

## A RAND NOTE

THE SOVIET UNION AND SECOND-AREA ACTIONS

John Van Oudenaren

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## PREFACE

This Note, prepared under Ford Foundation support, is the result of a discussion among a number of Rand colleagues about the relationship between "central" and "second-area" actions--i.e., actions in the central NATO-Warsaw Pact area and actions in regions that lie outside that area--in Soviet political and military thinking. The author would like to thank Paul Davis, James Digby, Harry Gelman, Michael Rich, and Robert Perry, all of whom commented on an early draft.

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## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

During the past decade the Soviet Union has shown an increasing capacity and willingness to intervene militarily in regions outside the central NATO-Warsaw Pact area. This Note discusses the likelihood of further "second-area" actions. It also addresses the question of whether the United States should attempt to challenge Soviet clients and allies in second areas, either to affect the overall U.S.-Soviet balance or to counterbalance specific Soviet actions that the United States finds difficult to meet directly.

The Note concludes that while the United States must be prudent in planning against Soviet military actions in second areas, it should not overestimate either the gravity of such challenges or the opportunities for exploiting vulnerabilities on the Soviet side. While in theory the USSR has the option of using its enormous military forces for intervention in contiguous and noncontiguous second areas, in reality the Soviets regard as available for second areas only those forces not devoted to filling three central tasks: deterring U.S. strategic nuclear forces; maintaining a favorable balance vis-à-vis Western Europe; and maintaining a favorable balance vis-à-vis China.

While the United States must work to blunt Soviet capabilities in the third world, it must do so without easing Soviet burdens in Europe and the Far East. To do so would be counterproductive, in that it would free up Soviet resources for use in second areas that the United States could not easily match.

For their part, Soviet leaders would like to expand their influence in the third world, but do so without mobilizing Western opposition. Soviet policy in fact aims to transfer the momentum of "legitimate" Soviet political successes in Europe (i.e., detente) to the competition in the third world. These Soviet efforts to link, at the political level, increasing influence in third areas with increasing influence over Western Europe indicate a preference in Moscow for a kind of controlled, gradual evolution--aided to be sure by both the shadow and occasional substance of Soviet military power--toward exclusion of the

United States from Eurasia rather than a sudden thrust at Iran, Iraq, or Pakistan that would dramatically overturn the world balance of power.

This broad Soviet approach to European and second-area problems presents the United States with difficult policy dilemmas. Although the United States may recognize the low probability of massive Soviet military action against second areas like Iran, prudence demands that it plan against such contingencies. In doing so, however, it runs the risk of itself appearing as an aggressive, reckless power both to third world and European audiences.

The Soviets are able to exploit global tensions and renewed U.S. activism in the third world in their efforts to undermine U.S. influence in Europe. Such efforts, if successful, will in turn favorably affect the USSR's ability to pursue an active policy outside Europe, thereby making more likely the very contingencies that the United States is aiming to deter. Soviet efforts to prevent the modernization of NATO's tactical and theater nuclear forces as well as more far-reaching attempts to create nuclear-free zones in Europe, for example, could tip the global balance and give the Soviet Union new latitude outside the NATO area.

One potential avenue for dealing with the dilemma posed by a Soviet policy aimed at both Europe and the third world may be to try to influence Soviet behavior by a combination of military and nonmilitary means. The historical record does tend to show that the Soviets do not exploit third world, second-area instabilities solely when they have the military capability to do so. They seek to obtain prior implicit or explicit Western agreement on spheres of interest, and often invest heavily in subversion within target countries before undertaking external aggression. In addition, then, to trying to limit the political damage of its worst-case military planning, the United States might try to limit the need for military responses by increasing its support for those forces within a country resisting Soviet pressure as well by demonstrating a clear geopolitical interest in the country itself.

CONTENTS

PREFACE .....	iii
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS .....	v
Section	
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
II. IDENTIFYING TARGETS .....	8
III. SOVIET CAPABILITIES FOR SECOND-AREA ACTIONS .....	10
IV. SOVIET BEHAVIOR IN CRISES .....	15
V. U.S.-SOVIET POLITICAL RIVALRY .....	22
VI. CONCLUSIONS .....	25



## I. INTRODUCTION

Any analysis of Soviet thinking about actions outside the NATO-Warsaw Pact area must begin with the recognition that the Soviet Union has always been and will remain a fundamentally European power.<sup>1</sup> Its emergence as a "superpower" rival of the United States after 1945 was a direct consequence of the destruction of the European state system and the permanent insertion of the Red Army into the heart of Europe.<sup>2</sup>

In the 1970s, it is true, the Soviet Union pursued an unprecedentedly active policy outside Europe as it sought to enhance its influence in Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. Among the causes most frequently offered for this activism (and for its relative success) are: (1) the emergence of strategic parity between the United States and the Soviet Union; (2) the development by the Soviet Union of conventional power projection forces; and (3) local instability in countries such as Angola, Mozambique, Afghanistan, and Ethiopia that offered opportunities for the Soviet Union and its proxies.

These are all good reasons whose relative importance can be debated. To them, however, must be added a fourth: It was in the late sixties and early seventies that the USSR finally established its full legitimacy as a European power whose sphere of influence in Eastern Europe was unassailable (as demonstrated in Czechoslovakia in 1968), whose territorial and political gains as a result of the Second World War were unequivocally recognized (the Soviet-West German treaty of

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<sup>1</sup> See Hajo Holborn, "Russia and the European Political System," in Ivo Lederer, ed., *Russian Foreign Policy: Essays in Historical Perspective*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1962. "...Europe is the area where Russian foreign policy has always operated, and the Russians feel themselves to be not only the most numerous but the greatest of all European peoples. They believe, on these grounds and on ideological grounds, that the Soviet Union has a right to greater influence in all European affairs than she has now." Malcolm Mackintosh, "Moscow's view of the balance of power," *The World Today*, Vol. 29, No. 3, March 1973, p. 111.

