

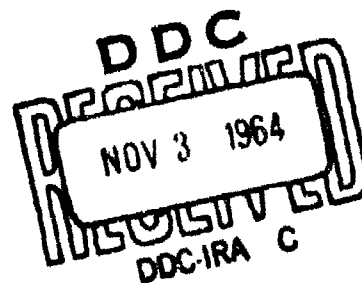
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SOVIET INFLUENCES ON AN ARMS CONTROL ENVIRONMENT

Thomas W. Wolfe*

Perhaps the first observation one should make on this subject is that the Soviets have customarily drawn a sharp distinction between the concepts of "arms control" and "disarmament." In the Soviet lexicon, the term "arms control" has been given a pejorative flavor. It has been associated with such alleged Western purposes as attempts to "legalize" nuclear war, to lend respectability to the arms race, and to facilitate espionage against the Soviet camp under the cover of control over armaments.¹ In short, the Soviets generally have sought to picture arms control as a devious Western device to avoid genuine disarmament, which they define as reducing and ultimately doing away with armed forces and all their institutional appurtenances.

Something more is involved here, of course, than a mere matter of semantics. It is symptomatic of the Soviet outlook on the subject

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¹For typical presentations of these arguments, see: V.A. Zorin, ed., Borba Sovetskogo Soiuza za Razoruzhanie 1946-1960 Gody (The Soviet Union's Struggle for Disarmament 1946-1960), Press of the Institute of International Relations, Moscow, 1961, especially pp. 73-83, 212, 302; G. Andreyev, "Two Lines in the Disarmament Talks," International Affairs, No. 3, March 1964, pp. 21-33.

that one does not find in the abundant Soviet literature on disarmament anything comparable to Western exploration of arms-control techniques to lower the risks of accidental war, to tighten command and control arrangements over nuclear weapons, or to help in the management of crisis situations. Neither does Soviet writing furnish any equivalent to the growing body of Western literature in which various concepts of deterrence, strategic posture and arms control are viewed as interrelated aspects of the international security problem.

A very important consideration thus should be recognized at the outset. In the West, over the past few years, the concept of arms control has come to be thought of essentially in terms of functional international security measures -- designed mainly to reduce the likelihood and destructive consequences of nuclear war. The basic underlying assumption upon which the Western concept of arms control rests is that a common interest can be found between even seemingly irreconcilable adversaries, which it is in the self-interest of each antagonist to identify and pursue.

Perhaps we have game theory to thank in large measure for the notion that relations between adversaries can involve both shared and conflicting interests. In the technical jargon, this adds up to saying that the United States and the Soviet Union are engaged in a non-zero sum game -- and that consequently one may conceive of an arms-control environment in which any gain in U.S. security need not necessarily mean a loss in Soviet security, or vice-versa.

The absence in the Soviet Union of a technical-analytical literature of arms control resting on such a concept can be attributed

at bottom, one may suppose, to a philosophy of society fundamentally different than our own. Without trying to get at the roots of this basic difference, however, I think one may say at a somewhat more superficial level of observation that a body of arms-control thinking comparable to our own has not been developed in the Soviet Union partly, at least, for the reason that such literature does not carry the emotional force and high moral tone demanded by the general Soviet disarmament line.

Further, the treatment of sophisticated concepts on the inter-relation of arms control and strategy not only calls for spelling out more details of Soviet military posture and strengths than normal Soviet practice allows, but such concepts tend to make poor propaganda for Soviet advocacy of radical and highly oversimplified disarmament solutions.²

At the same time, however, one should note that there has been some tendency of late for Soviet writers, especially in media designed mainly for foreign audiences, to adopt the technical idiom of Western arms control literature, even though continuing to attack its concepts. An example of this was provided in the January 1964 issue of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, in a guest article entitled "A Soviet Scientist Looks at Disarmament," by Yuri Sheinin. The Soviet author discussed at some length the American concept of "arms control," but argued that it cannot provide an adequate substitute

²For a fuller discussion of these and other aspects of current Soviet literature on disarmament, see the present author's Soviet Strategy at the Crossroads, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1964, especially Chapter XIX, pp. 231-243.

for what he chose to describe as the Soviet Union's "non-trivial" approach of "complete and universal disarmament."

