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Some aspects of American security are widely thought to be vulnerable to Soviet exploitation and indeed many are. This paper examines several problems and areas and finds them less vulnerable than some otherwise have thought. Prudence, however, remains the final recommendation.

EXPLOITING AMERICAN VULNERABILITIES

by

James A. Nathan

One consequence of the combination of the diffusion of power in international politics and growing Soviet military power has been an apparent inability of American arms to structure events. To be sure, we are regularly reassured that when vital interests are threatened, American might will be ready. Yet, lately, most events do not seem to lend themselves to a military determination. And although some U.S. interests have been discarded and others muted, by and large most U.S. interests inherited from earlier years have been retained.

In an earlier day the domestic consensus on the cold war and its attendant conceptions of the consequences for world order of expanded Soviet power made the use of force seem more expedient. Now, however, in the absence of apparent remedy, there seems an inescapable compulsion to reach for rhetoric and diplomatic legend.

When an exhausted Byzantium dealt with the problem of a farflung collapsing empire, it resorted to calling visiting Ambassadors to the capital by a circuitous route so that almost every fortification and military device would be in evidence:

There were interminable reviews at which the same troops emerging from one of the gates are entering by another, came round and round again carrying different kinds of armour. In order to dazzle... by glamour and mystery [,] mechanical devices [were used so that] the steps of the Emperor's throne [would] roar terribly. [T]he throne itself worked up and down, so that the visiting ambassador, on rising from the kowtow... would notice that the Emperor has been miraculously elevated.¹

Like that Empire situated on the edge of Europe 10 centuries ago, the

40 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

American "Empire" seems, to some, enervated; held together with smoke and mirrors.

Farflung commitments are forever reaffirmed to reassure the doubtful both abroad and at home. Rhetoric and assurance seem to be an inflated coin. Yet, assurances seem necessary lest a conspicuous silence or liquidation of interests call forth a run on the bank.

* * *

Is the United States vulnerable to a ruthless exploitation of contemporary economic interdependencies and today's apparent military *immobilisme*? This paper examines the capacity of the Soviet Union to undertake a campaign to exploit what might seem to be areas of weakness in American security. To be sure, American interests are at risk. The capacity, however, for a manipulation of these risks may not be very great for it may be part of the "great transformation" of international politics that neither the Soviets nor the United States are given much latitude to bedevil systematically the other toward any specific, realistic end.

The Shape of American Vulnerability. The relationship between the United States, the non-Communist industrialized, and industrializing nations are, of course, the basis of the interdependence model of world political economics so prevalent today. But the position of the United States vis-à-vis the rest of the Western World economy is probably stronger than all other elements of that system. Five years of high energy imports at high prices that in turn contribute significantly to Western monetary uncertainty are indicative of important American vulnerabilities and interdependence. However, analysis of the effects of rising energy costs on the other members of the non-Communist international economy makes it clear that the relative short and long-term

political and economic effects of the 1973-1974 and the recent 10-week crisis in Iranian oil production was greater in the Third World, Europe, and Japan than it was in the United States.² Furthermore, comparative assessments of relative vulnerabilities reflected in trade relations, whether taking "gross" indicators such as proportion of GNP represented by exports and imports or more "refined" measures focusing on a composition of trade, the nature of trading partners (friendly allies vs. unfriendly states), trade in specific commodities (e.g., energy or crucial imported raw materials), or the diversity of sources of supply and ultimately substitution capability, all underscore the relative security of the American economy within the Western economic context.³

At the same time, the Third World economies involved in these trade relations find it difficult to extract themselves from their dependencies within the "global system" or to revolutionize the economic order. Notwithstanding analyses of the contradictions purportedly driving the industrialized economies, the less-developed nations have almost without exception accepted the notion of development and all that it implies in terms of raw materials sales to and capital and technological imports from the West. Furthermore, when there are Third World profits to be made from this relationship in excess of internal development needs, the American economy appears to be a preferred place for investments.

