

Naval War College Review

Volume 38
Number 3 *Summer*

Article 3

1985

Nonmilitary Threats to Soviet National Security

John M. Weinstein

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Weinstein, John M. (1985) "Nonmilitary Threats to Soviet National Security," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 38 : No. 3 , Article 3.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol38/iss3/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

Nonmilitary Threats to Soviet National Security

John M. Weinstein

Except, perhaps, in the view of the most brazen martinet, national power is not an end in itself. Rather, it is a means to an end or set of ends which usually include such goals as the survival of the nation-state, its culture and its way of life; the improvement in the quality of life of its citizens; and the state's continued ability to increase its influence with other states in the pursuit of these goals. From this broader perspective, the national security of the Soviet Union is vulnerable to serious structural and systematic industrial and agricultural problems as well as demographic trends which threaten to tear apart from within the last of the world's great multinational empires. The systemic roots of these problems, the ineffectiveness of ideological exhortation, and political-bureaucratic constraints in dealing with these problems must make Soviet leaders far from sanguine in their evaluation of their future prospects—irrespective of their rapidly increasing strategic and conventional military capabilities.

Soviet Economic and Agricultural Vulnerabilities

The recently released CIA study of the Soviet economy came as a surprise to some who learned that between 1950-80, the standard of living in the Soviet Union tripled and overall economic growth, evaluated at 4.8 percent was not very different from the growth rates of the United States and the Western democracies. Nevertheless, these aggregate figures obscure the fact that the Soviets are facing unprecedented economic problems which have worsened in recent years and show few prospects for improvement in the near future.

Numerous factors contribute to the recent and rather precipitous drop in the growth of the Soviet Union's real Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The Soviet Union's relentless military expansion has imposed a considerable burden upon industrial production, investment and modernization. Military spending, which grew more rapidly than the growth of the GNP during the 1970s, retarded the development of the productive capital base. For instance,

Dr. Weinstein is assigned to the Nuclear-Chemical Directorate, Headquarters of the Department of the Army in Washington, DC. He is coauthor of *The Defense of the West: Strategic and European Security Issues Reappraised*, Westview, 1984.

Soviet investment priorities during the last decade favored heavy machine building because of its application to military production. The expenditure of funds in this area came at the expense of investment in transportation, agriculture (which remains labor-intensive accounting for 23 percent of the Soviet work force as opposed to about 3 percent in the United States) and food processing, to name only a few critical areas whose deficiencies ripple through the Soviet economy. Furthermore, the Soviet Union's maintenance of a large military force robs the economy of manpower, which, as we shall see, is becoming increasingly scarce and costly. Finally, the diversion of a large portion of that society's best minds from the civilian economy into the uniformed services and the massive industrial effort that supports military research, development, and acquisition are bound to result in an economy that functions at low levels of efficiency.

The deleterious effect of the Soviet Union's military burden is only one of numerous *systemic deficiencies* that retard the economy and defy easy or rapid resolution. In short, many of the problems currently plaguing the Soviet economy result from the very nature of an overcentralized political and planning system. Hence, the calls by the late General Secretaries Andropov and Chernenko and now, Mr. Gorbachev, for general proletarian discipline, less corruption, more rapid industrial mechanization and the linkage of wages to increased productivity are expected to bring little significant and long-lasting improvement.

At the heart of the Soviet economic malaise is what at times amounts to a deep hostility between the state planners who determine production goals and the managers charged with goal fulfillment. The excessive demands of the planners, once described as extortive by Nikita Khrushchev, were cited recently as a significant contributing factor to the poor quality control, waste, black market, theft and hoarding activities prevalent in the Soviet economy. In turn, these reactions to unrealistic production goals contribute to production shortfalls. The 34 percent underfulfillment of the transportation plan during the last Five Year Plan is the rule rather than the exception in the Soviet production process. Indeed, the Soviet economy was only able to achieve from 48-64 percent of its planned production quotas—electrical energy 48 percent, cement 53 percent, steel 59.2 percent, coal 60.7 percent, and natural gas 64 percent.

