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Soviet Policy and "the German Problem"

by

Ernest R. May

How have men in the Kremlin seen the "German problem"? How do they see it now? How may they see it in future?

The phrasing of these questions implies certain assumptions about Soviet policy-making, and these assumptions ought to be explicitly stated. As Walter Laqueur has recently reminded us, the interpretation of Soviet behavior has gone through several phases.¹ In the early postwar era, the organizing concept was "totalitarianism." We understood the Soviet government as analogous to Hitler's. In time, as we learned more about it and more about the Nazis, the concept came to seem less and less useful. Moreover, the exposure and condemnation of Stalinism during and after the Twentieth Party Congress of 1956, coupled with Khrushchev's public relations campaigns, encouraged belief that, even if the Soviet Union had been totalitarian, it was rapidly becoming something else.

The Soviet Union was next thought of as a modernizing state, headed, in Laqueur's words, "toward pluralism, toward economic and political decentralization, toward the demand not only for consumer goods but also for 'spiritual consumer goods.'" As he notes, this diagnosis gradually lost ground in face of the absence of any evidence that such trends were actually in progress.

To the totalitarian and modernizing-state images, there succeeded that of the giant bureaucracy. Applying propositions developed chiefly from analysis of American business firms, a new school of Sovietologists portrayed a regime whose policies were products of interaction among bureaucratic interest groups and therefore, on the whole, conservative and unadventurous. Drawing on cognitive psychology, people in this school hypothesized also that understanding of the giant bureaucracy required understanding of the peculiar perceptions of people within it. Laqueur is as critical of this addition as of the theory it amended, writing: "This new preoccupation with perception and misperception . . . on the whole had unfortunate consequences. It led to the belief that since we construct the reality in which we operate, the study of our perceptions about reality is as important as the study of reality (if not more so) As applied to the Soviet-American conflict in particular, cognitive psychology taught that

Russians and Americans, despite their different mentalities, were closer than generally believed: their common interests outweighed their divisions.”

I think Laqueur is unduly caustic. He summarizes simple-minded inferences popular among people who hoped the cold war could somehow be analyzed away. While adherents of the “giant bureaucracy” thesis may have been surprised by events such as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, they foresaw, as others did not, the likelihood that the Soviets would not level off their strategic rocket forces below or even at parity with the United States and that they would continue steadily to expand their oceangoing navy. Those who borrowed from cognitive psychology were able to distinguish previously little noticed differences between Soviet and American strategic forces, as, for example, the heavier Soviet emphasis on the safety of command and control systems. Nevertheless, Laqueur’s general description of the sequence of dominant models is accurate.

My opening lines betray my leaning toward the giant bureaucracy/perception-misperception approach. In speaking of Soviet policy concerning “the German problem,” I adopt the premise that the Soviet government, like most governments, is a processor of problems. To say this is by no means to argue that Soviet policy is essentially defensive or that the Soviet Union does not engage in adventurism, aggression, or “imperialism.” It is, however, to argue that meetings of the Politburo or of the Supreme Defense Council—if Michael Sadykiewicz is right in saying that body actually makes decisions on foreign policy and defense²—seldom begin with the General Secretary saying, “Well, what mischief can we do next?” Instead, as in almost all governments whose records historians have been able to study, discussion opens with someone saying, in effect: “Such and such has happened or is about to happen. What in hell shall we do?”

This approach need not involve “mirror imaging.” One does not have to suppose the problems identical with those processed by Western governments. In every sphere, from diplomacy around to sports and recreation, the Soviet government deals with distinctive problems, choosing from a distinctive array of options. It is less able than most Western governments, for example, to consider solving economic problems by relying on market forces or accepting marginal increases in unemployment. On the other hand, it is able, as almost no Western government is, to consider solving social or domestic political problems by a deliberate resort to terror. The Soviet regime *does* in some respects still fit the old totalitarian model. Its rulers can consider action on scales and timetables virtually out of the question for nations with comparatively free elections and less well-controlled news media. It also in some particulars fits the model of a modernizing nation. Its problems in the 1980s are not the same as in the 1950s, nor have its governing organs the same freedom of action. Brezhnev, at the height of his power, could not contemplate purges comparable to Stalin’s. The speeches of his

later years breathed fuming frustration at the failure of the government and the party to carry out the economic "reforms" he and Kosygin had ordered.

To suppose the Soviet Union as a giant bureaucracy is not therefore to suppose that it behaves like General Motors or the US Department of Defense. American business firms and government agencies borrow some of the pluralism characteristic of the American political system as a whole. Individuals and units within them compete with one another in some degree as if they were rational (or rationalizing) actors. Recognition of this fact led Graham Allison to use the term, "bureaucratic *politics*," when analyzing the interaction of common interests, organizational processes, and individual ambitions within the American government.³ In the Soviet government, our fragments of evidence suggest there is less goal-oriented competition, more rivalry among clusters of people united primarily by common experience or common beliefs. Thus, when studying the Soviet military, Roman Kolkowicz found less evidence of lobbying by services or service arms than of solidarity among people, including political commissars as well as soldiers, who shared the experience of fighting at Stalingrad.⁴ During the 1950s and 1960s, various people in Moscow, including members of the Politburo, spoke of an "Ulbricht lobby" influencing decisions concerning Germany.⁵ The phrase referred to officials personally or ideologically associated with Walter Ulbricht, the chief of the East German government and an important Marxist-Leninist theorist, and the only surviving Communist dignitary who could claim to have known Lenin. In borrowing from cognitive psychology, one has always to remind oneself that Soviet perceptions or misperceptions are not likely to be the same as those of Westerners. They are affected by the distinctive Russian past, by recent experience, by residual Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism-Khrushchevism-Brezhnevism, and by other factors which even Russians themselves find hard to articulate.

