



1/10/77

Soviet Goals and Expectations in the Global Power Arena

National Intelligence Estimate

This document has been
approved for release through
the HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM of
the Central Intelligence Agency

Date: 1/10/77

HRP: 1/10/77

~~SECRET DOCUMENT
CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE
AGENCY~~

~~SECRET
1/10/77
1/10/77~~

~~SECRET~~

41. Whether or how Soviet leaders think about the potential problem of crisis management arising from their military doctrine and force posture in Europe is not clear. For the present it appears likely that they will maintain the policies of the past decade, continuously modernizing their own and their allies' forces to keep, and if possible to add to, the advantages designed to yield a victory in a quick offensive conflict. NATO's planned force improvements, if implemented, will make this a more difficult task, never susceptible to fully satisfactory accomplishment; but neither NATO military improvements of the kind now programmed nor force reduction formulas of the kind that have been advanced by the West are in themselves likely to dissuade Soviet leaders from pursuing their present military policies in Europe. Even if pressed by demographic and economic factors to consider cutbacks in military manpower levels, the Soviets will probably remain highly conservative in their calculations of what they might give up in force reductions. While demographic and economic factors may constrain the total size of Soviet forces on a national basis, it seems unlikely that the pinch would be so severe as to compel the Soviets to want to cut their forces in the NATO center region.

D. Forces Against China

42. During the last dozen years the Soviets have increased their Far Eastern forces to more than 40 divisions, together with appropriate tactical air and air defense elements. They have augmented air and missile nuclear strike capabilities targeted against US forces in the Far East, and have deployed some ICBMs which are targetable against China as well as the United States. The increased targeting flexibility of ICBMs and SLBMs makes them available for employment against China. In addition, new peripheral strike systems, such as the SS-20 mobile IRBM, are being added to the forces opposite China.

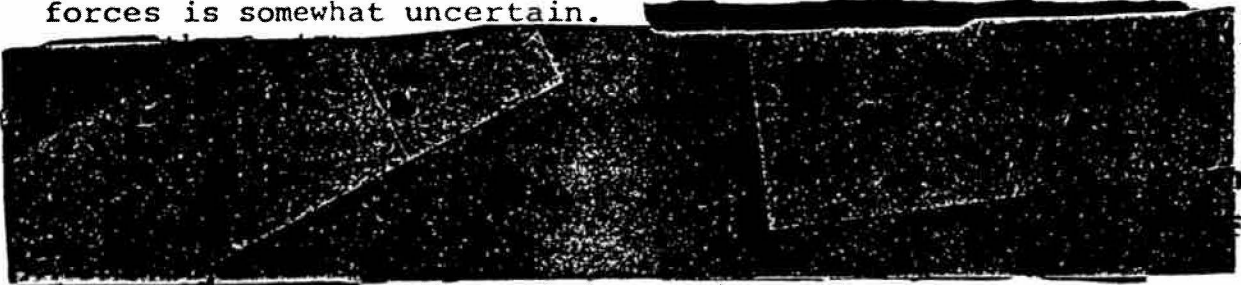
43. Soviet military policy against China may be characterized as one of containment with a variety of limited objective offensive options. As distinguished from Soviet

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

deployments in Europe, those against China incorporate fixed fortifications for defense. The Soviets clearly have sought a capability at all key points along the lengthy Sino-Mongolian-Soviet border to halt and punish local Chinese incursions and to discourage the concentration of Chinese forces near Soviet borders. They have constructed formidable regional defenses in the Maritime Province (Primorskiy Kray) against major Chinese ground attacks, and they have the capability to launch major regional offensives against Manchuria, Sinkiang, and the Peking area. In a large-scale land war, the Soviets might attempt to occupy major regions adjacent to the border, but would almost certainly not attempt to occupy central China. In a major war that went badly, the Soviets would be hard pressed to initiate the use of tactical nuclear weapons, especially in support of their ground forces; in that case, they would also be inclined simultaneously to launch preemptive attacks against the modest Chinese nuclear strike forces, and would consider the option of destroying major elements of China's industrial base.

44. Numerous statements have been made by informed Soviets that attest to a belief that China possesses a small but significant nuclear deterrent. How Soviet leaders perceive the military capabilities conferred by China's nuclear forces is somewhat uncertain.



43. Nevertheless, the Soviets are probably close enough to a damage-denying capability against China by means of a carefully executed attack on China's nuclear sites, to have strong incentives to launch such an attack in a major conflict, especially one that was not going well for the USSR.

45. The Soviets seem convinced that their powerful military position versus the Chinese is essential to prevent major trouble on the border and to inhibit anti-Soviet actions by China in other regions of Sino-Soviet rivalry.

~~SECRET~~

A less formidable Soviet posture would probably not, in Soviet eyes, lead to more congenial Chinese behavior, but would rather feed Chinese political ambitions and military pretensions. In any renewed test of will and strength on the border, the Soviets would undoubtedly react vigorously to a perceived military challenge. They would probably be very careful, however, about mounting threats against China in the absence of open provocation. This is because they appear to lack assurance that they understand Chinese motivation and attribute to the Chinese a propensity to react forcefully, even from a sense of weakness and vulnerability.

