believe that; while desiring a SAL agreement, the Soviets will offer only minor concessions: they will refuse to accept any inhibitions on the improvement or modernization of their own strategic forces, and will continue to press for limitations on US cruise missile development. CIA believes that, in the end, the Soviets are likely to prove willing to make more than minor concessions on the key issues of cruise missiles and Backfire (although not to the extent of counting Backfire in the 2,400 aggregate).
- Should a SALT II agreement prove unattainable and the projected summit meeting not occur this winter, the Soviets would face serious problems. They realize that at least a year's wait would probably be necessary before another try. It is possible that in the pre-Congress politicking this failure, combined with other factors, would spark a serious challenge to Brezhnev's policies and leadership. Nevertheless, we think it more likely that the Politburo as a whole would prefer to minimize the internal political repercussions in order to keep detente intact as the USSR's general line and to preserve as much of its content as possible in the short run. In such circumstances, however, the Soviets would be even more alert to the possible further growth of anti-detente forces in American politics. If they perceived such a trend, there could easily be a growth of sentiment within the Politburo that the price of the present bilateral relationship was becoming too high. In this event, we must face the possibility of a harsher reaction marked by the stronger assertion and pursuit of Soviet interests in a number of arenas.

DISCUSSION

Introduction

1. "Whither the US?" is a question more than ever being asked in Moscow these days. The Soviet leaders realize that the answer to this question is also essentially the answer to the question "Whither detente?" an undertaking lying at the heart of Soviet foreign policy and having vital importance for Soviet domestic policy. Soviet definitions of detente with the US have taken various forms, but most basically detente means minimizing the risk of nuclear war and redirecting the global competition with the other superpower into safer channels, where the Soviets can pursue long-standing goals with instruments ranging from diplomacy to military pressures. Detente for the Soviets has also meant selective muting of their competition with the US in the pursuit of specific Soviet objectives in trade, technology, and political atmosphere. The Soviet leaders sense that US international and domestic difficulties that they would ordinarily welcome could have the effect of putting detente off the tracks. They recognize these difficulties have already helped to harden US resistance to detente. This problem, which would preoccupy Moscow at any time, does so even more now for a number of reasons:

- An assessment of the state of US-Soviet relations must be presented to the Party Congress in February 1976. It will make a great deal of difference to Brezhnev how convincingly

he can say, in what is likely to be his valedictory Congress, that the detente approach he has championed is achieving specific benefits without jeopardizing Soviet security interests.

- The projected 1975 summit meeting, the first full-dress one since the change of US Presidents in 1974, could give new momentum to the detente process or, particularly if it did not take place, add to the doubts now surrounding detente.
- A crucial factor in the meeting's political effect will be SALT II, agreement on which requires some hard decisions by both sides.
- It is understood in Moscow that the terms, conditions, and future of US-Soviet detente will be under debate in the 1976 election campaign.

Moscow's View of the International Setting

2. There is a common outlook among the Soviet leaders concerning major world trends and a strong consensus in favor of the detente course. This does not mean that there are no differences among them regarding the interpretation of events, the choice of specific policy decisions, or the price to be paid for the sake of maintaining detente. There must be such differences, given the manifold major issues—touching the sensitive areas of security, economic policy, and domestic controls—which detente raises.

Such important figures as Podgorny and Suslov, for example, have repeatedly stood out from the others as being relatively more negative in their estimates of the benefits and prospects of detente, or relatively more concerned that it will weaken the USSR's "ideological defenses." With regard to arms policy, the inclination of the Soviet military is to put maximum stress on the US military effort compared to the USSR's and to look hard for pitfalls in arms negotiations with the US.² There are likely to be at the top level, as we know there are at subordinate echelons, divergent opinions about the amount and the utility of the economic and technological assistance the USSR can look for from the US. Such factors as these limit Brezhnev's freedom of action to concert Soviet detente policy, as may his health and questions about his tenure. However, given his personal identification with the USSR's detente course, he will be inclined toward interpretations of US policy that enable him to portray detente as successful.

3. The Soviet leaders—whatever the shadings of difference among them—generally see the larger international setting that provides the framework for the US-Soviet relationship as favorable to the USSR. As the USSR's power and weight in the world have grown, so has Moscow's sense of long-term confidence. More than to any other single factor, this is ascribed to the improvement of the USSR's military position, especially in the strategic nuclear area. But the Soviets also find encouragement in a number of other perceived trends:

- that international relations are undergoing a "fundamental restructuring," in which the non-Communist industrial states are witnessing the crumbling of long-held positions vital to their economies and their international standing.
- that capitalist society is in crisis, a crisis possibly deeper and more long-lasting than those it has recurrently undergone in the past. Evidence of this are serious economic and mone-

² The Defense Intelligence Agency, the Acting Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army, the Director of Naval Intelligence, Department of the Navy, and the Acting Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, Department of the Air Force, wish to emphasize the fact that the top Soviet leadership, including the Soviet military, basically agrees on Soviet policies and objectives, and that the military plays a major role in shaping those policies and objectives.

tary dislocations, the accompanying widespread political and social turbulence, and the resulting erosion of the West's sense of common purpose.

- that the USSR, basing itself on the world's second largest economy, powerful strategic forces, and constantly improving conventional force capabilities, is gaining steadily in international stature.
- that the Soviet position in Eastern Europe is strong and has been further strengthened by a European security agreement that in effect confirms the division of Europe.

