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SOVIET PERSPECTIVES IN
WESTERN EUROPE

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The Centrality of Europe

Western Europe, in the Soviet view, has remained the most important region in the "historic struggle between socialism and imperialism." Its domestic structure and foreign policy orientation are regarded as ultimately deciding the outcome of the global competition between the two world systems. This is due to a number of reasons of which the Soviet leaders are in all likelihood acutely aware: Western Europe has a more developed socio-economic infrastructure and a more advanced technological and industrial base than the Soviet Union. It is culturally more differentiated, and its societies are more dynamic and more adaptable to change than the Marxist-Leninist systems in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. And despite all the frictions and setbacks, it has furnished one of the very few examples of successful integration.

All this makes Western Europe a center of attraction and emulation for a significant part of the population and reformist elements in the Party leaderships in Eastern Europe, and reinforces traditional affinities between the two halves of the continent. It provides the West with some scope for influence and penetration of the systems in Eastern Europe, and thus poses a risk to Soviet control.

Soviet Objectives

Taking into account these facts of life, and looking at published Soviet analyses and the twists and turns of Soviet political approaches since World War II, it is possible to postulate the following six objectives in Soviet policy towards Western Europe:

- (1) To win recognition of the territorial and systemic status quo in Europe.
- (2) To make sure that the Western European countries adhere to the Soviet definition of "peaceful coexistence" and that they observe a certain code of conduct in their relations with the Soviet Union, for instance, that they maintain "friendly" relations with the USSR, abandon "policies from positions of strength" and refrain from "interference in the internal affairs of socialist countries."
- (3) To retain and, if possible, to broaden access to Western technology know-how and credits, and to utilize Western European

- assistance so as to overcome the Soviet Union's perennial economic and technological inferiority vis-à-vis the West.
- (4) To limit as much as possible Western political cooperation in the frameworks of the European Community and NATO, both within Western Europe and between Western Europe and the United States.
 - (5) To deny to Western Europe any viable defensive option and enhance the Western Europeans' sense of vulnerability to Soviet power.
 - (6) To transform the pluralistic systems of Western Europe in directions favorable to Soviet interests by encouraging and supporting the communist parties and other "progressive" and "peace-loving" forces.

If the gains and losses are measured against these objectives, it is immediately apparent that the failures lie primarily in the ideological and socio-economic realm (i.e. in the attempts at achieving objectives 1,2,3 and 6) and the success in undermining Western political and security cooperation and eroding the credibility of NATO's doctrine of "flexible response" (objectives 4 and 5).

Failures in the Ideological and Political Competition

To look at some of the issues in detail, contrary to Moscow's original designs, the Helsinki Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and the follow-up meetings in Belgrade and Madrid never did legally codify or politically legitimize the existing socio-economic order in Europe. Even more important, they never did endorse the kind of political and military control the Soviet Union is exerting in Eastern Europe.

If, from the Soviet perspective, further proof of this was needed, it was amply provided by the Western responses to the developments in Poland after July 1980. These responses included the open support for Solidarność across the whole political spectrum from left to right in Western Europe and the United States; the ill-concealed hope for an undoing of the "shameful surrender" to Stalin at Yalta; the earnest belief in the "Finlandization" of Poland as a realistic prospect; and, finally, after the restoration of communist control in December 1981, the demands put forward by

Western governments individually, as well as by the European Community and the NATO Council of Ministers collectively, for (1) the lifting of martial law, (2) release of all internees and (3) resumption of the dialogue between the authorities and Solidarność. These demands, moreover, were backed up by sanctions, more substantive and severe in the case of the US and less stringent, more symbolic, by the Western European countries.

Thus, neither the Western European countries nor the United States adhered to the code of conduct applicable, according to Soviet interpretations of the CSCE final act, to the events in Poland: "non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states". Rather than cooperating with the Soviet Union in codifying the status quo in Europe they had, in the Soviet view, tried their best ("worst") to change it.

This points to the failure of Soviet diplomacy to achieve yet another of the objectives enumerated above: transformation of the pluralist systems of Western Europe, winning a greater degree of control over Western European domestic policies and channeling these policies into a pro-Soviet direction.

In fact, all empirical evidence runs counter to the view expressed by an American correspondent that "bonds of sympathy and a community of interests are developing as rapidly between Western Europe and the Soviet Union as they are dissolving between Western Europe and the United States". Obviously, it is necessary to make a distinction between calculated adaptation to Soviet power (a problem which will be dealt with in a moment) and favorable images of the Soviet Union. Growth of Soviet power, it stands to reason, does not necessarily lead to improvements in the Soviet image. Indeed, the former may well damage the latter.