46. The present course of the Soviet leadership appears to be to retain indefinitely the clear preponderance of military capability the USSR enjoys over China by continuing steadily to modernize the forces deployed in the Far East.

E. Military Instruments for Distant Power Projection

47. The military reach of Stalin's Soviet Union was limited to its Eurasian periphery. This began to change meaningfully around a decade after World War II, which had undermined long-established colonial empires. Khrushchev, with characteristic overconfidence, trusted to a largely spontaneous political process to swing the "national liberation movement" of the Third World toward the Soviet orbit. Coups, wars, political betrayal, and their own blunders have taught his successors that the revolutionary process in the Third World is a much more complicated affair than they first thought. Despite tactical shifts and reverses, however, Soviet use of military instrumentalities to gain advantage from this kaleidoscopic transformation of political systems continues to increase.

48. The provision of military assistance in the form of hardware, support, training, technicians, and advisers is the most important dimension of this policy. Today the Soviets have active military assistance relationships with more than 30 countries of the Third World. The earliest and heaviest concentration of Soviet assistance was and remains on the USSR's southern periphery, in the Middle

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

hegemony in Eastern Europe. Soviet leaders regard this task as a quasi-domestic problem, a characteristic which distinguishes Soviet policy toward Eastern Europe from all other elements of Soviet foreign policy. Major economic and ideological developments in the states of this region have important implications for the USSR, and political setbacks in Eastern Europe strongly affect Soviet politics, even leading (as in 1956) to a serious weakening of the Soviet leadership's cohesion. In the present circumstances, the Soviets can see developments inimical to social and political stability in Eastern Europe emerging from several directions. The workers riots of June 1976 in Poland were especially unsettling to Moscow, and economic difficulties in other Warsaw Pact countries have also been a source of concern. In recent years, the Soviets have seen the economic burdens associated with maintaining their position in Eastern Europe grow, as Communist economies in the area consumed subsidized Soviet energy resources that could otherwise be exchanged for scarce hard currency.

78. It is generally understood that the Soviet leadership would use whatever means it deemed necessary, including force, to maintain control. If economic or political discontent once again generated a deep crisis in Eastern Europe and forcible Soviet measures were taken to end it, this would inevitably damage Soviet interests in other regions and probably, as in 1956 and 1968, impede preferred Soviet policies toward the West at least for a time. For the present Soviet leaders and for any likely successors, however, what would be in question in confronting a serious challenge to their grip on Eastern Europe would not be the ultimate outcome, but only the costs of achieving it.

D. Containment of China

79. While the Soviets regard the United States as their major competitor in the world and Europe as the most important arena of the competition, they now regard China as their most intractable opponent. For years, despite sober calculations to the contrary, the Soviets entertained hopes

~~SECRET~~

that after Mao's death some sort of rapprochement with China could be achieved. At the same time they have also feared that detente between Peking and Washington might move rapidly to heightened security cooperation and significant infusions of US technology directly helpful to China's military efforts. Neither the hopes nor the fears have materialized, although Soviet anxieties about the possibility of Western military-related assistance to China are still strong.

80. The Soviets appreciate that the national roots of Chinese hostility to the USSR are deep, making the prospects for greatly improved relations remote indeed. They also realize, however, that constraints on China imposed by its internal politics, particularly during the Mao succession, its economic and military backwardness, and the tenacious difficulties between China and the US help to keep China weak and comparatively isolated. Thus, while the Soviet Union's China problem remains difficult and continues to harbor the potential for developing into a threat of great magnitude, the Soviet leaders find it manageable for the time being. Moreover, with Mao's passing, they probably believe the likelihood of a new severe crisis provoked by irrational, blindly hateful Chinese behavior has receded.

81. Unable to move Chinese policy directly through successive resorts to ideological dialogue, punitive economic measures, thinly veiled nuclear threats, and assorted blandishments, Soviet policy settled some time ago on attempting to contain China's power and influence in Asia and in the Third World and to impede its access to the economic, technical, and military resources of the advanced capitalist countries.

82. In Japan, intrinsic difficulties in Soviet-Japanese relations, ranging from the intractable matter of the Northern Territories to abiding Japanese suspicion of Soviet motives, appear to impose severe limits on Soviet flexibility. The Soviets realize that some give on the Northern Territories might improve the chance for better relations with Japan, especially in a period of Japanese nervousness about the US role in the western Pacific. But the precedent-setting implications of any territorial concessions, especially in that region, seem to be judged by the Soviets as more dangerous for their future relations with China and Eastern Europe than attractive for the

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

promise of better relations with Japan. Moscow probably does not have high expectations of developing strong positive ties with Japan in the near future, or of greatly weakening Japan's ties with the US, but will be satisfied to see Japan remain weakly armed and deterred from abandoning its policy of rough equidistance toward China and the USSR.