While general and complete disarmament -- or GCD -- remains the ostensible goal of Soviet disarmament efforts, there have been signs that Soviet policy is not necessarily wedded solely to this "all or nothing" proposition. The "hot line" agreement and the test ban treaty concluded last year, for example, were obvious departures from the GCD approach. At the U.N. General Assembly in late 1963 and at the 18-Nation Committee in Geneva in early 1964, the Soviet Union displayed revived interest in a variety of "partial measures" well short of GCD. These partial measures included: withdrawal of troops from foreign territories, beginning with Central Europe; reduction of numerical strength of armed forces; nonaggression pact between NATO-Warsaw Treaty countries; nuclear-free zones in Europe and elsewhere; ban on spread of nuclear weapons; observation posts to prevent surprise attack; elimination of bomber aircraft; and prohibition of underground nuclear tests.³

One may, indeed, recall that the present "GCD phase" of Soviet disarmament policy goes back only to the fall of 1959, when Khrushchev unveiled his sweeping scheme for general and complete disarmament at the U.N. Prior to that, Soviet disarmament policy during the first decade-and-a-half after World War II had produced a series of proposals

³See Soviet Memorandum on "Measures to Slow Down the Arms Race and Ease International Tensions," January 28, 1964. See also: Khrushchev letter to the Italian Peace Committee, Pravda, July 7, 1963; Andreyev in International Affairs, No. 3, March 1964; M. Lvov, "Motion in a Circle," Izvestia, No. 4, April 1964, pp. 18-19.

far less ambitious than GCD, designed for the most part -- as one might expect -- to improve the Soviet Union's political and military position in one way or another, while strewing restraints in the path of its major adversaries.⁴

What these introductory remarks are meant to convey is that Soviet disarmament policy is by no means fixed solely on attainment of a totally disarmed world by the shortest possible route. Its first objective is to serve Soviet interests as the Soviet leadership construes them. The intermediate ground between armed peace and a disarmed world is broad and unexplored. How long it may take to cross it, no one can predict. In the meantime, Soviet interests are bound to be influenced by many factors which will have a bearing on whether or not the Soviet leaders find it possible to reach disarmament agreements on any terms that are likely to be acceptable to the West. In the remainder of these remarks, it may be useful to set down a check list of some of these considerations, pro and con, that seem relevant to Soviet attitudes toward disarmament, and that will help to shape the arms control environment of the future.

THE AFFIRMATIVE SIDE OF THE LEDGER

Looking first at considerations which may furnish motivation for "genuine" Soviet interest in arms control and disarmament, one would

⁴For accounts of Soviet disarmament policy in the postwar period, see: Malcolm Mackintosh and Harry Willetts, "Arms Control and the Soviet National Interest," in Louis Henkin, ed., Arms Control Issues for the Public, Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1961, pp. 141-173; Richard J. Barnett, "The Soviet Attitude on Disarmament," Problems of Communism, May-June 1961, pp. 32-37; and by the present author, "Khrushchev's Disarmament Strategy," Orbis, Vol. IV, No. 1, Spring 1960, pp. 13-27.

probably put at the head of the list Soviet appreciation of the destructiveness of a nuclear war, and a desire to reduce the risk that such a war might occur, wiping out in the process the achievements of nearly a half-century of Soviet history.

The military-technological revolution of the nuclear age has tended to undermine pre-nuclear age communist doctrine on the intimate link between war and revolution. Besides calling into doubt the Marxian role of war as the "midwife of revolution," and the Leninist concept of war as "an instrument of politics," a nuclear environment tends to put a brake on many other forms of revolutionary behavior, for small conflicts may escalate into big nuclear war -- jeopardizing survival of the Soviet system itself.

While the Soviet leadership still clings to the doctrinaire assertion that if a nuclear war should break out between the "imperialist" and communist camps, it would end with victory for the latter, this assertion is advanced with growing lack of conviction. Khrushchev's occasional appraisal of the difficulty of erecting a communist order on the radioactive rubble of a war, which, he says, might cost from 700 to 800 million casualties, seems to reflect a more candid Soviet view of the outcome than the doctrinaire formula of communist victory.

A second major factor which would appear to encourage serious interest in arms control and disarmament is Soviet uncertainty as to the outcome of an unlimited arms race with the United States. There is considerable evidence that an intensified arms race would create many problems for the Soviet Union. Moreover, past experience,

such as that relating to closure of the so-called missile gap, would seem to suggest that challenging the United States to a numbers race in modern weapons might leave the Soviet Union relatively no better off militarily and somewhat worse off economically.