4. It is impossible to say how firmly and confidently the Soviets hold to these optimistic perspectives: they are also conscious of weaknesses of their own. Given the sense of still considerable US power, of the continuing limitations on their own power, and of the unpredictability and uncontrollability of many of the other factors in the international arena, the leaders are inclined to be fairly cautious in their expectations about being able to translate favorable trends into particular gains. Furthermore, the confidence arising from Western difficulties is undercut by such long-run problems of their own as China's bitter hostility and the lag in Soviet technology. And recent developments—the Sinai Accord, fresh uncertainties in Portugal, and most of all the 1975 Soviet harvest—are bound to reinforce this countereffect.

The Soviet Assessment of the Overall US Posture

5. The Soviets believe that detente has been "forced" on the US: in the words of one of the Soviet leaders, "the most powerful country of the capitalist world—the USA—has been forced to talk with us as equals." Moscow believes that US power in the world has been reduced not only by the growth of Soviet power, but by other causes: the weakening of US leadership in its alliances; the resistance to US "domination" on the part of developing nations and regional groupings; and the pressure on the US monetary, raw materials and energy positions. The Soviets believe that, as a result of these and domestic US developments, they are dealing with a chastened US, a nation which has been obliged to recognize the limits of its power,

and one whose confidence in its old international role has been undermined. They also welcome signs that the utility of military power as an instrument of foreign policy has come into question in the US. Out of all this has come, according to this view, a more "realistic" American foreign policy approach, including, most importantly, a US realization of the need for detente in US-Soviet relations.

6. While Soviet analysis permits the USSR to judge that it may now be facing a less potent competitor, there is considerable ambivalence in their present perspectives arising out of two quite different kinds of considerations. First, the notion persists—and some Soviet leaders appear to give it greater weight than others—that "imperialism," in essence aggressive and expansionist, has not changed its character. At a less doctrinaire level, Soviet observers are often puzzled by turns in US policy which do not square with the conventional Soviet analysis of US aims and possibilities—hence the frequent references to the contradictions, inconsistencies, and "zig-zags" in US policy. Second, the Soviets would not in fact welcome a precipitous reduction of US international involvement at this stage, because this could have consequences inimical to their interests.

US Politics and Society

7. The social and political unrest which has marked the US scene in recent years is an easy opportunity for Soviet propaganda, but is also taken seriously as further evidence of the US' present weakened condition. Despite the trend toward a better informed and less stereotyped treatment of these subjects, Soviet observers usually underestimate the resilience of a pluralistic society and its ability to accommodate dissent. In a typical comment, a Soviet journalist recently summed up a tour of the US by saying that his "most general impression of present-day America is that it least of all resembles a country of serenity and satisfaction. On the contrary, it is all seething."

8. The Soviets believe that domestic dissent has had a corrosive, though not crippling, effect on US ability to act abroad, and has been a factor in turning the US Government toward improving relations with the USSR. They have been attentive to the part the anti-war protest movement played in forc-

ing US withdrawal from Vietnam. They have seized on signs of loss of public confidence in the political system and governmental institutions, devoting considerable coverage, for example, to the controversy over the role of US intelligence. Soviet commentary continues to dwell on the various well-known social issues that have arisen since the 1960s, but grudgingly concedes that the heat has gone out of some of them. Some of the more sober assessments issuing from Moscow are now allowing that the end of US involvement in Vietnam may contribute to a general easing of social tensions.

9. The outcome of the Watergate episode came as a surprise and a shock to Moscow and aroused strong anxiety about possible consequences for US-Soviet relations. The Soviets had assessed President Nixon as "pragmatic" and "realistic"—among the highest terms of praise they can confer on a Western statesman—and his administration had come to represent the kind of known quantity valued by the Kremlin's bureaucratic leadership. Their assessment tells them that one of Watergate's consequences has been to weaken the Presidency vis-a-vis Congress, which has limited the administration's ability to carry forward a detente policy.

10. The Soviets have been trying to make up lost ground in their appreciation of the Congressional role by, among other things, broadening direct contacts with members of Congress and putting more effort into studying its composition and proceedings. But the Congress obviously remains a highly uncertain quantity for Soviet analysts. Despite prior indications, there was surprise in Moscow that Congress was able in the end to overturn Administration plans for expanded US-Soviet trade and credits. Soviet observers have particular trouble, since it is outside their own experience, in grasping how interest groups influence policy through the legislature. They are evidently learning that changing Congressional coalitions form around different issues, making it hard to gauge its response in particular cases. Viewed from the standpoint of their own interests, the Soviets evidently find the Congress elected in 1974 a mixed bag: they welcome what they see as its increasing readiness to challenge Administration military spending and deployment proposals, but also believe that its generally more negative attitude toward US-Soviet

detente may mean trouble for them in arms control and trade negotiations.

11. It is partly because of Congress' diversity and unpredictability that the Soviets prefer a strong Presidency, assuming the President is a man they believe they can work with. Everything else being equal, their preference would also be for continuity in the office. The present Soviet estimate on the outcome of the 1976 Presidential election is guarded. The appraisals being forwarded by Dobrynin probably are no less tentative than those appearing in open Soviet publications, which have varied with fluctuations in US press reportage and the findings of the public opinion polls, on both of which they rely heavily. As of now, Soviet analysts are saying that the election could go either way, the critical factor being the degree of economic recovery between now and November 1976. This being so, the Soviets are taking care to allow for a number of contingencies, and have begun to take a close look at President Ford's potential opponents. Senator Kennedy has received friendly treatment in published commentaries, but a great deal more—all of it hostile—has been said, publicly and privately, about Senator Jackson than any of the others. Although some Soviets belittle his chances, others do not; and although some in Moscow are reported to believe that, as President, Jackson would have to adopt a more "realistic" stance toward the USSR, the Soviets undoubtedly do not want to see such a proposition tested.

