Soviet policy in Europe: A challenge for the 70's

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In this era of detente, 1973 is said to be the year for Europe. The issues of European security and cooperation loom larger as the recent breakthrough in Vietnam, at the SALT Negotiations and the Berlin-Moscow Treaties set the stage for what Mr. Nixon calls «the era of negotiations». Yet optimism that such progress will be repeated in Europe may be premature. There is a tendency in the West—particularly in Washington—to overestimate the prospects for detente and cooperation, and to underestimate or even ignore some of the more subtle dimensions and problems involved. This paper examines these dimensions in the context of the West’s position in general, and of US policy toward the Soviet Union in particular, and suggests some alternative views toward a more adequate framework for analysis.

In this era of revolutionary change, an era featuring the closing of the bipolar world order and the new emerging forces that will shape the new one, is the West prepared—politically as well as militarily—to meet the challenges of the 1970’s? Will yesterday’s adversaries become tomorrow’s reluctant but realistic neighbors, or will the «thawing» cold war turn into a «hot» peace? Above all, how adequate are Western, and especially American, views of, and attitudes toward, Soviet external policy and behavior? These are some of the questions examined here. It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide any definitive answers. But the focus may be sharpened, some of the main issues clarified, and a number of tentative conclusions reached.

As the bipolar structure of the postwar international order «has ended»,¹ US foreign policy is confronted by an emerging world order featuring an increasingly multipolar structure, nuclear parity between the superpowers, and the conviction among the American people that other nations ought «...to share the burden of world leadership».² The new «strategy for peace», whose main task is to seek —in this era in which the Powers «are compelled to coexist»³—to build an order which «...all will work to preserve because all recognize their stake in its

preservation, is based on three main pillars: strength, partnership with our allies, and continued negotiations with our foes or adversaries. The superpowers are likely to remain ideological adversaries and to confront each other on a number of still divisive issues, but the new joint interests of «global trusteeship» give rise to a certain «commonality of outlook» that encourages a spirit of Realpolitik, and restraints or inhibits ideological drive and any apocalyptic visions of world domination. Of course, the chief architects of the Nixon Doctrine do not expect the Soviet Union to suddenly be transformed into a conservative, status quo, Power, but the expectation (or hope) is that under the combined weight of domestic and intra-Bloc problems, the responsibilities of maintaining the new «balance», and with the rise to power in the Soviet Union of a new, less revolutionary-minded generation, the Soviets «will more and more forsake ideological blinders», and opt for a more pragmatic policy based on enlightened self-interest. Indeed Mr. Nixon was far more emphatic on this issue when he declared the passing of the «ideological accessories» of the past: «today», he asserted, «...the 'isms' have lost their vitality». The stability of the new balance of power will result mainly from a basic consensus among the major actors on the fundamental legitimacy of the system which, as noted earlier, derives from a common interest to preserve it. Here is how Henry Kissinger puts it in the one work that seems to have most inspired the Nixon Doctrine:

Stability... means no more than an international agreement about the nature of workable agreements and about the permissible aims and methods of foreign policy. It implies the acceptance of the... system by all major powers.

The major actors that are to forge together the new pentagonal order include, of course, China, Western Europe and Japan. It is assumed that they, along with the Soviet Union, are willing and able to perform the new roles as envisaged by Washington. But the US redefinition of its allies' commitments in terms of sharing a greater load of the burden of world peace, entails a re-distribution of military and political power which—given the present state of power imbalance between the US and the USSR, on the one hand, and Western Europe, China and Japan, on the other—does not seem forthcoming. For example, the US is very reluctant to promote the creation of a nuclear Europe, and expects continued deterrence credibility of its nuclear «umbrella» despite rising apprehensions in Europe and Japan over increasing popular support in the US for a «lowered profile» in world affairs and even voices for neo-isolationism. There is a lack of clarity in US policy—an ambivalence that is reflected in the contradiction between a desire for disengagement and self-restraint, and the persisting ambition of shaping a system in which its influence predominates. It is this sort of ambivalence that generates a sense of insecurity among allies, resulting in increasing efforts not to support the new «balance», but instead to seek to accommodate differences with the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc.