<sup>2</sup> See Ludwig Dehio, "The Passing of the European Political System," in Ludwig Dehio, ed., *Germany and World Politics in the Twentieth Century* W. W. Norton, New York, 1967.

1970, East Germany's admission to the UN, the 1975 Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe), and whose status of co-equality with the United States (which implied superiority over all other states) was codified in agreements (the Non-Proliferation Treaty, SALT, the 1972 agreement on "Basic Principles of Relations Between the U.S. and the USSR") and accepted by elites and publics in the West and in the third world.

Soviet political breakthroughs in Europe were not in themselves either necessary or sufficient to insure the active third world policy of the seventies. Khrushchev worked to expand Soviet influence in Africa, the Middle East, and Cuba in spite (and perhaps in part because) of a frustration with the stalemate over Germany and the status of Berlin. Conversely, the emergence of strategic parity, the USSR's acquisition of power projection capabilities, and above all the emergence of opportunities in unstable areas of the third world suggest that the USSR would have pursued an active policy in the third world even in the absence of the treaties with West Germany and the European security conference.

What the Soviet Union's political gains in Europe (and vis-à-vis the United States) did allow, however, was the pursuit by the USSR of a global policy that sought to link the growth of Soviet influence in Europe with the growth of influence in the third world, and to legitimize both with reference to the Soviet Union's acknowledged status as a "world" or "super" power. Such a policy would help to forestall negative Western and particularly West European reaction to Soviet activities in the third world, even as the USSR worked to undermine the previously dominant position of the United States in world politics.

In their efforts to establish influence in the third world, Soviet policymakers attempted to transfer the momentum of Soviet political gains in the West to other regions of the world. Following the successful conclusion of the European security conference (which China bitterly opposed), for example, Soviet spokesmen proclaimed that a new impetus had been given to the Soviet Union's parallel project for an Asian security conference (which China also opposed). In 1980, a number of Soviet spokesmen floated proposals for a triangular arrangement involving joint Soviet and West European undertakings with the various

oil-producing states of the Middle East to guarantee access to Persian Gulf oil. A modest start in the direction of triangular Soviet-West European-Middle Eastern energy cooperation was in fact made in the proposed project, since aborted by the Iranian revolution, to transship Iranian natural gas to West Germany via Soviet territory. One could also point to the numerous bilateral agreements that the USSR concluded with West European countries that pledged each side to undertake to promote joint efforts in economic cooperation in various third world countries. Here again, the Soviet Union sought to use its political leverage over Western Europe to enhance its political influence in developing countries, while using its existing political leverage in the third world (particularly in countries such as Angola and Mozambique, whose leaderships want to maintain a pro-Soviet political stance but who also want Western aid and technology) to entice West European countries and individual West European firms into joint arrangements. These triangular arrangements are all directed at the United States and represent Soviet efforts to use Soviet assets--geographical proximity to both Europe and the Middle East, Soviet natural resources, and Soviet political support for the Arab cause against Israel--and American liabilities--remote location, American competition with Europe for world energy supplies, the unpopularity in the Arab world of American support for Israel--in such a way as to acquire increased and mutually reinforcing political influence over Europe *and* the Middle East, Europe, *and* Africa.

None of these attempts to concretely link Soviet initiatives in Europe with efforts to expand influence elsewhere are in themselves particularly important. They are important, however, for what they reveal about Soviet attitudes toward global political change. Soviet efforts to link, at the political level, increasing influence in third areas with increasing influence over Western Europe indicate a preference in Moscow for a kind of controlled, gradual evolution--aided to be sure by both the shadow and occasional substance of Soviet military power--toward exclusion of the United States from Eurasia rather than a sudden thrust at Iran, Iraq, or Pakistan that might dramatically overturn the world balance of power, but that might also mobilize West European, Japanese, and U.S. resistance to Soviet moves.

In short, the Soviets seem to prefer a low risk strategy that offers small but steady gains, rather than a high risk strategy offering potentially higher pay-offs.

In light of the interconnection between the Soviet Union's base in Europe and its ability or willingness to seek influence outside Europe, U.S. planners need to recognize that from the Soviet point of view, NATO and the American presence in Europe *already* exert enormous horizontal pressure on the Soviet Union and have prevented the USSR from playing the global role to which it has aspired. In the Soviet view, the possibility of playing such a role depends upon the achievement of a stable and largely favorable balance in the East vis-à-vis China and in the West vis-à-vis NATO. While U.S. planning for action in Africa and along the southern periphery of the USSR is only prudent, in carrying out these plans the United States should not lose sight of the fact that any chance of their success must depend on the continued ability of NATO (and China) to tie up the bulk of Soviet forces.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, it must be stressed that this "tying up" of Soviet forces by NATO and by China is the result of both political and military factors. In theory, the Soviet Union could use its interior lines of communication to shift forces between the fronts facing Europe, China, and the Middle East. Indeed, in the event of *all-out war*, there is every reason to suspect that the Soviets would do precisely this: They would follow Bolshevik military tradition and concentrate on countering what was perceived as the "main blow" (probably in Europe). In situations *short of all-out war*, however, Soviet political ends are served by maintaining the capability to dominate separate fronts simultaneously, without transferring forces between them. In this regard, it is instructive that neither the Soviet military buildup against China nor the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan involved a major draw-down of forces from Europe.

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<sup>3</sup> "...Soviet leaders oppose NATO less because of its intrinsic military potential than because it brings American power to bear in Europe and--in their somewhat exaggerated estimation--brings European power to bear in support of America's global objectives." Robert Legvold, "The Problem of European Security," *Problems of Communism*, Vol. 23, No. 1, January-February 1974, p. 18.

