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# The Soviet Political System

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## THE SOVIET POLITICAL SYSTEM

A lecture delivered  
at the Naval War College  
on 2 October 1958 by  
*Bertram D. Wolfe*

I was prepared to assume that a talk of mine originally delivered at Oxford would be distributed in advance to this audience and that, like good boys, you would have done your home work by reading it.\* Then, I was going on from there. But some last-minute briefing indicates that only fifty copies were produced. As I see there are more than fifty people here, I shall try to combine some aspects of that paper with some aspects of the talk I intended to give and that will explain something of the structure of my talk.

I want to begin by distinguishing in principle two types of society: *first*, a relatively *open* society, which changes readily in structure, which is dynamic, self-changing, relatively painless in its changes; *secondly*, a *closed* society, which seems to have built-in staying powers, which endures for considerable periods of time, which undergoes a history to be sure, but the changes in which may be described as *within-system changes* rather than *changes in the system*. There are in principle, then, *self-transforming* or open societies and *self-conserving* or closed societies.

This does not mean that the closed societies have no history. Take, for example, the case of China. If a Chinese official or peasant of the nineteenth century were to be suddenly transported back to a China of the days before Christ, he would feel very much at home there, for the structure of Chinese society had changed very little in 2,000 years. Nevertheless, during those 2,000 years China had a very turbulent history — invasions, famines, the

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\*The paper which was distributed in advance is one delivered at a conference at Oxford University. The conference was to discuss "Changes in the Soviet Union Since Stalin's Death," but Mr. Wolfe provocatively entitled the paper which opened the conference *The Durability of Soviet Despotism*. It has been published in *Commentary* (New York, August, 1957) and in *The Russian Review* (Hanover, N. H., April and July, 1958).

fall of dynasties and the rise of new dynasties, interregnums and restorations. However, there was a marked continuity of overall structure so that a Chinese of the nineteenth century would feel quite at home in the China of the first century before Christ. This is an example of a closed and self-conserving society with built-in staying powers, while the society in which we live and which conditions our very habits of thinking about history and about society is one in which change is constant and relatively easy — a self-transforming or open society.

Another example of a closed society is the Roman Empire. Following its history from the days of Julius Caesar to the days of Julian the Apostate, one would find three or four centuries in which the Roman Empire was recognizably the Roman Empire. If one took the Byzantine Empire, one could go for nearly a millennium with a recognizably continuous structure of Byzantine society. This is the first distinction which I want to make.

Present-day Russia belongs to the societies of the closed type, with built-in staying powers and with a tendency to conserve itself, so that the changes which its leaders consciously adopt and the changes which are forced upon it tend to be *within-system* changes, leaving the basic system untouched. I think that most of the foggy thinking of Americans concerning Russia would be dissipated if they kept in mind the distinction which I have just raised; that is, if every time they are approached with some rumor of startling change in Soviet society they would remember the basic type to which it belongs.

The second feature that I would like to make clear today is that, from the aspect as to where power resides, societies may again be divided into two types: *multi-centered* societies and *single-centered* societies.

In a multi-centered society power is diffused, even where there is a great power at the head. Thus, in the West we had several centuries of monarchical absolutism. The absolute monarchy during those centuries struggled hard to preserve its absolute prerogatives but it did not exist in a single-centered society.

Along with the monarch and his undeniably great power there were also the fortified towns with their burghers and their independent wealth; there was the independent nobility where often one felt that a monarch was less powerful than some of the most powerful of his nobles; and there was the Church. Thus, with three or four distinct focuses of power, the monarch was not the sole possessor of power in spite of the fact that he was an absolute monarch. As a matter of fact, it was precisely his effort to get funds from the towns, to get armed retinues from the aristocracy, to get the blessing and sanction of the Church (itself a temporal as well as a spiritual power) which gradually developed the limited monarchy, parliament, the approval of the budget, the approval of the size of the armed forces and the length of time which they were to serve; in other words, there developed the limited and constitutional monarchy as we know it. It is our experience as people who arose out of that tradition or heritage in a multi-centered society which leads us unconsciously to accept the general notion of easy, relatively continuous, and painless change.