All this is intended to make clear that to characterize the Soviet government as a processor of problems is not necessarily to simplify the task of interpreting Soviet policy. Its leaders act within a political system very different from ours. That system has been and is continually changing. Even if the system is best understood as a giant bureaucracy, its component elements differ significantly from those in giant bureaucracies in the West. And people within the Soviet government perceive problems in quite distinctive ways. The basic proposition is simply that, before rushing to the customary question, "What are they after?," one can profitably ask, "What problem are they trying to solve?"

To illustrate, consider an example from a totalitarian state whose operations we can trace, whose bureaucratic structure has been painstakingly analyzed, and whose leaders' perceptions and misperceptions are at least well known if not still not wholly credible, namely Nazi Germany. We know that in the autumn of 1937 Hitler exposed to a group, mainly made up of generals,

the outline of his plans for step-by-step conquest of Europe. Early in 1938 he took the first step, effecting the *Anschluss* with Austria. What he did clearly reflected his deepest desires and ambitions. His timing and manner of action, however, resulted from his facing a series of forced choices. In the autumn of 1937 he had good domestic political reasons for trying to ginger up his generals. In early 1938 he needed some kind of external success to subdue disquiet stemming from his displacing Generals Blomberg and Beck and personally seizing control of the military establishment. At just that moment, the Austrian Nazis presented him with an opportunity to support a coup. Absent these circumstances, he might well not have acted when and as he did.⁶ The argument here is that Soviet actions should be construed as comparable. While the actions themselves may be indicative of ideology or profound national ambition, their timing and their particularities probably have to be explained in terms of problems which force themselves upon the leadership.

The attempt to apply such a hypothesis involves large risks of error. As with Hitler in 1937-1938, the problems seen by Soviet leaders may be as much internal as external, and we usually know next to nothing about internal Soviet politics. Also, the historical evidence suggests that, truly to know what problems are being acted on, one needs a sharp sense of how the particular governmental machine works. In the illustrative case, the action-forcing communications were going from Austrian Nazis to German Nazis via Party channels. Concerning the Soviet Union, we have only the dimmest sense of internal processes, even when we go back to the Stalin era.

Another source of possible error lies in the fact that the rule does not always hold. Every government has some capacity for initiative. In the United States, elections compel candidates to promise new departures. Winning candidates sometimes actually make new starts before they become caught up in responding to cables, headlines, and other events. In the Soviet Union the periodic Party congresses and the associated five-year plan cycle may have similar effects. As Eberhard Schulz has pointed out, dramatic Soviet moves concerning Germany were often associated with these events. Normalization of relations with West Germany in September 1955 preceded the Twentieth Party Congress of February 1956. The notes and speeches of November 1958 which initiated a crisis over Berlin came just before the Twenty-first Congress of February 1959. The erection of the Berlin Wall in August 1961 preceded by two months the Twenty-second Congress. Though nothing comparable occurred immediately prior to the Twenty-third Congress of April-May 1966, the Moscow and Warsaw treaties and complementary agreements concerning Berlin, West German-East German, and other West German-Soviet bloc relations were signed before the Twenty-fourth Congress of March 1971.⁷

And there is the fact that the principal evidence concerning Soviet policy

consists of speeches by party leaders, diplomatic notes to Western powers, and press releases. We know what the Soviet government decided to say. We have to infer what effects it hoped or planned as results.

With all these qualifications in mind, one can look back over the record of Soviet policy toward post-Hitler Germany, note the points at which significant changes appear to have occurred, and ask what problem or set of problems the regime may have been trying to solve. If the discussion that follows seems sometimes to ignore the qualifications, the reader should bear in mind that its purpose is merely to outline possible results of such an approach. The hope is that, even though the differences may be only in nuances, the question so posed may yield better understanding and hence better guidance for American policy than a more conventional question about what objectives the Soviets were pursuing.

During and immediately after World War II, Stalin evidenced a desire for a weak, possibly divided postwar Germany. Though he never endorsed anything like the Morgenthau Plan, many Westerners who dealt with him were led to believe that he favored breaking Germany up into a number of separate states.⁸ By the first half of the 1950s, Soviet declarations of policy favored instead a united but neutralized Germany. In the mid-1950s Khrushchev momentarily explored the possibility of a united or perhaps confederated Germany allied with the Soviet Union. From then through the first few years of the 1960s, Soviet government statements suggested a preference for a divided Germany with the western part more or less neutralized. After the early 1960s, they accepted as a fact the existence of two German states, one a Soviet satrapy, the other an autonomous power to be dealt with much as if it were one of the German empires of the past. That remains the apparent Soviet stance today.

In the earliest period, the German problem must have been for Stalin inseparable from the larger problem of how to rebuild Russia, ensure the supremacy of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and provide against an uncertain future. Within this general context, he faced a series of specific decisions concerning Germany. In interallied negotiations, he had to take positions on occupation arrangements, boundaries, and reparations claims. He could have chosen to seek influence over Germany as a whole, accepting the consequence of not having exclusive control over any part of the country. He could have posed as a friend to the Germans, resisting exiguous demands by the other victors but exacting in return pledges that an economically restored Germany would assist reconstruction and development in the USSR. For practical purposes, he chose instead to make eastern Germany an exclusive Soviet zone, forfeit any genuine voice in affairs in the other zones, establish a basis for a long-term alliance with Poland by creating a potential *Germania irredenta* on Poland's western frontier, and sponge up from Soviet-

occupied Germany every asset, physical and human, that could be put to work in the reconstruction effort in the Soviet Union proper.

