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A MEANS OR AN END?

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A MEANS OR AN END?

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...great historical questions can
only be solved by violence.

Lenin, 1905

...some people watch us with greedy
eyes and think how they can disarm
us. But what would happen if we
disarmed? We would certainly be
torn to pieces.

Khrushchev, 1955

The only and invariable aim of our
foreign policy is to prevent war.

Khrushchev, 1959

Soviet leaders have frequently stressed a desire for peace and disarmament while intermittently threatening the world with militant aggressiveness. The very first act of Soviet diplomacy at the first international conference attended by the Soviets in Genoa in 1922, was a proposal for general disarmament. Stalin, Malenkov, and Khrushchev continued to make such overtures, assuring the world of

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their peaceful intentions. Yet at the same time Soviet leaders continued to adhere publicly to the militant tenets of the ideology, which stressed the inevitability of war as long as capitalism existed. In 1928, communist leaders gathered in Moscow thusly described their views of disarmament:

The disarmament policy of the Soviet government must be utilized for purposes of agitation... for recruiting sympathizers for the Soviet Union...[and] arming of the proletariat, overthrowing the bourgeoisie....1

While the Soviet Union pursued a rather passive foreign policy in the interwar period, during and after World War II, they switched to a militant foreign policy, expanding its territorial borders, supporting revolutionary and insurrectional movements and expanding its military arsenals and capabilities. And although to desire peace and a strong military posture are not necessarily contradictory, one wonders how much credence to give to the peaceful overtures of the Soviet government. In view of their militant ideology and political opportunism, do the Soviets really seek disarmament or do such policy statements have other purposes? And more specifically, what role does disarmament policy have in the whole range of Soviet policy objectives?

Soviet policy serves two main categories of objectives: (a) the distant goal of world communism, as determined by the ideology, and (b) the more immediate and pragmatic strategic and tactical objectives related to the conduct of current policy. Soviet foreign policy encompasses and accommodates both types of objectives, and though they seem at times to contradict or oppose

each other, they are in reality variants of the same single objective: the achievement of world communism. However, while the latter is a static, distant goal, current policy is flexible and amenable to changes and opportunities in the internal and international situation.

Let us briefly look at the two broad objectives served by Soviet policy before we describe their relationship to disarmament policy:

1. SOVIET OBJECTIVES: IDEOLOGICAL AND EMPIRICAL

A. Communism, both as an ideology and as a guide for political action, is characterized by extremely militant tenets. Its main spokesmen have in the past counseled various forms of violence as correct means for achieving world communism. In 1905 Lenin said: "Let the hypocritical or sentimental bourgeoisie dream about disarmament"² and in 1916 he stated: "...socialists, without ceasing to be socialists, cannot oppose any kind of war."³ While such militant communist views could be explained with the fact that at the time they were out of power, and therefore seeking to exploit any sort of conflict in their interest, the Soviets continued, after coming to power, to adhere to their militant ideological tenets, while at the same time stressing their peaceful intentions. Until his death, Stalin maintained that as long as capitalism existed war was inevitable, and that it was only a matter of timing: "...a great deal depends... on whether we succeed in delaying war with capitalist countries which is inevitable, but which must be delayed."⁴ Soviet leaders also continued to publicly reiterate the well-known dictum that war is just a continuation of politics by other means.

There is little doubt in my mind that the original objectives of the Communist Revolution, far from being merely empty phrases, continue to have a deep meaning to the Soviet leaders. Even Nikita Khrushchev, the most pragmatic of Soviet leaders, seems to believe strongly in their ultimate truth: "...we say to the gentlemen who are waiting to see whether the Soviet Union will change its political program: 'Wait for the blue moon!' And you know when that will be."⁵

However, the achievement of world communism is a remote goal, the ultimate historical purpose of that society. At hand are the problems of ruling a state, preserving the gains and seeking opportunities to advance to that distant goal. To that end, Soviet policy runs the gamut of tactical and strategic measures, remaining constantly flexible, even at times seeming to obscure or even oppose the ultimate objectives of communism.