The reasons for this pattern of behavior are not difficult to discern. While the Soviets have the military option of creating relative margins of superiority in individual fronts and thus escalating laterally on these fronts, they are reluctant to exercise this option precisely because it might further the unification of their political opponents on these different fronts. By retaining the power to intimidate on all three fronts simultaneously, as well as by retaining a robust strategic nuclear parity with the United States, the Soviets feel--probably with some justification--that they are deterring the very combination of powers they most fear. There seems little doubt, for example, that West European leaders have been deterred somewhat from aiding China because of a fear of an adverse reaction from the USSR. Soviet leaders could probably also take comfort from the fact that some U.S. officials counseled against normalization of relations with China for fear that it would disrupt the ongoing SALT II negotiations with the USSR. Indeed, the more U.S. policymakers talk in terms of "strategic triangles" and "playing the China card," the more the Soviets are determined to convince key groups in the United States, China, and other countries that attempts to extract concessions or good behavior from the USSR by the threat of encirclement are bound to fail.<sup>4</sup>

At the same time that the Soviet Union seeks, by virtue of its military strength relative to the United States, China, and Western Europe, to deter potential combinations against it, it also tries, in its propaganda and arms control diplomacy, to gain sympathy for the very "encirclement" that in practice it has successfully neutralized. According to a recent Soviet publication, "the Soviet Union is in a

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<sup>4</sup> Adam Ulam has remarked: "Both detente and the massive Soviet arms buildup were...intended, among other things, to deter the West from offering [help in economic and especially military modernization] to China. Detente was to persuade the US and its allies that they had much more to gain, both politically and economically, by being friends with Russia rather than China. And the arms buildup was to complement Moscow's entreaties with an implicit threat: think of the dangers you could face in incurring Soviet hostility by being too helpful to China! The poor and backward People's Republic was by comparison of little use as a friend, and much less frightening as a potential enemy." *Dangerous Relations: The Soviet Union in World Politics, 1970-1982*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1983, pp. 217-218.

special strategic situation and is compelled, for defensive purposes, to ensure not only general equilibrium of strength, above all with the USA, but also a regional equilibrium in various directions, each of which has its own military specificity."<sup>5</sup>

This combination of military measures to counter encirclement,<sup>6</sup> coupled with diplomatic, propagandistic, and arms control measures to gain concessions for the very "encirclement" that has been neutralized, amounts to what might be characterized as a Soviet version of "walking softly and carrying a big stick." It accounts for the seemingly odd combination of "bullying" (of China, Sweden, Japan, Norway, Pakistan, and Iran among others) and "whining" (about the USSR's security "needs" and its "encirclement") that characterizes Soviet behavior toward the outside world. "Whining" and "bullying" both contribute to Soviet efforts to achieve, in arms control agreements, recognition of a kind *de facto* military superiority for the Soviet Union.

Because of the importance that the Soviets attach to maintaining superiority against all potential enemies simultaneously, it is unlikely that they will depart from their usual pattern of behavior and drawdown forces in one area to engage in action elsewhere. By the same token, however, in cases where the Soviets can maintain existing forces in Europe and China and still act laterally, they may well see opportunities for political benefit. Two examples come to mind. The first was an excursion by proxy, namely, Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia in 1978. The Soviets most certainly backed this venture, believing that it served to humiliate China by a visible military defeat at a time when the PRC was scoring important political gains at the expense of the Soviet Union (the friendship treaty with Japan). It was the Soviet Union that could pose as assured and peaceful while the onus of escalation shifted to China as it chose to "punish" Vietnam by an attack from the north.

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<sup>5</sup> *How To Avert the Threat to Europe*, Moscow, 1983.

<sup>6</sup> These military measures are of course supplemented by active political measures as well, including the recent efforts at a Sino-Soviet rapprochement, Soviet approaches to Japan, and Soviet efforts to drive wedges between the United States and Western Europe.

The second case is that of the invasion of Afghanistan. Precisely because the Soviet Union was able to carry out this action without drawing down forces deployed against NATO and China, it not only demonstrated Soviet power, but shifted the onus of introducing a European dimension into the conflict onto the United States. The failure of Western Europe to respond to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan can be attributed both to Soviet "bullying" (detente is necessary to preserve peace) *and* to Soviet "whining" (the USSR is "threatened" on its southern border).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> According to Pierre Hassner, "one of the least unsatisfactory definitions of 'Finlandization' is the constant need to adopt the most reassuring interpretation of Soviet behavior because one cannot face a more disquieting one or cannot afford to take actions that would follow from it. The apparent or conscious optimism is based, in this case, on a deeper or less conscious pessimism." "Western European Perceptions of the USSR," *Daedalus*, Vol. 108, No. 1, Winter 1979, p. 114. Translating Hassner's elegant formulation into the cruder terms used here, it could be posited that one is receptive to Soviet whining precisely because one is reluctant to face up to the reality of Soviet bullying.

## II. IDENTIFYING TARGETS

While it is possible that troubles at home and in Europe (i.e., Poland) will preoccupy the USSR in the near to mid term, it is still necessary to consider the possibility that the Soviet Union might engage in aggressive behavior outside Europe. In identifying possible Soviet targets, it is useful to distinguish between three categories of countries:

1. Countries unambiguously in the Soviet camp (e.g., Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia after 1948, Afghanistan after December 1979).
2. Countries unambiguously outside the Soviet camp (e.g., NATO countries, Sweden, Iran).
3. Other countries (e.g., Yugoslavia, Finland, Austria, Czechoslovakia before 1948, Nicaragua, Chile in the Allende period, Portugal 1974-1975).