In the transition from confrontation to negotiation, the twin pillars of strength and partnership are vital, and that means partnership that does not regard US allies as mere pawns or «pieces in...a grand design», but rather entails a relationship between equals. Thus, we are told, any moves toward bilateral negotiations are to be coupled with close consultations with one's allies, as in the case of SALT, the US-Soviet Trade Agreements, etc. But consultations means more than keeping one's allies informed, and no amount of «briefings», however meticulous, will reduce the uncertainty about US policy, and the feeling among Europeans that they were in effect being asked to give their approval to decisions already made in Washington and in Moscow, decisions that are likely to affect them directly and often substantially. And that uncertainty stems not only from Washington's strong emphasis on bilateral ties and its heavy-handed treatment of sensitive issues (e.g. the 1971 monetary crisis), but also from what appears—and Mr. Kissinger's assurances of an «underlying philosophy» to the contrary—as a certain lack

5. US Foreign Policy for the 1970's: A New Strategy for Peace, Op. cit., p. 3. Reference to the ideological elements as «accessories» suggests the view that these were at no time prominent or central to policy-making. It follows from this, that the 'isms' did not have much vitality to lose, which, of course, is historically inaccurate, and especially for the Soviet case.
8. Ibid., p. 637.
9. Ibid. See also, Michael Mandelbaum and Daniel Yergin, «Balancing the Power», The Yale Review, LXII, 3 (March, 1973), pp. 321-31; and Zhignew Brezninski, «Half Past Nixon», Foreign Policy (Spring 1971), pp. 3-21. This tendency seems to be growing in Western Europe where the lessons of Germany's Ostpolitik has left a deep impression.
11. Ibid., p. 25.
of an overall central framework in US policy. The two key premises of the Nixon Doctrine involve the gradual «decline» of Soviet ideology as a determinant of policy, and the related assumption of cumulative progress in consecutive negotiations. In reference to the latter, what may be called the «spill-over», or «linkage» effect, Mr. Kissinger said in connection with SALT and other issues that by simultaneous action we have sought to move forward across a broad range of issues so that progress in one area would add momentum to the progress of other areas. We hope that the Soviet Union would acquire a stake in a wide spectrum of negotiations.

But also implied in the Nixon Doctrine is a necessary dichotomy between ideology and power. While seeking to normalize intra-Bloc relations after the Czechoslovak crisis of 1968, Moscow is increasing its confidence about relations with the West and its «image» around the world, and is assuming a leading role in shaping the future of Europe and influencing the conduct of world affairs. Such developments as the Bonn-Moscow Treaties and the SALT Agreements, along with the Soviet initiatives for a pan-European Security Conference (ESC), illustrate the new Soviet «westpolitik».

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this new thrust in Moscow's foreign policy. Commenting on the flexibility and sense of sophistication of this policy, one author concludes that the Soviets «...have certainly come a long way from the days of the two-camp theory»,¹ in their approach to Europe, while another, in reference to Moscow’s response to the EEC, finds that response to be «...highly flexible», and the ideological elements of the response «carefully calculated and very receptive to new information...».² The 24th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party further illustrates the new emphasis on pragmatism and Realpolitik. The overall tone at the Congress was one of moderate caution, guarded optimism and a sense of conserva-
tion. On policy statements for Western Europe, the emphasis was on combining a pragmatic «mixture» between bilateral ties with different nations—especially in economic and technological terms, and a new security framework to be realized through an ESC.³ To be sure, Soviet long-term objectives have not changed: the demise of NATO and the reduction of American influence in Europe are still top priorities. But instead of confrontation and potential crisis, the new policy aims at more subtle forms of influence; by working with rather than against the prevailing «forces» in Europe,⁴ the influence of the US (and hence its potential «echoes of imperialist ravings», and as «synonyms for colonial empire». Peking Review, 13, 17 (April 17, 1970), p. 10, quoted in Ibid., p. 140.

