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US Policy Opportunities*

by

Richard Pipes

The year 1983 marks two-thirds of a century from the time when the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia. In the decades that have elapsed, US attitudes and policies toward the Soviet regime have undergone frequent changes. There were the initial fifteen years when Washington simply ignored the Communist state, as if expecting it to go away. There were the periods of rapprochement which on occasion (as during World War II and the early 1970s) bore all the marks of an alliance. There were also periods of aggressive containment of Soviet expansion that now and then came perilously close to the outbreak of hostilities. And yet, notwithstanding such seemingly extreme oscillations, there runs through the record of US policies toward the USSR one common thread: the virtually exclusive concentration of American policy-makers on Moscow's external behavior, or, as Ernest May has recently put it, on "events." US policies toward the Soviet Union have been and continue to be determined by Washington's evaluation of that country's behavior outside its own domain as being either "aggressive" or "restrained." When the USSR exercises "restraint" in its foreign policy, we respond with friendship and rewards. When it behaves "aggressively," we resort to punishments. In this calculating manner we seem to expect to tame the Soviet challenge.

As someone interested in intellectual history, I have often wondered about the philosophical underpinnings of such a foreign policy, and concluded that it is rooted in Watsonian "behaviorist" psychology, a theory particularly suited to America's predominantly commercial culture. For it was John B. Watson who introduced earlier in this century the principle that human conduct can be explained almost exclusively in terms of stimuli and responses and has nothing to do with "states of mind" which, in international relations, would consist of a country's political traditions, culture, and ideology. In the view of the behaviorist school, one simply adds or subtracts stimuli until the desired response is attained.

In one sense, such a behaviorist approach to the conduct of foreign relations is understandable. The only threat we face from the Soviet Union

and its dependencies derives from their external actions, namely, intimidation and overt aggression directed at us, our allies, and neutral powers. Much as Americans may dislike the internal policies of Communist regimes, they are not prepared to try to change them; indeed, we accorded the Soviet Union diplomatic recognition at the very time when it was setting in motion a most appalling internal bloodbath. We may condemn undemocratic regimes, whether of the so-called left or right variety, but we act against them only when they try to impose their systems on others. And then we seek to manipulate them with "stimuli" in the form of rewards and punishments.

It may be understandable, but is it sensible? Is human behavior, whether of an individual or of a government, really determined only by external stimuli and hence at the mercy of outside manipulators? Not only is this proposition questionable on its own merits but, as experience has shown in international relations, it does not serve well in practice either. One cannot divorce behavior from the nature of the behaving object, nor can one reasonably expect to secure the desired response merely by adding or withholding stimuli.

I do not propose to provide here an analysis of the causes of Soviet aggressiveness. But surely, before we can ask ourselves what policies are most likely to attenuate our problems with the USSR, we must be clear in our own mind where the problems lie. Let me, for my part, state emphatically that I do not believe—as many do—that the state of US-Soviet relations is primarily a function of US intentions and initiatives. We sometimes act as if US-Soviet relations were the by-product of controversies between "hawks" and "doves" in this country, with the Soviet Union relegated to the role of a concerned but passive party. As far as I can ascertain, the United States and the Soviet Union have no genuine conflicts of interest: neither territorial claims against each other, nor competition for markets nor—given the small role assigned to ideology in the American political culture—ideological differences that matter. The tensions between the two countries bear no resemblance to the ones that dominate Sino-Soviet relations or cause Arab-Israeli enmity. Ours is a purely artificial conflict initiated by Stalin as soon as the tide of World War II had turned in his favor for reasons imbedded in Soviet requirements and aspirations. Strictly speaking, there is nothing the United States can do (short of outright capitulation) to avert this enmity. As George Kennan once well expressed it, they hate us not for what we do but for what we are. Ever since it had become certain that the expectations of spontaneous world revolution which the Bolsheviks had entertained until 1920 or so would not be realized, the elite that lords it over Communist countries has had to find an external enemy to furnish it with internal legitimacy—to safeguard the privileges that it had monopolized, and to justify the disproportionate expenditures on the military establishment, whose essential function it is to protect this elite from its own people. For the

real enemy of every Communist regime resides within its own borders. To deflect this domestic hostility they require surrogate enemies elsewhere. In the interwar period they were the "Fascists" and since 1945 it has been the United States. If this assumption is correct, then the fundamental problem that we face in our dealings with the Soviet Union lies inside that country, i.e., in the "system" of which its external conduct is but a manifestation. To concentrate attention on and respond to conduct alone is to deal with symptoms instead of causes.

The practical difficulty here is that while our ability to influence internal conditions in the Soviet Union and other Communist countries is obviously extremely limited, it is not entirely absent. What I would like to plead for is a closer coordination of our policies vis-à-vis the USSR so as to take into account the effect our actions have not only on Russia's international conduct but also on her internal developments.