It is plausible to infer that the problem as Stalin saw it was the likelihood of the rapid recovery of a Germany that would again present a mortal threat to Russia. As is well known, Marxist-Leninist doctrine and specific predictions by Soviet economists assured him that the West would suffer a new economic depression. That expectation gave him reason both to feel that the Soviet Union would have some breathing time for recovery and to suppose that relatively little was likely to be obtained from Western powers in the way of trade or aid to assist Soviet recovery. But Stalin's vision of the future was probably strongly colored by recollections of the previous postwar era. After all, he was the Generalissimo who had based his strategy in the Finnish War on exact analogies from the Russian Civil War.⁹ He probably foresaw America's withdrawing into isolationism, Germany's reviving economically as it had in the 1920s, the bourgeois powers of Europe forming a common front as they had at Locarno, and the Soviet Union coping with efforts by those powers in one way or another both to strangle socialism and to curtail Russian strength. In any case, the course he chose involved the least risk of his having to make compromises which, like those in his prewar deals with the French and then the Nazis, might turn out to have been imprudent. It had the added benefit of giving him almost complete freedom to use the capitalist-encirclement bogey in reimposing discipline and Party supremacy.

At some point not long after the war, Stalin apparently came to see the German problem differently. Soviet occupation forces stopped stripping the land and began instead to encourage some revival of both agriculture and trade. Some Soviet officials in Germany surmised that this change in policy resulted from their advising Moscow that the Soviet Union would net more from working German capital goods in Germany than from moving them to the Soviet Union, but it certainly betokened expectation of prolonged Soviet occupation.¹⁰ The Berlin blockade of 1948-49 may have been an attempt to solve problems posed by the Western presence within the Soviet zone. It may have been a response to the evident development of a unified Western zone, with its timing affected by elections and parliamentary votes in Italy, the United States, Britain, and France. It may have been forced chiefly by internal and intra-bloc problems associated with the emergence of Titoism. And this list obviously does not exhaust the possibilities. In any case, it seemed indicative of a Soviet assumption that eastern Germany had become part of the Russian empire, at least for the foreseeable future.

Yet in 1950 the Soviet government made the first of a series of proposals for a unified, neutralized Germany. Foreign Minister Molotov put forward a plan for establishing separate councils in eastern and western Germany, then having them get together and arrange for free elections and creation of a

common government. In 1951 the Soviet government added the proviso that a unified Germany should be neutral and have stringently limited military forces. In two formal notes in early 1952 it recommended that the four great powers negotiate a peace treaty consistent with terms agreed to at Potsdam in 1945, recognizing the sovereignty of a united, neutral, and demilitarized Germany. Following Stalin's death in the spring of 1953, Western governments were given to understand that the new Soviet leaders not only desired such a treaty but might be prepared to give ground on interpreting their rights under the Potsdam accords—not to continue insisting on prohibiting political action by groups "inimical to democracy . . . and peace," and to accept a Western definition of "free elections." As has often been noted, Churchill believed them sincere and saw prospect of something like a new Locarno accord. His view has been shared by some historians.

The question of what the Russians had in mind will not be settled, even provisionally, until they begin to disclose some of what is in their archives. It is clear, however, that they decided to change their diplomatic posture. If the basic assumption presented earlier is valid, they did so because they faced some pressing problem which this change in posture promised to solve or ameliorate. The obvious problem was the rapid development of a West German state within the context of an anti-Soviet alliance growing in military power. The United States had responded to North Korea's attack on South Korea by not only coming to the defense of South Korea but by tripling its overall military spending, stationing several divisions in Western Europe, and ordering up and locating around the Soviet Union large numbers of land-based and sea-based bombers armed with nuclear weapons. The Nato allies of the United States had agreed to substantial if not corresponding increases in their own military forces, and during 1950-51 they agreed in principle to some limited remilitarization for West Germany.

Compounding the problem was the unbending insistence of Adenauer and other West German leaders that Germany should be reunified by means of genuinely free elections and that the restored state should be the Germany of 1937 or perhaps 1938, certainly with return of the territory taken by Poland. Adding yet other dimensions to the problem were: Yugoslavia's successful achievement of socialist independence; evidence of unrest in Eastern Europe, most particularly in the Berlin riots of June 1953; and the developing fissure between the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China.

In these circumstances, with affairs in Moscow in turmoil because of signs of a new purge, Stalin's death and rivalries among his would-be successors, possible alternative courses of action were limited. The Soviet government could deal with the new level of threat by enlarging its own military forces and strengthening defenses along its imperial frontiers. But the level of investment in defense was already high, given that Stalin had

assigned high priority in the first postwar five-year plan to developing a strategic bombing force, air defense forces, and modernized ground forces. In the Soviet Union as in Western states, an initial increment in military spending nearly always entailed compound expenditure in later years, and truly scarce Soviet and East European resources, such as construction equipment, concrete, and machine tools, were desperately needed in other economic sectors. Moreover, prudence argued against challenging the Western powers, particularly the United States, to a competition in which the key variables were resources and productive capacity.

The other broad alternative was some form of appeasement—to buy off the West Germans and the Western allies with political concessions. Here, too, practical possibilities were few. Not much could be done in Poland or Czechoslovakia or anywhere in Southeastern Europe without forcibly changing personnel and running terrible risks. Nothing of consequence could be offered or delivered in Asia. Communist parties elsewhere were either such negligible forces or were so quirkily managed that it was pointless to think of nonsubversion pledges.

Little was left other than to wag encouraging signals regarding eastern Germany. There were risks. Ulbricht and others indicated misgivings about the Molotov-Stalin overtures. The June 1953 uprising could be blamed in part on failure to quell completely hopes of compromise arrangements. Beria and certain of his collaborators apparently had plans for liberalizing conditions in the Soviet zone. Opposition from Ulbricht and his friends in Moscow may have been one force contributing to his downfall and destruction.¹¹ But the risks were relatively controllable, and suggesting appeasement did not necessarily commit the regime to carrying it out. The hand could be played card by card.