Obviously there are vulnerabilities in the American essential raw materials position. Thus, apart from the most important case of oil (to be taken up below), perusal of any list of imported industrial raw materials reveals numerous examples of U.S. import levels running at 80, 90, even 100 percent of consumption. But most of these materials are not readily subject to embargo. Supply is often dispersed among

ideologically incompatible sources and substitution is in most instances possible if price reaches a critical level. In those cases where substitution is not possible stockpiles are generally adequate to tide over any temporary shortage.⁴

Life could be made unpleasant and more expensive for Americans in the short run by certain kinds of embargoes; but the potential exploiter of American dependencies would have to confront important consequences that might prove less bearable than those imposed on the United States. Perhaps most important are the financial dependencies of those who export and, presumably, would try to exact advantages from their raw materials position. No matter what their ideological coloration, all Third World raw materials producers have learned a painful lesson from the economic downturn in the industrialized world occasioned by the first great use of raw materials power by a group of their own. Oil seemed in 1973-1974 the exception to these observations but with time even this crucial, cartel-dominated, Western dependency has taken on many of the attributes of interdependency. Moreover, it is not clear that it or any of the other conceivably similar interdependencies are readily subject to decisive Soviet intervention and exploitation.

The United States gets about 42 percent of its oil from OPEC with Europe and Japan receiving in excess of 90 percent from the same source.⁵ However, recent discoveries in Mexico, increased conservation, stockpiling, and oil sharing in time of boycott or supply interruption could lower the effects of any future interruptions implied in the above dependence measures. The Mexican reserves have been estimated from around 60 billion barrels (which would place it near Iran) to over 200 billion barrels.⁶ Mexican, Alaskan, and perhaps, eventually, Chinese oil coupled with a conservation program comparable to, say, Sweden's, where usage

on a per capita basis is now 33 percent less than in the United States, would go some distance in minimizing the effects of any future oil curtailments.

If an embargo were OPEC-inspired and not a function of a hostile power's blockade, further remedies would be possible. One would be a freezing or sequestering of American-placed OPEC short and long-term dollar holdings. After all, some 75 percent of OPEC reserves are held in dollars; 80 percent of all reserves are held by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates; and 25 percent of the dollar holdings are in short-term liquid assets and 50 percent of the long-term assets are in the United States. Recent reports indicate that the trend in OPEC investments is increasingly toward long-term holdings. Moreover, most of Arab investments are managed by American financial institutions (over which there would be government influence in an emergency) as there is some distrust that Arab banks are subject to political and personal rivalries that usually do not beset American institutions.⁷ Finally, of course, no major Arab economic development or even educational plan can go forward for very long without the active cooperation of the U.S. Government and its citizens. Current development undertakings are so vast that no other state or combination of states could rescue even Saudi Arabia or the new Islamic Republic of Iran from the studied indifference or hostility of the United States.⁸

In peacetime, it is hard to imagine any coalition of Soviet power and producer nations conspiring to isolate the American economy even if it were possible to extract benefit from such an effort. If the OPEC states now find themselves caught up in financial interdependencies, how much more so the rest of the non-Western world? Most Third World nations are painfully short of reserves, rely on Western commodity preferences and have, in any case,

42 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

precious little to sell. The more developed Less-Developed Countries (LDCs) are too conscious of the dangers of courting permanent Western antipathy. Moreover, when the Group of 77 (actually 111) met in Nairobi in 1976, they showed little disposition to side with the Soviets against the West. Rather, most LDCs grouped the Soviets with the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) states in presenting their demands. In many cases, the LDCs were more hostile to the Russians, noting that the Soviets give less aid to fewer countries than the West. "Trade with the Soviet Union," as one diplomat was heard to complain, "is a one way street." The LDCs are, he pointed out, paid in rubles spendable only in the Soviet Union, not even East European countries. The Soviet goods are shoddy, deliveries intermittent and promises of aid often go begging for performance.⁹