The other basic type of society — the long-lasting and closed one which I referred to in my first point — is also a single-centered society, where the central power brooks no other focus of power existing along with it. How such societies arose is something I do not have the time to go into except to say that a plausible theory has been offered to the effect that these single-centered societies tended particularly to develop where great hydraulic works were necessary (huge irrigation and flood-control projects) on a scale so great that the whole of society had to be commanded by the central power to engage in the hydraulic works. Thus the state became so much stronger than society that the diffusion of power into plural social structures never occurred.

Where some diffusion of power did exist — as, for example, in Old Russia, where the boyars at least gave some sign of independence from the monarch — in the course of time the Czar subverted the independent power of the boyars, destroyed them, and substituted a state-service nobility which was ennobled merely

by service to the central power. If you served in a certain capacity to the central power, you became an hereditary noble. At this point Russia became a single-centered power, although it might have been a multi-centered power if an aristocracy had continued. Thus, some political scientists have the habit of saying that aristocracy is the source of freedom, and in that sense it is — at least it is another locus of power beside the power of the absolute monarch.

Both Old Russia and New Russia belong in principle to the single-centered type of society. They never developed a burgher class, or middle class. The towns in Old Russia were primarily administrative centers rather than independent centers, such as the Western towns which produced the Western burgh or town with a bourgeoisie. And the nobility became a state-service nobility.

Finally, bondage or serfdom was set up in Russia at a time when it was disappearing in the West. It was set up so that the central power — or the tax-gatherer and the recruiting sergeant — could find every man in his place and hold each community *collectively responsible* for a certain amount of taxes and a certain number of recruits. Therefore, the fixity which is so characteristic of Russian life: in which you are compelled to stay in your village, in which you are collectively responsible for the taxes and the recruits of your village, and of which it came to be said that while ordinary men consist of two parts (a body and a soul), Russians consist of three parts (a body, a soul, and a passport). This fixity inheres in the fact that bondage was introduced into Russia, a land of continuous wars, lying in the great open Eurasian plain, a land of continuous military expansion, from tiny Muscovy to something which today spills over one-fourth of the earth, as a glance at the map will tell you. This historical process developed the powerful, single-centered, Czarist society in Russia.

We come next to another question of basic principle in political science. That basic distinction is *the distinction between old-fashioned despotism and modern totalitarianism*. I know that it is very fashionable among some Russian experts to say that the

New Russia is nothing but the Old Russia with new uniforms, a new flag, new slogans and new decorations, but that its despotism is identical and continuous. This is not true. There is a basic difference in principle between the older type of despotism and modern totalitarianism.

The older type of despotism involved a monopoly of power by a single center, as modern totalitarianism does, but there the resemblance stops. The aim of the older type of despotism was to prevent any challenge of its power and any rival centers of power. But its aim never was, nor could be, to control all aspects of life, high and low, down to the life of the humblest peasant in the most far-flung corner of the Empire. The old-fashioned despot was satisfied if there was no challenger and no challenge. He was content to let his subjects feed themselves in their own fashion, sing to themselves their own songs, write for themselves their own poems, paint for themselves their own pictures, and tell themselves their own stories. There was what Karl A. Wittfogel, in his *Oriental Despotism*, has so aptly named a "beggars' democracy" in the village, along with the single monopoly of central power by the Czar. The peasant had his own little piece of land and all of the other things which were undisturbed because they did not affect or challenge the central monopoly of power.

The aim of modern totalitarianism is not only total power in the sense of a *single center* of power, but the aim is all-embracing power. It attempts to become coextensive with the whole of society and, indeed, the whole of life. If you want to paint in the New Russia, they will tell you what to paint and in what style. If you want to look at pictures, they will take you to the galleries and tell you which pictures are worth looking at and what you are supposed to see in them. If you want to hike, they hike you. If you want to collect stamps, they direct the stamp-collecting society. To us, this is unbelievable and fantastic. It is hard for us to think about Russia because we cannot grasp the fact that quite literally totalitarianism attempts to embrace the totality of social and individual life insofar as they can reach it — individual feelings and thoughts, economic, artistic, religious,



political, organizational, and whatever other activities there are. So the first fundamental difference between the New Russia and the Old Russia is the modesty of the aims of the old-fashioned despotism and the all-embracing character and immoderateness of the aims of the new totalitarianism.