There were also positive arguments that, if not made in the Kremlin beforehand, could have been presented in detail later—after they had been developed publicly by Western analysts. The proposals could, and did, provide reinforcement to West German critics of Adenauer who feared that too close association with Nato would preclude reunification forever or that remilitarization might impede democratization and social and economic reform. They did entice Churchill and a few other Western statesmen to think again about the policies adopted in 1950-51. And they helped a little in the “peace offensive” designed to encourage antigovernment agitation in Europe, Britain, and what would soon be called the Third World.

The Soviet government offered increasingly pallid and formulaic versions of the proposal for a unified, neutralized Germany on through 1954. The “giant bureaucracy” hypothesis probably helps to explain why. Having once started to do something, a large organization is apt to continue doing it until something makes it stop. Moreover, reiteration of the proposal promoted discord in the West. It figured in the rhetoric which helped to kill the projected European

Defense Community. As events played themselves out, however, it did not block substitution of the Paris accords in 1955. Its nonseriousness had by then become apparent.

Afterward, with West Germany formally a member of Nato, Khrushchev raised with West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer the possibility of an alliance. What happened in Moscow beforehand can only be guessed. The problem as Khrushchev saw it may have been primarily one of external security. He and his advisors may have foreseen a danger that West Germany would take the lead in Nato. Holding a low opinion of France, Khrushchev was later to say to de Gaulle that the French would be lesser partners in any Franco-German alliance. On the other hand, Khrushchev may have been speaking his exact mind when he stressed to Adenauer his alarm about the Chinese. All the evidence we have is the following passage from Adenauer's memoirs: "Khrushchev again spoke about Red China. He declared that Red China was the great problem. 'Just think, Red China already has a population of over six hundred million. Its yearly increase is twelve million. They all live from a handful of rice. What,' and he clapped his hands together, 'what will come of all this?' I thought, 'Dear friend, one day you will be very satisfied if you no longer have to keep any troops in the West.' Khrushchev said suddenly, 'We can solve this problem. But it is very difficult. Therefore I ask you, help us. Help us to deal with Red China,' and after a pause he added, 'and with the Americans.'"¹²

Khrushchev's overture to Adenauer could have been a minor element in an effort to solve domestic problems resulting from the long tyranny of Stalin. He and his colleagues in the governing bodies of the Party and the state had probably received ominous reports indicating discontent with economic and social conditions, resentment of the bureaucracy's rigidity, and indignation at the persistence of repressive police controls. Nothing else can explain the decision to risk presenting to the following year's Party Congress a detailed denunciation of Stalin and his crimes. Just possibly, the Soviet leaders had decided to pursue as one alternative the loosening of the existing Eastern bloc and the substitution of a set of arrangements which would include an economic partnership with West Germany. The reopening of ties with Yugoslavia and the negotiation of the Austrian State Treaty were moves which would have been consistent with such a decision.

Whatever the case, the approach to Adenauer came to nought. The Chancellor's account concludes, "During my Moscow stay Khrushchev three times repeated this request to help him. I did not reply. It would have been . . . to put one's head in the lion's jaws." Possibly, Khrushchev's words were nothing but a test of the Old Man's virtue. Possibly, in fact, they were not nearly so precise as, a decade later, Adenauer recollected them.

Soviet posture shifted toward a preference for, or acceptance of, a permanently divided Germany with the western portion subject to at least some

limitations in military power. Khrushchev was to say to Guy Mollet in 1956, "I prefer 20 million Germans on my side rather than 70 million against us. Even if Germany were neutral, that would not be enough."¹³ Hans Wassmund argues that creation of a unified, neutralized Germany had been advocated by Georgi Malenkov and that the demotion of Malenkov in early 1955 signified abandonment of that objective as well as of efforts to emphasize satisfaction of consumer needs over buildup of the industrial base.¹⁴

A series of notes preceding the Adenauer visit to Moscow and the opening of Soviet-West German and Soviet-East German diplomatic relations certainly indicated that the Soviet Union had adopted the assumption that there were, and would be for the foreseeable future, two Germanies. Over the next eight years or so, Soviet actions more or less consistently reflected a strong desire for West Germany formally to accept this condition but combined with hope that it could somehow be brought to accept some restraints on its own exercise of sovereignty.

If the general hypothesis of this paper is valid, each action came in response to particular circumstances which required a response of some kind. For each one, it would be possible to develop conjectures as to what those circumstances were. The proposal made in 1957 by Polish Foreign Minister Adam Rapacki that the two Germanies be included in a larger nuclear free zone, for example, could have been a compromise means of dealing with Polish and East German complaints about Soviet failure to frustrate the partial nuclearization of the Bundeswehr. Adam Ulam has argued that the sudden and shocking speech of Khrushchev in November 1958—calling for a German peace treaty, threatening unilaterally to turn Berlin over to East Germany, and seemingly giving the West a six-month ultimatum—may have been a forced response to Chinese complaints about the feebleness of Soviet support for them in the recent Quemoy crisis. Alternatively, it may have been, as Robert Slusser reconstructs it, an outcome of Byzantine maneuvers and counter-maneuvers among members of ideological factions within the Politburo and Central Committee.¹⁵ The most dangerous action of all, the sudden erection of the Berlin Wall in August 1961, may well have seemed in Moscow the least risky among various possible responses to pleas from the East Germans for help in halting the drain of manpower via West Berlin. It may also have been Khrushchev's way of coping with criticism in Moscow orchestrated by partisans of Ulbricht. Dramatic as these various actions were, however, none involved a shift in basic posture. From 1955 to 1963, Soviet declarations of policy seemed consistently to evidence preference for a permanently divided but partially neutralized Germany.