Impoverished producer nations have little of the flexibility that consuming nations have. Most have capital needs that cannot possibly be squeezed out of internal savings no matter how brutally pushed. Barring rending themselves away from a money economy, most producer societies are inextricably tied to Western consumers no matter how monopolistic their position, how large their reserves or hostile their ideology. No non-Western society has adopted Marxism, and, as a result, refused to sell its wares to the West. Indeed, in Angola, 80 percent of state revenue is provided by Gulf Oil which is aided, in fact guarded and guaranteed, by Cuban troops. And recently the Angolan Government has banged a very loud drum in the hopes of attracting further American investment.¹⁰

One could argue that once a state adopts a collectivist ideology or begins to identify itself with forces of radicalism, then its pricing policies are likely to become predatory. But in the bauxite industry, for instance, Jamaica was

quick to discover that the realities of an elastic demand curve and diverse sources of supply, can dampen ideological zeal.¹¹ In the case of oil, one could argue that the history of Libyan dealings with the West demonstrates that a sufficiently motivated and well-placed producer society can play real havoc in a way it would not have done had it not been associated with radicalism. But Qadaffi's success can be attributed as much to the proximity of Libyan oil to European markets, its unusually low sulfur content, and a foreign exchange position in 1970 and 1971 sufficient to finance 3 years of imports as it is to his ideology.¹²

Of the two purported petro-superpowers, Iran and Saudi Arabia, Iranian supplies to the West seem at present most vulnerable. But even if Iran was overwhelmed by a leftist pro-Soviet minority, the effects could be contained. An anti-Western Iranian Government might choose to sell its oil to the Soviets or the East Europeans rather than the West, but other OPEC producers have demonstrated capacity to cover the shortfall to Western Europe and Japan (albeit at higher prices). Israel might well suffer grievously from this restriction, given that 60 percent of its oil had come from Iran. But the United States has guaranteed Israeli petroleum supplies for 5 years. After this period, one supposes, the Israelis will have to make another arrangement with the United States as a part of any settlement with its neighbors. South Africa is vulnerable, perhaps, but South African coal conversion and gold supplies seems to have alleviated any immediate hardship. In the long run, South African oil needs might well serve as an instrument of American and West European diplomacy now apparently committed to majority rule in the area. And finally, of course, the behavior of other ostensibly anti-American/Western OPEC members has not proved absolutely intolerable to Western interests. Both

Algeria and Libya have proved willing to sell their petroleum to the West. Once their oil has entered the heretofore flexible, Western-dominated distribution system, they have not proved interested in or able to control its ultimate destination.

On the other hand, the new Islamic theocracy does not automatically serve Soviet interests. Indeed, as Ambassador Sullivan recently put it, "There are 40 million Moslems in the Soviet Union just north of Iran and the last thing the Soviets want is an Islamic Republic there."¹³ Eastern Europe has suffered more dislocation from the recent Iranian cutbacks than any Western society, thus putting an added burden on the Soviets to supply them or force their bloc associates into further dependence on Western sources of supply and finance.¹⁴ In the end, Iran might fragment along disputatious, religious and ethnic lines in a bloody repetition of the Lebanese model. Still, this event would hardly be welcome by the Soviets. The West might find what was left of greater Iran to be a ward unable to pay debts or pump oil. The result would be costly but might not really affect the price of oil any more than the interruption has up to now—some 10 percent. The remaining possibilities—an anti-Shah coalition advocating "clean modernization" but in some measure hostage to the pro-Shah military, or, alternatively, a "Brazilian solution" with the military in control—would remain well within American and Western influence if not control. In both these latter cases, the financing of the Iranian debt and development programs would remain American and in the latter, the "umbilical" dependence on the West for military supply and training would provide additional leverage.¹⁵

The Saudis are even better situated to interrupt Western oil supplies without having to draw on outside superpower help. But current Saudi leadership is, despite some recent overtures to

the Soviets, hardly sympathetic to Soviet ambitions or to a crippling of the West. Moreover, Saudi pricing policy is a calculus of what the West can pay and how profits can be optimized over the longest haul. An oil shutoff would stimulate retaliation, cripple the growing military, economic, and political alliance with the West and the Third World and promote American efforts to move seriously to real energy independence.

