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THE NATURE OF THE SOVIET REGIME AND ITS FUNDAMENTAL
POLICY OBJECTIVES

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Notes and Sources

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Synopsis

The author looks at the new power structure within the USSR since Andropov's swift succession to leadership and Soviet policy options in their chosen balance between continuity and transformation.

Current and future problems in the Soviet economy, Socialist bloc, and foreign affairs are reviewed along with their possible influence on Andropov's choice for reform and policy formulation. The gradual deterioration of ideological motivation in Soviet political conduct vis-à-vis the Third World ?

The new Soviet leader, says the author, has the chance to create two "windows of opportunity" in East/West relations. One would be opened by a new approach to arms control, promoted by a move to give the economy absolute priority, resulting in some decrease in current defence spending. The second could be created by continued trade and economic co-operation with advanced industrialized countries.

These two "windows", the paper says, could also provide political advantages for the West, if handled properly. Co-ordination of Western policy is certainly important, the author says, but unity of purpose does not exclude a variety of means. The differences in Euro-American approaches to East/West relations should be used to widen the panoply of Western policies, he argues.

The paper concludes that by making judicious use of East/West co-operation without needlessly overstressing confrontation, the West could effectively turn to its advantage the numerous weak spots in the Soviet position.

I.1. The nature of the Soviet regime

I. 1. Andropov's position in the power structure

Andropov's swift and relatively effortless accession to power has set Brezhnev's successor on a slightly different course than forecast. Despite the obvious political skills and intellectual awareness of the new leader, transition has just begun. It would be inappropriate to draw too many inferences on medium-term developments in the USSR from Western crystal-ball gazing on Andropov's "liberal" rather than "authoritative" learnings.

The succession process will probably follow the established Soviet pattern, and it will take time for a new balance to materialize between continuity and transformation. (The precedent of Malenkov - although admittedly different in many respects - could be usefully remembered here). It is important to note that Andropov cannot be isolated from the system which has ruled the Soviet Union over the past 18 years, to which he belongs in every respect. For all his interest in reform and wider intellectual pursuits, his nomination is a function of continuity and has taken place through the vital support of the military and established bureaucracy - hardly to be reckoned as driving forces of revolutionary change anywhere.

Brezhnevism without Brezhnev is both a truism and an empty phrase. Within a broad framework of continuity, long-term trends will gradually come to the fore. As the last of the leaders having survived Stalinist purges, Andropov will be responsible for eventually handing over power to the new

generation of leaders that has emerged since the second World War. His ability to control the Party-Government machine and the policy options he will take in the near future will be crucial in strengthening his bid for continuing power. At the same time these could significantly influence medium-term trends in the Soviet Union, favouring gradual reform or, conversely, allowing a relapse into orthodoxy.

I.2. Problems facing the new leadership

The long, drawn-out twilight of Brezhnev's rule increased the feeling of uncertainty and apparent weakness in a country where political stability has been maintained at the cost of economic and social stagnation.⁽¹⁾ The problems facing the new leadership at the beginning of the 'eighties are of tremendous magnitude. A deep identity crisis seems to permeate a system that, in the 1961 Party Programme, set 1980 as the deadline for initial transition to communism.

Quantitative analyses of the crisis of the Soviet economy abound, and it is not the purpose of this paper to concentrate on figures. It will suffice to note that the disappointing results periodically admitted by the leadership are not affected by the cycle, but reflect structural weaknesses which have not been corrected and could get worse in the 'eighties.

In the 'sixties the Soviet Union, having established a strong industrial base in primary and strategic sectors moving towards the idea that consumption was not a "necessary evil", but rather an element of social stability and economic growth.

Massive imports of advanced technology from the West failed to produce the necessary results. This was not due to the crisis of détente, sanctions, cut-offs, etc., but was primarily caused by the system's inability to accommodate innovation in the absence of adequate incentives. Similarly, economic reform - with its impossible aim of promoting decentralization of economic activity while retaining overall centralized control - was condemned to failure, thus compounding the system's resistance to change and to the introduction of qualitative rather than quantitative parameters.

In agriculture, dependence on external supplies will remain unavoidable in the medium-term as Brezhnev's "Food Programme for 1990" recedes gently into the future. The succession of "torrential rains" and "droughts" over the last years are a paper-thin justification for a failure which is economically costly and ideologically embarrassing.