US Military Capabilities and Intentions³

12. In trying to make judgments about future US resolve to remain a vigorous *strategic competitor*, the Soviets witness on the one hand strong pressures in the US to limit defense spending, already eroded by inflation, to reduce military commitment abroad, and to accept the fraying of US alliance relationships. On the other hand, they observe the US seeking improvements and innovations in weapons technology, funding new systems, and adjusting military doctrines in response to a new strategic environment. Soviet leaders do not know how these contradictory trends in US attitudes will net out during the next decade.

³ Issues raised in paragraphs 12-14 will receive fuller treatment in forthcoming NIE 11-3/8-75, "Soviet Forces for Intercontinental Conflict Through the 1980s."

13. Nevertheless, the Soviets have a high regard for the technical, industrial, and economic prowess of the United States and assume that the US will continue to improve its strategic posture. For example, the Soviets have shown great eagerness to stop, slow, or limit US development programs for the B-1 bomber, Trident SSBN, and strategic cruise missiles. They have also expressed concern about US programs to improve missile accuracy and the possibility that US policy on limited nuclear options will spur further weapons improvements.

14. The prevalent view among the Soviet leaders is that SALT has so far produced satisfactory results. Since Vladivostok, however, differences have arisen between the Soviet and US interpretations of those accords. Soviet sources have noted with some anxiety the public criticism of the understanding which has arisen in the US. While the Soviets still believe that a SALT II treaty based on their interpretation of Vladivostok would be desirable in both military and political terms, the more demanding elements of US interpretations have doubtless raised questions in Moscow about whether an agreement can be achieved.

15. How much anxiety announced changes in US nuclear employment policy actually arouse in Moscow is difficult to judge; the consternation registered by a variety of Soviet sources is to some degree propagandistic. Objections have been raised to the policy on both strategic and political grounds. With regard to the first, some Soviet commentators have asserted that the US by taking this step was edging away from "assured destruction" toward a counterforce and Limited Nuclear Options strategy. Although these statements may exaggerate real Soviet anxieties, there appears to have been substantial concern that the changes in US targeting and deployment principles would require an increase in numbers of US warheads and in weapons accuracy. The Soviets are doubtless more uneasy, however, over the implication that the US and its NATO allies will calculate that in the event of crisis the US could couple, at a lower perceived risk of escalation, the limited use of nuclear weapons with conventional defenses. They further see the US doctrinal modifications as manifesting an anti-Soviet political attitude that can complicate all their bilateral dealings with the US.

16. The Soviets believe that the relative balance of *conventional forces* is being improved by the increasing strength of their ground and air forces and by the steady growth of their naval capabilities.⁴ At the same time, however, they have a healthy respect for US military capabilities and do not doubt that the US has the physical and technical means to sustain and develop them further. For Moscow the question has become: does the US have the will to do so?

17. According to the Soviet analysis, a cardinal objective of US policy in recent years has been to make adjustments to insure that its role remains a powerful one. Close attention and much comment have also been devoted, however, to the contrary currents running through US public and Congressional opinion. The Soviets know that in the 1970s there is not the same support from these sources for military programs as there was throughout the postwar period into the 1960s. Soviet US-watchers have carefully chronicled the evidence of this, alluding to close Congressional struggles over military budgets, the Diego Garcia project, and the like, and they cite the economic and social needs which ought to make the US Government see the advantages in cutting back its arms expenditures.

18. But Soviet sources contend only that public and Congressional opposition to arms spending has grown, not that it has won the day. The so-called military-industrial complex in the US is said to be still highly influential, and it is regularly claimed that US defense spending is moving steadily upward. There is evidence that such claims are also employed in private budget discussions on Soviet force posture.

The US Economic Position

19. The Soviet leaders, most of them closely involved with economic issues throughout their political lives, pay special attention to the state of the US economy as a key index of overall US power. They have always had great respect for the capacity, diversity, and innovativeness of the US economy. Habitually preoccupied with comparisons of the US economy to their own, the Soviets

⁴ See NIE 11-14-75, "Warsaw Pact Forces Opposite NATO," and NIE 11-15-74, "Soviet Naval Policy and Programs," for fuller treatment of these topics.

see themselves currently running ahead in terms of overall rate of growth, but by other measures they continue to concede the lead to the US. Soviet publications regularly carry data which show a wide US lead in GNP and industrial production. The same holds true for farm output, where the comparison is painfully unfavorable, particularly in the recurrent years of poor harvests. The Soviets concede a substantial edge to the US in productivity, an index to which they assign increased weight as they seek to shift the emphasis in their own economy from extensive to intensive growth, and in managerial techniques, which they view as an important source of productivity gains.