To illustrate the point, recent public opinion polls show that a significant majority of West Germans believes that the aim of Soviet policy is not to achieve peaceful cooperation with the West but the domination of Western Europe, and that they today feel more threatened by the Soviet Union than a few years ago. Perhaps predictably, these very same polls also show that West German opinion of Russia has become less rather than more favorable.

Similarly, even without detailed poll data, it is evident to any casual observer that there has been a spectacular deterioration of the Soviet image and influence in France. This was true before the imposition of martial law in Poland and in all likelihood has increased since. Concurrently, there has been broad support in France for Mitterrand's hard-line policies toward the communists at home, relations with the Soviet Union (e.g. the mass expulsion of Soviet agents in the spring of 1983) and on defense. Britain in the past decade has been particularly immune to an increase in Soviet influence. At the same time, it has set a standard which has been emulated by other Western European countries: despite high unemployment figures, the country remains eminently "governable" and even retains an electorate that is prone to vote center-right rather than center-left or left.

The communist parties, needless to say, have been the prime instruments in the Soviet attempts at transforming the domestic system of the countries concerned as well as their foreign policy orientation. In line with the declining attraction of Soviet ideology among Western intellectuals, however, the effectiveness of the communist parties in promoting Soviet influence has decreased. More often than not, the impact that can be made by various "peace" campaigns on domestic politics in Western Europe crucially depends on their organizers being able to refute the charge that they are acting on behalf of the Soviet Union.

Similarly, voting strength and electoral support for communist parties have almost inversely been correlated with pro-Moscow orientation. But more independent or even outrightly anti-Soviet positions do not help either. Thus, "Eurocommunism," which thrived on the idea of a model of communism different from that of Soviet and Eastern European Marxism-Leninism, and which to many observers seemed to become a major political force in the late 1970s, today is a dead issue.

Failures in the Economic Competition

Concerning economic issues, the Soviet Union has abysmally failed in its attempt, still part of the official 1961 Party Programme, to "catch up with and overtake" the United States in production by 1970 (!). It did not achieve its aim of overcoming the perennial technological inferiority vis-à-vis the West. Its

structure of trade with the OECD countries is still very much that of a developing country: it is importing finished products (machinery and equipment) in exchange for raw materials and energy supplies (notably oil and gas).

For a time, in the first half of the 1970s, the USSR was quite successful in achieving its goal of broadening access to Western technology, know-how and credit. This soon began to change, however. A number of economic and political factors converged and significantly limited East-West trade. Such factors include (1) the burdening of Soviet-American trade with political preconditions leading to a tendency for the Soviet Union preferentially to place orders in Western European countries and Japan; (2) the slowdown in the rates of growth of the Western economies in the wake of several "oil shocks" resulting in cutbacks of orders from Comecon countries; and (3) the change in the role of commercial credit from being an important driving force of East-West trade to becoming a brake on its development.

Thus, contrary to opinions expressed at times in the West (notably in the United States), no "business as usual" obtained in Soviet-West European trade relations. The Soviet attempt to shift much of its potential trade with the United States to Western Europe (and Japan) must appear, in Moscow's perspective, as not having been very successful. Many products and types of equipment are available only in the United States. And although there has been an increase in the value of Soviet-Western European trade (caused mainly by the significantly higher prices charged for Soviet oil), the share of the Comecon countries in overall Western European trade has been falling steadily since the mid-1970s.

Credit relations conform to this pattern. While it is understandable that, for financial and economic reasons, the Eastern European countries have increasingly come to be regarded by Western banks as a credit risk, this should be different with the rating of the Soviet Union which possesses huge gold reserves and natural resources, and the foreign indebtedness of which is quite low. Yet its creditworthiness, too, has significantly suffered. Net financing flows from Western banks to the Soviet Union have decreased to a trickle. As this decrease cannot

convincingly be explained on economic grounds, it must be due to political reasons, i.e. to the general atmosphere of tension and uncertainty prevailing in East-West relations.

Furthermore, neither the scale of the economic exchanges, nor the images and mood of the Western European public concerning this issue, make it safe to assume that the Soviet leaders think that they have managed to achieve Western European dependence on the Soviet Union. Quite to the contrary, the Soviet leaders must be aware that on matters of East-West trade they are more of a demandeur than the Western countries.

Relative Success in the Military Competition

In contrast to the East-West competition in economic, ideological and cultural affairs, the Soviet Union has been more successful in the East-West military competition. This is indicated by (1) the achievement of strategic parity by the USSR, (2) the modernization of its intermediate-range and theatre nuclear forces, (3) further improvement of its conventional preponderance in Central Europe and (4) the build-up of forces capable of power projection and intervention at and beyond the periphery of the Soviet Union.