Oil and energy resources present a somewhat more chequered picture. The pessimistic forecasts of the CIA have been revised and the perspectives do not look so bleak. (2) Oil, however, is an increasingly scarce resource. It will become difficult for the USSR to maintain preferential arrangements for intra-bloc supplies through the 'eighties, not only in price terms (differentials are soon to vanish here, and in theory could even become negative), but also in quantitative terms.

Lagging productivity and the basic lack of flexibility in the system have contributed to a serious squeeze on investments. High investment ratios have been constant in the Soviet economy, and capital formation has traditionally exceeded the growth in GNP. In the present situation, on the other hand

a marginal increase in investments would call for a more than proportional cut in consumption and/or defence expenditure, with either case posing difficult choices.

In the 'seventies the Soviet Union aimed at increasing its role as a major trading partner to favour such a development, providing for additional competitiveness and proving the general viability of the socialist model. The retreat from such ambitious aims obliged the USSR to change its external economic priorities. As Carlo Boffito has noted, the USSR gradually reverted to a policy of "complex management" of its own primary resources on the international markets. (3)

The Soviet Union has substantial reserves of raw materials and it can direct their use with relative ease, imposing limits on the rise of internal consumption which would be difficult to enforce elsewhere. A policy of this kind can provide the Soviet Union with a significant international economic role, allowing near-monopoly control in some cases. But it is all too clear that this is a "second-division" policy in the major league of industrialized countries; a policy ill-equipped to sustain the projections of global super-power.

The unifying force of Brezhnevism has made it difficult to isolate strong political currents within the power structure. This lends support to the opinion expressed by Leo Labeledz that the importance of ideological motivations in Soviet political conduct has become gradually negligible, while at the same time, ideology maintains a key-role as a legitimizing element of the Soviet bureaucratic State (4).

The Soviet Union is still far from transition to communism. Class structure and class differences have remained (and in some instances increased), contributing to the creation of a cumbersome apparatus that is authoritarian, oppressive, and elitist. The ideological superstructure is designed to make such a state of affairs acceptable to the Soviet citizen, in the name of historical and nationalistic connotations and in the expectation of new things to come. The "empty box" of ideology - devoid of intellectual content - is called upon to act as an artificial unifying factor in a society deprived of its expectations of rising living standards, and less inclined to political mobilization.

A gradual move away from ideology in the Soviet system could have been a function of the introduction of an advanced consumer economy, based on industrial reform and technological innovation. Such a process should have encouraged a transformation of the social structure, in line with the nature of a modern industrial society. But at the beginning of the 'eighties we have to register a failure on both these planes.

The paling of ideology has produced far reaching effects in the Soviet position vis-à-vis the Third World. The gradual emergence of the USSR as world power with an "imperial" design of political expansion has reduced the credibility of socialist solidarity with respect to revolutionary and/or national movements. The growing perception of Soviet policy as being dominated by power, with ideological considerations no longer providing satisfactory answers, could seriously affect the pattern of Moscow's penetration in developing countries.

The shortcomings of Soviet aid programmes are another factor here. Economic and monetary structures are bound to remain and, if anything, increase further in the coming years. Soviet attitudes aimed at exploiting the role of transaction in convertible currencies in trade with developing countries, etc., will add to the overall negative effect. (5)

II. Policy objectives

II. 1 Possible economic reforms

Andropov's first moves point towards an absolute priority in favour of the economy and some cautious probing for fresh approaches. The figures presented to the Supreme Soviet by Chief Planner Baibakov in November 1982 (setting a 2 % rise in GNP for 1982, half the target rate and the lowest figure since World War II) were probably meant to have a sobering effect and produce a clear signal. (6) The General Secretary's call for efficiency and a drive against corruption could be taken as one of the somewhat perfunctory bouts at bureaucratic re-organization and psychological mobilization, designed to signal changes at the top of the Soviet system. This time, however, it appears to be more than the usual window-dressing. (7)

Renewed speculation on the merits of the "Hungarian economic model" and its applicability to other countries within the Socialist community is certainly not coincidental. Kadar's experience is personally known to Andropov, who is rumoured to be personally in favour of it. Any attempt at a gradual extension of the Hungarian model to the USSR would have to be very carefully thought out, and the risk of major difficulties would be quite serious.