views on external affairs, see Evgeny Chossudovsky, «Genoa the early revolutionary period and quite consistent with Lenin's (April, 1972), pp. 554-77.

historical precedents to Soviet views and policies of coexistence, 94


appears that Moscow, after a hard re-appraisal of the dangers and bitter fruits of past confrontation (e.g. in Berlin and Cuba) and an assessment of the Chinese challenge and the Czechoslovak crisis, has decided that a more prudent policy was in order, and that «...playing with fire is too dangerous a pastime for grown-up powers».⁵ The need now, it seems, is to limit one's objectives and concentrate energy somewhere; and Moscow's attention may well be focused on Europe, the one area in which the threat or use of force has shown to be ineffective and even counter-productive.

But in pursuit of its policy of coexistence, the Soviet Union is confronted by a serious dilemma: such a policy is reasonable (and increasingly necessary) in view of the realities of the Nuclear Age, and desirable since increases in contact and trade with the West relieve growing domestic pressures for more consumer goods, technological and economic growth, etc.; but the very same policy sets in motion within Soviet society and the Eastern Bloc, liberalizing forces toward 'incipient pluralism' and ideological diffusion that undermine the purpose and unity on the Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO) and the hegemonry of the Soviet Union. Was not Dubcek's «Socialism with a human face» a result of such «openings» to the West and its «echoes»? Now Moscow must coordinate and control such inevitable openings or transactions between East and West, while pursuing its policy of detente and coexistence? In the current rapprochement with the West, as illustrated by the Warsaw Pact's agenda⁶ for a Security Conference, Moscow must anticipate that Bloc member states may seek to pursue their own policy of Westpolitik, independently of Soviet dominance.⁷ Thus in the aftermath of the invasion of Czechoslovakia, growing criticism of the Pact by some member states,⁸ reinforced by severe attacks from China,⁹ has resulted in considerable intra-Bloc tensions and re-assertions.

5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., p. 224.
of sovereignty. Ceausescu's direct criticism at the July, 1968, Meeting of the Warsaw Pact—as if in anticipation of the invasion of Czechoslovakia—sent reverberations throughout the Communist world:

When the Warsaw Pact was set up, it was conceived as an instrument of collective defense... not a reason for justifying interference in the internal affairs of other states.

Such signs of internal dissent and pressure for more collective decision-making within the Pact are growing, and Moscow is apparently willing to accept some sharing of power, provided internal cohesion is maintained to meet the possible divisive and de-stabilizing effects of detente and coexistence. In other words, the Soviet Union is seeking to make the prospects for «openings» to the West conditional upon the acceptance by Pact members of the vital priorities, namely internal coherence and a 'united front'. Thus it appears, that more and more the Warsaw Pact is assuming an increasingly important internal role of coordination and control, a role that seems necessary in an era when the 'threat' of former enemies has diminished, and that of new adversaries is not widely seen as urgent or serious. It is increasingly evident that, despite Moscow's repeated warnings for the need to «prepare» against the new Chinese «threat» to the USSR «...and the other socialist countries», many East Europeans do not share Soviet views on the new China; consequently the new «threat» has not been very effective as a binding force within the Warsaw Pact. In this context, the view that the Warsaw Pact is becoming an instrument for military and political coordination among European Communist states, is essentially correct.

The Soviet response to the «paradox» of coexistence and incipient pluralism or liberalism, has been the so-called «Brezhnev Doctrine». Initially advanced in Pravda to support and justify Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia, and subsequently refined and broadened so as to provide an analysis of (and theoretical basis for) current trends in social development and modernization and the effects of these on the foreign policy of the 'Socialist Commonwealth', the Doctrine has been generally viewed as a reaction to the needs for continued revolutionary dynamism by a Power that must also attend to the demands of superpower status, or as a hasty attempt to justify the Soviet decision to intervene in the affairs of other socialist states on the basis of the concept of «limited sovereignty».