In the Khrushchev era, the primary focus of competition between the two opposed world systems was declared to be ideological and economic. But starting from the Berlin crisis of 1961 and Cuban missile crisis of 1962 the focus began to shift. Increasingly, the central sphere of competition between the two systems came to be military. This was, perhaps not a conscious decision taken by the leadership under Brezhnev. But as the adversary superpower itself seemed to place such a great emphasis on military power in international relations, and as other Soviet means of influencing world events turned out to be relatively ineffective, this reorientation became ever more pronounced.

There are other reasons for this reorientation. Military competition is best suited to a centralized command economy in which military industry has been allocated a privileged position and national security receives top priority. Conversely, military competition is the sphere which is most controversial in Western pluralist systems. It is the sphere where they are most vulnerable. Consequently, claims for a higher or even constant share of

defense expenditures against the trend in almost all Western countries of cuts in government spending and rising unemployment are likely to lead to domestic polarization.

But the emphasis on military competition is bound to lead to intra-Alliance polarization as well, for several reasons. In Western Europe the size of the military sector in the national economy is smaller than in the United States (i.e. the "military-industrial complex" is economically and politically less influential). Western Europe has a more extensive and costly social welfare net; and it has strong social democratic parties committed to its protection.

The emphasis on military competition, moreover, is most likely a reflection of the belief held by the Soviet leadership that military power can successfully be transformed into political influence. Such transformation is probably regarded as working through perceptions -- or, more precisely, through a process of interaction between changes in the power relationship and their recognition. If, the Soviet leadership may reason, a power "A" can convincingly demonstrate that the opposing coalition "B" has no viable defensive option, political accommodation is likely to set in.

Such a process could be enhanced, to continue this reasoning, if the use or threat of force by "A" at the flanks of "B" were to add to the latter's political, economic and military constraints. In such circumstances, military opposition would appear as increasingly risky and seem to require political adaptation.

In order to accelerate such adaptation, the Soviet arms build-up, the Soviet stance in arms control negotiations and the Soviet support for the "anti-war movement" in Western Europe have closely been integrated in one approach. This much is undisputed by most political analysts. What is hotly debated, however, is the question of whether Western European political accommodation to or appeasement of Soviet military power is (1) an accomplished fact, (2) a discernible, on-going process, (3) a conceivable, future possibility, or (4) a distinct impossibility. It is undoubtedly a question that looms very large in the collective mind of the Soviet leadership, too.

From its perspective, looking at Western Europe and its role in the Western alliance, there are indeed some trends and issues which indicate an increase in Soviet influence over Western security relations. These trends are most likely, in the Soviet view, reflected in

- . the adoption of programs declared necessary by NATO but never implemented (e.g. the Long-Term Defense Program and the decision to increase defense expenditures by 3% in real terms);
- . the declaration of production and deployment of the "neutron bomb" as necessary to counter Soviet superiority in tanks but the shelving (upon West European hesitation and domestic opposition?) of these plans by President Carter;
- . the growth -- in conjunction with the domestic opposition to the "neutron bomb" -- of a "peace movement" in Western Europe, rallying pacifist, environmentalist, religious and leftist political forces against nuclear weapons in general, and against NATO's plans for the modernization of medium-range nuclear systems in particular;
- . major divisions in important Western European political parties, notably social democratic parties, and conflicts in coalition governments in Western Europe and between Western Europe and the United States concerning NATO strategy, Western security policy and relations with the Soviet Union.

Prospects

If trends and events such as these were interpreted by the Soviet leadership as proving that the transformation of Soviet military preponderance in Europe into political leverage is well under way, the outcome of the INF controversy must give Moscow cause for re-appraisal.

There can hardly be any doubt: for the Soviet Union and the "peace movement" in Western Europe non-deployment of Pershing II and cruise missiles had become an important test case for their ability to decide important Western security issues in their favor. This test case they lost.

This loss must appear to the Soviet leaders as particularly painful as they had characterized NATO's dual-track decision as the most serious and most hostile measure taken against the Soviet Union since World War II, portrayed the dangers of deployment

as equal to those of the Cuban missile crisis, warned that détente in Europe could not survive deployment, and threatened that the USSR would reply "both militarily and politically" and that the consequences would be "very grave indeed."