The decentralization and autonomy in the decision-making process that characterize the socialist market economy in Hungary inevitably entail a diffusion of the political control structure. Kadar's ability to compromise, as well as the force of well-known historical constraints, have produced a delicate working balance between a centralized Party system,

strong external allegiance to the Soviet Union, and relative internal economic freedom. (8) The mix is difficult to duplicate. In Poland, for example, reference to Hungarian-style economic reform was used as a means to promote political stabilization, but to no avail. The problem in Poland is in fact one of re-couping a totally fragmented political system, which could not tolerate even minimal moves towards institutionalised decentralisation. (9)

The problems are even greater in the Soviet Union. The power of the bureaucracy stems from its control of a rigidly centralized apparatus. Any attempt at change would have to take into account the heavy political costs of running against the grain of a group impervious to change and strongly opposed to the idea of individual responsibility.

At present Andropov cannot afford to run this kind of risk. On the other hand, he does need a quick upturn in economic performance in order to consolidate his influence. This could be attempted through a policy aimed at acquiring some of the advantages of the Hungarian system in terms of efficiency - but not its institutional framework.

Structural reform would be postponed, and the improvement in production standards and industrial output would have to be based on "rationalization through productive discipline" : i.e. a greater use of selective controls rather than increased economic competitiveness.

The paradox of using police methods in the interest of economic advancement may sound less preposterous from a Soviet perspective. Furthermore, it could suit Andropov's realism and his particular skills.

Andropov's experience at the head of the KGB, and his continued access to the organization through a trusted successor, puts him in a unique position to understand the workings of Soviet society and the limits on decentralization compatible with overall political control. Even limited movement could produce a positive impact on the sclerotic Soviet system. It would be a far shot from in-depth reform, and far less dangerous, too. The political advantages, on the other hand, could be considerable for Andropov, without prejudicing more far-reaching reforms in the future.

Such a line of reasoning could account for the promotion to the Politburo of Geidar Aliyev. Being a man of continuity (as a long-standing Brezhnev faithful) and an experienced manager and security expert (through his KGB background and his successful anti-corruption campaigns in Azerbaijan), Aliyev could turn out to be an important element in Andropov's strategy of controlled changes.

Efficiency in itself cannot provide the whole answer, however. Additional resources need to be devoted to agriculture and the consumer industry, with an eye to technological innovation. This brings into the picture the question of defence expenditure and the role of the military in the present political situation.

Defence is a traditional obsession with the USSR, and priorities have always been set irrespective of economic indicators and social needs. The military-industrial complex has developed into far the most efficient sector of the Soviet system, attaining a degree of productive capability and technological innovation unparalleled in other areas.

Throughout the 'seventies the "correlation of forces" has shifted gradually, but regularly, in Soviet favour, and the West has become confronted with rough parity in strategic weapons, the emergence of Soviet global sea power, and the SS-20 in Europe. This is a position that Soviet Generals would be naturally reluctant to jeopardize in any way, especially in the light of American statements favouring overall US superiority.

Bonapartism, however, has never presented a real threat in the Soviet context. The armed forces (unlike in Poland, for example) have no claim to national identity apart from that of the Party. Both are closely intertwined at all levels and form a co-ordinated body. This has facilitated, rather than hindered, political control by the civilian establishment. Key decisions on strategic options and defence programmes have always been taken by the civilian leadership and not contested by the uniformed services. Their degree of autonomy, although considerable, has been limited to the actual management of the military machine. (10)

The support of the defence establishment was crucial for Andropov's nomination. It is natural for the uniformed services to acquire greater weight in periods of transition and/or crisis, and the principle has not been disproved this time.

Marshal Ustinov played a central part. As a "civilian" who has earned the confidence of the Armed Forces, but who has always made clear the need for overall political control in military matters, his action should point once more in the direction of a strengthening of the role of the Party, rather than the other way round.

