

● USSR: Foreign Relations  
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SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY 1967-68

1967 will be recalled in the Kremlin as the year in which the Middle East blew up in the most unexpected way. Twelve years' work in the arming and training of the Egyptian armed forces at enormous cost to the USSR was almost nullified in six short, destructive days. The Israeli forces, equipped by France, the USA and Britain, defeated the UAR, Syria and Jordan in the minimum of time with the minimum of loss. Yet the Kremlin recovered its poise and the initiative quicker than the West, and its position in the Middle East today is probably stronger than before the June War. This paradoxical result is largely due to resolutely pro-Arab diplomacy backed by liberal hand-outs of tanks, jet aircraft and artillery moved on the grand scale at great speed.

In Europe the USSR has moved closer to one major goal, the non-proliferation treaty (NPT) which would theoretically mean a permanent guarantee against the emergence of W. Germany as a nuclear power. But this limited degree of Soviet progress was more than offset by the withdrawal of Rumania from the Budapest Conference of pro-Soviet communist parties and Bucharest's subsequent refusal to sign a Warsaw Pact communique for the first time since the pact was founded. What is happening now in Czechoslovakia also implies a serious lessening of Soviet influence there and, perhaps, the end of the Northern Tier.

In the Far East the Soviet position in Vietnam is visibly growing stronger as more and more sophisticated weaponry (now even including amphibious tanks) trickled down in to S. Vietnam, making the US bases and the cities increasingly difficult and expensive to hold.

Similarly in India the flood of Soviet arms, which in previous years had only affected the Air Force and Army on a large scale, is now reaching the Indian Navy with results which imply a further weakening of the West's position.

Altogether 1967 provides some grounds for the boasts of Moscow that she is able to be both the driving force behind revolutions in the third world as well as to co-exist with the USA and even collaborate on such projects as the NPT. It is currently fashionable in the West to claim that such a foreign policy must inevitably come to grief sooner or later because it is founded on an internal contradiction.<sup>1</sup> Such a consummation is certainly devoutly to be wished, but it seems to rest on an excessively dogmatic view of what foreign policy is all about. In fact, foreign policy is simply concerned with the expansion of the power, influence or strategic posture of the country concerned, and there is little reason to think that to achieve these ends it must be based on any logical and coherent Western concept of how the Kremlin should behave.

Kosygin and Gromyko are much more likely to look for results wherever they can get them, choosing their methods on strictly pragmatic rather than theoretically neat and tidy lines. The world is a contradictory and highly diversified place, and the Kremlin would have to be much more devoid of imagination than it is to abide by the same policy in Washington and Paris, Stockholm and Saigon, Cairo and Caracas.

The Economist recently announced reassuringly that:

The history of the foreign policy of the Brezhnev-Kosygin government is the history of the Russians' attempt to operate two incompatible policies side by side. For a moment they can make it look as if they have pulled it off. The US, run ragged by the Vietnam War, has not yet come to the point where it will tell them that they have got to choose. But one day, under either President Johnson or his successor, it will.....

It all sounds persuasive, but is it true? For one thing, the Brezhnev-Kosygin regime has been "pulling it off" for 3 years, which is scarcely "a moment" in

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1) E.g. The Economist, 23 February 1968, Aussenpolitik, November 1967, article by Herr Alois Riklin.



post-war history. For another, the West would be wise to anticipate that the Soviets can keep it up for a good many years yet.

In this recipe for giving diplomatic advice, the US President, for about two years past, has repeatedly been told that he must tell the Kremlin to choose between genuine peaceful coexistence and further support for revolutionary wars. But he is never told what he should do if B and K politely decline to accept his advice. Is he then to unscramble the NPT or to reach for his telephone and recall his Ambassador?

The "Brezhnev must choose" school of thought goes on to analyze what is happening in Vietnam as a Russian attempt to run an expansionist foreign policy by proxy, on the grounds that a billion dollars of arms a year ought to give the Kremlin enough influence in Hanoi to make the small Vietnamese "dependency" sue for peace. The truth is not so simple: firstly Hanoi is not a Soviet "dependency," despite a billion dollars of arms a year, and it never has been since 1945. Secondly, there is no persuasive evidence that any compelling Soviet interest would be served by pressuring Hanoi to a peace conference, but there is a great deal to the contrary. Yet the fact that the Vietnam War is, on balance, an asset to the Kremlin does not by any means make it the result of "Russia's expansionist foreign policy," nor even a by-product of that evasive beast. It is simply an unexpected bonus dropped into Moscow's lap by the conflict between Ho Chi-minh, Saigon and Washington. Moscow would be carrying logic to the point of folly if it resisted the opportunity to make hay now in the East wind.