A second fundamental difference is this: old-fashioned despots hated nothing so much as change. The enemy for a despot was, in a word, "revolution" — not only revolution within his own borders but among all of his neighbors, because he was afraid of the spill-over effect of disorder in any neighboring country. In a word, old-fashioned despotism based itself on the *status quo*.

But the new totalitarianism is wedded to *permanent revolution from above*. It has a blueprint as to what man must be made to become, and it wishes to continue transforming him until it has remade him according to its blueprint. That is the meaning of the term which you find in Soviet literature, the "New Soviet Man." Human material, being rather recalcitrant to the hand of this kind of potter, makes the effort continuous, strenuous, and all-embracing. So in place of being wedded to the *status quo*, totalitarianism is wedded to permanent revolution from above. Whereas despotism favors order everywhere (not only within the confines of its own country), totalitarianism spreads by promoting disorder wherever it sees a chance to promote it.

A feature which the Old Russia and the New Russia had in common was the fact that their organization of the state and their organization of industry were *for the sake of waging war*. When Peter the Great was defeated by Sweden (then a great power), when he saw his armies melt away at the Narva and he himself fled in panic, he took a lesson from that: old, backward, unwashed Russia would have somehow to be modernized technologically. He began to shave their beards, to change their clothes and wash them up, and he kicked them forward into modern technology. He did not bother to develop the spirit which the West had to (and did) develop in the course of the slow and organic development of modern technology, but by fiat and decree from

above he attempted to lift his people into such technology for the purposes of war as would enable them to defeat the Swedes, the Poles, the French, and the Germans, who were technologically more advanced than was his country at that time. Still, today, *industrialization is industrialization for the sake of war*. This, the Old Russia and the New Russia have in common.

The other day Mr. Khrushchev made a speech in which he said, "I know perfectly well that hydroelectric power is more economical than thermal power stations and will cost less per kilowatt. But we must overtake the West in a hurry. The one thing we cannot afford is time, but we can afford to spend more per kilowatt. Therefore, we are going to abandon many of our hydroelectric projects and are going to increase the number of thermal power stations because we can build them faster, even if they cost more — even if they cost more per unit."

This is the mood that our country gets into only when we are actually at war: "Never mind the cost, everything for the sake of winning the war. Never mind what goes down the drain, everything for the sake of the war." But modern totalitarianism is *perpetually at war* and perpetually in a war mood. You need only read the Russian press to find that there are "fronts" everywhere and at all times. There is a grain front; there is a coal front; there is an art front; there is a music front — everything has a "front." Everything has the language and the sense of urgency and emergency that go with the spirit of war, for, indeed, totalitarianism is engaged in *an endless twofold war: war on its own people* to remake them in the image of its blueprint, and *war on the world* to win it for the same blueprint.

This war is perpetual. Of course it flares up and then becomes relatively quiet — I don't mean to say that it is always at the extreme stage, but it is always war. This war is quite literal; I am not using a figure of speech. They make war on their own people. Psychological warfare is continuous and unending on their own people; there is a war of nerves; a war of propaganda; there is physical war, with concentration camps; there is war in the

form of a bullet in the base of the brain — all the things that are necessary to atomize, fragment, drill, and put the people into the mood that is required of them. This war is waged continuously and has been waged ever since Lenin took power. It was waged under Lenin, under Stalin, and under Khrushchev. Whatever the ebbs and flows of its intensity, this war on their own people is never for a moment abandoned or forgotten.

Similarly, we would get into less trouble in meeting various emergencies if we recognized that never for a moment have the men in the Kremlin renounced their determination to take possession of the rest of the world for the same infallible blueprint. They may recoil when they meet opposition, but they look for a weak spot; they feel out here, and they feel out there. They make agreements, but their agreements are as the French say: "*Reculer pour mieux sauter.*" They never make agreements for the sake of ending tension or ending the effort to win the world, but merely to gain a new vantage point from which to advance further, or to avoid a particular defeat.

The fundamental error which our experts, our diplomats and officials have made is to regard the agreement by the Soviets in its own terms, as if it were a real agreement to end this effort to win the world. When Mr. Khrushchev says, in one of his more frank and cordial moments, "We will bury you!" — we are gravely mistaken to think that he does not mean it.