Precisely because the Saudis have become more assertive in world politics may mean that they have become more exposed to Soviet mischief and this may account for their reluctance to base American forces or publicly welcome the concept of a new "Fifth Fleet." The Saudis have concerned themselves with events in the Gulf, Africa, the Maghreb, Pakistan and could, conceivably, ally themselves against a Soviet move based in Iraq, the Horn, Afghanistan, or Yemen that they found militarily threatening. This in turn, one could speculate, might well invite Soviet retaliation. Or the Soviets might simply find it expedient to put pressure on the West by crippling a Saudi regime in some manner. The problem, of course, is how.

Soviet Military Intervention? A Soviet military intervention in the Gulf area would run a seemingly insurmountable gauntlet of obstacles. To begin with, the balance of interests in the area is asymmetric. To be sure, the Arabian peninsula is nearer to the Soviets than it is to the United States. But it is vastly more important to the United States; and, in any confrontation between superpowers, the balance of interest is likely to determine the tenacity of any defense strategy. It has been estimated that a Soviet blockade of the Gulf could take as few as 250 mines dropped from the air.¹⁶ These however, would soon be cleared in the absence of sustained sea and air support, the latter being extremely

44 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

tenuous if projected from beyond the Caucasus.

If repeated mining with escorts or if a landing of airborne troops on the peninsula were contemplated then escorts would have to fly from as yet unsecured bases in southern Iraq.¹⁷ If the Soviets could not attain early air superiority, then a resupply of the initial Soviet surge would most likely have to come over land—a 1,000-mile trail from the Caucasus to Kuwait over Persian mountain passes. Even if the Soviets were assisted by Iraq, "roads . . . are rudimentary at best. The road 'net' is nominal . . . water is scarce . . . way stations are nonexistent. Wear and tear on men and material would be immense."¹⁸ And if the Soviets wanted to land men by sea, some experts have said that the speediest way to get sufficient landing craft to the region would be to crate them and fly them to the region.¹⁹

The Soviets could, of course, bring their significant submarine capability to bear in a Gulf blockade. However, Soviet submarines would be thousands of miles from their nearest home port, regional repair facilities would be vulnerable, and the necessary concentration of submarines would make them relatively easy to locate.²⁰ A more sensible strategy for the Soviets might involve plying the open Atlantic or the Cape routes. Even then, however, a geographic fix on Soviet submarines would attend many attacks. Moreover, there are more tankers than submarines and the submarines would, after a time, have to return to port. In so doing, they become subject to the disadvantages attendant to the Soviet Union's geographic location: well-known choke-points where it would be relatively simple to locate and eliminate departing or returning submarines.

The Soviets could attempt to mount a blockade with both submarines and surface ships, but the problem of air cover remains.²¹ The Soviets have

reportedly flown TU-16 bombers out of Aden to survey the Persian Gulf but these airplanes are cumbersome and vulnerable. Moreover, it is unclear if they could sustain much of a combat operations capability against American fixed-wing carrier-based aircraft during any time of tension. Soviet bombers might be aided by the VSTOLs carried by the Pacific-based *Minsk* that recently appeared in the Indian Ocean in the wake of the U.S. carrier task force led by *Constellation* and *Midway*. (The appearance of *Minsk* may have been happenstance in any case; apparently the Soviets had been planning to send *Minsk* to Vladivostok since January 1974.²²) But the Soviets have no secure port nearer than Cam Rahn Bay and there is little assurance that they have free access to those facilities.²³ Moreover, the current Indian Ocean flotilla has only about six fighting ships and refueling and repairs are a problem in the absence of reliable in-area basing. In fact, repair and resupply seem to be an endemic problem of the Soviet Navy. In contrast to the U.S. Navy's one out of three ship deployment ability, the Soviets reportedly can maintain fewer than one out of six. Furthermore, deployed vessels spend considerably more time at anchor than American vessels and are frequently, in the case of the Indian Ocean task force, observed in tow. By calling on cruisers, destroyers and carriers from the 6th and 7th Fleets in the April 1979 Yemen crisis, the United States built up its naval force to more than 11 surface combatants. The Soviets had seven or fewer in the area, the most impressive of which arrived well after the American ships had been on the scene for some time.²⁴