The rigidly centralized Soviet economic planning, production and distribution system is a second structural vulnerability. This centralization, an artifact of the requirements from the rapid industrialization of the 1920s-30s and alleged ideological imperatives, now interferes with the flexibility, incentives and innovation crucial to maximizing productivity. It is characterized by differentiated responsibility which, for instance, does not make those who transport raw materials responsible to those who produce the finished product. In a country encompassing 11 time zones and lacking an efficient

transportation infrastructure, it is not surprising that many production plants often lack critical resources while others have more resources than they can use effectively. Consequently, the Soviet economy is characterized by frequent and serious bottlenecks which undermine planning, coordination and cost-control efforts.

A second problem associated with rigid oversight is the discouragement of innovation. Apart from the low funding of nonmilitary R and D and the geographical and administrative separation of those who seek and develop new ideas and those charged with their implementation, experimentation and innovation usually are viewed as counterproductive because they divert resources from the plan's fulfillment and often result in immediate production shortfalls. Consequently, the short-term prospects of innovation threaten the careers of industrial managers whose advancement depends upon obedience and productivity rather than risky experimentation. Among the many shortcomings of this inflexible system are the production of shoddy merchandise which is not competitive in international markets (military goods and energy exports are the notable exception) and the subsequent limitation of foreign exchange earnings. Furthermore, the rigid system is hard-pressed to anticipate or to control wild production fluctuations resulting from various factors (such as extraordinarily harsh climate) which lie outside the planning system. Consequently, the Soviet economy is notorious for the frequent post hoc revision of its plans.

A third systemic problem, which greatly affects the Soviet economy, is the lack of investment in the neglected and woefully inadequate transportation system. The few paved roads in the Soviet Union mostly are rendered impassable by rain, mud, and snow three seasons each year. This "roadlessness," known as *Rasputitsa*, hampers distribution of materials and goods and largely limits the ability to coordinate and integrate the vast national wealth and efforts of the Soviet Union's far-flung citizenry.

Problems of motor transport place a premium upon water and rail transport. However, many Soviet waterways are frozen during eight months of the year, thus precluding regular commercial transport. Soviet transportation shortfalls are hardly ameliorated by the railroads which, in 1982, carried less tonnage than in the previous year. Vast regions of the Soviet Union, including many areas rich in vital natural resources such as petroleum, remain unserved by rail transport. Moreover, the concentration of population in the European portions of the Soviet Union causes the inefficient use of many railcars traveling toward the east. Fully loaded cars traveling in the opposite direction face severe delays at all six transshipment points which handle 80 percent of all Soviet rail freight. This condition, in part, explains why as much as 30 percent of all agricultural production is lost in transit and why the completion of the Baikal-Amur Mainline (B-A-M) railroad will alleviate but hardly resolve the serious transport problems.

Extant demographic trends which will not be overcome by planning, ideological exhortation or marginal adjustments present additional problems for Soviet decision makers. These trends will affect the Soviet Union's economy in numerous ways. Among the most salient trends are the aging of the entire population and the population flow away from the economically crucial but underpopulated Far East. An aging population increases the social welfare strain of monumental pension payments and slows down the expansion of the work force. Work force expansion is particularly crucial to the Soviet Union as that country's increasing allocation of national resources to the military obliges it to rely more upon increased labor assets than increased per capita productivity for economic growth. Labor shortages in the Soviet Union will persist as long as the military continues to receive so large a percentage of the youth cohort and the labor productivity of individual workers (who are given to alcoholism, sloth, and absenteeism) is not increased. These problems, which will become more serious toward the end of the decade, are not lost upon the Soviet Union which already relies upon workers imported from allies to meet the annual demand for 700,000 new workers. The second demographic trend, the flow of people from the resource-rich but inhospitable Far East to the urban centers, has not been reversed despite the Soviet provision of salary and education inducements for those working in these harsh regions.

Finally, the continuing problems of Soviet agriculture, which has not yet recovered from the brutal forced collectivization and inefficient management of Stalin, place the Soviet Union in the unenviable position of many Third World countries. Soviet leaders are embarrassed that despite their labor-intensive efforts, the country cannot feed itself. This embarrassment is especially acute to the Soviets in light of the fact that tsarist Russia was a leading grain exporter. Having suffered its fourth consecutive poor harvest in 1982, the USSR is compelled to import vast quantities of grain from the very economies whose demise has been predicted by every Soviet leader since Lenin.