These countries are distinguished from each other by the varying degrees of control or influence exercised over each by the USSR. In Eastern Europe, the Soviets know that in the final analysis they can use whatever means they deem fit to maintain their control without provoking a Western military response. Conversely, in regions unambiguously in the Western sphere, the Soviets are likely to remain extremely cautious about trying to seize control by the direct use of force. It is in other areas that the Soviet Union may be faced with uncertainties about whether or not to use force. These are also the areas in which Western policy is likely to play the greatest role in influencing Soviet decisionmaking.

The most dangerous international situations are likely to arise in those countries in which the USSR has obtained significant although not yet total control and then sees this control threatened by international or internal developments. The greater the Soviet investment, the more likely it is to react militarily to threats to this control from within

or without. Soviet calculations about whether to intervene probably place less stress on the intrinsic value--economic, strategic, demographic--of a given target than on the value of Soviet resources (including political prestige) invested in bringing that target under control. Afghanistan lived for many years under the shadow of Soviet power but it was only after the USSR had built up its influence within the country and then saw this influence threatened that it moved to occupy the country.

While Pakistan is clearly vulnerable to a Soviet external threat, a Soviet move against Pakistan at this time is probably unlikely simply because the USSR does not have a great deal invested in building up a pro-Soviet government, in cultivating ties with leaders, in infiltrating Pakistani institutions, and so forth. Over the long term, a dangerous situation could arise in Iran, however, were the Soviet Union to find itself in a half-way position in which it saw the Tudeh party increase its influence, cultivated ties with separatist groups, infiltrated various governmental institutions, and then saw these investments threatened by internal "reaction." The lesson for the United States, as well as for local opponents of the Soviet Union, is that early efforts on the political level to counter Soviet influence may obviate the need for military measures later on.

### III. SOVIET CAPABILITIES FOR SECOND-AREA ACTIONS

The most serious threat of direct aggression in the Middle East is posed by the 25 Red Army divisions stationed in the North Caucasus, Transcaucasus, and Turkestan military districts. Most of these divisions are Category III type, manned at levels estimated to be anywhere from 10 to 33 percent of full strength. Bringing these divisions up to combat readiness would require the mobilization of perhaps 200,000 reservists and the requisitioning of equipment such as trucks from the civilian economy.<sup>1</sup> It might also require diversion of officers, noncoms, and specialized personnel from military units deployed in the Western USSR and Eastern Europe. The low level of readiness of Soviet forces adjacent to the Middle East--except for the airborne divisions that are staged or that might be staged there--reduces the likelihood of a "standing start" attack and means that the United States would have significant warning time to prepare for a defense against Soviet aggression. Moreover, even in these regions directly on the Soviet border, logistical difficulties would probably hamper Soviet efforts. Because the Soviet Union's internal rail and road network is underdeveloped by American standards, all areas contiguous to the Soviet Union are not equally accessible to Soviet military power.

In the past decade Soviet capabilities for distant air- and sealift in support of Soviet foreign policy objectives have grown from virtually nothing to very substantial levels, as was evident in the Soviet airlift in support of the MPLA-Cuban takeover in Angola, in Ethiopia, and later in the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The mere existence of Soviet intervention capabilities poses a problem for the United States in the Middle East with which U.S. planners must cope. From the Soviet perspective, though, these forces appear to be intended, at least in the main, for contingencies in Europe. The Soviet Union has seven Category I airborne divisions, all of which are stationed in the Western USSR.<sup>2</sup> Soviet Military Transport Aviation (VTA) currently has over 600 medium-

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<sup>1</sup> Keith A. Dunn, "Constraints on the USSR in Southwest Asia: A Military Analysis," *Orbis*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Fall 1981).

<sup>2</sup> Keith A. Dunn, "Power Projection or Influence: Soviet

and long-range cargo transports. In the case of military emergency, VTA can also draw on the resources of Aeroflot, the Soviet civil aviation organization, as it in fact did during the 1978 airlift in support of Ethiopia. The bulk of VTA is stationed in the Western USSR, which, together with the positioning of the seven airborne divisions, indicates a primarily anti-NATO role.

The Soviet naval infantry also appears to be dedicated mainly to Europe. These forces are exercised mainly in the Baltic. The naval infantry's small numbers and its inability to sustain combat without quick follow-on support from attacking regular army forces are further indications that its role is one of supporting a rapid Warsaw Pact offensive in Europe. Soviet Frontal Aviation is also largely dedicated to the European contingency and would face difficulties in adapting itself to combat in Southwest Asia or in more distant theaters. While the range of Soviet tactical aircraft is increasing, it is still limited by the Soviet air force's failure to stress refueling in flight. Soviet aircraft are also heavily dependent on ground-based control that is concentrated in the USSR. Though the equipment is generally mobile, rapid movement would be difficult.

In considering the degree to which airborne and naval infantry dedicated to anti-NATO missions could be freed up to support Soviet adventures in the third world, it is necessary once again to consider the connection in Soviet thinking between the USSR's European power base (and its European vulnerabilities), and its ability to project power outside Europe. Recent research suggests that Soviet ground forces as well as specialized units attached to them are committed, in the event of war, to the rapid seizure by conventional means of as much of NATO's European-based nuclear forces as possible. Forces withdrawn from Eastern Europe and the Western USSR would minimize the likelihood-- at a time of marked international tension--of the USSR and its allies being able to accomplish this already demanding task. Long-term Soviet efforts to prevent the modernization of NATO's tactical and theater nuclear forces as well as more far-reaching attempts to create nuclear-

free zones in Europe could therefore tip the global balance by giving the Soviet Union new latitude outside the NATO area.