The Economist concludes its analysis by advice to the Kremlin as to what it ought to be doing with the statement that "a sleight of hand is no basis for a lasting policy. Sooner or later the Russians will have to say what they want most: a mandate to be revolutionary missionaries, or a stable world."

This optimism ignores the fact that for 50 years Soviet foreign policy has been based on sleight of hand, and it has never given much sign of wanting a stable world. What it wants is an unstable world tilting in its favor, which does not get out of hand to the point of nuclear explosion. The desiderata of the "you must choose" school are not necessarily the same as those of the men in the Kremlin, who are not conspicuously devoted to the maintenance of the status quo (even in

Czechoslovakia they are acquiescing, without public protest, in extremely rapid evolutionary change). If the West is to outwit them, it will have to be better at playing its cards, or simply hold a better hand, but not try to confront the Kremlin with false alternatives at a time when it has not the power (and has not had since 1917) to make the Politburo choose between them.

The Brezhnev-Kosygin team is certainly not as aggressive as Stalin nor as reckless as Khrushchev, and they are not willing to spend as much on foreign adventures unless they see a major profit in the offing. But they are still ready to exploit any weaknesses or opportunities in the third world, and that is what they are doing in Vietnam.

#### The Middle East

Not only in terms of the military defeat of Soviet weaponry and Soviet client states, but also in economic terms, 1967 was an extremely costly year in the M.E. for the Kremlin. At least one billion dollars worth of Soviet arms were either destroyed or captured by the Israeli armed forces. Moreover the Suez Canal has been finally closed, apparently for several years, due to the mismanagement by Nasser of his policy towards Israel and to the over-confidence lent to him by those hundreds of Soviet tanks and aircraft.

The loss of Soviet prestige resulting from the Kremlin's failure to take any effective action to protect Nasser from the consequences of his own folly was apparently so great that it could only be offset by a massive and immediate resupply program to replace the wasted arms. Yet in the end the USSR managed not only to maintain its overall position in the M.E., but even to improve it at the expense of the West, not only in Egypt, but also in Yemen, Jordan and the Sudan in particular.

For the second time (Cuba in 1962 was the first) the serious military consequences of the Soviet lack of a strategic intervention force were amply demonstrated, and the USSR is therefore expanding her naval forces in the Mediterranean and experimenting with helicopter carriers in the Black Sea in order at least partially to overcome this inferior position relative to the US global strike forces.



On the negative side of the balance sheet, Soviet relations with Syria, Iraq and Algeria seem to be somewhat strained by the aftermath of the June War. In November Pravda was speaking out against "hotheads" in Arab countries who reacted with hostility to the (British) resolution of the Security Council which initiated the Jarring mission. This presumably was aimed at Syria and Algeria. And since then Iraq has shown signs of wanting to equip her armed forces with French aircraft and armour for the first time since the Migs and T-34s were bought from Moscow by Baghdad in the late fifties.

Moreover the closing of the Suez canal indefinitely means that the day of repayment of Egyptian debts to Moscow has once again had to be postponed sine die, while Soviet ships bringing aid from European Russia to N. Vietnam must now make the long haul round the Cape. Altogether the conclusion might be that while the USSR strengthened its overall political position in the M.E. in 1967, this achievement was bought at an ominously high cost in purely economic terms.

### Asia

For the second year running, much of China remained in a state of uproar and even now about a third of the provinces still have no Maoist "revolutionary committee." This state of affairs represents a net gain to the Kremlin, since China's foreign policy remains virtually paralyzed throughout the world. China's economy has been hit, to such an extent that its trade with even such a dynamic country as Japan is likely actually to decline in 1968, to judge by the lowering of the quotas in the Sino-Japanese trade agreement for this year.

In 1967 Sino-Japanese trade had already dropped by 10% (to \$562,000,000)<sup>2</sup> but even so this reduced figure is more than twice as high as the likely level of Sino-Soviet trade in the same year.

However, despite all the political and economic losses caused by "cultural revolution" to China, N. Korea, N. Vietnam and all the major Far Eastern C.P.s were absent from the Budapest Conference of pro-Soviet parties in February 1968, and the USSR has failed during the year to restore any of her once substantial influence in Indonesia.

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2) Baltimore Sun, 8 March 1968.

On the other hand the TET offensive has revealed the limitations of US power in Vietnam, and the Pueblo capture has performed the same function in N. Korea. The moral which the Kremlin is likely to draw is that a major arms supply program to the divided small Asiatic countries can pay off as long as it is not bolstered by the dispatch of Soviet troops or any of the more dangerous forms of direct military intervention. During the year, the presence of Soviet armoured and surface-to-air missile units in Mongolia has been confirmed, but in this case there is no danger of a direct confrontation with US forces. Their mission is solely anti-Chinese and defensive.