Some balancing exercises will obviously be required, although the military will be unable to escape some hard facts. A further deterioration of the Soviet economy could seriously undermine the foundations of its defence efforts, making it impossible for total spending to remain at the present level of 13% - 15% of GNP. (11) Continuation of the arms race would risk a major widening of the East/West gap to the USSR's disadvantage, because of its lack of adequate resources and a growing lag in technological know-how.

II. 2. Arms Control

Andropov's policy of consolidation and gradual economic reform would have to include a new approach to the problem of arms control, thus opening a potentially relevant "window of opportunity" in East/West relations.

Soviet attitudes on disarmament have been dominated over the last year by the impending decisions on INF deployment. The attempt to capitalize on Western disagreements in this respect, may have distorted in the short term more fundamental considerations of policy, and there is some evidence that Andropov might be under strong pressure from his own military establishment to continue the build-up. The months following initial deployment of Cruise and Pershing II missiles on the part of NATO, will show where the destruction between tactical and strategic motivations lies in Soviet approaches. In the meantime, the conclusion of the C S C E exercise in Madrid and the convening of a European Disarmament Conference (EDC) in Stockholm are positive signals pointing to a "businesslike" attitude on the part of the Soviet Union : their importance should not be overstated, but ignoring them could also prove a mistake.

The possibility of lowering the level of nuclear confrontation on the basis of a willingness on both sides to discuss the issues in concrete terms, should be taken seriously and analysed in depth. Western countries should test the credibility of Soviet approaches across the whole spectrum of arms control negotiations and devise alternative strategies accordingly.

In the framework of negotiations, European sensitivities should be properly taken into account. The often distorted debate on the de-coupling effects of some of the proposals being aired with regard to adopting a strategy of "flexible response" has added to the confusion. (12) While it would be difficult to deny that most people would favour raising the nuclear threshold, the debate on "no first use", "no early use", and the role of conventional forces has increased European suspicions. At the same time the issue has been made even more confused, particularly in American eyes, by the opposition to the INF modernization programme and its presentation as an American "imposition" rather than a Western European "request", which it was originally.

While the East/West approach to arms control is therefore sufficiently clear, an important West/West rider should be attached : on the one hand effective consultation at all levels of the negotiating process, as close as security considerations will allow; and on the other a firm European commitment to play a full and fair share in the defence effort, with particular reference to INF.

II.3. East/West trade

Priorities in economic development and social stability in the Soviet Union point towards a continuation of trade and economic co-operation with advanced industrialized countries. This creates a second "window of opportunity" in Andropov's approach to East/West relations.

Although trade with the West is relatively marginal in quantitative terms, it is difficult to conceive how the Soviet Union could carry out any wide-ranging programme of economic-reorganization without some degree of Western co-operation.

The picture of East/West trade has notably suffered from the transatlantic dispute on the pipeline-sanctions issue. One could note, in passing, the extraordinary resilience of sanctions as one of the major bugaboos of international relations, although their usefulness has been constantly questioned in practice. The issue is extremely controversial, of course, but both Alec Nove (13) and Robin Renwick (14) have recently presented a convincing case on sanctions' counter-productive, or at best futile, value.

The West/West dimension of the pipeline issue far outstripped its significance in terms of East/West economic relations. Fortunately, it is now behind us. The dispute did produce, however, some lasting indications, which could be usefully borne in mind.

First, unilateralism can pose a serious threat to Western solidarity. Some feathers might have been unnecessarily ruffled, but the need for an effective leadership of the Alliance has to carry with it the idea of consultation. Common aims can best be achieved through co-ordinated - but not necessarily identical - means.

Second, transatlantic misunderstandings have overshadowed basic agreement on both sides of the Atlantic on the need for in-depth reassessment of the impact and implications of economic relations with the USSR and the socialist community.

A drastic re-evaluation of credit policies towards Eastern Europe is made necessary by specific political priorities, but even more so by the grave concerns stemming from an increasingly unmanageable world debt situation. Short-term considerations, both trade-oriented and political, could provide some difficulties for some time to come. In essence, the foundations of a more cautious approach are not disputed; the problem will be one of devising adequate and sufficiently elastic means of consultation towards a co-ordinated policy.

Over-simplification has sometimes clouded the issue of trade in strategic-related goods. Structural differences in trade patterns are important in this respect; situations should be avoided in which exclusions penalize one side to the advantage of others. Definitions allow for sufficient negotiating margins, and a satisfactory revision of COCOM rules should not be beyond the realm of possibility.