As concerns the Soviet military threat, there is wide consensus in this country that it must be matched and neutralized, even if considerable disagreement exists as to the precise extent of the threat and the best ways of coping with it. Controversy over such issues is legitimate and proper. However, it is disconcerting to see responsible public figures approach the problem not in terms of the need, but of fiscal affordability. It is as if the competitor of our armed forces was Medicaid rather than the Red army. On the subject of the military threat, one only needs to stress that, given the uniquely advantageous geopolitical situation of Russia—which enables it to shift forces rapidly within its own confines from the frontiers of Western Europe to those of the Middle East and from there to East Asia—we are wise in not contesting Soviet superiority in land forces. But this forfeiture places on us the obligation of maintaining a comfortable margin of superiority on the sea and in the air, not to speak of credible deterrence in strategic forces. Credible, that is, to the Soviet High Command even if not necessarily to the American Association of Atomic Scientists.

The military threat is readily understood by most people, which is probably why governments that feel externally threatened tend to reduce the threat to military terms. But it would be a delusion to believe that by neutralizing the danger posed by Soviet armed might we would eliminate the Soviet threat altogether. One needs only to recall that in the immediate post-World War II years, when the United States enjoyed nuclear monopoly, the Soviet Union was in an exceptionally truculent mood.

To cope effectively with the Soviet threat, one has to understand its comprehensive character. Leninism-Stalinism, which continues to dominate Soviet thinking and behavior, is a doctrine that calls for the militarization of all aspects of life. It has been rightly observed that Lenin put Clausewitz on his head by treating politics as the pursuit of war by other means. This conception is a historic novelty to which the non-Communist world has had

great difficulty adjusting. In the Communist view, foreign policy (for which there exists, properly speaking, no Marxist theory) is the extension of class conflict onto the international arena. In the blunt words of D.B. Riazanov, a leading Russian Marxist of the 1920s, "the war of the proletarian state is a continuation of the revolution by other means." In this view, struggles between nations represent the internationalization of struggles among classes; and since the class struggle must rage until it is finally resolved by the triumph of "classless" society, international conflict is equally unavoidable until the ultimate triumph of "socialism" around the globe. In this conflict, all instrumentalities must be employed because all of them are expressions of underlying productive relations: ideas as well as economic resources and political levers, not to speak of military force. Failure to grasp this essential feature of communism and exclusive concentration on the military threat has been the cause of the failure of numberless attempts to stem Communist aggression, from the Russian Civil War to the war in Vietnam. To act as if the challenge were exclusively military is to leave one's flanks open to devastating nonmilitary assaults.

Adam Michnik, a leading theorist of Solidarity, opens one of his books with the startling statement: "The government under which I live has as its objective the establishment of dominion over human minds." This is the view from the inside; but because in the Communist outlook the line separating internal from external policy is far less sharp than it is in our thinking, it applies in some measure to Soviet foreign policy as well. Inside their own realm, the Communist authorities seek to establish dominion over minds by controlling the flow of information; outside of it, where they lack this power, they do so by semantic manipulation and by setting the rules of international discourse in a manner that exclusively favors their cause. Let me illustrate what I mean.

The majority of Americans would probably define the cause they espouse and defend as that of freedom, broadly interpreted. But since in any contest over freedom the Soviets would obviously lose, Moscow has consciously striven—and to an astonishing degree succeeded—to define the East-West conflict as one pitting the forces of peace against those of war, or "nuclear holocaust." Indeed, so successful has this campaign been that there is a certain embarrassment in the very mention of freedom as a national objective, as if it were a cause detrimental to peace.

Once this principle has been established as a frame of reference, several consequences follow:

- Peace can only be preserved by "détente," defined as the antithesis of "cold war" and interpreted to mean the acceptance, among other things, of Communist-sponsored "wars of national liberation" in the Third World. Under such rules of the game, to raise the issue of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, for example, is tantamount to undercutting détente and risking nuclear holocaust. Détente's allegedly sole alternative.

- Arms control is the most effective means of preventing nuclear holocaust. It must, therefore, be entirely decoupled from any other issue adversely affecting US-Soviet relations. Acting on this principle, the Soviet Union endeavors, and in no small measure succeeds, in making arms control negotiations the nearly exclusive topic of bilateral relations between our two countries.

- The preservation of peace requires that Soviet and Soviet-dominated frontiers be recognized as permanent and inviolate, while the status of territories lying outside them is fluid and subject to change of ownership.