As we look at totalitarianism in the Soviet Union, we find the following features: (1) A state stronger than society; (2) a single-power center; (3) a managerial state; (4) a total lack of independent organizations separate from and independent of the state, and capable of bringing organized pressure upon the state; (5) a lack of independent social orders. When the totalitarians move into a new country the first thing they attempt is, to use Hitler's phrase, *Gleichschaltung*, or coordination. They take the independent organizations which happen to be in existence and gear them into the machine of the omnipotent and all-embracing state.

Are there parties? They penetrate all parties and reduce them to one party. Any party which does not lend itself to co-ordination is framed up as treasonable and destroyed. That is why the purges are a natural accompaniment of their moving into a new society.

Are there churches? The churches are either turned into state churches which will serve the purpose of the state, or framed up and destroyed. Even if they agree to serve the purpose of the state, insofar as religion can be destroyed by the state by a slower and more subtle process, the men in the Kremlin have a blueprint which pledges them to "destroy it."

Are there trade unions? They are geared into the state. In place of their being a possession of their members, used by their members to make pressure upon the employer, now the state, they become a possession of the state, are used by the state to make pressure on their members.

So when you get a totalitarian society fully working, there is *no organization independent of the central power*, the state and the party. It is true that there continues to be opposition, but the *opposition is unorganized*. They neither can nor really imagine they can completely destroy opposition to what they are doing. *But they can deny to it the power of organization and independent expression of any sort.*

The old Czarist censorship tried to keep certain obnoxious expressions out of the press: anything which affronted the dignity or the power of the Czar. Other than this, the press could say what it pleased. The new censorship not only consists of censorship, but *the government is the owner of the press*. It not only dictates what should be kept out of the press but what should go into the press.

When it comes to the artist, who buys his pictures? The government. Who decides which picture shall be hung and which shall not be hung? The government. Who decides what music shall be composed and in what style? The government. If you write

a play, who is your impresario? The government. Who owns the theaters? The government. Who decides who gets tickets and how many, and which people are to be in the audience? The government. When you are put on trial, who decides who shall sit as "the public" to witness the trial and snarl at you at the appropriate moments? The "public" in the courtroom is a professional audience selected by the N. K. V. D. to fill up the seats so that their snarls may be heard over the air along with the victim's and the prosecutor's indictment of the accused as something subhuman and bestial.

So it is difficult for us to realize what we are talking about. We glibly use the word "totalitarianism," but we just do not envisage the structure of the kind of society I have been describing.

There is one more difference which I would like to make clear in this first half of my talk: the relationship of modern totalitarianism to technology and to literacy. Many learned people tell us that this cannot last. They say: "Everything changes." Everything does change, but I began by showing that many societies lasted through the most drastic changes with their basic structure unchanged. Others comfort themselves and us (and we are hungry for comfort) by telling us that once everybody learns to read, they cannot be kept in subjection; that literacy is incompatible with totalitarianism. Another "comforting thought" is that modern technology is incompatible with totalitarianism — "once everybody learns how to run machines, they will also know how to run their bosses."

I do not need to go into Russian society to prove that that is not so. I want to take another modern totalitarian government, the German. When Nazism arose, the Germans had the most universal literacy and the widest higher education of any people in Europe. If literacy and education make totalitarianism impossible, we could never explain how Hitler came to power with many professors cheering, not to mention those who merely knew how to

read and write. Technologically, too, Germany was the envy of Europe, but nevertheless it became a totalitarian power.

Indeed, we must go farther. We must recognize that modern totalitarianism is *only* possible with modern literacy and modern technology. The older despotisms could not aspire to penetrate every nook, cranny and recess of the country and of the spirit of the people. Totalitarianism needs modern, high-speed communication such as the radio, telegraph and telephone. It needs modern literacy, so that everybody reads the same slogan at the same moment. It needs modern techniques for conditioning the mind, so that every mind can be conditioned in the same fashion.