The facts that only 10 percent of the Soviet Union is arable, that 90 percent of the Soviet Union's landmass lies north of the parallel demarcating the continental US-Canada border, and that the weather is harsh, are not adequate to dismiss the system's inefficiency or low per capita output, which is only 5-10 percent of that of the US farmer. Specifically, the absence of adequate and stable agricultural and transportation investments owing to the military spending burdens; ruthless exploitation of the land which is not offset due to problems with the production, packaging and distribution of fertilizers; insufficient incentives to the individual farmer; and the flight of rural manual and skilled laborers to the cities causing labor shortages and inflating percentages of female and older farm workers, are among the many systemic obstacles to agricultural self-sufficiency. In an amazingly frank condemnation of his country's economy, I. N. Buzdalov, an economist with the Soviet Academy of Sciences lamented that ". . . profitability, efficiency,

and quality play virtually no role in the work of state and collective farms." The absence of faith of Soviet *kolkhozniks* in the agricultural system's validity is demonstrated vividly by the vast differences between state and collective farm productivity on one hand and that of the peasants' private plots on the other. The appallingly low output of state farms is well known and a direct cause of the Soviet Union's dependence upon Western grain imports. Less well known is the fact that the peasants' one to several-acre plots, constituting only 1.4 percent of the available farmland, produce 61 percent of the country's potatoes, 54 percent of the fruit, 34 percent of the eggs, 30 percent of the vegetables and 29 percent of the meat and milk. These figures suggest that the Soviet lack of agricultural organization and incentives, rather than the abilities of the peasants themselves, account most readily for the deplorable food shortages throughout the country. Such figures also lead one to Buzdalov's conclusion that in the absence of a "... judicious [re]orientation and state investment policy" that improves rural housing, child care, educational opportunities and consumer and rural economies, the debilitating burdens of agricultural backwardness will continue unabated. Since many of the popular demonstrations have been related to food shortages, the concern of Soviet leaders with the continuing agricultural ossification is easily understood.

The Soviet Union has had to rely increasingly on hard currency enterprises to meet the need for: the importation of vast amounts of agricultural products, Western technological transfusions, the subsidization of their Eastern European allies (whose economies suffer from similar Socialist maladies), and guarantees on loans from the West. While foreign military sales are an important source of such income, energy sales constitute almost three-quarters of their export earnings. However, rapidly falling commodity prices for petroleum, increased Soviet and East European energy consumption, the growing exhaustion of easily recoverable assets and an infrastructure incapable of exploiting Siberian and Eastern territorial riches (where 85 percent of the petroleum potential lies), and the reduced access to, and cost of Western technology will constrain the Soviet Union's ability to resolve its economic and political problems.

Although the quality of life for the average Soviet citizen is the best ever, its current stagnation comes at a dangerous time when continued material improvement is expected. It also comes at a time of calls in the Soviet Union for a redistribution of wealth to the rapidly growing numbers of Muslims and Central Asians who reside east and south of the Urals, a development vigorously opposed by the Great Russians, Slavs, and Balts living in European Russia; a rapidly declining hard currency accounts balance and a growing debt service burden; and heightened financial obligations and political deterioration throughout much of Eastern Europe. The Soviets could solve many of these problems by reducing their levels of military spending and

rectifying the numerous systemic problems discussed above. However, such prospects, short of a radical transformation of the Soviet politico-economic edifice, do not appear likely.

Soviet Demographic Vulnerabilities

As already noted, current demographic trends will have profound impacts on the Soviet labor supply. Indeed, the impact of numerous demographic trends will ripple through every aspect of society and are likely to cause unprecedented problems for Soviet leaders. These trends, analyzed perceptively by Murray Feshbach, the foremost US authority on Soviet demographics, so alarm the Soviet elite that they have refused to publish complete details of the country's 1979 census. This silence is a striking departure from the publication of the 16 and 7-volume results of the 1959 and 1970 censuses.