In those years, Soviet leaders had reason to see such a status for Germany as part of the solution for the key security problems confronting them. Though the United States then possessed strategic forces capable, in the words of one US Air Force general, of making the Soviet Union "a smoking radiating ruin

at the end of two hours,"¹⁶ the threat from the United States probably did not rank first among Soviet concerns. The Eisenhower administration had betrayed increasing concern about America's own strategic vulnerability and, despite occasional use of threatening language, had shown in its problem-solving a consistent strong preference for avoiding conflict. The Kennedy administration similarly combined bellicose rhetoric with what others—certainly Germans—saw as timid behavior. In Willy Brandt's words, "a curtain was drawn aside to reveal an empty stage . . . Ulbricht had been allowed to take a swipe at the Western super-power, and the United States merely winced with annoyance."¹⁷ Though Kennedy's brinkmanship in the Cuban missile crisis did in some degree counteract such impressions, Soviet leaders had every reason for supposing relations with the United States to be in *their* control and to assume that the Americans would not go to war unless seriously provoked.

In all likelihood, the West Germans worried the Russians more. The two World Wars remained vivid in memory. While Bonn was for the time being subject to direction from Washington, it might not remain so forever. Any number of imaginable events in Eastern Europe, especially in East Germany, could make it difficult for the West Germans not to act, if the Americans no longer had the deciding voice. Hence, though their apprehensiveness undoubtedly diminished year by year, Russians probably continued to feel some real nervousness about the German "militarism" and "revanchism" that their propaganda organs constantly trumpeted.

Thinking of the approaching ten to a dozen years, however, men in the Kremlin very likely saw the chief danger of actual war stemming from the PRC. Mao was much less predictable than most other world leaders. He professed to be, and had reason to be, relatively unterrified by either the Red army or Russia's nuclear-armed aircraft and rockets. And, in face of a Chinese attack, the Kremlin could not count on united support in the socialist world, perhaps not even in the Soviet Union itself.

The principal external security problem therefore interlocked with intrabloc problems. The Soviet government needed assurance both that East Germany would not erupt and that it would remain an ally against Communist China. This became increasingly difficult as the "German miracle" to the west excited envy among people in East Germany and as the youth and the intelligentsia of East Germany poured out via Berlin. And, as was demonstrated by events of 1956 in Poland and Hungary and by Albania's open defection, trouble was even more to be apprehended in countries without Red army garrisons.

External and intrabloc problems in turn intertwined with entirely domestic problems, for "de-Stalinization" disrupted the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Khrushchev's efforts to revitalize the Party leadership at local levels, combined with his often ill-considered efforts to remedy

economic failings (decentralization, "virgin lands," etc.), contributed to factionalism which was overt during 1957 and apparently not far from overt in most subsequent years. Evidence arrayed by Slusser, Michel Tatu, and Roy Medvedev suggests that Khrushchev may have been near ouster on many occasions before October 1964.¹⁸ Conceivably, dramatic doings abroad, including obvious failures such as siting IRBMs in Cuba, helped him stay in office: i.e.: "We can't kick him out just *now*."

Given this complex of problems, Khrushchev and his associates probably saw their alternative approaches to "the German problem" as extremely limited. They could not consider threatening to use force outside the border of the bloc. Berlin was the only possible pressure point. But neither could they consider any approach that one might characterize as appeasement, for, so long as Adenauer was in power, West Germany seemed potentially tempting only if offered a prospect of reunification, with the East German state dissolving. The Soviets could not even hint at such an offer without upsetting the delicate linkages between Moscow and Pankow. The broad set of problems facing them left Soviet leaders with few options other than to seek general acceptance of the status quo combined with some assurances that the future would not visit on them a West Germany bent on revenge and capable of seeking it.

A modest shift in basic Soviet posture did finally commence at approximately the time of Brezhnev's succession to power. It was not an entirely coincident shift, for there were faint signals of possible change as early as 1963, and the change took place so gradually that, as late as 1968, many sensitive interpreters of Soviet policy believed the official line to be still identical with that of the Khrushchev era. By the very end of the decade, however, Soviet statements had come consistently to evidence preference for the status quo in East Germany combined with some form of *détente* between the Eastern bloc and West Germany. Though holding East Germany as a virtual colony, the Soviets would deal with West Germany as something between the Germany of Wilhelm I and the Poland of Colonel Beck—a country potentially hostile but also potentially seducible. Secret negotiations with Bonn conducted through 1967 and into 1968 were broken off on account of the threatening conditions in the bloc culminating in the Prague spring, the August 1968 Soviet march into Czechoslovakia, and the announcement of the Brezhnev Doctrine. They resumed in 1969 and ended in the agreements of 1970 to 1972 which formalized the status of Berlin, established diplomatic relationships between West and East Germany, and disposed of most territorial and other issues outstanding from World War II. Though still frequently reverting to the old rhetoric about West Germany, the Soviets have for practical purposes persisted in this same posture down to the present.

The shift into this posture coincided with changes in the general array of problems in front of them. At least down to the last year of the Carter

administration the Soviets continued to have little reason for concern about the United States. With the retirement of Adenauer and subsequent turns in West German politics, Soviet apprehensiveness about West German *revanchisme* probably lessened. Though the "cultural revolution" made Communist China seem even less predictable, it also made the country militarily weaker. Though the subsequent rapprochement between China and the United States undoubtedly alarmed Moscow, it offered some prospect of making Beijing subject to restraining influence from Washington—comparable to those which had earlier been in evidence in Bonn. Objectively, the Soviet government had more reason than in the past for feeling secure against foreign enemies. Whether they did feel so or not, we do not know.