In both such views, the emphasis is on treating the Brezhnev Doctrine mainly as a function of the short-run power interests of the Soviet elite; ideology is seen as having a derivative function dependent upon power interests and relationships. But such views, which regard Soviet ideology as an «esoteric code» that has been «routinized» and used by the elites to «sell» the system to the masses and re-assure their own legitimacy, ignore the fundamental relationship between ideology and system change or transformation, and miss the long-term ideological implications of the Brezhnev Doctrine and the new interpretations of the problems and prospects of socialist development that it entails. Ideology does not merely serve to legitimize the functions and protect the power interests of the Soviet elite; it also provides them with operational guidelines and thus shapes their responses to various circumstances. It is, after all, the task of the elite to explain and assess the immediate and long-term significance of socialist and capitalist development trends—a process that gives meaning and coherence to foreign policy priorities. It is simply false and misleading to hold that ideology in the Soviet Union—in spite of the effects of bureaucratization and social

2. Signs of dissent were evident as early as 1966, despite Kosygin's assurances of «unity» and «cohesion». Pravda, October 14, 1966.
5. The alleged threat of West German «revanchism» and «militarism» is no longer credible, and China seems far removed from the issues and problems confronting most Europeans.
7. Ibid., p. 109. It may well be, that during periods of relatively prolonged detente, the respective functions of opposing blocs or coalitions tend to be oriented more towards the political rather than the military aspects of policy objectives.
differentiation—has been reduced to «...a mere ritual... almost as removed from actual life and its activities as Sunday sermons.»


In the Soviet view, the weakest link thesis provides both a rationale for collective efforts «in defense» of those socialist states whose level of development make them «ripe» for «revisionism» and even capitalism, and—more importantly a prescription for a state of preparedness throughout the socialist system of states. As emphasized by Brezhnev, that prescription for preserving the integrity and «solidarity» of the socialist camp against «imperialists» attempts of «...seeking out the weak links... and drive wedges between them», consists of: intensification of the ideological struggle against «revisionism» and «nonconformity», greater coordination, in all fields, of the activities of all socialist countries, and a strengthening of the role of the party throughout the socialist camp. The message of the new directives was clear: the main threat to socialism lies in spontaneous development and the possible restoration of «bourgeois» ideology. Clearly, the Soviets have «rediscovered» Lenin's warning that spontaneity in socialist development and modernization inexorably leads to a decline in revolutionary dynamism, and the creation of social roles and structures antithetical to it. As one contemporary disciple of the Leninist tradition puts it, the need is to act on ideology and transform it into an instrument of deliberate action on history... men's adaptation to their conditions cannot be left to spontaneity, but must be constantly assumed, dominated and controlled—hence the need for ideology.

Mere obedience to the forces of history, as Marx would have it, will not do; to prevent ideological diffusion, Brezhnev restores Lenin's emphasis on organizational power, thus drawing attention to the fundamental relationship between ideology and political power. Thus it is dubious and misleading to assert, as the Nixon Doctrine implicitly does, a simple dichotomy between ideology and power. As Mitchell points out:

This is precisely the Leninist contribution to the ideology—the insertion of organizational power as a crucial variable into an ideological framework that was developmental, functionalist and teleological.

Reflecting a continuity with previous policy state-


8. Ibid., p. 2.


ments, the above clearly indicate that peaceful coexistence does not extend to the province of ideology. Indeed, under the new conditions of «peaceful competition», conditions that now make it possible and desirable to «mobilize» world public opinion and the support of «all European peoples» for Moscow's new «peace offensive» as would be expressed by convening a Security Conference on Europe, the prospects are that «...the struggle is now primarily an ideological one, with the outcome open-ended».

For in the communist view, it must be remembered, the concepts of «peace» and «security» have a dual character: while reflecting major tactical steps in a new policy of Realpolitik aiming at the prevention of major war and the promotion of enlightened self-interest in the present world, they continue to be embodied in a logically coherent vision, world-view or Weltanschaung of a world order that is to be in the future; thus they suggest properties that are far more broadly political and action-oriented than would be found in their Western counterparts. As one author says flatly, «...the struggle for peace and security is closely intertwined with the struggle for human progress, and a revolutionary remaking of the world».