To understand the significance of these trends as well as the Kremlin's sensitivity to them, one must recognize the Soviet Union as the last of the great multinational empires. The Great Russians, the dominant ethnic group which comprises approximately 52 percent of the total population, control either directly or indirectly every aspect of national power: the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), the national and republic governments, the military, the economy, education, the national academies, etc. The Great Russians have maintained their primacy through difficult times including internal instability, global war, and intense postwar competition with the United States. But their primacy has not gone unchallenged. Many of the more than 100 nationalities speaking more than 150 languages and dialects have revolted against Great Russian control, collaborated and fought with the Nazis against their masters during World War II, and stubbornly resisted and continue to resist linguistic and cultural Russification which would establish national integration and homogeneity at the expense of the national identities of these groups.

The Russians (henceforth referring to the ethnic/cultural group) have repeatedly maintained that the nationality issue is artificial, and a result of foreign intervention that would reverse the growing natural and fraternal solidarity between all Soviet citizens. Because nationalism, according to Leninist doctrine, is a remnant and tool of reactionary capitalism, "bourgeois propaganda channeling nationalism into anti-Sovietism" is identified as the culprit. While the Russians are alarmed by the nationalism and enmity of their Ukranian Slavic brothers and European countrymen (e.g., ethnic Poles and Germans, Latvians, Lithuanians, etc.), they are most sensitive to the ferment in the Central Asian republics. They have stressed that: "In their propaganda for the Soviet Central Asian republics, including the Turkmen republic, the imperialist centres of lies and disinformation pay particular attention to the preaching of Pan-Islam and Pan-Turkism, bourgeois nationalism and religious prejudice."

Apparently, as a result of these “great efforts to introduce ‘the flame of Islamic rebirth’ into the Soviet Union and thus destabilize . . . the republics of Central Asia,” great interest in Islam’s competing value system (to official Marxism-Leninism) has been maintained and according to some is growing rapidly. Indeed, Soviet leaders lament that, “Many misguided men and women, accompanied by their children, have paid homage to various graves and burial grounds . . . they make sacrificial offerings, pay homage to graves . . . beseech the saints to grant one plea or another . . . and perform their prayers five times a day.”

The four demographic trends that follow are vital to the interests of those who would retain the political status quo because the shifting patterns of population growth and distribution threaten to undermine the dominance of the Great Russians while imposing upon them unsavory economic and political dilemmas. Such vulnerability was acknowledged in September 1981 by the vice president of the Academy of Sciences when he noted that “Neither we nor our friends are immune to harmful influences and a certain revival of various prejudices.”

First, the most ominous demographic trend is the differential rates of population growth among the various nationality groups. As a result of higher fertility rates of the Central Asians and the higher Great Russian mortality rates (which have climbed 40 percent since 1964), as a result of alcoholism, increasing suicide, etc., the 1970-79 population increase of the Russians and other Slavs of 0.7 percent is substantially below the average Muslim rate of 2.7 percent in general, and the Uzbek 3.7 percent/Tadzhik 3.5 percent rates in particular. In short, these rates explain why the Russians, who comprised 54.6 percent of the total population in 1959, are expected to constitute only 46-48 percent of the population by the year 2000.

Second, males in the Soviet Union have failed to regain their pre-World War II and normal share of the population, usually estimated to be approximately 48.5 percent. The current male percentage of the population is 46.7. However, the situation is substantially worse for the Great Russians (46.0 percent) than it is for the Central Asians such as the Uzbeks (49 percent). Furthermore, Soviet males, who live a full ten years less than females, have the singular and dubious distinction among citizens of the world’s developed states of a life-expectancy rate which plummeted from 66 to 62—3 years between 1966-80. Once again, alcoholism, suicides and inadequate health care—especially among the young 20 to 44-year-old Russians—are the major culprits.

Third, the demographic trend is the uneven geographical distribution of the youngest population cohorts. Specifically, the percentage of Russian 0 to 9-year-olds (14.8 percent) is less than the national average (16.8 percent) and far less than the Uzbeks (29.2 percent) and other Central Asian peoples. Numerous reasons account for the decline of Russian youths in the Russian

Soviet Federated Socialist Republics (RSFSR): high levels of female alcoholism; abortion as the principal form of birth control (the average number of abortions for Russian women is 6, more than 12 times the rate for US women); the widespread use of artificial milk and crowded nurseries where the babies are placed when Russian women return to work; and the trend of the European Russians to have fewer babies than mothers in rural Central Asia. The results are a steep rise in Russian infant mortality and a drop in Russian youths relative to the Central Asian increases. By the year 2000, approximately 85 percent of all Soviet citizens below 9 years of age will be Muslims. The long-term prospects for continued Russian primacy in the Soviet Union become highly uncertain in such a scenario.