Intrabloc problems, on the other hand, clearly remained causes for high concern. Soviet leaders at the end of the 1960s saw Czechoslovakia, Rumania, and Yugoslavia move toward formation of something resembling a revived little entente this time oriented toward Germany rather than France. The forcible occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968 arrested but did not halt fragmentation within the Soviet empire. Albeit circumspectly, both Hungary and Rumania pursued somewhat independent courses. Events in Poland in the 1980s then put before the Brezhnev regime a succession of agonizingly difficult decisions. All these developments meanwhile made the stability of East Germany more and more precious to Soviet leaders, for that state served them, first of all, as an example of a Soviet-style socialist country with a comparatively successful economic record; secondly, as a base for police action almost anywhere in the vicinity; and thirdly, as a visible shield against any interference from the West.

And, as has perhaps been overly publicized, the Soviet Union itself meanwhile suffered a variety of domestic ailments, including an acknowledged decline in economic growth, maldistribution of population, social stress (evident in, among other things, increasing alcoholism), cynicism and corruption among Party and official elites, and rising criticism by the intelligentsia of the rigidity and ineffectuality of existing institutions and arrangements. Aggravating these conditions were successive bad harvests, shortcomings in technology, and shortages of foreign exchange.

Facing decisions concerning Germany, Soviet leaders probably found themselves, as in the past, with a very narrow range of options. A deliberate military threat against West Germany had been hard to consider in the 1950s or early 1960s. Afterward, it became almost unthinkable. In view of the growth in Soviet military capabilities, the risks of actual war may have seemed less, but the danger of fragmentation in the bloc had obviously become greater. Economic ties with West Germany had become crucial to the maintenance and achievement of levels of prosperity surely important, possibly indispensable, to the various regimes allied with Moscow. The

problems entailed for the Soviet Union itself had been made apparent when the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961 led to a West German embargo on the export of pipe. Despite strenuous efforts to find substitutes, the Soviets suffered serious disruption of their economic plans and did not recover the ground until the embargo had been lifted.¹⁹

The East Germans meanwhile lost some of their influence in Moscow. Ulbricht and his Kremlin allies had apparently fought consistently against any rapprochement with the West Germans. In all likelihood, many specific actions by the Soviet government in the later 1960s resulted from having to take positions in disputes between Ulbricht and his friends on the one hand and, on the other, factions in the bloc wanting to take advantage of opportunities for improved trade with West Germany. This chronic condition apparently reached a crisis stage during the Soviet-West German negotiations of 1970-1972. Brezhnev was by then strong enough to insist that Ulbricht step down. Under Ulbricht's successor, Erich Honecker, East Germany then fell in line.²⁰

Since the early 1970s, the Soviet government has been inhibited from adopting a threatening posture toward West Germany because the economic relationship with the West Germans has been so important for the nations of the Soviet bloc. It has also had great utility for the Soviet Union itself, especially in view of the extent to which West German banks have helped the socialist world meet balance of payments deficits and to which West Germans have aided Soviet efforts to acquire advanced technology.

On the other hand, Soviet leaders must have felt some misgivings about the alternative of seeking much closer Moscow-Bonn relationships, on the often-cited Rapallo model. While the East German regime may be more tractable than in Ulbricht's time, its hold on the populace has to remain a source of concern in Moscow. Given events in Poland, almost nothing could be worse from a Soviet perspective than serious disturbances in East Germany, and a genuine alignment between the Soviet Union and West Germany could encourage such disturbances by stirring among people in the east hopes of sharing the comforts of those in the west. And while a closer Soviet-West German relationship might contribute to solving Soviet domestic problems, any gain in trade or technology imports could well be offset by fresh trade restrictions on the part of the United States and other nations, Japan included.

Considerations arguing against either threats against West Germany or efforts to achieve closer ties have probably weighed against any less dramatic departures from the policy line of the past two decades—for example, any genuine effort to neutralize Germany or Central Europe or even, despite the temptation that must rise from reading the rhetoric of the Greens, seriously to sponsor some notion of a nuclear-free zone. In brief, Soviet policy toward Germany as of 1983 seems one of solid support for the status quo.

What of the future? If the basic hypothesis is right, speculation should go chiefly to possible changes in how the Soviets see "the German problem."

The historical evidence suggests that statements or actions by the American government concerning Germany will probably not have much effect on how the Soviets perceive their German problem. Roosevelt's talk of withdrawing from Europe, subsequent American moves to consolidate a Western zone, the Berlin airlift, and encouragement of German rearmament undoubtedly had a good deal to do with Soviet perceptions of Germany in the early postwar years. The American-sponsored nuclearization of Nato forces in the 1950s led to major alterations in Soviet military posture and figured prominently in Soviet propaganda, but it is not clear that it caused any real change in how the Soviets saw Germany or thought about their options for dealing with it. The deployment of nuclear weapons in West Germany may have done no more than add a line of argument supporting the general policy adopted in 1955. The virtual nonreaction of the United States to the Berlin Wall seems to have been what the Soviets expected. To the extent that subsequent American actions regarding Germany had any effect on Soviet perceptions, it was primarily because of their influence on politics in Bonn. Thus Lyndon Johnson's declaration that détente had to precede, not follow, reunification had an impact because it undermined Adenauer's successor, Chancellor Ludwig Erhard, and helped bring into power a "Grand Coalition" with ministers from the Social Democratic Party as well as from the previously dominant Christian Democratic Party. The same was true of American pressure on Bonn to pay more of the support costs for Nato forces stationed in West Germany, and to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty and thereby renounce any prospect of having an independent nuclear deterrent. Along with the bilateral diplomacy leading to the 1972 SALT agreement, continuation of such pressure affected the German problem, as the Soviets saw it, chiefly by playing some part in dissolving the Grand Coalition and bringing to power a new government led by Social Democrats Willy Brandt and, later, Helmut Schmidt.