The continuing economic crisis in the Soviet Union will call for some painful reappraisals of priorities on its part. Pressure from the West, in the form of sharp reductions in exchanges and a reversal of co-operation trends, would not necessarily encourage a more responsible line of internal and external action. Closed systems like the USSR's can react to pressure far more effectively than open societies. The elasticity of internal consumption is such that drastic reductions in the standard of living could be imposed in the USSR (though not probably, on Eastern Europe) without serious repercussions. Finally, the creation of a siege mentality could bring about a current of nationalist and pan-Russian feeling, paradoxically strengthening the regime.

The impact of outside influence is essential to the prospects of future developments within the socialist bloc. The Polish repression has proved that any interruption in the process set in motion by the C S C E can only be carried out by the USSR at growing costs. The West should not unilaterally renounce its means of exercising constant - even if reduced - pressure.

The widely held opinion that the Soviet Union has turned part of East/West economic links into a useful means for spreading the cost of its overall political control should be open to discussion. Developments in the 'eighties could point in a different direction. Countries in Eastern Europe are facing up to increasingly complex problems, while the viability of the socialist system remains limited.

Economic interdependence could be an important element in promoting greater autonomy on the part of Eastern European countries. Economic co-operation with the West will not produce pluralist democracies in the East; but it could encourage a limited degree of autonomy. The trend set by Hungary, and in many respects by East Germany and Poland, is in the West's interest and should be encouraged. The problem here is one of clear strategic choices and careful cost-benefit analyses.

The importance of the economic level will probably increase. The West will have to use it in an imaginative fashion : eliminating all forms of subsidy, stressing mutual advantages, but also bearing in mind long-term political objectives.

III. Western reaction

The "window of opportunity" concept is based on a two-way exchange, providing adequate political advantages for the West.

Stability is obviously a desirable goal. A lowering of international tension could significantly assist the West in solving its own problems. The impact of increased defence spending could cripple the Soviet economy, but the cost for the West, irrespective of technological advantage and superior productive capacity, could also be quite heavy.

A more rational allocation of resources could ease the problems of recession, of reforming the present disarray in international monetary relations, and of social consensus in a period of rapid change - all of which concern Western industrialized countries very closely.

Stability is a dynamic concept. Co-operation with the Soviet Union must be accompanied by a gradual mitigation of the causes of strain in the relationship. Looking at the problem from a geo-political angle, some areas for progress can be identified.

Repression in Poland has clearly shown the limits of polycentrism the USSR is prepared to accept within its own empire. The idea behind the C S C E exercise was that peaceful development of East/West relations had to go through a relaxation of controls, but it should not lead to questioning basic allegiances while still providing a certain amount of exchanges. It was borne out by successive developments. Society in Eastern Europe was quick to seize on the opportunity and set out to research the compatibility of respective systems. Moscow's reaction, in brutally putting an end to this process, confirmed that its unimaginative leadership was not prepared to accept the idea that stability can be effectively ensured through dialogue, oriented perhaps, but dialogue nevertheless. The Soviet Union's clamp-down on movements in the East allowed it to regain the upper hand, but at the same time sowed the seeds of a crisis which might prove difficult to control. Of the many ways of running an empire, direct repression is the least effective in the long run. And the most expensive.

The elements of instability introduced by the Polish crisis will not be easily removed : Moscow's priority - and those of Eastern European regimes - will continue to be unity within the bloc at Government, Party, and mass organization levels. Geo-political realities will be relied upon to make the message clear, and the room for internal experimentation with socialist democracy will be further reduced. Caution will be needed, however, to avoid counter-productive effect : too harsh

a course could make control more difficult and encourage a spread of tension.

The liberation of Walesa and the effective down-grading of the independent Trade Unions shed new light on the Polish case. The compromise apparently reached between power and society may be based on reality rather than consensus, and could set the ground for more stable truces.