The Soviet Navy is another factor that must be considered in any analysis of Soviet capabilities for second-area action. Admiral Gorshkov's writings indicate that the Navy is seen in Moscow as a tool for enhancing the Soviet Union's global presence in peacetime. In regions such as the ASEAN area, the Soviet Union's economic and political influence is limited. A strong naval presence can therefore bring home to local governments the reality that the USSR, though uninvolved in the region in many respects, is a truly "global" power. Beyond these important peacetime demonstration purposes, however, it is debatable to what extent the Soviet leadership would actually use its Navy to challenge the United States in any action short of war. The OKEAN-70 and OKEAN-75 exercises seem to indicate that the Soviet Navy's military mission is largely one of massive, surprise preemption of the U.S. Navy at the outset of general war. Short of massive preemption of this type, the Soviet Navy would probably be at a dramatic disadvantage vis-à-vis the more powerful and versatile U.S. forces.

There is one exception to this general rule, however. In recent years the Soviet Navy seems to have taken on the task of what might be called "interposition." In the Angola crisis, several Soviet ships interposed themselves between Angola and the area from which Western navies might be expected to operate. Soviet propaganda then claimed--and sought to impress upon the victorious MPLA forces--that it was Soviet might that protected the Angolan revolution. The interposition mission would seem to correspond neatly to the Soviet doctrinal claim that the USSR does not "export" revolution--but simply frustrates the prospects for successful "counter-revolution." Fulfillment of this mission would in turn lend credence to Admiral Gorshkov's claim that the Soviet Navy is an effective instrument for furthering revolutionary change in the current epoch. The Soviet policy of building large, heavily armed surface ships with an obvious antiship mission appears to be aimed at enhancing interposition capabilities.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Norman Friedman, "New Trends in the Soviet Navy," *NATO's Fifteen Nations*, June-July 1982. Gorshkov's claims of course are aimed in part at creating a constituency in the USSR for growth of the Navy.

While in the eighties one can expect that the Soviet Union will work to acquire the kinds of capabilities that would allow it to mount a more effective military presence in areas not contiguous to the USSR, this improvement is likely to come slowly. Moreover, even in the event of a huge Soviet buildup, Soviet planners are fully aware that they would be unable, under any circumstances, to match the sheer physical resources of the West when it comes to moving men and material--particularly if civilian air and merchant shipping fleets are brought into play. As a result, one can expect the USSR to pitch its military activities in third areas at levels appropriate to existing Soviet military capabilities.

The limitations in Soviet military capabilities are likely to reinforce the existing Soviet tendency to use a combination of political and low-level military means to enhance the USSR's influence in the Middle East, Africa, and elsewhere. While Soviet capabilities are not at present sufficient for a large-scale cross-border attack in the Southwest Asia region or for large-scale amphibious or airborne assaults in areas not contiguous to the USSR, Soviet airborne, naval, and naval infantry forces could play a decisive role in exploiting domestic instability in various regions and in creating *faits accomplis* that the United States would find difficult to reverse.

Soviet ideology continues to proclaim, and most Soviet leaders at least for now seem to believe, that the interests of the Soviet Union are broadly in harmony with those of revolutionary and "progressive" forces throughout the world, particularly in the developing countries. Conversely, Soviet leaders regard the United States as standing in opposition to change. Because of these differing positions of the United States and the USSR with regard to global trends, Soviet leaders proclaim--and appear to believe--that the Soviet Union needs only to *neutralize* U.S. military power with equal power in order to permit revolutionary change, whereas the United States needs *superior* power, both to neutralize Soviet power and to "artificially" underwrite, by military means, the existing international system. The enormous significance that the Soviets attached to the attainment of strategic parity stems from this belief that U.S.-Soviet parity on the military

level means, in effect, American inferiority on the political level. The Soviets may be mistaken in this view in some "objective" sense, but for now it appears to influence their behavior. When Soviet leaders argue that "reactionary circles" are opposed to detente because it furthers revolutionary change throughout the world, they are reflecting a basic belief that Soviet interests are best served by a dual strategy of detente with the United States and continued, incremental change in the rest of the world, furthered mainly by political means, but by low-level violence as well.

An additional factor influencing Soviet calculations could be the ability of the United States and its allies to mobilize civilian resources to meet a Soviet threat. The United States faces two separate challenges: first, being able to rapidly mobilize the *whole* of the U.S. civilian economy in the event of an all-out Soviet threat; and second, being able to mobilize at least *some* civilian capabilities in response to less than all-out threats. The Soviet advantage relative to the West is probably greatest in the case of lower-level threats, where the USSR's "social system" provides for centralized control over civilian shipping and aircraft. Given this disparity, it is in the Soviet interest to keep conflict in the third world at a high enough level that it ties up active U.S. military forces, but not so high and so unambiguous as to make it easy for the United States to mobilize the totality of its resources.

#### IV. SOVIET BEHAVIOR IN CRISES

This section will outline a number of general characteristics of Soviet behavior in crises. At the conclusion of this section, a balance will be drawn up to determine which of these characteristics might encourage or discourage Soviet aggression or Soviet responses to U.S. second-area action.

*Difficulty in reacting--fear of loss of control.* An important element in Soviet political culture is a deep-seated mistrust of spontaneity and loss of control. Soviet communist leaders pride themselves on their ability to "scientifically" plan the country's social and economic development. While they grudgingly admire what they see as the isolated strengths of the capitalist economies, they retain a basic abhorrence of and contempt for the "anarchy" of the market economy. Bolshevik leaders have always shown a certain frustration at their inability to plan international events as they do the domestic environment. In the early seventies, however, Soviet commentators actually began to speak of the Soviet "peace programs" as the CPSU's plan for foreign policy. At party congresses and on other occasions, leaders tick off lists of cooperation agreements signed, friendship treaties concluded, and summit visits held in much the way that they list output of steel and machine tools.