These political changes in Bonn, accompanied as they were by apparent changes in West German policy preferences, unquestionably affected Soviet perceptions of their "German problem." The major shifts in Soviet policy preferences that we can see in retrospect coincided more or less with the retirement of Adenauer and his replacement by Erhard, the formation of the Grand Coalition, and then the assumption of power by the Social Democrats. Indications of willingness on the part of West Germans to retreat from doctrinaire insistence on reunification or preservation of the 1937 borders or *Alleinvertretungsrecht* (sole right to speak for all Germans) were essential preconditions for the successive changes in Soviet posture.

Looking ahead, one is hard put to imagine how Washington might in future affect Soviet policy toward Germany except by affecting Bonn or East

Berlin or, in some separate sphere such as strategic arms negotiations, affecting the general context of that policy. On the other hand, one finds it easy to imagine the American government dealing with its "German problem" in such fashion as to have profound effects in one or the other of the two German capitals and, as a result, to alter or even transform the problem as perceived from the Kremlin.

In certain circumstances, for example, Washington could see as least among evils the creation of a West German *force de frappe*. Hedley Bull and Theodore Draper have recently analyzed strains within the Western alliance in terms which suggest such a conclusion.²¹ In other circumstances, the American government might conclude that it should press the West Germans to develop nonnuclear forces sufficiently strong to hold their frontiers against any level of nonnuclear attack from the Warsaw Pact. This would be one possible outcome if America's curious political processes had to digest either a serious European initiative for a plausible nonnuclear deterrent or an unstoppable surge in domestic support for a unilateral nuclear "freeze."

Another possibility, perhaps easier to imagine in light of the gas pipeline controversy and other exchanges concerning transfers of technology and hard currency, is a series of American actions having the effect of pushing West Germany toward a Gaullist stance. This is even easier to imagine given the fact that much less irritating and less costly pressures from Washington led Adenauer seriously to consider aligning West Germany with France in a Gaullist Europe and Willy Brandt to say in his headline-making Foreign Policy Association speech of 1964 that de Gaulle was "thinking the unthinkable with audacity and determination" and that ". . . sometimes I ask myself as a German: Why only he?"

Any such change in West Germany would change the set of problems confronting the Soviet government. An American decision to press for a German *force de frappe* or for much more powerful German nonnuclear forces would not necessarily have the desired result. The point at which American pressures might tip Bonn toward some form of Gaullism is utterly incalculable. The same results could come from a West German cabinet's seeing such courses of action as possible solutions to its own problems, regardless of whether or not those problems appeared to have originated with the United States.

German political debate has traditionally involved frequent reference to the *Schaukelpolitik* (or seesaw policy) sometimes identified with Bismarck, sometimes with Stresemann, and to *Rapallopolitik* (so-called after the Rapallo accord with which the outcast Germans and Russians surprised the world in 1922 but actually describing something more like a "1939-politik," involving a wholesale shift in the apparent balance of power). As a rule, these alternatives are invoked so that the speaker can praise the alignment with the United States and Nato that has been chosen instead. Nevertheless, the

frequency of the references indicates that the existence of alternative policies has not been forgotten. A variety of possible developments within West Germany could add to the numbers of people seeing arguments for one or the other. And, of course, there is a current in German opinion, the exact strength of which remains hard to measure, in favor of having the West German republic pretend to be Austria or Switzerland.

While there seems no current reason to suppose that the return to power of the Christian Democrats significantly changes conditions as they are understood from Moscow, possibilities exist for realignments in Bonn which might have that effect, especially if the Social Democrats should go the way of the British Labour Party. And possibilities certainly exist for changes in West German foreign policy such as to lead men in the Kremlin to see the solutions to their problems in terms different from those of the last twenty years. Nor, of course, are the United States and West Germany the only foreign powers whose actions might affect thinking in Moscow. For a long time, fear of Communist China seemed to have powerful influence on Soviet views of German issues. That may still be true.

But this cursory review of the history of Soviet policy suggests that the concerns which most shaped Soviet thinking about Germany had to do on the one hand with states in the bloc and on the other with conditions internal to Russia. In trying to foresee possible future trends, one should probably concentrate first on questions about East Germany. For one: how secure is its socialist regime? Rumors continually circulate in the West about an active "opposition" within the ruling Socialist Unity Party, and there are recurrent signs of tension between the government and intellectuals. Though most observers think the regime reasonably firmly seated, it is not difficult to make a case that East Germany resembles pre-1956 Poland or Hungary or pre-1968 Czechoslovakia.²² For another: how much hope, if any, flickers in Pankow that the late twentieth or early twenty-first century may see events of the midnineteenth century repeat themselves, with Prussia leading the way toward German reunification? East Germany's taking the initiative in celebrating events in German history, including bizarrely the birthday of Martin Luther, may indicate that such notions do enter the minds of East German leaders. And there is disturbingly abundant evidence that, despite the Wall, many young West Germans, and some not-so-young, romanticize East Germany as less materialistic, more idealistic, and more egalitarian than their own country.

Any eruption in East Germany even faintly comparable to that in Poland, any turn of East Germany toward greater independence, whether of the Hungarian/Rumanian variety or of the variety once exemplified by Ulbricht, or any East German-West German rapprochement not orchestrated from Moscow, could have immediate effects on how Soviet leaders construed their options in dealing with particular issues concerning Germany as a whole.

One should concentrate, secondly, on questions about the internal health of the Soviet Union. These are numerous and familiar and need not be rehearsed here. It should, however, be repeated that history which we can study in detail, whether Russian, Soviet, or other, usually shows decisions on foreign policy to have been principally responses to domestic political problems, comprehensible only in terms of personal, organizational, or ideological rivalries of which people outside the particular ruling elite were either ignorant or misinformed. The chances are therefore that, if there are factors conducing to a fresh change in Soviet policy toward Germany, they reside in the internal politics of the Soviet leadership, and we will not know what they are until after some change has taken us by surprise.