Soviet policy toward Western Europe, therefore, has arrived at a crucial juncture. On the one hand, the Soviet leaders may consider the Western European "peace movement" to have suffered only a temporary setback but still to be an effective political force useful for Soviet foreign policy purposes. They may still regard the erosion of consensus over NATO strategy among Western European political parties (e.g. the about-face of the West German Social Democratic Party on the dual-track decision) as significant and likely to be strengthened by a tough Soviet stance.

Such a stance would have the additional advantage for a leader or group of leaders during the current succession struggle that he or they would not be perceived as weak. It would not ostracize an important political ally: the military. And given the tremendous Soviet efforts in arms production and deployment over the past two decades, it would meet an -- in the circumstances perhaps understandable -- inclination of the collective leadership: to "cash in" on its investment.

In practice, such a tough line could mean ever more threats of new deployments; closer military integration in the Warsaw Pact; pressure on the East European countries to increase their share of the defense burden; intransigence in arms control negotiations; further fueling of divergencies between the United States and Western Europe; and continued reliance on domestic pressures in NATO.

Part of such a line could be interpreted to have begun with the Soviet walk-out from the intermediate-range (INF), strategic (START) and conventional (MBFR) negotiations, and the adoption of certain countermeasures as announced in November 1983: (1) cancelation of the (self-proclaimed and self-violated) moratorium on the deployment of SS-20 missiles in the European part of the Soviet Union; (2) stationing of shorter-range nuclear missiles in the GDR and Czechoslovakia; and (3) deployment of additional missiles in "ocean areas" around the United States.

On the other hand, unceasing emphasis on military power does nothing to alleviate the Soviet Union's social and economic problems. It strengthens the role of the military and of the orthodox political and ideological forces in the Soviet system, making decentralization and other economic reforms even more difficult to achieve. The unbroken priority for military production and the military instrument in foreign policy does nothing to improve the efficiency of Soviet control in Eastern Europe. It serves to undermine even further the legitimacy of this control among most Eastern Europeans. It further enhances the image in Western Europe of the USSR as a repressive garrison state founded on a rigid and antiquated ideology.

Most importantly, it carries with it the risk for the Soviet leaders that they may be overplaying their hand. In fact, they may already have done so. This would be the case if now, after deployment of intermediate-range nuclear weapons has begun as scheduled and is being backed by strong, defense minded governments (Kohl in West Germany, Thatcher in Britain and Mitterrand in France), the peak of the "peace movement" had been passed. Perceptions in Moscow as to the effectiveness of pressure and the Soviet Union's ability to control the course and outcome of Western security policy would then probably change. Changes in perception could lead to changes in policy, and away from the emphasis on military competition.

Much depends, therefore, on developments in the West -- more specifically, on the direction public opinion and governments in Western Europe will take and how the relations between Western Europe and the United States will evolve. If only for the requirement of having to "wait and see" what tack the West is taking, Soviet policies toward Western Europe in the foreseeable future, thus, will neither be of an unmitigated, across-the-board "tough" or "soft" variety. In line with the committee-type of decision-making so characteristic of the Brezhnev era, they will most likely be a mixture of "hard" and "soft".

Certainly, the idea conveyed by Soviet propagandists and Western scare mongers that after the Deployment Day the Soviet Union would act like a bear in the china shop is becoming untenable. The "countermeasures" can be regarded as the very minimum which

Andropov had to announce in order to save face. Militarily, some of the measures are fairly mild and inconsequential, others were planned in advance and merely received a more convenient packaging. But, significantly, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania have been exempted from the military countermeasures on the nuclear level, and there are good reasons for not forcing them, as well as the GDR and Czechoslovakia, to put further strain on their vulnerable societies and economies either by increasing their defense burden or cutting off their trade with the West.

The "countermeasures" at the political level are by and large limited to posturing -- and, for the Soviet Union, not very promising posturing at that. This is the case because the walk-out from the three arms control forums at present damages the interests of the Soviet Union more than those of the West. It removes one of the most effective Soviet means for influencing domestic political processes in Western European countries and, for a change, casts the Soviet Union in the role of enfant terrible holding up arms control agreements.

If, therefore, the scope for a "tough" line is limited, it is small also for a "soft" line. Any immediate, far-reaching shift away from the military competition leaves open the question for the Soviet leaders of how -- with the reduction in the effectiveness of the military instrument -- to influence Western Europe in conditions of reduced tension. In the 1970s this proved a difficult task.

Thus, to persuade the Soviet leadership of the limited utility of military power in Soviet-West European relations can only be a gradual process. It can be successful only if the West develops its own mix of a "tough" and "soft" line: to strengthen deterrence but also to expand cooperation in areas of mutual interest.