The Threat Elsewhere. The only other position comparable to the Persian Gulf in terms of its relation to Western prosperity is South Africa. The United States' \$1.7 billion investment in the country represents about 16 percent

of external investment in South Africa, and American banks hold over \$2 billion in loans.²⁵ Great Britain has about eight times this level of investment and the return on it is a critical prop to the United Kingdom's payments position. In addition, South Africa is endowed with vast wealth: 86 percent of the world's platinum, most of the world's industrial diamonds, magnesium, vanadium, and nearly half of the world's chrome and uranium.²⁶ The chrome situation is perhaps most significant, for as Dr. Earl R. Parker of the University of California at Berkeley has written, "The United States is strategically more vulnerable to long term chromium embargoes than to an embargo of any other natural resource, including petroleum."²⁷ There are no known substitutes for chrome and although it can be recycled and complex tax regulations could restrict unnecessary decorative use, only some 20 percent of American imports could likely be trimmed. Given current consumption, however, there is about 2½ years worth of stockpiled chrome. Hence, any boycott would take a number of years to make itself felt.²⁸ Finally, of course, about 18 million barrels of oil a day and about one-fourth of European food imports are carried via the Cape route, thereby adding yet another crucial strategic dimension to the area.²⁹

In some ways, therefore, it could be argued that South Africa is as critical as the Gulf—and the security of both is not unrelated. Ninety percent of South Africa's oil comes from Iran and the remaining 10 percent from elsewhere in the Gulf.³⁰ If no oil could be delivered to South Africa, the South African economy, it has been estimated, would collapse in less than 2 years.³¹ But in the unlikely event of a blockade by the Soviets, they would find it difficult, at least, to enforce a selective embargo. Tankers carry oil bound for many ports and an effort to stop ships bound for South Africa would soon find itself

interrupting Western commerce as well. Moreover, apart from previously noted constraints, the capacity of the Soviet Union to maintain its flotilla on station has been, to an extent, conditioned on the hospitality of Guinea. Sekou Toure has not only balked at building any significant basing facilities despite a visit from as lofty a personage as Admiral Gorshkov, but most recently he has withdrawn landing rights for Soviet reconnaissance flights that had patrolled U.S. sealanes.³² Perhaps alternative basing will become available in Angola or somewhere on the east coast. Nevertheless, it is clear that Soviet capacity to project its presence is extremely tenuous.

A more probable threat to South Africa comes from the various guerrilla, insurgent and hostile armies arrayed along South Africa's northern border. Most military observers, however, have argued that the South Africans can be reasonably sanguine about their defenses in this area. The terrain is open, hospitable to mechanized warfare and relatively uncongenial to guerrilla activity. The difficulties of coordination of all potentially hostile armed factions are enormous as they are rent by ideological and tribal divisions as well as differences in levels of political sophistication. The South Africans, moreover, have even fewer compunctions than the Rhodesians concerning sanctuaries outside their territory. Perhaps opposition could be led by Cubans. But the 1975 Cuban-South African engagements left Castro's forces bloodied and should be a memory that would give them pause.

Further, for a "pariah state" surrounded by hostile neighbors, the South Africans have invested thus far a surprisingly small amount of their GNP and manpower in defense. The Israelis with a smaller population than the white population of South Africa can field an army of 250,000; under pressure, it is estimated, the South Africans could mount a reasonably sustained campaign

46 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

with 500,000 troops.³³ The South Africans manufacture most of their own munitions and their only real liability seems to be their air force, which is nonetheless more than equal to that of its neighbors at this time. The Israelis have established a close military relationship with South Africa and are known to be anxious to sell some sophisticated aircraft to the South Africans. If South Africa were in danger of being strangled, moreover, either by the Soviets or a coalition of Soviet-backed associates, it is plausible to expect that the South Africans would resort to nuclear diplomacy. Indeed, the South African capability seems to be not unlike (and perhaps linked to) that attributed to the Israelis and may well put a ceiling on the conflict and inhibit great powers from synoptic quick fixes in the area.