20. The Soviet judgment concerning comparative economic strengths has shifted over the last few years as the US has been afflicted by serious domestic economic difficulties. Soviet commentators frequently make the additional point that the economies of the US and the other industrialized Western nations are now so fully interconnected that they inevitably encounter similar problems simultaneously, e.g., inflation and recession, whose solution therefore has become more complicated. A number of leading Soviet economists and political analysts have now concluded that present problems not only pose the most severe economic challenge the US has faced in the postwar period, but are no longer of a temporary character. Yet Soviet observers are subject to the same uncertainties, and the same tendency to revise their short-term prognoses in the light of new trends, as their Western counterparts. Whereas until recently, most Soviet commentators had predicted that "1975, like the previous year, would be one of the hardest in the entire postwar period," there are now signs that they are revising their expectations. Several high-level Soviet economists have acknowledged that the recovery in US industrial production has already begun. Meanwhile, the USSR's bad 1975 harvest will promote a downward revision of the Soviet estimate of comparative economic prospects, as will the adverse shift in the USSR's hard currency position.

21. In science and technology, Soviet respect for US capabilities is undimmed. Soviet observers concede that the US is the world leader in many areas of high technology such as computers, electronics, and chemical equipment, and is constantly moving

further ahead of the USSR. One Soviet Americanologist has acknowledged that, while the USSR has more or less reached the US level in the gross output of certain basic commodities, the US advantage in important areas of technology is actually growing. The proposition that the USSR has a long way to go to close the technology gap appears to be uncontested in Moscow.

22. The Soviet leaders undoubtedly have asked themselves whether or not they should not be seeking ways to exploit current US and Western economic difficulties. Indeed, a certain impatience is visible within Western Communist parties, and exists among the faithful in the USSR itself, on this score. A related question has also been posed: is the USSR not, by expanding its economic relations with the capitalist states, in effect helping them to lift themselves out of their economic slump? The Soviet Party's public response has been to counsel patience and restraint and to argue that, through its contributions to economic recovery in the West, the USSR is contributing to the relief of the hard-pressed working class.

23. But there are many indications that Soviet thinking on this matter is affected by other considerations. On the political level, Soviet commentators recall the causal connection between depression and rise of fascism in the 1930s and profess alarm about a possible recurrence. On the economic level, Soviet officials have shown concern that international economic instability could severely complicate Soviet trade objectives and long-range economic planning. In fact, the USSR faces a record hard-currency deficit in 1975 largely because of reduced Western demand for Soviet products, increased Soviet purchases of Western manufactures at inflated prices, and large-scale grain purchases from the West.

24. The Soviet leaders have given high priority to and expected much from the expansion of US-Soviet economic relations. They saw an opportunity to gain US Government support for long-term commitments by American companies that could be synchronized with their own economic plans and related to certain particularly large developmental schemes, especially in Siberia. Hardly less important were the potential political benefits they could see flowing from this: increased inter-

national acceptability, cultivation of a sympathetic constituency among US businessmen, and a larger US stake in its relations with Moscow. In the wake of US trade-credit legislation, there is more realism in Moscow about the future prospects for these relations. But if Moscow perceives that Congressional action will be put off until after the 1976 elections, the importance attached to expanding trade with the US will diminish somewhat, because by that time the USSR would be well into the Five-Year Plan now being developed. According to a Gosplan official, however, the policy of expanding long-term economic relations with the US cannot be changed because Gosplan views the US as the only country capable of providing the whole range of equipment, technology, and managerial know-how that the Soviet economy requires.

25. Skepticism about the economic benefits of detente is spreading, particularly among Soviet economists. Some Soviets have voiced an economic nationalist viewpoint, which sees a danger to the USSR's future control over its natural wealth in expanded East-West economic relations. There is, however, no sign that these fears enjoy strong support within the top leadership. Indeed, one Soviet official has said that Brezhnev and much of the Soviet elite continue to attach great importance to economic relations with the US as a key factor in getting the USSR out of its own economic difficulties. The fact that generally only the US has grain surpluses capable of meeting Soviet needs can only strengthen this view.

US Foreign Policy

26. Soviet analyses of US foreign policy during recent years have consistently seen its main line as an attempt to adapt to a changing international environment. This adaptation is said to amount to a change, begun under the Nixon Administration, in the whole structure of US foreign policy, aimed at preserving a powerful world role for the US through use of balance-of-power methods, best illustrated by the accommodation with China, and limitations on direct foreign involvement consonant with diminished resources and public support.

27. This Soviet interpretation of US policy became the dominant one in Moscow during the late 1960s and 1970s. It has been viewed as an improve-

ment on the grounds that it is based on a "proper" sense of the limitations of US power and on responsiveness to the Soviet detente approach. Yet even those most inclined to take this positive view are not convinced that these trends are set for good. The suspicion persists that the US will, in fact, not be satisfied to accommodate itself to international changes but will try to reverse them or to find ways to turn them to advantage, not just to maintain its power but to regain clear superiority over the USSR.

28. Developments during the last couple of years have introduced an additional element of uncertainty into Soviet thinking about the US. Taken together, many of these developments are regarded by the Soviets as a boon to themselves: US domestic tribulations, the weakening of NATO resulting from events in Portugal and the Greek-Turkish dispute, the collapse in Vietnam, and increasing US vulnerability in the face of OPEC. But these US setbacks also worry the Soviet leaders: they are fearful that the US, from an urge to recover its losses and restore its prestige, will take a harder stance in adversary situations; they believe that increased US preoccupation with domestic affairs and with shoring up the Atlantic Alliance has adversely affected the development of US-Soviet detente; and by and large, they are less confident that they can read the intentions of the Ford Administration than they were in the case of the Nixon Administration. Moreover, some signs suggest that questions have arisen among the Soviet leaders about the current detente balance sheet—whether the costs associated with it (e.g., the USSR's diminished position in the Middle East) and the constraints on Soviet behavior the US is asking for (e.g., vis-a-vis Portugal) are not sending the price of detente for Moscow appreciably higher.