A nineteenth-century Russian thinker, Herzen, once ominously said: "Some day Jhingis Khan will return with the telegraph." Tolstoi tried to bring that up-to-date and said: "Some day Jhingis Khan will return with the telephone." If you want to be the latest Russian prophet, you may say: "Jhingis Khan has returned with electronics and the atom and hydrogen bombs." In other words, modern technology *enables one to control a wide area — and to attempt to control it in depth*, as no earlier despotism could even have aspired to do. Let no one tell you that we have an easy remedy that will cost us nothing; that we have only to watch the Russians educate themselves and learn how to run machines, and all of our troubles will be over.

Well, as you can see, neither the distributed paper (some parts of which I have been summarizing) nor the talk I had planned to give you today (which I now enter into briefly) is very cheerful. I do not come as a bearer of comfort and consolation.

I want now to say a few words about the enemy we face. First, it is truly a great power — great in population, great in resources, great in technology, and great in military strength. Secondly, it has a great state machine which is in a condition of permanent semi-mobilization, and which attempts to keep its people mobilized. Finally, it is an enemy which is resourceful enough, wealthy enough, and determined enough, to do what we have not had the determination to do (although we have had the resources

in the West in much greater abundance): namely, to keep simultaneously an atomic striking power and a massive conventional striking power in being. It has a definite advantage over us at this moment because it is geared to both types of warfare. It believes that both types are necessary and that they must be integrated into a single plan.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, one European in seven was a Russian, or under Moscow rule. At the beginning of the twentieth century, one European in four was under Moscow rule. At the middle of the twentieth century, approximately one European in two is under Russian rule. This in itself is enough to give us pause. I do not have to tell this group that there are one hundred and twenty-five divisions in Russia in being, while we have approximately fifteen.

It is a deadly enemy! It is a deadly enemy because never for a moment does it abandon its two basic aims: to remake man, and to conquer the world. It is particularly our enemy — not because we so choose, but because it has chosen. It regards the strength and the way of life of the United States as the chief obstacle to its plan to remake its own people and to remake the world in the image of its blueprint. We have been picked as Enemy Number One.

No matter what Eisenhower says or does, no matter whether Dulles conducts himself with tact or tactlessness, no matter how well the tourist behaves when he goes to the Soviet Union for his three weeks — we will still be Enemy Number One. Whether our working class is prosperous, or hungry and jobless, or jobless and not hungry, we will still be Enemy Number One. Whether we treat our Negroes decently, or indecently — or somewhere in between, as we are doing at present — we will still be Enemy Number One. Whether we pull out of Lebanon or Quemoy or do not pull out of Lebanon or Quemoy, we cannot disengage ourselves from this enemy.

Let us not listen to the siren song of those who tell us that we can get a release of tensions and a little peace in our

time if we only "disengage" ourselves. If we disengage ourselves, we leave another strip to be occupied, a new place from which battle will begin.

They know, to be sure, that they cannot conquer us. They know something about our strength. They do not covet for a moment the risks of all-out war with us. There are two things that they are determined with all their might to avoid: one is all-out war, the other is all-out peace. They will keep us in between as long as they have the power to do so. They do not wish all-out war because they believe that time and history are on their side. When they consider how their system has been expanding, I must say it seems to them that they have some empirical confirmation for their belief that time is on their side.

Of course, they do not want all-out peace, for their two fundamental aims do not permit them to be at peace either with their own people or with the rest of the world. If our statesmen and experts wish to make a test of any fresh proposal of theirs to see whether it really intends peace, there is a simple test. *When they are ready to make peace with their own people*, then we will know — and only then — that they are ready for real peace with their neighbors and with us. Otherwise, when they use the word "peace" it is just one of the gimmicks in their waging of war.

Until then it is well to remember that Khrushchev is said to have two sets of teeth, one to smile with and one to bite with. And the more dangerous of the two is the set with which he smiles.

My next point is that "by the Russia we face," I do not mean the Russian people. The Russian people are not and have never been our enemies. They have not chosen and they do not choose their government. They do not control its policies — except by their mute and silent pressure. And those who tell us that "when the Russian people mature" they will be able to control their government and its policies, are deceiving themselves and us. No mere "maturing" of the Russian people will change their system, nor does their system allow them the organizational



scope and independent activity, the genuine information and the right to judge which alone permit of "maturing."