Fourth, as noted in the previous section, the Soviet population is aging. However, the phenomenon, which is tied to declining Russian birth rates and declining Central Asian mortality rates, is most notable once again among the Russians whose position relative to the Central Asians will continue to deteriorate. For instance, the average age will increase in the USSR from 28.7 to 33.1 years between 1975 and 2000. However, the average age increase in the RSFSR (31.7 to 37.1 years) is substantially higher in these years than that projected in Uzbekistan (17.8 to 21.7 years).

Clearly, the Muslims appear to be winning the "battle of the bedroom." Between 1979 and 2000, the percent of the entire Soviet population made up by Central Asians will rise from 16.5 to 30 percent while the percent of Great Russians will fall from 52.4 to 46-48 percent.

Some of the implications of these trends have been identified already: increased pension costs which will divert money from needed investment; increased adherence to Islam which will challenge the primacy of Marxism-Leninism; demands from the Asian republics for a reorientation of investment and redistribution of wealth; and severe manpower shortages in European Russia. This will occur because, despite the origination of 60 percent of the Soviet GDP in the RSFSR, few Central Asians are inclined to move to the region where they do not speak the language, find the culture alien, and themselves the butt of racial antagonism. Such shortages will be exacerbated if the military continues the annual conscription of approximately 700,000 18-year-olds to maintain the 4.8 million-man Red army. In addition to these problems, military reliability and effectiveness is likely to decline and serious constraints upon Soviet foreign policy may become evident. Moreover, the Russians take little comfort from the knowledge that their traditional efforts to resolve the nationalities problem have been disappointingly slow and ineffective.

Political and Ideological Vulnerabilities

The economic, agricultural and demographic vulnerabilities described confront the leaders of the Soviet Union with a particularly acute dilemma.

The physical separation of resources from the areas of population concentration, labor shortages west of the Urals and an inadequate transportation infrastructure to connect resources and capital assets with the future labor supply will force the Soviets to consider two basic options. The first entails relocating existing industrial assets and building future industrial installations in Central Asia to exploit the abundance of labor, reduce transportation costs, and ultimately, to lower production costs. The problem with this strategy has been understood by the Soviet leadership for decades. It would amount to a massive redistribution of wealth and would probably require a substantial redirection of investment monies from the military; no doubt a policy fraught with danger for its proponents. An "eastern" investment strategy would certainly incur Great Russian and Slavic resentment given these peoples' racial and religious hostility toward their countrymen and the increasingly resource-constrained environment. Also, increasing investments in areas closer to contested and vulnerable border areas with the PRC would further complicate such a strategy.

On the other hand, the Politburo could encourage its Muslim and Asiatic population to resettle west of the Urals. But such a labor relocation would be unlikely for a number of reasons: the delay that would be imposed upon the access to and development of eastern natural resources, further reduced eastern agricultural production due to the heightened emigration of male farm workers, the unattractiveness of European Russia's religious and cultural environments to the eastern peoples, and the racial animosity toward and economic threat posed by the easterners to their western countrymen who have been traditionally *primus inter pares* in every influential Soviet institution. Moreover, the Soviet Union's decisions regarding this dilemma will be made within a context of: Great Russian chauvinism toward all other Soviet nationalities; among the Russians, a debate about whether future Soviet greatness is to be found within a Western or a Slavophile context which extols the historical and cultural uniqueness of the country's Slavic elements; and an apparent widespread sense throughout the Soviet Union that the ideology has lost its relevance, and the government its efficiency and effectiveness in the increasingly complex and interdependent national and global environments. This context is manifest by the increased numerical and decibel levels of the dissidents, growing political apathy and a resurgence of interest in religion, all of which challenges Marxism-Leninism as the society's primary guiding force.