29. *The US and Its Allies.* Although the Soviets recognize some easing of US-European strains in 1975, there is a real belief that the US position in Europe has eroded over the last decade. They attribute this trend to:

- The growth of their own power, together with the improved image of themselves they have succeeded in impressing on many Europeans.

- The loss of US prestige in European eyes as a result of its international reverses and domestic troubles.
- European doubts about the reliability of the US security commitment, accentuated by what Europeans see as the heavy emphasis in US policy on superpower relations.
- Stresses on US-European ties due to international monetary and energy problems, growing competition in the spheres of trade and technology, and European resistance to the influx of American investments. The process of European economic integration is now also seen as placing some burdens on US-European relations, instead of merely as a device promoted by the US for its own advantage.
- The weakening of NATO caused by Greece's partial withdrawal, Turkey's disaffection, and the change in Portugal.
- The divergence between US and West European interests in the Middle East.

30. Soviet observers are in no doubt, however, that the US continues to regard Europe as crucial to its national interests, and they see the US as now engaged in efforts to shore up its position there. What emerges from the variety of Soviet comments on these US measures is a sense that Moscow more than half believes that the US—by virtue of its political influence, its economic and technological superiority, and the Europeans' dependence on its military support—will succeed in doing so, at least in the near term. It is claimed, for example, that the European members of NATO have been increasing their military budgets under pressure from Washington. One commentary has noted that the US is now trying to obtain concessions from the West Europeans (and Japan) in such domains as reform of the international monetary system, foreign trade, and the system of governing foreign capital investments, and leaves the impression that because the economic positions of the others "have to some degree been weakened by the energy crisis and its consequences," the US might very well obtain what it is seeking. Furthermore, it has been noted in Moscow that the West Europeans had blamed US involvement in Vietnam for its neglect of Western

Europe, and that the prospect that the US may now pay more attention to the area has been greeted with satisfaction.

31. Weighing the present US position on Europe against their own, the Soviets are almost certainly convinced that they too have made some recent progress. They see that the West European states are more and more inclined to set their own courses in dealings with the USSR, and they think that their prospects are good for obtaining a bigger voice in the political, economic, and security affairs of the area. Fears are also expressed, however, that popular disenchantment with the prevailing order in Europe could provoke a dangerous revival of the extreme right, and some have recognized the risk of a backlash from the US and the West Europeans if the USSR tries to push the Communist cause too hard, as for instance in Portugal. Meanwhile, much as it would like to see the US sooner or later gone from Europe altogether, Moscow fears for the consequences for political and military stability in the area—and the potential increase of West Germany's weight—if this were to happen too quickly. Controlling this process is one of the major Soviet concerns in the MBFR talks.

32. In ideological terms, the Soviets place Japan in the same category as Western Europe: its relations with the US are said to be subject to the same "contradictions;" they are two of the major centers of capitalism, each motivated by an urge to free itself from domination by the third, the US. In practical terms, Japan is recognized as the anchor of the US position in East Asia and the western Pacific, and it is believed in Moscow that the US is attempting now to goad the Japanese to take on a larger political and security role in the area. Yet Soviet sources do not devote anything like the amount of attention to the state of US-Japanese relations that is devoted to US-West European relations, nor do they try as hard to portray a relationship in flux, although it may be too early for them to have judged the effects of the collapse in Vietnam. They allude to increased frictions stemming from intensified trade rivalry, technological competition, and differences over the size and function of the Japanese armed forces. But it has also been argued that structural changes in the Japanese and US economies are increasing mutual interest in trade. Altogether, in the sober evaluation of a leading Soviet expert, the

problems in US-Japanese relations "in the near future . . . will not be able to radically undermine the military, political, economic, and ideological alliance that is advantageous and necessary at the present stage to the ruling elites of the two countries. . . ."

33. *The China Factor.* Moscow has never doubted that the US gained significant advantage vis-a-vis the USSR by bringing about a quantum change in its relations with China. High levels in Moscow were for long able to see nothing but seriously negative consequences for the USSR in the US-Chinese rapprochement. Suspicions were expressed, by Brezhnev among others, that the US and the PRC had concluded a secret agreement, presumably with an anti-Soviet intent, and it was alleged that the US strategy was to apply pressure on the USSR from two flanks. Even the possibility that the US goal was to fan the Sino-Soviet dispute into full-scale conflict seems to have been taken seriously. Moscow feared that, at a minimum, the US would conclude that it could raise its asking price in various dealings with the USSR.

34. These concerns are evidently no longer as intense as they had been. The Soviets seem now to recognize that the US would not want to see Sino-Soviet tension boil over into war. They have also concluded that Washington assigns higher priority to its dealings with Moscow than with Peking and that, because of the greater range and significance of US-Soviet engagement, this will continue to be so—indeed, establishing this point has been a major purpose of the USSR's detente approach. The Soviets, meanwhile, have moved toward the view that the US-Chinese rapprochement has reached a plateau and that further progress must await movement on the Taiwan issue and the opening of full diplomatic relations.