Soviet influence elsewhere in those areas of the Third World of importance to the United States is no less ambiguous than the cases discussed above. Despite some Western analysis which sees the Third World as naturally predisposed towards the Soviet Union,³⁴ Third World leaders can be quite skeptical concerning a Soviet presence. Thus, among the nonaligned nations, something of a split has developed concerning Soviet and Cuban involvement in Africa epitomized in the resolutions adopted at a meeting of nonaligned states in Sri Lanka 2 years ago. And, last year in Belgrade, these states condemned "imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, racism and all other forms of foreign domination." This phraseology has been widely interpreted to allude specifically to the Soviet Union and Cuba.³⁵

Soviet military assistance seems to have been carefully targeted to maximize Soviet influence, but it is not clear that this activity is invariably crowned with success. Hence, for instance, to fret about Iraq as a launching pad for a Soviet move against the Gulf is not only

to ignore the herculean nature of establishing a meaningful Soviet presence in the area, it is also at odds with the history and character of politics in the region. Iraq has, even when it is most dependent on the Soviet Union, refused Soviet requests for a naval station and an aircraft landing and refitting depot. Moreover, the Iraqis have never been sympathetic to Communist activity in the army, a fact made abundantly clear in the recently reported purges of Communists from the military.³⁶ Syria, perhaps Moscow's only other important associate in the Middle East, was asked for military facilities in early 1977 and refused. Even on the verbal level, the Syrians have refused to back Soviet support for its various clients in Africa.³⁷ The Soviet loss in Egypt appears incapable of being retrieved for years, although a trickle of spare parts has arrived since 1975. In the Sudan, where the Soviets maintained a large military mission and had hopes for achieving considerable influence in the Sudanese Armed Forces, they were expelled in May 1977. Furthermore, the Sudanese subsequently have become involved against Soviet and Cuban activities in the Horn.

Some fear that Soviet influence in Afghanistan represents more than a traditional addition to the Soviet border glacis, but that it will become a springboard to control of the Gulf. A multi-lane highway runs from the Soviet Union through Kabul to Pakistan and that could be used to mass troops on the Pakistani border. An American general recently said, "If Pakistan should fall apart, the Russians would have a clear road to the Arabian Sea and the capability to build bases near the exit from the Persian Gulf through the Straits of Hormus."³⁸ But lacking a reliable pro-Soviet regime in Iran the Russian position would be a difficult one. And further, it is plausible that the prospect of a Soviet-dominated Pakistan would compel the Indians to respond in

some way, especially in view of the recent change in government and the longstanding Indian desire to see the Indian Ocean free of outside military power.

It may be true, of course, that the Soviet Union's ambition in the Third World, no matter what their current fortunes and limits of capacity, knows no bounds. Certainly their view of their "responsibilities" as the leader in the restructuring of international relations would suggest this.³⁹ But whatever ultimate Soviet aims may be, the breakdown of the bipolar world, the diffusion of power and the rise of power competencies apart from American or Soviet control are bound to constrain the reach, if not the ambition, of the Soviet Union in the Third World.

Conclusion. Psychologists know that there is a phenomenon called ideotic memory. Those who experience it see the past with astonishing intensity. Some compare this remarkable facility with the viewing of a photo flash that we can see again with bright intensity when we close our eyes. The brutality and carnage perpetrated by totalitarian governments in this century has had a similar effect on those in the West who concern themselves with foreign affairs. It has been concluded from the interwar and immediate post-World War II experiences that totalitarian regimes were necessarily aggressive. Their appetites, it has been feared, grew with the eating and knew no satiation. For the demands that totalitarian regimes made were not predicated on objective concerns with security but stemmed from a peculiar set of needs fueled by the pathological mix of power and ideology. At home, a population needed to be incessantly mobilized for purposes of control and to be diverted from its discontents with promises ever unfulfilled. The Soviets' militarized domestic structure gave their chiliasm even more force when it confronted opportunities abroad.