The determination of the most economically efficient yet politically feasible manner of dealing with these problems will require innovative and flexible thinking by CPSU and government leaders, and popular confidence in the correctness of their decisions. As noted above, it is unlikely that any government decision will meet with uncritical acclaim because of the country's political apathy, cynicism and heterogeneity. Even if popular

acceptance could be assured, it is uncertain that the actual decision would be forthcoming.

The decisions to identify priorities and to redistribute wealth require some flexibility and decentralization. Yet this is hardly the first time that such needs have been prescribed. Lenin's New Economic Policy, Leiberianism in the 1960s and the management by objective approach adopted by Alexei Kosygin in the early 1970s are precursors of Yuri Andropov's initiatives which are likely to be pursued by Mikhail Gorbachev. The unhappy condition in the Soviet Union is that broad-based social change either is not implemented at all or it is done haltingly and inefficiently.

There are several straightforward explanations of the Soviet Union's limited ability to reform. The size and fragmentation of the country's massive and rigid party and government bureaucracies contribute to inertia. Furthermore, the myth of the CPSU as the sole repository of truth and its status as the only party needed in a classless society to function as the vanguard of the proletariat, places every national decision and development—no matter how trivial—under its aegis. Consequently, the CPSU must meddle in every matter, often imposing inappropriate "solutions" from the top and causing delay when questions are debated up the entire hierarchy in accordance with the principles of democratic centralism.

Second, even a constipated bureaucracy can be motivated to act by a strong leader. However, Soviet leaders no longer enjoy the omnipotence that characterized Stalin. The acceptance by Khrushchev of a consensus-based Politburo, designed to prevent Stalinist abuses in the future, has been strengthened over the years. As noted above, it is uncertain that any government decision will be met with uncritical acclaim because of the country's political apathy, cynicism and heterogeneity. Even if popular acceptance could be insured, it is uncertain that the changes of sound decisions being made and implemented are questionable. Consequently, the power of each successive first secretary and plenipotentiary has been reduced. Within this general trend, numerous reasons and hints indicate that Secretaries Andropov and Chernenko, though powerful, found it necessary to grant increasing political stature to the armed forces, thereby limiting the scope and depth of reformation he could pursue. The government of Mr. Gorbachev is likely also to find itself beholden to the military, at least until the new leader is able to consolidate power.

Third is the problematic nature of the data available to the decision makers. In the Soviet Union, high-level party functionaries still remember Stalin's legacy to kill the messenger bearing bad news. Although no longer fearing for their lives in the event of mission failure, CPSU functionaries recognize that their own advancement depends on their mission area success. Naturally, such pressures in the face of adverse economic, societal and cultural obstacles result in sycophancy and generate falsification of information by commission

or omission throughout the chain of command. Furthermore, as one would expect in a garrison state with Russian cultural antecedents, every issue affects national security and, therefore, is shrouded in secrecy. The resulting compartmentalization of information means that, in the Soviet Union, the left hand often is unaware of what is being done by the right. Furthermore, the absence of a genuinely loyal opposition precludes the attenuation of the distorted information problem.

Ideological considerations constrain flexible responses to extant economic and social problems. Because Marxism-Leninism is viewed as a set of prescriptions (in addition to an explanation of current and past social developments), the Soviet Union is limited in the degree to which it can pursue certain palliatives such as greater economic decentralization. Also, because of the ideology's revolutionary ethos, the Soviet leadership finds it difficult to abandon obligations such as its \$9 million per day subsidization of the Cuban economy at a time when Soviet hard currency reserves are dangerously low. Hence, the ideological gurus find it difficult to maneuver since their orthodox interpretation of ideology justifies their own primacy within the CPSU, the primacy of the CPSU within the Soviet Union, and the primacy of the Soviet Union in the "progressive" world. In short, to acknowledge the limitations of the ideology would undermine the very *raison d'être* and legitimacy of the Soviet hierarchy, Party and State.