The Russian people are not unfriendly to us, only ill-informed, deeply curious, well-disposed towards us, and a little envious. If the gates were opened, they would "vote with their feet" by the millions in favor of our "system." In fact, wherever they have had a chance to cross the line, they have crossed by the millions. Two-thirds of all the Chinese "volunteers" whom we took as prisoners during the Korean War refused to return to their native scenes, families and lands, preferring the half-world of barbed-wire camps to returning to a country where their government makes unending war upon them.

The real reason for the Kremlin's endless hostility towards the United States, regardless of what we do, is that they regard us (and rightly) as the main obstacle to their underlying plan. This will not be changed if Khrushchev should come to New York and "see our skyscrapers," or if he should then go to Detroit and see how many automobiles our workingmen have. The Russian leaders are ruthlessly friendly. They talk of "easing of tensions." In our society, "tension" is a bad word. We can thank the Freudians for that, I suppose, for they talk of the "age of anxiety" and the "age of tension." To anybody who comes with a panacea for easing tensions, we open our arms and our hearts. However, if every time they speak of "easing of tensions" you would substitute for the word 'tension' the word "concern" (which is a more neutrally or differently colored word), you would see that what they are asking us to do is to *stop concerning ourselves with the freedom of the world and with our own freedom*. Then you would realize that we must hug our "tensions" to our breasts as long as the dangers exist which have caused the concern.

When I say that nothing we can do will change this, I do not mean to say that it makes no difference whether our workingmen are prosperous and employed or not, or that it makes no difference how we treat our colored population, for it does make a difference. But the difference is in the winning of allies, not

alienating them; in winning the secret support of the Russian people; in strengthening our prestige with neutrals. However, we will not disarm or change the philosophy or the goals of a mortal enemy. Nor do I believe with those who think that if we but disarmed everything would be easy (of course that sentence is not complete: it would be easy *for the men in the Kremlin*). I have never believed that the best way to get thieves to reform is to remove the locks from our doors.

The world is in serious and even mortal danger now, as it was in Hitler's day. Every country in the East is in mortal danger from China, with its huge population. Every country in Western Europe, the cradle of modern thought and liberty, is in mortal danger. Every country on the Mediterranean, which was the cradle of Western civilization and culture, is in mortal danger. The Near East, which was the cradle of our faiths, is in mortal danger at the present moment.

We have tried the gesture of "Let's be friends and see if that won't work" — we have tried it more often than our historical memories permit us to recall. I remember when Franklin Roosevelt said to Mrs. Perkins: "I really believe that I can get Uncle Joe to go along with me." Well, we tried it. So, at the end of the war, it turned out that there were three kinds of occupation zones. There were countries which Russia occupied (liberated) exclusively — they lost their freedom and were sucked behind the Iron Curtain. There were the countries which were jointly occupied — all of those except one have been partitioned, and the Russian-occupied half of each is behind the Iron Curtain (North Korea, East Germany, and so on). One country was occupied exclusively by us, Japan, and there the occupied country is free to criticize and disagree with its occupiers and liberators. If the experience of those three types of occupation does not teach us not to play this costly game of seeing if we cannot hypnotize them into abandoning their blueprint or into just being nice, then nothing will ever teach us. In the end we will perish, and deserve to perish, for being fools incapable of learning.

They are now proposing (and have been proposing for some time) a "unification" of Germany. Unification consists, as they have made abundantly clear, in having the two Germany's linked together and then in seeing how Communist Germany can gradually take possession of West Germany as well. We tried that before, too. We tried it with the two China's during World War II, and we see how it turned out. We tried it with the two Korea's, and we also see how that worked out. Some poor fellows tried earnestly to cooperate with them in Eastern Europe. But the Communists took the key posts in the Cabinets and popular-front governments; they took the Ministry of War, the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Propaganda (Education); and, in the end, they took the country, by what Rakoczi called "Salami tactics," in which you slice off one slice, then another slice, and then another slice, until you have the whole salami sliced up.

If you are still tempted by poisoned semantics (one of their deadliest weapons) to believe that the word "peaceful" means "peace," and that "coexistence" means "mutual tolerance" and "live and let live," I don't know at this late date what I can tell you except perhaps, it now being October, I might offer a homely metaphor: the farmer is perfectly willing for the turkey to coexist with him *until Thanksgiving Day*. If you keep that in mind, you will have a general notion of what they mean by "peaceful coexistence."