A closely related consideration is the broad question of economic pressure and constraints. The Soviet leaders are certainly aware of the rising costs and rapid turnover rates of modern weapons systems at a time when they face major problems of resource allocation. Investment requirements for a faltering agricultural sector, a rising level of consumer expectation, increased demands on resources to restore a sagging economic growth rate, the claims of space programs -- these are some of the competing pressures upon Soviet resources that could make a reduction of the arms burden look attractive.

The Nth-country problem, or recognition that the spread of nuclear weapons may increase the danger of war in circumstances beyond Soviet control, is another factor which may spur genuine Soviet interest in arms control and disarmament. The prospect of nuclear proliferation seems to disturb the Soviet leadership particularly with regard to West Germany and Communist China, in both cases perhaps because of concern that these countries would have the greatest propensity to take actions which could lead to a Soviet-U.S. nuclear confrontation.

Another category of factors which might sharpen the interest of the Soviet leaders is the prospect of opening the path to tangible political gains through disarmament negotiations. The process of

negotiation itself, whether culminating in agreements or not, provides certain political dividends by reinforcing an image of the Soviet Union as the champion of peace and disarmament. Other advantages of a technical and strategic nature may also flow from inconclusive negotiations, such as those the Soviet Union obtained while preparing -- during a drawn-out period of test ban negotiations -- for resumption of nuclear testing during the fall of 1961.

Some types of limited arrangements, particularly regional measures affecting Europe (nuclear-free zone, nonaggression pact, etc.) probably hold a definite appeal for the Soviet leaders as a step toward political gains -- such as dividing NATO, neutralizing Germany's future military potential, and so on.

Beyond partial measures of this sort, there is also the question of general and complete disarmament. Politically, the original Khrushchev GCD proposal of 1959 may have been meant mainly to put the West on the defensive, with little expectation that it would lead to anything more concrete than prolonged negotiations from which the Soviet Union could hope to extract maximum political-propaganda advantages. However, on the outside chance that adoption of a plan somewhat along the lines of this or subsequent versions of the Soviet total disarmament proposal might transpire, one may ask what opportunities it might seem to offer from the Soviet viewpoint.

For one thing, the dismantling of formal military machinery and the rather drastic change of relationships in a world abruptly and totally disarmed might seem likely to the Soviet leaders to create a favorable environment for well-organized revolutionary movements to

gain the upper hand. This seems to have been the sense of Mikoyan's reproach to Chinese critics of Soviet disarmament policy a couple of years ago, when he said that disarmament as proposed by the Soviet Union would not make the "national liberation struggle" more difficult, but rather would strip the imperialists of the means of "resisting the revolutionary actions of the proletariat and the peasantry."⁵

Even well short of a totally disarmed world, the Soviet leaders might feel that partial implementation of such measures as the scrapping of nuclear delivery systems and withdrawal from overseas military bases would bring about the demoralization and collapse of the Western alliance system -- a political and strategic prize well worth seeking in itself.

The kind of situation just sketched out connotes no essential decline of Soviet political aggressiveness and revolutionary élan, but rather a set of circumstances in which these impulses would be wedded to a bona fide and practical interest in dismantling the present formal military power structure of the world. However, one should mention also another set of considerations which might lead in the direction of a genuine Soviet interest in disarmament through the decoupling, so to speak, of revolutionary impulses and goals from the pattern of Soviet behavior.

One has in mind, in this connection, the much-debated question of the process of change in Soviet society.⁶ This is a question too

⁵ Pravda, March 15, 1962.

⁶ On this question, see Wolfe, Soviet Strategy at the Crossroads, especially pp. 1-18. See also: Zbigniew Brzezinski and Samuel P. Huntington, Political Power: USA/USSR, The Viking Press, New York, 1964, especially pp. 3-17, 409-438.

complex to explore thoroughly here, but a few pertinent points may be mentioned. Among these is the proposition that "Soviet national interests" are gradually crowding aside any practical interest in the ultimate Marxist future and that -- as some students have argued -- the Soviets are now acting a good deal more like a country than a cause. Presumably, a new generation of Soviet leadership may find itself increasingly preoccupied with the technical management of the powerful state it has inherited and by inference, less interested in promoting revolution abroad.

A related phenomenon which might make for far-reaching change in the Soviet outlook is the trend variously described as liberalization and embourgeoisement of Soviet society, which the Chinese, among others, seem to feel may increasingly disqualify the Soviet Union for leadership of the world communist movement and render it susceptible to ultimate accommodation with the enemy camp. Furthermore, in a world where nuclear war may seem no longer a rational course and where the possibilities of altering the political balance by use or threat of military action are fraught with great danger, Soviet attitudes toward the management of military power in the service of politics may well undergo change.

THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF THE LEDGER

Turning briefly now to the other side of the ledger, one may note certain off-setting considerations which argue in varying degree against serious Soviet interest in embarking on a meaningful program of disarmament.

First, the Soviet leadership is abundantly aware that the power position and political standing of the Soviet Union in the world today rest to a large extent on Soviet military strength and the technology associated with it. Modern arms have given the present leadership a capability for influencing events on a global scale which no previous generation of Soviet leaders enjoyed. It seems to be a fairly universal political aphorism that power, once acquired, is not easy to part with.

Secondly, in addition to the vital function of deterring a Western attack on the Soviet camp -- a danger which the Soviets profess to believe is inherent in the situation as long as "imperialism" exists -- Soviet military power has an important role to play in support of Soviet political strategy generally. Indeed, the Soviet leadership appears to be quite aware that, while the prospects of using war as a deliberate instrument of policy have gone down in the nuclear age, the potential political returns from exploiting the possession of modern military power have gone up. In a sense, the Soviet leaders seem to have grasped what may be the salient strategic truth of our times -- namely, that men's minds are the most profitable and perhaps the only suitable target system for the new weapons of the nuclear age.

This, too, tends to offset somewhat the very real concern the Soviet leaders undoubtedly feel about the dangers of nuclear war. For they obviously recognize at the same time that the world's fear of nuclear catastrophe provides a potent issue around which the "peace struggle" and other forms of political warfare can be mobilized. If a really successful disarmament program were carried out it would

undercut this issue and rob the Soviet "peace offensive" of its mass emotional appeal. In a word, given the nature of their political aims, the Soviets have a large political stake in simply keeping the disarmament pot boiling.

Another factor which weighs in the scales against any serious move by the Soviet leaders to embrace a major disarmament program is their apparent belief that a wisely-applied policy of "peaceful coexistence" will permit them to steer clear of the worst risks of nuclear war without disengagement from the political struggle. This policy itself, on both theoretical and practical grounds, rests in the Soviet view on the possession of military power so imposing that the West dare not challenge it. To trade off this function of the powerful military machinery they have built at great cost and effort in return for the uncertain benefits of disarmament may not strike the Soviet leaders as a very sound move.

There are still other factors that might be mentioned. One is the persistent belief that Soviet superiority in the political, economic and military elements of power must be attained before a new communist order can be expected to replace capitalism in the world. Another is the possible future threat posed by China. Certainly, the Soviet leaders are not likely to contemplate dismantling of their military power on a serious scale so long as Communist China remains outside the arrangements for arms control sought by other major powers. There is also the unpalatable invasion of Soviet secrecy and the dilution of the Party's internal monopoly of power which would be implied by acceptance of international authority over the disarmament and peace-keeping process.

Finally, a further and perhaps even more profound obstacle to Soviet interest in adopting a workable disarmament program with which the West would be prepared to live, lies in the apparently still valid Soviet commitment to upsetting the status quo in the international arena and replacing it eventually with a world system of communist states. A disarmament program would remain compatible with this policy only so long as it did not inhibit "wars of national liberation" and similar destabilizing upheavals intended to help move the world toward a communist future.

By contrast, the Western approach assumes that disarmament must be structured so as not to have serious destabilizing effects on the world situation. It calls for progressive establishment of impartial international constraints on all parties concerned as the process of disarming proceeds, with the object of moving the world toward a more stable and tranquil international order within which the change and modernization of societies can take place without violent upheaval. The Soviet leaders can be expected to approve neither this process nor the kind of world order expected to evolve from it -- unless, to return again to the question of internal change -- they are prepared to modify and abandon some of the basic assumptions and practices which presently characterize the Soviet system.

WHICH WAY DOES THE AUDIT OF PROS AND CONS POINT?

So, it may be asked, where does this audit of the pros and cons bring us out? Each interested person may draw his own conclusions. The writer's own views can be stated in very summary fashion as follows.

Looking first at the long-term prospects, there would seem to be at least an even chance that both Soviet objectives and ways of behaving may undergo further change that could improve the prospects for meaningful progress in the area of arms control and disarmament. There are, however, two broadly contrasting views as to why and how such changes might come about. Since these views have quite different implications for our own policy approach, it may be fitting to state them briefly.