In the Soviet context, the pursuit of practical matters of enlightened self-interest is not incompatible with intensification of the ideological front; indeed, the two may coexist and even reinforce each other. It may well be, that the Soviets are not prepared to be restricted in their practical behavior by Marxism dogma; but neither are they prepared to give up a familiar guide to understanding and action, and now especially that new departures (and uncertainties) in policy give it a new and active role.

**Conclusion**

After the initial period of skepticism during which the Soviet appeals for an ESC were branded as «mere propaganda» and the proposed agenda viewed as «noble and imprecise», the US has belatedly and unenthusiastically agreed to hold preparatory talks for an ESC. We shall not comment on the pru

3. Ibid., p. 31.
7. As one author puts it, «The slogan L'Europe se fera en marchant only makes sense if this Europe gets a better idea about the direction in which it is supposed to march...». See, Gasteiger, Op. cit., p. 156; see also comments by Mr. Brandt's secretary to the effect that the key issue for Nato consists not so much of military security, but of the challenge of political manipulation; cited in Der Spiegel, 10 February, 1969. Brandt himself has called for a «New Relationship» between the US and Europe based on military security through the Western Alliance system, and a «true partnership» based on «political interdependence» between the US and Europe. See his «Germany's 'Westpolitik'», Foreign Affairs, 50, 3 (April, 1972), pp. 416-426.
8. For the strong tendency in Europe to assume the political initiative while depending on US security guarantees, see Heinrich End, «Political Tensions in the Mediterranean Theatre», Europa Archiv, 21 (Fall 1971).
A mutual problem-solving orientation will first require, that the relevant issues and priorities facing the West are so framed or posed, that they correspond not to some current or popular notion of the «problem» and the level of its solution, but to the real dimensions of the problem itself. In other words, there are tendencies—and this is characteristic of the ambivalence in US policy noted earlier—to «push» to the European level certain issues, not on the basis of the appropriate problem-dimensions that such issues raise, but rather on the basis of a set of «images» that the notion of Europe as a weak or powerful actor on the international scene might evoke. Thus in the context of European security, the need for a coordinated Western Ostpolitik will not be realized until the NATO Allies—in addition to a common military defense policy—design an appropriate political framework of security, and until the US political commitment to Europe is broadened and clarified. There is a serious discrepancy in treating Europe both as a military whole and a set of political parts, a discrepancy that may open up new options for Soviet policy in the area.

In a world of increasing social and economic interdependence, ever-growing patterns of transnational (and supranational) phenomena that transcend national boundaries and elude government direction or control, and the obscuring of the boundaries between domestic and external affairs, the very nature of security is taking on added dimensions. Security in today’s world entails a complex network of phenomena, involving far more than the military and technological considerations. Reflecting on the sort of policy required to meet the Soviet challenge in Europe, one author perceptively points out that there are infinite gradations of the strength which makes it possible to oppose Soviet policies and the weakness which makes it necessary to comply with them.4

The new patterns of interaction and forces of change in the relations between nations and within them, reflect the increasing complexity and structural differentiation that are characteristic of our modern era. Herein lies the major task facing the West in the 70’s: change and differentiation are an integral part of the processes of growth, development and progress; but differentiated structures—along with important changes in popular attitudes and values—need to be integrated and coordinated, lest their divisive tendencies result in fragmentation. In the Soviet Union, a new role for a changing, more flexible and less doctrinaire ideology seems to be designed to meet this task. Is the West as well preoccupied or prepared? The Soviets seem to know the kind of world they want to build—do we? If the West is to move away from the ideological defensive and assume the initiative in building the new world; if it is to unify and re-organize itself for the complex tasks that lie ahead, then it will have to establish a common «image» of that world, the set of priorities required, and the conceptual framework needed to define and view common problems in perspective, and then solve them. If this is not a prescription for some sort of appropriate ideology, it is a call for its functional equivalent.


The concept of economic stress may be more useful than that of social disturbance in describing the adjustment process. Economic development implies an opening up of a new range of economic opportunities. Exploitation of these opportunities can imply a breach of traditional social observances and this may be reckoned to have a cost.

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