The mistakes which our public figures have made, our statesmen, experts, journalists, diplomats — and our military men as well when we were in a joint military effort with Russia — have all sprung up from the same thing: the virtual incapacity of a people brought up in an open society to understand the nature of the system we have been examining, and the aims and plans of its rulers. I could illustrate that with errors made throughout the last forty years since 1917. But let us start with World War II and the "Grand Alliance." Not understanding that our ally of the moment had been, was then, and at the war's end would be also our enemy, we did not plan the peace during the war. We did not make it a self-enforcing peace, which we could

only have done by planning our military conduct of the war to ensure a decent peace by the position of our armies at the war's end. Therefore there has been no peace.

We have failed to understand that "agreements" with such an unrelenting and continuing foe are carried out only if there are deliberate provisions to make them self-enforcing. Such provisions involve the proper disposition of our military forces to ensure enforcement.

Thus, when we say "free elections" for Germany, and they say "free elections," it behooves us to remember that the "elections" they have in the Soviet Union are what they call "free elections." We must spell out any agreement on "free elections" so as to include multiple parties, a press owned by individuals, associations and parties not controlled by the government, empty prisons and closed concentration camps, and the like, and *joint occupying troops in quantity in all sectors*, to enforce the rights and liberties we mean by the thus defined free elections.

When they say "peaceful unification" arranged between the East and West German "Governments," we must remember that that is what they said of Korea, of Vietnam, of wartime China. Agreements that are not spelled out and self-enforcing are merely semantic poison to prepare and "justify" conquest.

Above all, we are not giving our own people a clear vision of this opponent, and the nature of our struggle. How often have I sat down in taxicab or train and been asked: "What is your racket?" I answer, "Russia." Invariably the taxi driver or traveling companion follows up with: "Tell me, is Russia really as bad as our newspapers say it is?" Always I must answer, "Much worse, man! Our newspapers are not doing a good job." That depressing and forever recurring question shows how our leaders have failed to make our people understand — because they do not really understand themselves — the nature of our self-appointed opponent. Since both political parties must appeal and do appeal recklessly and demagogically to a people to whom they have not given decent leadership and proper political education, each party

poses as "the party of peace" while the enemy chooses to continue to make war on us. This is the most dangerous feature in our political life.

At the war's end, we demobilized our troops too soon, because we had not prepared our own minds nor our people for keeping them mobilized until a decent peace was assured.

We failed to make effective use of our then monopoly of atomic weapons in ways which would have furthered a decent peace and effective and controlled disarmament, not because this could not have been done — it probably could — but because we were not sufficiently aware of the need to do so, and too frightened by our awful preponderance of power to make wise and restrained use of it for bringing about genuine peace and genuine liberation of the "liberated" countries.

We left Korea without adequate defenses because we were afraid that Koreans might use our arms to unify their country and we did not have the understanding to realize that the puppet government of North Korea would surely use Russian and Chinese Communist arms and forces for the "peaceful unification" of Korea, and the "liberation" of Korea from its independence. We even withdrew our troops and made the fatuous and inviting statement that Korea was not part of our "essential defense perimeter." What could be expected from such a foe under such circumstances? When we finally had to fight to save Korea, we did an inspiring job. But under such self-imposed limitations that it was easy for Communist China to reconquer the northern half of the country, and restore the same impossible condition that had brought us into war.

Our policy of containment has not contained; and our policy of liberation has not liberated; as our acceptance of the poison semantics of "peaceful coexistence" and the propaganda circus of "summit conferences" has given us neither genuine conferences for agreement on anything, nor peace, nor the mutual tolerance of "coexistence."

All these errors — and, alas, I could enumerate many more like them — come from a failure to understand the difficulties and intricacies of the problems, because of a failure to understand the nature of our enemy, his system, his power, his ruthlessness and unscrupulousness in negotiation and action, his aims, his determination, and the role of his ideology in his efforts to conquer the world and remake man. This failure of vision or understanding, which is at the root of our failures in action and omission and negotiation, is the central thought of the second half of my talk.