This belief in the need to plan is deeply ingrained in the Soviet bureaucracy. It is a belief that has both its strengths and its weaknesses. On the positive side, it tends to help the bureaucracy mobilize all resources of the state in pursuit of predetermined ends. On the negative side, however, it makes the bureaucracy ill-adapted to anticipate or to react to sudden setbacks. As one observer concluded, "time and again, when it has been forced to respond to firm initiatives (for example, the U.S. blockade of Cuba in 1962 or Israel's preemptive strike against the Arabs in 1967) the Soviet government has reacted in a manner that suggested a mental state bordering on panic."<sup>1</sup> (It is also

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Pipes, "Detente: Moscow's View," in Richard Pipes, ed., *Soviet Strategy in Europe*, Crane Russak, New York, 1976, p. 22.

worth recalling Stalin's shock at the time of Hitler's invasion.) In short, the Soviets seem to have a certain "it can't happen to me" attitude (Stalin 1942, Khrushchev 1962) that is potentially dangerous.

*Strategic indecision--tactical decisiveness.* The slowness of the Soviet leadership in reacting to unexpected setbacks manifests itself in vacillation and internal disagreement in the face of a crisis situation. Such behavior was seen in response to Czechoslovakia in 1968 and Poland in 1980-1981. Once the leadership has decided to act, however, it tends to do so massively and in such a manner as to insure success. This also was seen in the scale of the invasion of Czechoslovakia and the decisive move into Afghanistan. Soviet leaders, aged bureaucrats though they may be, are still much enamored of and influenced by the romantic image of the communist party acting decisively (storming the Winter Palace, etc.) at the appointed moment.

*Obtaining prior or implicit agreement on spheres of influence.* Soviet fear of the unexpected may explain the long-standing Soviet preference for high-level agreements with their "imperialist" rivals that clearly demarcate spheres of influence. Such agreements, which in the Soviet view have the status of "bourgeois international law," in effect mark the furthest point of the Soviet Union's historical advance and are seen as preventing imperialist counteroffensives. They are also seen as helpful in preventing the emergence of ambiguities that could lead to armed clashes.

Historically, high-level agreements demarcating spheres of influence have played a major role in Soviet diplomacy. One need only recall how seriously the Soviets took the exercise of dividing East and Central Europe with Hitler, a direct result of which was the Soviet annexation of the Baltic states. The 1939-1940 "Winter War" with Finland offers an example of the role that sphere of influence agreements have played in influencing Soviet perceptions. In the secret protocol to the Molotov-Ribbentrop agreement, Stalin obtained from the Germans a "free hand" in Finland, whereupon Soviet forces invaded the country. Stalin was little concerned with the reactions of the Finns themselves, or of third parties (the United States, United Kingdom, France). What mattered to him was obtaining prior acquiescence in his action from the main power that mattered--in this case Nazi Germany.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See Adam Ulam, *Expansion and Co-Existence*, Praeger, New York,

In the various wartime conferences with Britain and the United States, Stalin showed a similar eagerness for a frank division of spheres of influence with the Western powers at the expense of the smaller countries (recall the Stalin-Churchill percentage agreement).<sup>3</sup> Conversely, the statement by Secretary of State Acheson to the effect that South Korea was outside the U.S. defense perimeter may have led Stalin to endorse the North Korean invasion.

At Yalta, Stalin was careful to gain precise wording in advance as to just what parts of the Japanese Empire the USSR could seize with American and British acquiescence. In 1973, it will be recalled, Brezhnev tried to extract from President Nixon agreement on the parallel insertion of U.S. and Soviet forces into the Middle East. (Even leaving aside the undesirability from the U.S. point of view of having Soviet troops in this region, it seems fair to generalize that the U.S. tendency would be to recoil instinctively from the dangers of placing Soviet and American soldiers in close proximity during a shooting war. On the Soviet side, there seems to be much greater faith that the "big powers" can come to agreement at the expense of small countries and that this process can be controlled.) There is even some evidence to suggest that the Soviets felt they had been implicitly granted by the United States a right to control Afghanistan by the increasing lack of interest that the United States showed in that country during the seventies (as compared to the extensive U.S. aid programs of the fifties).

With detente, the Soviets seem to have concluded that their implicit (indeed explicit, if the text of the 1972 "Basic Principles of Relations Between the U.S. and the USSR" is considered) agreement with the United States on spheres of influence had transcended specific geographical regions and had come to embrace a mutual agreement to "equal security" between the United States and the USSR, or, in an alternative wording that Brezhnev often used, between "the two world

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1968, p. 290; Klaus Hildebrand, *The Foreign Policy of the Third Reich*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1973, p. 104. Evidence suggests that Hitler was ambivalent about selling out the Finns, and changed his mind when they performed well in their struggle against the invading Red Army.

<sup>3</sup> See Churchill's account in *Triumph and Tragedy*, Houghton Mifflin Co., Cambridge, MA, 1954, p. 227.

systems." In the event that the United States does attempt some form of second-area action, it must be prepared to expect, in addition to direct Soviet resistance in the area of U.S. attack, Soviet proposals or even unilateral actions that attempt to gain for the USSR as a great power with special rights and interests "compensation" for the U.S. action. The Soviet Union may prove very successful in swaying world and even U.S. domestic opinion that its demands are fully justified.<sup>4</sup>

It should of course be noted that Soviet "recognition" of a great power sphere of interest is always tactical and aimed at securing initial counter-recognition of a compensating Soviet sphere of interest. In the final analysis, the Soviets do not recognize the legitimacy of *any* U.S. or Western sphere, including Western Europe and Central America. The Soviet attitude toward spheres of interest is therefore asymmetrical, with Marxist-Leninist dogma (the Brezhnev doctrine) invoked to justify the irreversibility of Soviet and the ultimate reversibility of all U.S. and Western spheres of interest.