83. The Soviets are highly alert to any signs that Peking may be interested in improving Sino-Soviet relations, however narrow the range or cynical the motive. In recent years, as they anticipated Mao's impending death, they probably considered various packages they might offer the Chinese, including economic assistance and new approaches to border management. They hope they are now dealing with a Chinese regime that is at least capable of recognizing that its own self-interest may be served by the appearance of even a small improvement in Sino-Soviet relations. But a Soviet initiative that confronts the central impasse in the relationship has to hold out the prospect of concessions on the regional arms balance and on territorial issues, and perhaps even on a range of political-ideological matters. Moscow is extremely reluctant to make such concessions, particularly without very high confidence that Peking would fully reciprocate them. More tactical flexibility could be expected from Moscow, however, in the event of a promising turr. in Chinese internal affairs.

E. Movement Into the Third World

84. In Lenin's image of the world transformed, conflagration in the hinterlands of imperialism leads to crisis and revolution in the metropolis of capitalism. This vision persists in Soviet ideological efforts to give comprehensive meaning to the development of the Third World, and it contributes to the determination of Soviet leaders to expand the USSR's power and influence there. The diverse regions and countries of the Third World present common challenges to Soviet policy at a very basic level: socio-economic development, political instability, regional conflicts, and nationalism. The revolutionary potential of these common elements makes the Third World an arena of interest and necessary involvement for the USSR, but also makes that arena extremely unpredictable and difficult to deal with.

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

probably expect to witness fluctuations in US sensitivity to the dangers over the long term of incremental Soviet gains in the world. What they call zigzags in US policy will have to be anticipated and endured to some extent as the inevitable byproduct of a disorganized international environment in which US power relative to that of the USSR is seen to be in a general, if uneven, decline. The economic health of the West is expected to be troubled, but the economic collapse of the West is not in prospect. On the contrary, the West's great productive capacity, its powerful role in world trade, and its overall technological superiority over the USSR are perceived to pose a continuing challenge to Soviet global aspirations. The United States is expected to devote new energies to enhancing the cohesion and strength of NATO and to improving NATO's military capabilities, but the obstacles are judged by the Soviets to be formidable.

112. Soviet leaders cannot be sure how long their present policies for managing relations with the United States will continue to prove workable. They are constantly apprehensive about a US reversion to "cold war" behavior; this could be induced by an international crisis or an accumulation of perceptions in the United States that the "correlation of forces" was shifting too dangerously. But, failing such a turn, the current Soviet leaders would expect to continue their present policies toward the United States for some time with the aim of attenuating US reactions to adverse trends, collaborating in managing problems where US and Soviet interests partially overlap, and gaining economic benefits. The Soviets probably see a similar outlook for Europe, although the possibility of internal political discontinuities, perhaps stemming from gains by Eurocommunism or the destabilization of post-Tito Yugoslavia, would appear greater.

113. The Soviets' forecasts of relations with China are especially uncertain and reflect their difficulty in understanding the wellsprings of Chinese political action. Over the span of a decade the possibility of a substantial improvement in Sino-Soviet relations is surely entertained by the Soviets and is clearly the alternative strongly desired. A far-reaching reconciliation is almost certainly excluded and is difficult for the Soviets to imagine without postulating a radical discontinuity in China. A more likely,

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

still somewhat favorable, Soviet forecast assumes continued strong antagonism, but with more fluidity in the relationship as both sides seek to improve the shape of the triangular relationship with the United States, which is now seen as skewed in Washington's favor.

114. Unabated hostility from the present Chinese leadership or its successors is probably still regarded by Soviet leaders as more likely than not. How severe a threat an unremittingly hostile China could pose to Soviet security and foreign policy interests a decade from now is probably seen by Soviet forecasters as depending mainly on factors external to China. While the Soviets do anticipate that China's economic and military power, especially under stable, pragmatic rulers, will grow steadily in the years ahead and are concerned about the costs that countervailing Soviet efforts would impose, they are probably relatively confident that China cannot by its own devices cause the Sino-Soviet power relationship to shift seriously to Soviet disadvantage. However, a deeply hostile China whose military capabilities grew rapidly with the aid of large-scale economic, technical, and particularly military assistance from the West would confront the USSR with a two-front version of the worst period of the Cold War. Soviet capacity to influence US behavior provides an important measure of relief, but the Soviets are aware that if they cannot alter China's stance toward the Soviet Union they may have to accept constraints on their own policy toward the United States so as to avoid raising US incentives for higher levels of security cooperation with China.

115. In the Middle East, the Soviets believe the prospects for arresting or reversing the sharp downturn in their fortunes would be improved by the failure of direct Israeli-Egyptian negotiations and by the demise of Sadat which they hope such a collapse would precipitate. They are probably skeptical about the possibility of achieving an enduring Arab-Israeli settlement and will try to obstruct attainment of any agreement from which they are excluded. A reversion of the region to its previous polarity would provide the USSR with a more congenial policy environment than the present one, although it would pose again the same uncomfortable risk of a new war threatening Soviet confrontation with the United States. To reduce this risk the USSR would probably favor a Soviet-American jointly engineered Middle East agreement in which the weight of the Soviet

~~SECRET~~