From our standpoint, it seems likely to be a source of regret if, for whatever reasons, Soviet policy does change. Present conditions are less unsatisfactory than most realistically imaginable alternatives, for the current Soviet approach to Germany involves neither any serious military threat nor any serious effort to detach West Germany from its associations with Western Europe and the United States. A change that made the West Germans feel themselves in greater military danger would be a change for the worse. So would any change offering them powerful arguments for either shifting sides or going it alone. It was John Foster Dulles, no fair weather friend of the West Germans, who said to Willy Brandt, "[W]e shall never permit a reunited and rearmed Germany to roam around in the no-man's land between East and West!"²³ There is no reason to suppose that a Reagan administration or one of its successors would take a different view. And the alarming consequences of West Germany's somehow neutering itself are even more obvious.

Hence, if policy recommendations for the United States emerge from this survey of Soviet approaches to Germany, they are quite conservative. The first is that the American government should recognize its relatively limited capacity to affect how the Soviet government sees its problems and the high uncertainty attending any deliberate effort to influence Russian thinking. The Law of Unintended Effects would almost certainly come into play. The second is that, as the American government addresses its various problems, including those related to arms reductions negotiations, technology transfer, and the like, it should not lose sight of the desirability of preserving, to the extent possible, the essential conditions which now shape Soviet policy decisions. In this particular sphere, the best situation is one in which neither superpower has high on its agenda a "German problem."

Notes

1. Walter Laqueur, "What We Know About the Soviet Union," *Commentary*, February 1983, pp. 13-21.

2. Michael Sadykiewicz, "Soviet Military Politics," *Survey*, Winter 1982, pp. 179-209.

3. Graham T. Allison, Jr., *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1972).
4. Roman Kolkowicz, *The Soviet Military and the Communist Party* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967).
5. Hans Kroll, *Lebenserinnerungen eines Botschafters* (Cologne and Berlin, 1967), pp. 394f. and 472ff., describes conversations in which both Mikoyan and Kozlov spoke of an "Ulbricht lobby" in the Kremlin.
6. See Gerhard L. Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany: Starting World War II, 1937-1939* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).
7. Eberhard Schulz, "Die sowjetische Deutschlandpolitik," in Dietrich Geyer, ed., *Osteuropa-Handbuch: Sowjetunion—Aussenpolitik 1955-1973* (Cologne and Vienna, 1976), p. 232.
8. See Voytech Mastny, *Russia's Road to the Cold War: Diplomacy, Strategy, and the Politics of Communism, 1941-1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980).
9. John Erickson, "Threat Identification and Strategic Appraisal in Soviet Policy, 1930-1941," in Ernest R. May, ed., *Knowing One's Enemies: Intelligence Assessment before the Two World Wars* (Princeton, N.J. [forthcoming]).
10. Robert M. Slusser, ed., *Soviet Economic Policy in Postwar Germany: A Collection of Papers by Former Soviet Officials* (New York: Research Program on the USSR, 1953).
11. So *Pravda* for 10 March 1963, quoted Khrushchev as saying, thereby confirming a rumor long current among Russian emigres in West Germany. See F. Stephen Larrabee, "The Politics of Reconciliation: Soviet Policy towards West Germany 1964-1972." Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1977, pp. 28-30.
12. Konrad Adenauer, *Erinnerungen, 1953-1955* (Stuttgart, 1966), p. 528, as translated in William E. Griffith, *The Ostpolitik of the Federal Republic of Germany* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1978), pp. 71-72.
13. Larrabee, p. 40.
14. Hans Wassmund, *Kontinuität im Wandel: Bestimmungsfaktoren sowjetischer Deutschlandpolitik in der Nach-Stalin Zeit* (Cologne and Vienna, 1974).
15. Adam B. Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence* (New York: Praeger, 1974), pp. 619-628; Robert M. Slusser, *The Berlin Crisis of 1961: Soviet-American Relations and the Struggle for Power in the Kremlin* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).
16. David A. Rosenberg, "'A Smoking Radiating Ruin at the End of Two Hours': Documents of American Plans for Nuclear War with the Soviet Union, 1954-1955," *International Security*, Winter 1981-1982, pp. 3-38.
17. Willy Brandt, *People and Politics, The Years 1960-1975* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1976), p. 20.
18. Slusser, Michel Tatu, *Power in the Kremlin* (New York: Viking Press, 1969); Roy A. Medvedev, *Khrushchev, The Years in Power* (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1976).
19. Angela Stent, *From Embargo to Ostpolitik, The Political Economy of West German-Soviet Relations, 1955-1980* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 93-126.
20. Larrabee, pp. 278-293.
21. Hedley Bull, "European Self-Reliance and the Reform of NATO," *Foreign Affairs*, Spring 1983, pp. 874-892; Theodore Draper, "The Dilemma of the West: A Transatlantic Parting of the Ways?," *Encounter*, March 1982, pp. 8-21.
22. The best-informed general writings on Honecker's East Germany are Melvin Croan, "East Germany: The Soviet Connection," *The Washington Papers*, vol. 4, no. 36, 1976, and Hartmut Zimmermann, "The GDR in the 1970s," *Problems of Communism*, March-April 1978, pp. 1-40. On West German attitudes, see David Gress, "What the West Should Know about German Neutralism," *Commentary*, January 1983, pp. 26-31.
23. Brandt, p. 79.

Dr. Ernest May served as chief historian, Joint Chiefs of Staff. He is Charles Warren Professor of History at Harvard University.