### Europe

The last fifteen months have severely shaken the Soviet position in Eastern Europe, although in West Europe the USSR has continued to make some noticeable though unspectacular headway. Taking the latter area<sup>3</sup> first, the major Soviet long-term aims are threefold:

1. To end the US military presence in W. Europe, or at least so to reduce it as to allow the large resources needed for confronting the US Forces in Germany to be redeployed to the Chinese border or to be demobilized for more constructive duties.
2. To achieve formal Western recognition of the status quo as regards the Soviet predominance in E. Europe, in the form of recognition of the Oder-Neisse line and the permanent partition of Germany.
3. To restrain W. Germany from becoming a nuclear power for as long as possible.

The reason for the unusually cooperative attitude of the USSR towards the US-Soviet draft of the NPT is simply to further the third of these aims, and Moscow has unquestionably made some real headway here even though leaders of non-nuclear powers (including some W. German voices) are still strongly critical of the present formulations in the draft.

As for the first Soviet long-term goal, progress is already being made in 1968 with the removal of 35,000 US troops and about 10,000 British and French troops from W. Germany. The Soviet quid pro quo, a reciprocal troop withdrawal, may already be under way, although country evidence is lacking.

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3) See R. Loewenthal, Adelphi Papers, March 1967.



Even on the second goal, the one which is most difficult to attain, some marginal headway has been recorded. The "DDR" is more and more often referred to in W. Germany as the DDR, and Herr Brandt has announced that the Federal Republic will respect the Oder-Neisse line until a peace treaty is signed,<sup>4</sup> which is a long-term proposition to put it mildly.

This is further evidence that the W. German coalition is increasingly interested in better bilateral relations with the USSR, as was hinted in Herr Kiesinger's speech of June 1967. In January 1968 the Kremlin also demonstrated that at the diplomatic level, as opposed to the propaganda posture, it is soft-peddling its habitual harshness towards W. Germany. The Soviet note on Berlin's new status delivered in January proved to be in support of the status quo as regards quadripartite control. The contrast with the attitude of Khrushchev, who seven years ago ordered the Western powers out of Berlin within six months, is striking to say the least.

Because of the way in which the situation in Czechoslovakia and Poland is developing, Moscow in future will have to be still more cautious in its attitude to Germany. The "Northern Tier" is no longer recognizable when translated as "das eiserne Dreieck." There is nothing "eisern" about it, as both Dubcek's Czechoslovakia and the Warsaw students have shown, and we have nothing to gain by using this type of propagandistic exaggeration.

Moreover the fact that it is precisely the Northern Tier which has now become the soft over-belly of European communism must inevitably weaken the USSR's and Ulbricht's position in the GDR in the course of time. Czechoslovak foreign policy is still to cooperate with the Warsaw Pact and to rely on friendship with the USSR, but it is also to have a more national stamp than in the past, and probably will be less vociferously anti-German. The potential for a new Titoist type of Czech foreign policy, which would be more independent without being anti-Soviet, is quite impressive.

One of the reasons for the emerging new foreign policy in Prague is that the old has ceased to be credible. Bonn's coalition Government has largely undermined it, first by opening diplomatic relations with Bucharest and Belgrade, secondly by halting the original plans for expansion of the Bundeswehr, and thirdly by moving towards acceptance of the Oder-Neisse line as a long-term, though not necessarily permanent, fact of life.

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4) DPA, 18 March 1968.

5) New York Times, 19 January 1968.

These developments have major implications for Moscow's propaganda stance concerning West-Germany. Until now it has always seemed useful to the Kremlin to beat the anti-German drum as loudly as possible because such music was one of the few remaining unifying influence in E. Europe. But now that Yugoslavia and Rumania have diplomatic relations with Bonn, and now that both Rumania and Czechoslovakia seem likely to reduce or have already reduced the anti-German content of their policies, the old Moscow line towards Bonn is becoming more divisive than unifying, and sooner or later it will have to be toned down.

Almost every Soviet article on European security nowadays gives its reader the impression that Bonn is thirsting for nuclear weapons. Herr Brandt, on the other hand, has not only moved towards recognition of the Oder-Neisse in his speech of March 18th, but also said "yes" to the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. "We won't get them, we don't want them, and we don't need them,"<sup>6</sup> he remarked. This type of robust statement, if repeated often enough and adequately publicized by the West, will eventually remove yet another major plank from the artificial edifice of Moscow's German policy.

### Africa

Although it has been a predominantly successful year for the USSR in the Arab countries, because of the Kremlin's vocal, militant support for them before, during and after the Six-day War, in Black Africa the record has been much more patchy. South of the Sahara the USSR has gained an important foothold in Nigeria, by sending aircraft to support the Lagos Government against the Biafran revolution, but in Kenya, for example, the Soviet position has been appreciably eroded by the storm over the recent expulsion of the Novosti and Sovexport-film correspondents.