Related to the above is the implication of change for Soviet dissidents and the Warsaw Pact allies. The Kremlin has long resisted substantial departures at home and within its alliance from its own mandated policies. To the extent that the Soviets permit reform at home or in East Europe, they acknowledge limits to the universality of their ideology, open the door to demands for more change and ultimately risk losing control of the Party, the State and the Empire. Interestingly, while the Soviets are obligated to limit reform at home and abroad due to ideological imperatives, their endorsement of Basket 4 of the Helinski Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (as well as greater interaction with the West) not only commits them to the observance of fundamental human rights but also gives the United States and its allies the formal right to critique Soviet performance in this regard. Thus, once again, those in the Kremlin find it difficult to move in either direction.

In short, we see that the Soviet Union is beset with difficult domestic problems and lacks many of the means necessary to deal with them. Inasmuch as the traditional "muddling through" response is likely to prove unsatisfactory—and in the absence of unlikely major structural, ideological and military reforms—one well understands why, at least with regard to the domestic situation, one analyst has concluded that from the crest, all directions are down for the Soviet Union.

What do these difficulties portend for the United States? On one hand, it can be argued that the continued efforts of these domestic problems are likely to make the Soviet Union less, rather than more, interested in confrontation with the United States. In this optimistic scenario, Soviet military expenditures will be moderated and economic intercourse with the West will be pursued to ease strains upon the system. Arms control will also become more attractive as a means of moderating defense requirements and, by avoiding another round in the arms race, allowing the leadership to concentrate more attention on the difficult problems outlined above. Furthermore, the unpredictable period of leadership consolidation faced by Mr. Gorbachev and other younger leaders should interest the Soviet Union in preventing any further deterioration of relations with the United States.

It can be argued on a more pessimistic note that we will observe a substantial hardening of the Soviet posture over the next several years. In the first place, let us recognize that the average Soviet citizen is more accustomed to material deprivation and intrusive government than his Western counterpart. This stoic tolerance for suffering combined with the State's ability to control the dissemination of information, manipulate public opinion, and monitor and constrain dissent are likely to reduce popular pressure upon the State to reallocate its resources on a massive scale.

Second, there is a widespread belief in the Soviet Union that its increased stature in the international arena and the increased respect by the United States for its power are largely due to increasing Soviet military capabilities. At a time when domestic indicators of well-being are in decline, it seems unlikely that the Soviet Union would undermine the only area in which it excels and through which it is able to pursue its national interests. Moreover, the Soviet leadership could easily come to view international adventures as an effective means of deflecting national attention from current domestic problems.

The increasing influence of the Soviet military in the political arena is a third factor which further minimizes the chances that the Soviet Union will moderate its military acquisitions and the heavyhandedness of its foreign policy. There has been much informed speculation that the Soviet military has gained further influence in the uncertain post-Brezhnev period. The increased prominence of the late Minister of Defense Ustinov at State functions supports the view that the military has become a crucial power-broker, and that the CPSU's current and future chairmen will find it increasingly difficult to maintain power while denying military claims for a continued disproportionate share of the national budget. In light of the Soviet Union's traditional fear of hostile encirclement and the current and projected military modernization programs in the United States, Western Europe, and the People's Republic of China, it is difficult to imagine how the spending claims of the military can be refused on a long-term basis.

Soviet domestic problems will provide limited opportunities to the United States and its allies to pursue cooperation with its increasingly uncomfortable and internally debilitated adversary. The United States should do everything possible to exploit these opportunities with the hope that more amicable relations with the USSR will be forthcoming. And while the United States can hope for the first scenario which envisions a less confrontational and more inwardly focused Soviet Union, prudent planning demands the anticipation of the alternative. It remains in this country's best interests to maintain the flexibility and credibility of our military forces while realizing at the same time that unnecessarily harsh rhetoric will play into the hands of the most hawkish policymakers in the Kremlin. In these times of leadership transition and consolidation in the USSR, enhancing the credibility of Kremlin hardliners would be most unfortunate. Therefore, the United States must maintain its diplomatic, cultural and economic initiatives in an attempt to stabilize and institutionalize peaceful superpower relations. However, the United States must not abandon required military initiatives in order to mollify the Soviet leadership, or because we believe that the Soviet Union's domestic difficulties will attenuate its threat to the West lest we unwillingly undermine deterrence and the very peace we seek.



Strategic realism requires:

- The analysis of objectives
- The challenge of assumptions
- The appraisal of expectations

Rear Admiral Henry Eccles, US Navy (Ret.)