I have used the word *enemy* in this talk, and I should not like to close without saying something about the choice of this word. I recognize that it is not a nice or pleasant word. But do not be afraid of it. We did not pick the Men in the Kremlin as enemies; they picked us. We have tried not to believe their statement of their aims. They said “world revolution,” but we preferred not to believe they meant it. We have tried many times to show our good will and friendship. We offered to help them with arms in 1918 to reestablish a front against the invading Germans, but all that came of it were the misunderstandings of intervention. During the so-called “intervention,” we helped them to get back Siberia after they had lost it, and we forced the Japanese by our pressure to give up their occupation of Siberia. When war and civil war and the follies of the socialization of every grain of wheat and every inkpot brought on universal famine, we helped to save millions of Russians from starvation by our generous famine relief. In the period of their forced industrialization, we sent them technicians and engineers, whole factories and machinery, and helped them to build dams and power houses.

In World War II, after they had made their pact with Hitler to divide Europe, and Hitler turned on them, our help was generous and unstinting. Instantly, and not only after Pearl Harbor, but in June 1941, Harry Hopkins flew to Stalin to offer planes, and tanks and trucks, and guns, and wool and meat and fuel and bread. When Stalin asked Harry Hopkins quite naturally: “What do you want in return for all this?” . . . Again came the failure of vision and understanding. Harry Hopkins boasted: “I told

him we were not interested in conditions. All we were interested in was getting them the planes, the guns, the tanks, and the other things they needed."

They have picked us as the enemy of the things they are trying to do to their people, and to their neighbors. If we forget that for a moment, in any one of their maneuvers, we fail in leadership. Yet always, with each maneuver, we are prone to forget afresh. We have failed to learn from a monotonous multitude of repetitions. We have failed in understanding. We have failed in leadership and enlightenment of our own people and other peoples. We have failed in political courage. Above all we have failed in vision — and here, truly, where there is no vision the people perish.

I would not have you understand that we have done nothing right in these forty years, or recently. We have done many fine things. I do not count generosity among our errors, only the generosity which defeats and undoes itself.

A power which wishes to preserve peace and prevent an upsetting of the *status quo* by force is always at a disadvantage when dealing with a revolutionary power. I recognize that. Moreover, our life in this recent period has had its great moments: the first stage of the Korean War; the Berlin airlift; the Marshall Plan — in which we even offered to include Russia if she would use it for genuine healing of the wounds of war. These have been noble moments, and there have been others like them.

But our vision is faltering, our understanding blurred; we are too easily deceived and too ready to deceive ourselves, to the world's detriment. So the purpose of my twofold talk today has been only a single one: to give such awareness of the nature of the Soviet system that the hand can be steadier, the vision clearer and more unflinching, so that each new maneuver of a tactical nature which the Soviet Government undertakes can be appraised in the light of a deeper, overall understanding of the nature of the system that torments its own people and is vowed to our destruction.

## BIOGRAPHIC SKETCH

### Bertram D. Wolfe

Mr. Wolfe received his B. A. degree from New York City College, and his M.A. from Columbia University and the University of Mexico.

He is a teacher and writer in the fields of history and political science. His interest in the Soviet Union dates from the Spring of 1917, when he predicted (in print) after the February Revolution that a second revolution would occur before the year was up and would take Russia out of the war. He has made three trips to the Soviet Union and was personally acquainted with Stalin, Bukharin, Molotov, Zinoviev, Trotsky, and a number of other Soviet leaders and ex-leaders. At the outbreak of the Korean War, he set up and headed for the State Department the Ideological Advisory Staff of the *Voice of America*.

Mr. Wolfe has been a Guggenheim Fellow three times and has also been a Senior Fellow in Slavic Studies at the Hoover Library at Sanford University and, later, at the Russian Institute at Columbia University. He has lectured previously at the Naval War College.

Since 1939, he has been at work on a three-volume history of the Russian Revolution. The first volume has been published under the title of *Three Who Made a Revolution*. In progress are a second volume, to be called *The Conquest of Power*, and a third entitled *The Uses of Power*. Two of his other books in this field are: *Six Keys to the Soviet System* and *Khrushchev and Stalin's Ghost*. He has also contributed articles to such magazines as *Foreign Affairs*, *Russian Review*, *Slavic and East European Review*, and other foreign journals. During World War II, he edited the journal entitled *Russian Affairs*, until it was closed down under pressure from the Soviet Union.