B. The more immediate objectives of Soviet policy are: (a) maintenance of military security in the Soviet Union, (b) building of communism and maintenance of control in the satellites, (c) advancing communism in the underdeveloped countries, and (d) advancing communism in the capitalist world. In seeking to implement these policy objectives, Soviet leaders have to make choices which would help create an international environment most conducive for their purposes. In crude, general terms such choices fall into two broad categories: (a) is Soviet policy best served by high levels of military and political tension, and the corollary to it, high levels of military capabilities and readiness, or (b) are policy

objectives best served by a devolution of such tensions and minimization of the military aspects of East-West confrontation? To be sure, Soviet leaders are not completely free to make such choices arbitrarily. Such policy choices are often dictated by some major changes in the international, and sometimes internal, situation. Furthermore, there are various risks attached in a radical pursuit of either policy: a tough, blustering policy may cause a disproportionate military reaction in the West -- the Soviet bluff may be called, a highly conciliatory policy may be interpreted as a sign of Soviet weakness in the West and as ideological bankruptcy within the communist bloc. Soviet policy navigates therefore between these two extremes while seeking to achieve its objectives.

2. EVOLUTION OF THE DÉTENTE

The revolutionary changes in military technology, brought about by the introduction of missile-nuclear weapons, has deeply affected traditional policies of the major powers. Ironically, the stronger the Soviet Union has become militarily and economically over the past decade, the more moderate and responsible did their policy become. Indeed, the past decade has effected a significant change in Soviet views of war and peace and has led to a substantial adjustment of some major doctrinal tenets. In 1954 Khrushchev still maintained that in the event of a war, the imperialists "will choke on it and it will end in a catastrophe for the imperialist world."⁶ He still seemed to view the consequences of a war in the traditional terms, with the communists as the

victors and the capitalists as the losers. Such a view was clearly echoed in a speech by a ranking Soviet leader, Voroshilov: "...we cannot be intimidated by fables, that in the event of a new world war civilization will perish."⁷ However, by 1956, now more firmly in power, Khrushchev began to hedge, and announced that "War is not fatalistically inevitable"⁸ and by 1958 he reversed himself from his former position: "A future war...would cause immeasurable harm to all mankind."⁹

However, while recognizing the basic changes caused by missile-nuclear weapons, and moderating accordingly the archaic dicta of the ideology, Khrushchev nevertheless continued to pursue a militant policy, while seeking to avoid war. While Soviet leaders continued to stress peaceful coexistence with the West, Soviet defense industry began to produce strategic missiles, the Red Army underwent a massive reorganization program intended to raise its firepower and to make it more mobile. Soviet strategic doctrine shifted emphasis from conventional to strategic missile-nuclear forces. And when the U-2 affair unmasked the superficially peaceful relations between the blocs, and indicated anew the deep-seated distrust in their respective intentions, Khrushchev abandoned the role of the peace-loving statesman, and threatened the world with aggression. At the same time the Soviets shrewdly exploited the highly publicized western miscalculation of the number of deployed ICBM's available to the Soviets. They seized this so-called missile-gap as an opportunity from which they extracted political gains, maintaining the initiative in international affairs, and making negotiations on disarmament less desirable.

However, when the missile-gap was soon exposed as a myth, the West made smaller, more realistic estimates of Soviet strategic capabilities. U.S. defense industries began to produce missiles in larger numbers, massively raising western strategic capabilities and leaving no doubt as to where the strategic balance of power lay. Soviet leaders then had to face some hard choices: (a) they could continue to deny the revised western estimates of their strategic capabilities and act as if the Soviet Union still retained superiority; (b) they could attempt to engage in a large-scale arms race, trying to keep pace or even outdistance the West in the production of strategic missiles; (c) they could attempt short-cut measures which would still be effective to minimize the growing preponderance of U.S. strategic missile forces; or (d) they could resign themselves to remain an inferior military-strategic power and shift East-West relations from the hard, militant line to a more agreeable, conciliatory line.

In view of the great economic difficulties Khrushchev was facing at home, and because of the existing limitations of the Soviet economy, engagement in a full-scale armaments race with the West seems least desirable, and the Soviets did not attempt it. Presumably, they also understood the futility of such a move: the West could easily match and outmatch any increment in Soviet strategic capabilities. What the Soviets did do, was a progression of measures from (a) to (c), then to (d). At the XXII Party Congress in 1961, Malinovskii still boasted of the powerful might of Soviet missiles, and

later the Soviets developed the line of the superiority of the "quality" of Soviet weapons (their enormous destructive power) as being at least equal to the quantity of western missiles. However, this was empty boasting, and the Soviets then tried the second ploy, a short-cut to achieve some sort of parity in deterrents: the result was their attempt to place missiles in Cuba. When this measure turned into a fiasco, the Soviets embarked on the third ploy: a search for a détente with the West.