*Legalities matter.* The USSR claims both a special status as the leader of the world's "progressive" and "peace-loving" forces, and all of the rights and privileges that "bourgeois" international law affords. Both influence from below (control of communist parties ranging from strong presence in a country to outright Sovietization) and from above (in the form of legal agreements) are valued by the Soviets as instruments of control. In the various Soviet adventures in Africa, the USSR has been careful to stay on the side of the Organization of African Unity, and to maneuver the United States into the position of opposing its resolutions. Even in the case of Afghanistan, the USSR attempted--unsuccessfully--to provide a legal pretext for its intervention. In Europe, Finland, because of its 1948 treaty with the USSR, and Austria, because of its 1955 agreement to maintain permanent neutrality, are each

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<sup>4</sup> This emphasis on compensation or redress is in fact already a feature of Soviet diplomacy. The Soviet position on Afghanistan, for example, is that the Soviet invasion was a response to U.S. efforts to subvert the Kabul government that threatened Soviet "interests" or Soviet "security," and that the *status quo ante* will not be restored by a mere Soviet pull-out and the establishment of a neutral government, but rather by a U.S. acknowledgement of its activities "around" Afghanistan (including in the Indian Ocean), guarantees against subversion, and so forth.

in different positions from Sweden, for example. The USSR already enjoys, in the case of Austria and Finland, certain *de jure* "rights" that it might seek to enforce by military means in a crisis situation.

Soviet "friendship treaties" with their various consultation clauses can be seen as elements in long-term political effort to lay the basis for future intervention on a "legal" basis. Soviet activity in international organizations (e.g., support for the African National Congress) also contributes to the legitimization of Soviet intervention in other countries. The USSR is more likely to act in situations in which it has managed to get on the "right" side under international law.

*Soviet fears of tactical setbacks.* Soviet military leaders are probably wary of a short, decisive clash with highly motivated and professional non-U.S. forces (Israeli, South African, perhaps Iranian), which could inflict a visible tactical defeat on Soviet forces. Such a defeat would force the USSR either to escalate--to bring quantity to bear against quality--or to visibly back down. Soviet reluctance to continue encounters with Israeli pilots over Egypt in 1970 may attest to this fear.

*How good are the Soviets in assessing local situations?* A great deal of recent Sovietology proclaims that Soviet leaders, realizing the difficulties in propagating their ideology and the problems of their political and economic system, are increasingly likely to resort to direct military force in efforts to impose their system on other countries. By this view, Soviet leaders are assumed to be extremely cynical, but they are credited with being able to make shrewd and objective calculations about the degree of support their policies encounter in the outside world. This view is frequently repeated in the West without much supporting evidence. There is, however, other evidence that suggests that the Soviet leaders may in fact be less cynical than is perhaps often thought but also a great deal less shrewd when it comes to making judgments about the outside world. There is a long history of Soviet miscalculation when it comes to assessing outside views of the Soviet regime, beginning with the expectation in 1920 that the Polish workers would rise up to greet the Red Army as it invaded Poland, to Stalin's documented fascination with the Wallace candidacy in the 1948 U.S. presidential election, to the Soviet underestimation of

the difficulties the USSR would face in forming a quisling government in Czechoslovakia and of the depth of Czechoslovak resentment of the Pact's "fraternal" assistance, to the most recent Soviet miscalculation in Afghanistan, where the Soviet leaders did not so much misjudge the military difficulties of stamping out "reaction" in the country as they did the degree to which they could count on a loyal Afghan army to carry out this task for them.

A certain obtuseness on the Soviet side may make the USSR in some ways a more rather than less dangerous power. Top Soviet leaders sometimes appear to be strangely oblivious to the utter unattractiveness of the Soviet model to the rest of the world. In a curiously un-Marxist fashion, they ignore the broad base of "anti-Sovietism" in most countries and attribute this to U.S. pressure and to isolated "circles" in these countries. The Soviets appear to have fallen into the trap of believing their own propaganda about NATO and other U.S. alliances being mere instrumentalities for U.S. "diktat," "pressure," etc. There is of course a large element of propagandistic posturing in this view, but there is also reason to suspect that Soviet leaders and even many working-level officials are chagrined that the Soviet Union's "peace-loving" foreign policy and its "humane" domestic order are not taken at face value. At the 1973-1975 Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Soviet diplomats appeared to be genuinely surprised that the neutral Swedes and Swiss, for example, did not differ substantially from the NATO states in their positions on such matters as human rights.

Coupled with the "it can't happen to me" attitude that afflicts Soviet bureaucrats, the difficulty that the Soviets have in assessing hostility to the USSR is potentially dangerous, in that it could encourage aggressive behavior against new targets in much the way that it helped bring about the invasion of Afghanistan.

*On balance.* Summing up, the following factors must be considered in estimating the likelihood of Soviet actions in second areas:

*Factors that would encourage the Soviets to initiate action:*

- Miscalculation in assessing local situations;
- Successful maneuvering to get on the side of international law;

Successful maneuvering to get the United States to agree to spheres of influence.

*Factors that would discourage the initiation of Soviet action:*

Fear of tactical setback;

Failure to get prior U.S. agreement on spheres of influence.

*Factors that would encourage the Soviets to respond to U.S. second-area action:*

Unilateral claim to a right to "compensation" for U.S. action;

Outside sympathy for the legitimacy of this claim.