View A. Favorable change will come about essentially as the result of internal liberalizing trends in the Soviet system, the shift from a "have-not" to a "have" nation psychology, and so on. A Western policy which is basically cooperative, reassuring and disposed to make large allowances for Soviet concerns will best encourage these trends and make the Soviet Union amenable to equitable disarmament arrangements.

View B. Soviet change will most likely occur in an environment in which the Soviet leaders find their political momentum checked and their ambition to attain a predominant power position frustrated by Western moves, so that bit by bit the Soviets may come to elect the arms control route as the most sensible and rational path to legitimate security. In this case, a preferred Western policy might be one which follows essentially a vigorously competitive line and which offers the continuing alternatives of an intensified arms race or arms reduction and controls.

These two contesting alternatives are somewhat overdrawn here for the sake of illustration. In the real world, a judicious combination of the carrot and the stick principles which they embody might be sought. This would certainly be the present writer's inclination.

Now, as to the short-term, there would seem to be no very bright prospect in the near future of any far-reaching agreements on disarmament with the Soviet Union. The picture, however, is not wholly dark. One may discern several trends which offer some promise.

For example, we may be witnessing an emergent Soviet approach which entails somewhat less concern for fashioning disarmament proposals so as to yield obviously one-sided military and political advantages for the Soviet Union, and somewhat more concern for measures promising to reduce the danger of war, to lighten the burden of armaments, and to control the character of the arms competition.

The evidence in this direction is, to be sure, tentative -- and it may hold good only so long as the Soviet Union finds the present atmosphere of détente in U.S.-Soviet relations to be in its interest. Among the signs which might be cited are: the Washington-Moscow "hot line" agreement; the test-ban treaty; the UN resolution against the orbiting of weapons of mass destruction; and the joint declaration on cutting back the production of fissionable materials. These are all steps in the category of "arms control," rather than "disarmament" in the customary sense. There also has been some slight change in past months in the Soviet attitude toward an international police force under the UN. While still insisting on a veto over the activities of any such force, the Soviet position may at least point in the direction of recognizing that ultimately all countries, in their common interest, may find it expedient to vest peace-keeping military power in a collective organization.

To the extent that the Soviet leaders have come around to viewing their military programs in terms of their contribution to deterrence and to a more stable strategic environment, one may note that they are -- whether this is their immediate intention or not -- thereby lending themselves to an approach in which military posture tends to become in the largest sense an aspect of arms control.

There is a further sense in which the Soviet leaders may find themselves drawn along the arms control path while ostensibly being concerned in the first instance about their military posture. The possibility of employing arms control measures to reduce the tempo of the arms race and to channel it in directions less burdensome to the Soviet budget would seem to have a particular appeal to the Soviet leadership at a time when converging demands upon Soviet resources are great. Even if no positive gains for the Soviet military posture were forthcoming, an arms control program which prevented "weapons gaps" from widening might still look attractive in terms of the relative correlation of forces between the two sides.

All this raises an important but as yet unanswered question to which reference was made earlier: Does the Soviet leadership still consider the improvement of the Soviet Union's relative power position an unalterable objective to be sought in disarmament negotiations, or does it now recognize areas of mutual interest in which both sides might give up something in order to attain a common benefit?

The test-ban treaty signed on August 5 and ratified in September 1963, seems to have involved both of these elements. On the one hand, it probably contributed to some easing of international tension and may have marked a step toward slowing down the proliferation of nuclear weapons which both sides professed to find to their mutual interest. On the other hand, the Soviet Union was quick to observe that the treaty foreclosed testing of the kinds of weapons "in which

superiority is on the side of the Soviet Union," while permitting the Soviet Union "to conduct underground tests of nuclear weapons if necessary for the security interests of the Soviet Union and other socialist states."⁷

Here, one may say, is an example of the way in which the Soviet leaders can combine the criteria of mutual and self-interest. It is a small step at best, but perhaps in the right direction. It may give grounds for supposing that other ways can also be found for developing a set of mutual restraints -- tacit or otherwise -- to reduce the risk of nuclear war and still be consistent with the realities of the East-West conflict. This is a conflict in which one cannot realistically expect either side to relinquish its power position, but in which one can at least seek some alteration of conduct which could threaten the overriding interest of both sides -- their common survival in the nuclear age.

⁷Editorial, "To Strengthen Our Country's Might," Red Star, September 21, 1963. Pravda, September 26, 1963.