3. SOVIET MOTIVES IN SEEKING DISARMAMENT NEGOTIATIONS

After their fiasco in Cuba, the Soviets embarked on a major peace offensive, avowing their desire for far-reaching disarmament agreements with the West, and earning in the process thunderous condemnation from Peking. Do the Soviets really want complete disarmament and permanent stabilization of the international status quo? Do they seek partial arms control and disarmament agreements? Or is this new policy only a dialectical phase in Soviet policy development?

In his study of Bolshevism, Nathan Leites observed that it is "a central Bolshevik belief that enemies strive not merely to contain the Party, or to roll it back, but rather to annihilate it." He also observed that such a paranoid belief is so "self-evident...that they do not feel a need to re-examine it."¹⁰ Soviet leaders have in the past acted on such deep motives of distrust, placed heavy reliance on strong military forces, emphasized the fear of a "capitalist encirclement" and pointed to capitalist "containment" policies. While such fears still exist among the communists, they

are less acute than in the past. The potentially totally devastating results of a nuclear war which would hit all combatants effected a sobering and moderating change in their estimates of Western intentions. It would be safe to assume that Soviet leaders do not want war nor do they expect the West to initiate an unprovoked nuclear war, and moreover, that Soviet policy is predicated on such estimates of western intentions. However, if the working assumption is that the West would not initiate a preventive attack, at what level of provocation or threat would the West go to war? In other words, what sorts of risks do the Soviet leaders regard as unacceptable in the pursuit of their objectives, and furthermore, what are the broad constraints which would limit their willingness to take certain risks?

The basic constraints on Soviet policy are created by the superiority of U.S. strategic deterrents. And since the Soviet Union is not able to destroy this deterrent without bringing about its own destruction, it must operate with circumspection and avoid: (a) provoking the superior adversary into a major war, (b) situations and events which could escalate into a full-scale war, and (c) "either-or" situations where the alternatives may be war or severe concessions. Of course, one must also mention the fourth possibility, that of accidental war. However, both sides view such an occurrence as a remote possibility, and have taken various precautions to prevent it.

However, within the limits of these constraints, Soviet leaders will most likely continue to assess the political opportunities available to them and will undertake such risks which are commensurate with the expected

gains to be derived. Consequently, the choices available to them are: (a) deterring the West from using its strategic capabilities by the maintenance of Soviet strategic deterrents, (b) manipulating the political environment in order to deprive the western strategic superiority of its coercive political value, and (c) eliminating or reducing western strategic capabilities through arms control or disarmament. And since the mutual deterrents are relatively stable and, barring any major technological breakthrough, will continue to be so in the foreseeable future, the Soviets will most likely continue to employ and stress the latter two policy avenues.

In the final analysis, however, one must question Soviet statements concerning their desire for complete and general disarmament (CGD). Soviet policy has generally stressed complete disarmament first and controls and verification afterwards. And although they have recently somewhat modified their traditional position and agreed in principle to gradual and partial measures, agreements on major disarmament issues have so far failed to materialize, and will most likely remain unsolved in the foreseeable future. While some progress has been made in some peripheral issues pertaining to arms control and disarmament (establishment of the "hot-line," the nuclear test ban treaty), their effect is more in the nature of symbolizing good intentions rather than settling the key issues of the cold war. To satisfactorily settle these major issues through a full scale, viable disarmament agreement, the Soviet leaders would have to thoroughly modify, or even indefinitely postpone their ideological

objectives as well as some of their major policy objectives. Furthermore, they would have to be able to prevail upon the Chinese communists to abandon their ideological and policy objectives and to bring them into such concerted international agreement in order to make it meaningful and viable. At the present both such eventualities seem unpromising, and will most likely continue to be so.

The reason for such skepticism derives from an appreciation of Soviet policy motivations and their perception of political processes. A world without arms, where the sole controlling and coercive instruments (other than those of police) may be some supra-national body, is an idea which the communist leaders, and most other non-communist leaders, would find difficult to accept. To entrust the security of one's society and its national interests to an international body, while willingly giving up one's own traditional protective military shield is indeed asking much of the usually suspicious communist leaders. To permit the presence of control teams of foreign nationals within their territory, and to tolerate their extensive prying and checking into what Khrushchev called "sacred places, where not even all friends are admitted,"¹¹ is against the grain of the Soviet communists, who may want to hide their weaknesses. Furthermore, in such a totally disarmed world, communists would find it very difficult to foment and utilize the national liberation wars and other insurrectionary situations, a goal which continues to be advocated by both the Soviet and Chinese communists. However, while complete disarmament is probably unlikely and not desired by the

Soviets, they may seek partial arms control and disarmament measures which in their view may serve their purposes, or which could be attractive to both sides. Disengagement plans (like the Rapacki Plan in Europe), denuclearized zones which would restrict proliferation of nuclear arms, and possibly some other selective partial measures hold promise for both sides.