## V. U.S.-SOVIET POLITICAL RIVALRY

In regard to the likelihood of new Soviet acts of aggression, it may be that in the 1980s, far more than anything the United States can do in the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean to counter Soviet efforts, the USSR will be constrained from resuming an active role in the region by the problems of succession, the continuing turmoil in Poland, and the cooling of the detente with the United States and with Europe. There may be direct and calculable connections between numbers of troops tied down to deal with a possible Polish crisis (or to replace a weakened Polish army) versus numbers of troops required for new Soviet actions, or between funds tied up in subsidies to Poland versus funds that would be needed to pay for activism in the third world. More important than any calculation of costs in manpower and money in restraining the USSR, however, is the changed general outlook and increased pessimism of the Soviet leadership. Historically, the USSR is a European power. Without a secure base in Europe, it has tended to limit its commitments in Asia and the Middle East. (An extreme example of this tendency was the non-aggression treaty with Japan in World War II.)

The most likely prospect for the eighties is that the USSR will continue to build forces that will enable it to intervene in situations in which a relatively low level of force can tip the balance in favor of Soviet clients, and in which the ambiguities of the situation are such that the United States is not likely to respond forcefully. U.S. planners must of course consider that more decisive Soviet action-- such as outright invasion of Iran--is at least possible. The United States is then forced to plan for this kind of worst case scenario. In doing so, it inevitably takes measures that will increase political tensions between the United States and the states of the Middle East that the United States must plan to "defend." Active Soviet propaganda campaigns can then portray U.S. worst-case planning as part of a sinister plot to seize Middle Eastern oil, support Israeli objectives against the Arabs, and so forth.

The Soviet Union will also attempt to use U.S. military activities as a pretext to mobilize West European public opinion against the United States and NATO. In attempting to block Intermediate Nuclear Forces deployment, for example, the Soviet Union has claimed that U.S. activities in the Middle East could drag Western Europe into a nuclear war against its will. Similarly, the Soviet Union used, in its anti-NATO propaganda, the U.S. hostage rescue mission in Iran as an example of American recklessness and unpredictability. In the event of a serious U.S.-Soviet clash in the third world, one could expect the USSR to use both muted threats and offers of security guarantees to European states to discourage U.S. allies from supporting the United States outside the NATO area, and perhaps to damage permanently the U.S. presence in Europe itself.

Whatever the merits and demerits of second-area actions in purely military terms, then, it must not be forgotten that in situations short of all-out war, the United States will have to respond to a Soviet strategy that is both political and military. All indications are that the Soviet Union sees its interests as being furthered by a process of slow political evolution in both Europe and Asia that leads to the isolation of the United States and the creation of *de facto* "zones of peace" all around the USSR's periphery. This course has *military* advantages, since it neutralizes U.S. naval power, lowers the risk of direct confrontation and possible nuclear war, complicates Western efforts to respond to ambiguous situations, and generally maximizes the Soviet advantage in large standing forces. It has *political* advantages because it permits a linkage of European with Southwest Asian policy at the expense of the United States.

In its campaign to increase its influence in Europe and the third world, one of the political assets that the USSR enjoys is its claim that it is *in principle* entitled to "equal security" with the United States (irrespective of the implications of this "equality" for the security of third countries, whether U.S. allies or not). Following this principle--which is said to have been agreed to by President Nixon in 1972--countries such as Turkey, Norway, Japan, and others are in effect told by the USSR that they must not assert their own rights

deriving from their own sovereignty and from the universal principles of the UN Charter, but that they must think of themselves as elements in a global equation (Soviet security must equal U.S. security) whose existential correctness must not be questioned. The USSR will use any threatening U.S. actions to convince third parties that the Soviet Union, because it too is a great power and has certain security "needs," is entitled to compensation. Already we have seen the Soviets using U.S. activities in Iran and the Indian Ocean, or alleged U.S. collusion with China, to convince publics in Western Europe that it is the USSR that is threatened.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

Soviet engagement in areas outside the central NATO-Warsaw Pact area presents U.S. policymakers with both challenges and opportunities. The challenges arise from the need to contain Soviet expansionism in general and to forestall Soviet moves against regions of particular importance for the West, i.e., the Persian Gulf. The opportunities arise because of the increased vulnerability to second-area actions that Soviet engagement in the third world entails. With the USSR investing money, political prestige, and military assets in clients throughout the third world, the question arises as to whether the United States should try to reverse Soviet gains in the hope that doing so might affect favorably the overall U.S.-Soviet balance.

As this Note has argued, there are a number of reasons why the United States should proceed cautiously in attempting to exploit Soviet vulnerabilities, and why, in addition, it may be able to take a somewhat more relaxed view about the danger of major Soviet military moves in the third world. A U.S. policy of responding to Soviet threats in one area by taking actions against Soviet allies or clients elsewhere is likely to be counterproductive. It will help to isolate the U.S. politically, even as it confers legitimacy in the eyes of many observers on Soviet efforts to expand global influence at the expense of the United States. It may ultimately weaken resistance to Soviet pressures in Europe, thereby reducing the European drain on Soviet resources that the NATO alliance represents. Such an outcome could well lead to dramatically increased Soviet adventurism in the third world.

By engaging in second-area actions at the expense of nominally sovereign states (Cuba, People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, Syria) to strike at the Soviet Union, the United States runs the risk of playing the Soviet game--of joining with it in undermining the sovereignty of third states in the name of conflicting "rights" that are alleged to accrue to the superpowers by virtue of the mere fact that they are superpowers. From the political point of view, U.S. interests--as well as American principles--might be better served by re-emphasizing the

inherent right of all states, including those on the periphery of the Soviet Union, to their own sovereignty and security, and contesting the implicit Soviet claim that the national security of third parties must be subordinated to the requirements of Soviet "equal security."

Against the political and military background presented in this Note, it must be concluded that the United States should proceed extremely cautiously in adopting any strategies that aim to exploit Soviet vulnerabilities in second areas. Formulating such strategies is likely to be politically counterproductive in peacetime, both in Europe and in the third world, without offering the promise, in wartime, of fundamentally altering outcomes in favor of the United States.