To counter this very dangerous psychological game, which has had profound effects on Western public opinion, two things are required: lucid thinking and the courage of one's convictions. Moscow is extremely sensitive to any attempts by the West to turn the ideological-psychological tables on it. This was demonstrated by its near hysterical reaction to President Reagan's statement in his London speech that Marxian laws of economic and political contradiction apply not to free market economies but to the Communist ones. We must refuse to adopt the one-sided rules of the game of international relations which Moscow seeks to impose, and if we are unable to change them, then we must at least insist that they apply with equal force to all parties. Peace, of course, is an overwhelmingly important objective, but it does not preclude other objectives and it is not an alternative to freedom. It must be made clear that we do not accept the Soviet definition of *détente* and that nuclear arms negotiations, essential as they are, do not require us to ignore Soviet outrages inside and outside Communist borders. The Brezhnev doctrine must be rejected without qualification. If the Soviet Union is free to seek a change in the *status quo* outside its domain, then its own domain is not secure either. It is inconsistent that the United States—which after World War II had urged with such persistence friendly West European countries to give their colonies freedom—should treat with solemn respect the Soviet Empire, a relic of Tsarist imperialism, and fail to recognize the national aspirations of its non-Russian inhabitants as a fundamental human right.

Our political leverage in dealings with a country which has no free opinion, is necessarily weak. To the extent that we may be said to have it, this leverage is negative in nature. It consists in doing nothing that might enhance the legitimacy of the Soviet dictatorship and its transient management, the kind of legitimacy that the regime has a difficult time securing from its own subjects. We should not sign accords that recognize as legitimate Soviet conquests in return for promises of liberalization that the regime cannot realize without undermining its authority. We should not engage in frenetic "dialogues" which allow Soviet diplomats to exploit natural differences of opinion that exist in free societies without fear of reciprocity. We should not seek "summits" for the sake of public relations because they project a false

sense of identity between dictators and duly elected officials, both of whom are deceptively called "Presidents." Accords, dialogues, and summits make sense only when they are conducted with good will on both sides and result in fair and implementable agreements. Under any other conditions, they serve mainly as instruments in Soviet psychological-ideological warfare.

The second opportunity we have to influence the Soviet system is through the exercise of prudence in East-West economic relations. It is said that the Soviet economy is in large measure self-sufficient. This proposition is correct but not entirely relevant. The importance of Western technology for the Soviet Union must be measured not in the share of imports in the overall economy but the role such imports play in certain of its critical sectors. Computers, semiconductors, or fiber optics may amount to relatively little in terms of the Soviet GNP, but they are essential to some industries, including those which produce directly for the military. As Anthony Sutton has shown in his exhaustive study, *Western Technology and Soviet Economic Development*, Western technology has played an important part in Soviet industrial development all along, from the early 1920s on, even in periods when the USSR pursued a policy of ostensible autarky. Importation of advanced technology permits the Soviet regime to avoid false starts, thus saving it both costs and time in the design of equipment.

But the importance of imports of technology and capital transcends for the Soviet Union such calculable advantages. The Soviet economy—essentially Stalinist in its design—is in deep systemic trouble, in part because of excessive centralization and in part because of the absence of adequate incentives for the work force. The consequence is an unremitting decline in the rate of growth of the GNP. The system stands in need of thoroughgoing reform. The Communist elite, however, fears it because reform will inevitably enhance the economic independence of the citizenry, thereby undermining the monopoly of economic resources on which the political power of the regime in the ultimate analysis rests. Assistance rendered to the Soviet Union to overcome its economic difficulties under the existing arrangement, inherited from Stalin, helps the Soviet elite out of its dilemma and shores up the very system which is the main source of Soviet aggressiveness. Thus, while on one hand we spend billions to match the Soviet military buildup in order to thwart Soviet expansion which the system generates, with the other—for the sake of relatively piddling commercial profits—we help keep the same system intact. The Soviet penchant for 1970s-style détente derives from the fact that it allows the Soviet leadership to eat its cake and have it too: to arm itself at a frenetic pace and instigate anti-Western movements in the Third World and, at the same time, using Western credits and technology, to keep Stalinism intact.

Self-imposed restraint in commercial and fiscal dealings with the Soviet Union will not bring that country to its knees; nor will it cause it to withdraw

from Afghanistan or to allow the restoration of Solidarity. But it will at least compel Moscow to face the consequences of its political and military priorities. It will make it harder for the Soviet elite to maintain an increasingly less productive economic regime while enhancing its military establishment as well as engaging in costly adventures abroad. Something eventually will have to give: either the Soviet leadership will have to abandon Stalinism or it will have to curtail its imperialism. It is decidedly not in the interest of the Western powers to postpone the inevitable day when such a choice will have to be made.

A policy which combines external containment with what, for lack of a better word, may be called psychological and economic containment, cannot be expected to bring quick results. It is certain that, confronted with such a strategy, the Soviet regime will balk, and probably seek to exasperate the West by doing the very opposite of what is expected of it. But, in contrast to military action which can be swift and decisive, any peaceful foreign policy strategy designed to encourage basic change, calls for patience. Years, perhaps decades, will be required before it bears fruit. But this is not a heavy price to pay when one considers the alternatives.

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