35. It is, however, probably also the Soviet view that these are impediments which can and, in due course, probably will be surmounted. Moscow may also anticipate that in the wake of Vietnam the US inclination will be to proceed more actively in this direction—at least this is a thought that will have occurred to the Soviet leaders. In any event, they regard China as, in effect, a quasi-ally of the US in the triangular relationship, and they see little chance of significant change in China's attitude

toward the USSR for many years to come, even with Mao gone, a judgment from which our evidence suggests there is no serious dissent among the Soviet leaders.

36. If the Soviet leaders are less concerned about Peking's capability or Washington's inclination to disrupt detente, they also realize that the Washington-Peking connection places constraints on Soviet freedom of action. Moscow no doubt calculates that any Soviet action arousing alarm either in China or the US is likely to strengthen the Sino-American relationship. And in heightening their competition with China, the Soviets are already attempting to exploit fears of China in their relations with the US in Asia.

37. *The US in the Third World.* Moscow sees the Nixon Doctrine—permitting the US to conserve its resources through a greater degree of burden-sharing—as providing the overall framework of US policy in the Third World, now and for some time to come. In general, Soviet analysts have concluded, the US will be attempting to maintain a lower profile in Third World countries, and it will be less disposed than previously to bring military power to bear in support of its policy.

38. There is no indication, however, that the Soviets are expecting an extensive US disengagement from the Third World. It is, of course, obvious to them that the US role in Southeast Asia has already been reduced, and Moscow will be doing its best to measure the effect of this on US prestige and credibility in other parts of Asia. A public lecturer in Leningrad told his audience recently that the US will reduce its presence in the Pacific area. He also observed, however, that the US has said it will continue to support South Korea, and this seems likely to reflect the opinion at high levels in Moscow.

39. Soviet observers have concluded that US policies in the developing world increasingly aim at safeguarding access to raw materials and energy sources, particularly in the Middle East and Latin America. They recognize that the US position in the Middle East relative to their own has improved markedly, and they calculate that the US plans to further diminish Soviet influence in the area. Meanwhile, however, they fear that, despite the safety-valve detente has provided, a new Arab-Israeli war

could once again create the danger of US-Soviet confrontation. While oil concerns are seen to have heightened the US need for progress toward a settlement, some Soviet analyses convey an even keener sense that the US might act vigorously if this interest were threatened as a result of a new conflict. The danger area, in the view of one of the USSR's top experts on the Middle East, has been enlarged to take in the Persian Gulf, which he has said might become an additional area of conflict between the US and the USSR.

40. Latin America in the Soviet view, is no longer an "exclusive US sphere." The Soviets note that the US has lost its unquestioned leadership within the OAS, and that this in turn has helped to move Washington toward some kind of "normalization" of its relationship with Havana. Beyond this, Soviet commentaries on Latin America depict a rather mixed picture regarding the future US role. One of these has declared that "Washington has still not come to any final conclusions about the overall political course of the US in this region of the world." It notes, nonetheless, that the "exacerbation of the energy crisis and the new situation . . . with regard to raw materials is compelling the US to activate its policy in Latin America." It has also been implied that the US has several assets: the anti-Communism of many Latin American governments; the support it gains through its military aid programs; and the still considerable influence of American business, which, moreover, is showing some readiness to make practical adjustments to the changed Latin American climate.

The Soviet Appraisal of the Current US Mood

41. The Soviet leaders believe that what happens in the Soviet-US relationship is not only central to their national security, but also shapes the entire movement of international events. They see that over the last year hitches have begun to develop in these relations, such as to raise doubts about the firmness of the US commitment to detente. They continue to believe that in principle a majority of the US public, the Administration, and, with some qualifications, Congress favor a further easing of tension with the USSR. But the Soviets now speak less often and less confidently than they did a year ago about the prospects for making detente

"irreversible," and are more ready to concede that there are "serious forces" opposed to detente in the US. In addition, Moscow senses that, since US-Soviet relations will be a central foreign policy issue in the US elections, the next year will be important in determining whether the US chooses to give detente a wider or a narrower scope.

42. Some Soviet sources have expressed the opinion that this Administration, while wanting to move forward with the improvement of US-Soviet relations, nonetheless is more reserved toward this undertaking than its predecessor. Although such doubts and suspicions had begun to recede last winter under the influence of Vladivostok, subsequent events have rekindled them. More broadly, as seen from Moscow the climate for detente in the US has become perceptibly cooler. The sources of Soviet unease are multiple:

- The Soviets have noted the objections raised against the Vladivostok agreement, causing them some concern that a SALT II agreement will be harder to achieve or, once achieved, will face hard going in Congress.
- The Trade Bill proceedings suggested to them that both the Administration and Congress perceive them to be more susceptible to economic leverage than they want it to be thought.
- They are face to face with American consumer fears that further grain sales to the USSR this year will raise US food prices.
- The Soviets cite as additional evidence of some "hardening" US allusions to possible military intervention in the event of a renewed Arab oil embargo and the continuing publicizing of new nuclear employment policies.
- The setback in Indochina and concern over developments in southern Europe could, they believe, provoke a further stiffening in the US posture toward the USSR.
- Moscow recognizes that, apart from such familiar foes as "the military-industrial complex, the Zionist lobby, the Cold War bureaucracy," the trade unions, and parts of the intellectual community, a growing body of opinion in the US is skeptical that the US is getting a fair return from detente, believes the US should

drive harder bargains in its dealings with the USSR, or contends that no effort should be made to extend the detente relationship beyond its present limits.