Those scholars and policymakers who sketched grim cold war portrayals of totalitarianism were not political cartoonists. The Soviets have posed a threat to Western institutions and values. And if Soviet leaders did not welcome war, they were not loathe to play on Western abhorrence of force. But to argue that such a picture is as appropriate today as it once was would deny that there has been a waning of ideological and political vigor in Soviet society. Few could deny that the Soviet Union is led by an oligarchic gerontocracy. This almost dottering leadership has apparently made few preparations for the long approaching succession crisis.⁴⁰ The ruling elite suffers not only from the normal ossifications of age but also from declining zeal and an entrenched and maddeningly inefficient machinery of state and national economy. Moreover, the sense and tendencies of the separate "national" and ethnic makeup of the Soviet citizenry have accelerated as the Great Russians have become a minority. Modern ills such as vandalism, alcoholism, and divorce are rampant. And some cynics have claimed that those who look to the Soviet working class are really looking to a contradiction in terms.

Whether some new leadership will be disposed more toward an accommodation with the West than some of the harder line elements is largely beyond Western influence. But by pursuing an unwillingness to assume a pragmatic stance with not only Brezhnev's successors but with the current oligarchy as well cannot help but strengthen the hand of those antiaccommodationist factions that virtually all analysts see as playing a role in contemporary and any future Soviet leadership.

It may be, of course, that Brezhnev or his successors, at some time, may regard themselves as being in the same asymmetric relationship to the United States as the United States was to them

48 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

in the Cuban Missile Crisis and, therefore, opt for a military showdown with the United States by attempting to cut off vital resources from the West. But there is no evidence that they have cause for this kind of confidence. Indeed, it is not clear that they can even sustain their position of essential equivalence, for the Soviets apparently have no defenses against the next generation of American strategic weapons, the cruise missiles which, when they enter the American strategic arsenal will likely be competent first-strike weapons. As Dr. William Perry, Chief of Research for the Department of Defense, put it on 1 June 1978, even if the Soviets "spend tens of billions" on defenses "we will be able to sustain the penetrability of the cruise missile."⁴¹ But assuming, however, that through a massive effort the Soviets are able to maintain a position more or less equivalent to the United States, perhaps even the Soviets are beginning to realize, as G.A. Arbatov, director of Moscow's Institute of the USA observed, "The further accumulation of military power is not accompanied by an increase in political power."⁴² For on balance it is arguable that the Soviet Union has experienced as much frustration as the United States over the last decade of superpower interaction in the face of interdependence.

The world does not run by Soviet management and the longer Americans restrain themselves from tasks where the legitimacy of a U.S. presence is in doubt, the more likely others will concern themselves with regional instabilities. In a world without the rigid certainties of the cold war, there is a tendency for those whom we formerly cared for and even some who are our

nominal ideological adversaries, to care for themselves. Hence, in a world of increasingly diffuse power, others are attempting to manage their own interests in the absence of a predictable American response. It is a process the United States is not accustomed to and it does have its uncertainties, but the United States need not fear it and perhaps, after all, it should be welcomed.

The domestic realities of a now long fractured cold war consensus, economic uneasiness and the inability easily to manipulate the idea of Russian threat have severely constrained political leadership. The abandonment of Taiwan, the insensitivities of Congress, and the domestic politics of other states, bode little promise of managing a coherent set of commitments or the addition of further burdens. The alternative is to come to grips with a bad conscience and the moral ambiguity of politics in a fashion that faces inevitable upheaval with more equanimity and fewer words. This position is unaccustomed. But prudent restraint in word and deed can make it more comfortable.

BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



James A. Nathan is an associate professor of political science at the University of Delaware. In addition to numerous articles he is co-author (with James K. Oliver) of *U.S. Foreign Policy and World Order*, the recently published *The Future of United States Naval Power*, and the forthcoming *World Politics in the Late Twentieth Century*.

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50 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

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