We must therefore conclude that: (a) the Soviet leaders still subscribe to the ultimate ideological objectives of communism; (b) in the face of stable deterrents and strategic inferiority, they find it useful to follow a conciliatory disarmament policy in the hope of minimizing the adversary's strategic advantage; (c) their insistence on full disarmament prior to controls and verification is to serve two purposes: one, indicating their peaceful intentions while blunting the thrust of western strategic preponderance and, secondly, making almost certain that such Soviet proposals will be rejected by the West as being unrealistic, enabling the former to blame the latter as aggressive imperialists; and (d) unless the Soviets are willing to make major changes in their ideological and policy objectives, and unless they feel that a world of proliferating nuclear arms is more dangerous and less desirable than a stabilized and disarmed world, Soviet policy will continue to manifest its traditional duality and ambiguity: peaceful disarmament overtures will continue to be paralleled by traditional juggling for political advantage. And though the Soviets begin to show real concern about losing control within their own sphere of influence and about possible

acquisition of nuclear capabilities by the militant Chinese communists, they have not yet convincingly shown a willingness to practice what they preach: agree upon viable and meaningful disarmament. And the root of that dilemma is reflected in a Khrushchev statement made in 1958: "The Western powers greatly distrust us. We, too, do not trust them in everything."¹²

Disarmament proposals will likely continue to be a major and useful aspect of Soviet policy, remaining as before a means rather than end. Soviet leaders are quite familiar with the advice of their greatest teacher, Lenin: "In order not to get lost in the periods of retreat, retirement or temporary defeat...the only important and the only theoretically correct thing is not to cast out the old basic program."¹³ Stymied in their expansionistic policies by the threats of western deterrents, strongly concerned with the security of their countries, deeply divided within their own camp, Soviet leaders need a new "breathing space" (peredishka). In seeking such an accommodation with the West, they are well aware of the persuasiveness of strong disarmament proposals, which they can suggest and undertake without giving up either the minimal security needs of their country or their historical objectives.¹⁴ And while it is highly unlikely that they seriously desire complete disarmament, stabilization of international relations at a lesser level of tranquility would still be a welcome turn of events from which, for the time being, both the United States and the Soviet Union would benefit.

SOURCES

1. "Theses and Resolutions of the VI World Congress of the Communist International," International Press Correspondence, vol. VIII, No. 84, November 28, 1928, pp. 1596-1597.
2. Lenin, V. I., Sochinenia, 2nd ed. (Moscow: Gosudars-tvennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1926-1932), vol. VIII, pp. 395-397. The context of this statement was the Sevastopol mutiny of 1905, and Lenin most likely sought to exploit the crisis in the interest of the revolution.
3. Lenin, V. I., "Military Program of Proletarian Revolution," Collected Works (New York: International Publishers, 1942), vol. XIX, p. 362.
4. Stalin, I. V., "Foundations of Leninism," Collected Works, 1953 edition, vol. X, p. 288.
5. Khrushchev, N. S., Speech at November 24 Indian-Soviet Society reception in Bombay: Pravda, November 26, 1955.
6. Khrushchev, N. S., Speech to the Czechoslovak Party Congress: Pravda, June 13, 1954.
7. Pravda, March 27, 1955. However, while Khrushchev and the military pursued the hard line, Malenkov and others sought a more conciliatory policy viewing future war as threatening all civilization.
8. Speech at the XX Party Congress, TASS, February 14, 1956.
9. Speech at the Budapest Opera House, Budapest radio broadcast, April 3, 1958.
10. Nathan Leites, A Study of Bolshevism (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1953), p. 28.
11. Moscow radio broadcast, July 12, 1958.
12. Interview with Iverach McDonald, TASS, February 15, 1958.

13. Lenin, V. I., "Party Program and Name," Speech to the VII Party Congress, March 8, 1918, Selected Works (New York: International Publishers, 1943), vol. VIII, p. 315.
14. The Soviet leaders will most likely continue to view the problem of disarmament independently from other exacerbating issues in East-West relations. Khrushchev expressed this attitude in 1957: "...one must give up attempts to artificially link the decision on questions of disarmament, as the Western powers have been doing hitherto, with the solution of, for example, such political questions as the German problem." (TASS, December 21, 1957.) And although the present international situation is less auspicious to the Soviets, they still seem inclined to view disarmament and other policy considerations as being unrelated.