For Soviet ideologists, who profess to believe in a "workers and peasants" revolution as the road to progress, it must be depressing to note that at present about a quarter of all the independent African states are controlled by soldiers, most of whom have little or no faith in communism.

Even in Sekou Toure's Guinea there have been increasing signs during 1967 of a slide away from total dependence on communist aid and towards more economic cooperation with the West, and with the US in particular. In the much more important territory of Ghana, the USSR

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6) Guardian, 19 March 1968.



has regained almost none of the influence it lost with the collapse of Nkrumah, while Mali continues to drift back towards the franc zone.

In September 1967 Moscow took a strong stand against federalism in tropical Africa, describing the federal structure of countries as diverse as Nigeria, the Congo and Uganda as "paralyzing the work of the whole machinery of government." Instead it began to recommend what it calls "union on federal lines," as in the case of the Cameroons and Tanzania, in order to eliminate the problem of microstates.

In October last year, the pragmatists of Novy Mir summed up Moscow's ideological problems in Africa in just three short sentences:

It is hardly possible to agree with the assertion that in Africa there is a swift spread of the doctrine of scientific socialism. Unfortunately that is not now the case. 60,000 Communists in a continent of more than 300,000,000 people provide grounds for a more cautious assessment .....

One might add that this is especially true when one considers how many of these 60,000 communists spend their time in jail.

#### South America

Of all the areas in which the Soviet performance met with reverses during the year, South America was the most conspicuous. 1967 began badly for the Kremlin, with Castro's attack on the Soviet inclination to trade with "oligarchic regimes," and his warning that "not everything which is red is revolutionary."

For a long time the Kremlin held its peace on this issue, while busily continuing to build up this economic links with the "oligarchies." Then in July Pravda published an article by Luis Corvalan, Secretary-General of the Chilean C.P., in which he hinted that the Cuban experience was not necessarily valid for other countries.

- 7) Soviet State and Law, No. 9, 1967, article by V.G. Gafsky.
- 8) Novy Mir, No. 10, 1967, book review by L. Kletski.
- 9) The Times, 15 March 1967.

In October Che Guevara was killed in Bolivia, and while the news may have been received with some Schadenfreude in Moscow among those officials who had long been telling Castro that revolution cannot be exported until a country is ripe for it, nevertheless the incident disclosed the weakness of indigenous support for communism as a creed. The guerilla movement seemed to be visibly running out of steam.

In mid-December Pravda was claiming that Soviet trade with S. America in no way implies support for the governments of the countries concerned, and that in fact it is designed only to help "the peoples" -- who surely, in any Marxist analysis, could only receive a minute share of the benefits.

Cuba, in reply, chose to absent herself from the Budapest Conference of pro-Soviet parties, and to unmask the "microfaction" of Escalante's pro-Soviet communists from the Cuban old guard. Castro also disclosed that Cuban oil supplies from the USSR were limited in 1967 to an inadequate 2% growth rate, and plunged the country into an austerity program which cannot be a good advertisement for continued one-sided dependence on Soviet aid.

In sum, one might say that while the Kremlin has made further limited progress in its trade campaign with the non-communist countries during the year, the ideological and political cost of Castro's show-trial and of his thinly-veiled anti-Soviet speeches has been much heavier than in any year since the Cuban revolution was launched.

### Conclusions

All told, it has been a distinctly uneven year for the B and K team. The Economist believes that:

The Russians have not been riding so high in the world for the past ten years. (Feb. 23, 1968)

But that view may perhaps underestimate the damage done to Soviet policy in Europe by the removal of Novotny and the likely emergence of a more independent Czechoslovak foreign policy which may make the Northern Tier seem far less of an asset and far less of a bastion in the past.



Now that Rumania has broken all precedent by refusing to sign a Warsaw Pact document, it may not be long before other countries begin to follow her example, just as the Chinese walk-out from the Moscow Conference in 1960 has already spread its infection to the point where half the ruling parties in the world do not any longer appear at pro-Moscow conferences.

As regards the West, the successful US-Soviet compromise on the draft NPT shows that coexistence will continue to be backed by diplomatic action whenever Moscow finds it advisable; at the same time it would be prudent to anticipate that the Kremlin will continue its aid to Hanoi and to the Vietcong for just as long as the policy appears to be producing worth-while diplomatic and military gains to the USSR. The arms aid to Hanoi has been increasing constantly since 1965, and only this month Moscow declared that 20% more cargo would be shipped on the Haiphong route this year.<sup>10</sup> If that is illogical in terms of peaceful coexistence, Moscow can almost certainly live with the contradiction.

r.r.g.

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10) Moscow Radio, 19 March 1968 (in Polish to Poland).