Some Implications for Soviet Policy

43. Soviet leaders, comparing their own domestic and international positions with those of the US, believe that the balance sheet is changing in the USSR's favor. Despite problems of their own and the greater realism in Soviet thinking that has accompanied the USSR's expanded involvement in world affairs, Soviet leaders remain convinced that their system will, by degrees, ultimately predominate. But there are important areas—economic, technological, military, and diplomatic—in which they continue to believe the US has great strengths and the capacity to maintain vigorous competition with the USSR. They recognize that US leaders remain determined to sustain the international role of a superpower, and they suspect that recent setbacks, especially the collapse in Vietnam, may strengthen this determination and public support for it. Thus they do not accept, as a basis for policy making, that the US is in permanent decline.

44. The Soviet leaders perceive the present US-Soviet relationship in strategic nuclear weapons to be one of rough balance. Although they may now entertain hopes—and, in the view of some Agencies, already believe—that US resolve as a strategic competitor is weakening, they know realistically that the US need not concede the USSR a superior position in the next decade. Thus they believe that in areas unconstrained by agreement they will have to compete vigorously to deny the US any strategic nuclear advantage it might seek by exploiting its technological strengths, and also to keep open the possibility of advantages for the USSR.⁵

45. The Soviet leaders recognize that US-Soviet relations are particularly sensitive to developments in Europe, and the USSR's policy toward Western Europe aims at a steady buildup of its influence without arousing alarm in the US and Western

⁵ A more extensive discussion of the Soviet view of strategic competition with the US, including substantive differences within the intelligence community, will appear in NIE 11-3/8-75, "Soviet Forces for Intercontinental Conflict Through the Mid-1980s."

Europe. The Soviets seek in MBFR a reduction in American military presence and influence and limitations on West German armed forces. The Soviets have rejected Western proposals for substantially asymmetrical ground force reductions. They will continue to argue for a limited, mostly symbolic, agreement as a first step. They evidently anticipate a Western offer of nuclear elements and are probably prepared to bargain about trading asymmetrical reductions of ground forces in return for reduction in American nuclear forces.

46. There is constant conflict in the minds of the Soviet leaders between the temptation to seize tactical opportunities as they arise, in Europe and elsewhere, and their desire to preserve profitable relations with the US and the West generally. If the Soviets perceive a decline in US readiness to react against developments such as those in Portugal, if the benefits of detente should appear to be diminishing drastically, or if more militant attitudes should become dominant among the new leaders soon to emerge, these tensions could be resolved in favor of a more assertive policy. But, at present, the Soviets remain concerned to preserve the benefits of the detente relationship, and to avoid arousing negative US reactions.

47. Because the Soviet leaders can foresee China's remaining indefinitely a fairly useful lever in US hands, they will be conscious of the need to be somewhat more considerate of US attitudes and interests in certain policy areas than they would otherwise be. It will be clear to them that in some areas, such as Southeast Asia, the weakening of the US role is more likely to provide opportunities for the Chinese than for themselves.

48. The Soviet leaders may believe that the growth of their own strategic power and constraints limiting the US capacity for armed intervention abroad will give them more room for maneuver in support of their clients. This, however, is a proposition that the present leaders would want to, and as occasion arises well may, test incrementally. They recognize the dangers in challenging US resolve in such areas of major US strategic interest as the Middle East or Korea, or in the delicate case of post-Tito Yugoslavia.

49. While regarding the US as their adversary, the Soviet leaders do not welcome those American political divisions that threaten the bilateral relationship Moscow has cultivated with Washington in the 1970s. They will be hoping for the election in 1976 of the presidential candidate, whatever his party affiliation, who is in their view most committed to US-Soviet detente and best able to secure a firm consensus behind this policy. Between now and November 1976 they will be giving some thought to the possible impact of their own policy actions on the election's outcome. Their decisions in this regard will depend on whether they estimate that detente as a contested political issue will be affected by the voting results. If this is its reading, Moscow might make some extra effort to improve the atmosphere surrounding US-Soviet relations.

50. As for Brezhnev's position, while his colleagues agree with him that detente now provides the most advantageous general framework for relations with the US, he probably feels a greater stake than they in achieving specific successes, the more so as he sees time running out on him and looks forward to his last Party Congress as General Secretary next February. The strength that he can muster behind this line depends upon both policy factors and political relationships. With regard to the latter, most of the changes in Politburo membership in the last few years have worked to strengthen his personal authority. But as he grows older and less energetic, old loyalties and dependences may be eroding as his colleagues cast their minds forward to a post-Brezhnev period. With regard to policy, there is some evidence that he was embarrassed and weakened last winter by the US Trade Act affair. If so, he subsequently recovered, only to suffer another setback with the 1975 harvest, which is a much more potent political issue than the ups and downs of dealing with the West.

51. We believe that Brezhnev will approach a decision on SALT II, and thus the Summit, anxious to record a success, but with his political freedom of action somewhat more circumscribed than before. On balance and considering both the USSR's larger strategic and political interests in a SALT II agreement, and what the Soviets would probably see as the consequences of failure, we think the USSR

will be prepared to make some further concessions in bargaining, although by no means to the extent of meeting all outstanding US demands. All Agencies except CIA believe that, while desiring a SAL agreement, the Soviets will offer only minor concessions: they will refuse to accept any inhibitions on the improvement or modernization of their own strategic forces, and will continue to press for limitations on US cruise missile development. CIA believes that, in the end, the Soviets are likely to prove willing to make more than minor concessions on the key issues of cruise missiles and Backfire (although not to the extent of counting Backfire in the 2,400 aggregate).

52. Should a SALT II agreement prove unattainable, and the projected summit meeting not occur this winter, the Soviets would face serious problems. They realize that at least a year's wait would

probably be necessary before another try. It is possible that in the pre-Congress politicking this failure, combined with other factors, would spark a serious challenge to Brezhnev's policies and leadership. Nevertheless, we think it more likely that the Politburo as a whole would prefer to minimize the internal political repercussions in order to keep detente intact as the USSR's general line and to preserve as much of its content as possible in the short run. In such circumstances, however, the Soviets would be even more alert to the possible further growth of anti-detente forces in American politics. If they perceived such a trend, there could easily be a growth of sentiment within the Politburo that the price of the present bilateral relationship was becoming too high. In this event, we must face the possibility of a harsher reaction marked by the stronger assertion and pursuit of Soviet interests in a number of arenas.

ANNEX

The Soviet Assessment Process

Like foreign policy decision-making itself, the evaluations which underlie it are the province of the Soviet ruling group. It is the roughly two dozen members of the Politburo and Secretariat whose judgments, opinions, and impressions are significant for Soviet policy. The kinds and amounts of information and analysis these men receive are therefore questions of considerable interest.

But no matter how accurate the information on the US available to the Soviet leaders, it would be transformed to some degree by subjective influences, group or individual. The role of Soviet ideology is not negligible in their interpretation of the behavior of others. The belief in the eventual victory of the Soviet system over the Western is for the present generation of Soviet leaders as solid as ever. Trends of recent years affecting the relative strength of the two sides have, in fact, seemed to them to corroborate these beliefs. But to go beyond imputing to ideology this kind of broad influence on the leaders' perceptions would overstate the case. This belief system is neither fixed nor in most cases capable of providing anything more than the general framework for analysis. The Soviet leaders are not the mere servants of their ideology; they are also its interpreters and can revise it as deemed necessary. In practice, the opinion of the dominant group in the Politburo determines what is the correct ideological line, and in this determination policy imperatives and practical politics tend to outweigh philosophy.

In the Soviet system, as in others, policy issues are usually decided not on their merits alone but also according to the presumed effect on the personal political interests of the decision-maker or

on the bureaucratic interest he represents. This factor, important for an understanding of the decision-making process under the Brezhnev leadership—notable for its careful balancing of major political and bureaucratic interests—also affects how members of the leadership interpret facts and events. Each leader will tend to be receptive to information or analysis that supports those policies closest to his heart or that promises increased influence to himself or his bureaucratic constituency.⁶

Available to this group at the top is an enormous fund of information on the US provided by: the USSR's diplomatic missions (its mission in Washington headed by an ambassador with 13 years of experience in his post and with extremely good personal sources of information); the KGB and military intelligence; the large file of reports which Soviet journalists prepare for official circulation; and, not least, the great amount of fact and analysis in Western publications of all kinds. Valuable additional knowledge has resulted in recent years from expanded exchanges and negotiations, from which the Soviet side habitually takes more information than it gives.

Because even the final product of this inflow is so large, the Soviet leaders are frequently faced with the problem of choosing among conflicting or confusing information and analyses. There are, in addition, good indications that they are inclined to be distrustful of openly published material, suspecting it of being inspired or controlled. These circumstances help to account for the great value Soviet leaders attach to meetings with highly placed

⁶ For a separate view on this matter, see footnote 2 on page 6.

Americans and to summit meetings, which they believe give them better insights as to which of the many viewpoints on the US side deserve attention.

Many examples in recent years show that the Soviet leaders, increasingly involved in a complex world, are trying to reduce the hazards of operating on an inadequate or distorted understanding of that world. Corrective measures have been directed at old-line organizations such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the KGB, whose personnel have regularly been officially exhorted both to improve their information collection and to provide better analysis. Important innovations have also been undertaken in the assessment process. One such development has been the increased availability of expert opinion to the top leaders, reflected in Brezhnev's case in the addition of foreign policy specialists to his personal staff.

A further new dimension has come from the growth in number and importance of the foreign affairs institutes. The principal institutes for the analysis of the US are the Institute of the World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO) and the Institute of the USA and Canada (IUSAC). The two institutes have within their walls a substantial body of specialists on the US' international relations and economic position, on its domestic

economy, politics, and society, and, to a more limited extent, on military-strategic affairs. Institute views are neither highly objective nor disinterested, nor do they by any means represent the whole spectrum of important Soviet opinion. One has to look, for example, to the Party press and the organs of the Ministry of Defense. The institutes and their directors are, however, influential and play a major part in explaining US developments to the leadership.

But despite their resources and efforts, the US still constitutes a difficult target for the Soviets in their assessments. To take one prominent example, not only were they late in foreseeing the outcome of Watergate, but they misperceived the entire process, believing that President Nixon's opponents were, at bottom, enemies of detente exploiting a domestic scandal to sabotage foreign policy. Furthermore, personal experience of the US remains quite limited; it is still possible to reach membership on the Politburo without having had any significant personal contact with non-Communist foreigners. Thus there is considerable scope, at the top level of Soviet politics, for erroneous conclusions and differences of opinion in interpreting the US, particularly at times when Soviet political instability may give greater play to personal political and bureaucratic factors in the assessment process.

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