General Jaruzelski could eventually come to represent not so much the epitome of Soviet brutality, but rather the maximum permissible limit for a country belonging to the Socialist bloc whose vast majority never accepted the communist choice imposed on it. The papal visit last spring - in a passively "pacified" Poland - has contributed to the stabilization of the regime and has accelerated the fading of Solidarnosc and its leadership into the background. Long-term trends are difficult to define in a situation as volatile as Poland's : today, however, Jaruzelski and Archbishop Glemp may have different priorities in mind, but coming to a modus vivendi they reflect, respectively, a position of weakness and one of strength. The fact remains, that a de facto agreement between Church and State is probably necessary and the only means of ensuring a limited relaxation in the expectation of better days to come, in this or other worlds.

Western attitudes should not renounce essential positions of principle, but they should also bear in mind objective factors. Sanctions may have to be adapted as they gradually risk losing their effectiveness, and today's status quo may set the limit for further pressure. The prospect of a dramatic re-orientation of the Polish economy towards the Soviet Union is at present largely propaganda. Structural links cannot be severed overnight, and the large investments of the Gierek era were consistent with closer integration of Poland into the

international economic system. The Soviet Union, furthermore, cannot be seen at the present juncture as seriously capable of shouldering the cost of another lame and very large duck. In the long run things could be different. Polish economic relations, therefore, should be construed to ensure a certain degree of interdependence which - while not posing an excessive burden on its economy - could leave the door open to developments in Poland.

The first signs of movement could come from areas further removed from Europe. The political fall-out space of the Afganistan campaign is proving very costly. Although it is difficult for the USSR to disentangle itself from a situation which is "oriental" in more than one way, Andropov's reported distaste for the operation could be the foreboding of positive developments in the not too distant future.

The reinstatement of an acceptable neutral government in Afghanistan could ease the path to Sino-Russian co-operation. The geopolitical imperative is clear here, but while many a concerned eyebrow has been raised in the West, the limits to a rapprochement would seem to be sufficiently closed. Rather than signalling an extension of Soviet influence, developments in this area could mark a further step in China's return to the major league of the World Powers.

In the Third World, the constraints on Soviet policies mentioned earlier are not about to be eroded. Progress in trouble spots, such as Namibia, could increase the appeal to the Soviet Union of new areas where internal social and political conditions might appear to provide favourable ground for action. (15)

Results obtained so far have been limited (even in Central America) and Soviet priorities should remain low. Turning to the Middle East, the lack of USSR visibility throughout recent events, whatever the reason, has severely impaired the

prestige of Soviet military co-operation (as well as its weapons systems) and has undeniably reduced the perception of the USSR as a global power in the area. Things could change here of course were the Lebanon finally to disintegrate.

IV. Conclusions

The points mentioned in the preceding section refer to some of the main areas of friction between East and West in the recent past. The question is what degree of movement should be deemed adequate by the West and how should this best be achieved ? Through carefully balanced dialogue or sustained pressure ? The answer points to the core of Euro-American differences in the approach to East/West relations.

Roberto Aliboni writes in his paper submitted to this Conference : "We have a pragmatic European perception of Soviet power, versus an ideological American perception ... on practical grounds the difference is that according to the European point of view, Soviet power can be influenced whereas it can only be opposed and contained according to the American view." (16)

Europe views with some concern the idea - currently put forward by experts such as Richard Pipes - that through a selective use of co-operation vs. confrontation Western attitudes could influence the struggle supposedly going on in the USSR between moderate technocrats and orthodox hard-liners. The effectiveness of such "punitive" tactics in retribution for Soviet misbehaviour is difficult to perceive. (17)

Relations between sovereign states cannot be cast into artificially conceived alternatives. Priorities have to be set in the light of political conditions, taking into account prevailing situations. Realism does not exclude commitment, of course. But as Robert Legvold notes, it should not be forgotten that too "vigorous, sometimes bellicose anti-Soviet

policies on the part of US authorities could vindicate and strengthen ... hard-line" proponents in the USSR. (18)

Two points should be borne in mind when looking at Euro-American attitudes towards Eastern Europe. First, although there are differences, positions set forth by the United States and Europe do not represent mutually exclusive alternatives ; rather they reflect political, historical, and psychological considerations peculiar to each contry's tradition and experience. There is basic agreement that the West must devise a concerted strategy in its relations with the Socialist bloc and that, failing to do so, it could turn a situation of relative advantage into one of grave weakness.

Second, it should be underlined that unity of purpose does not exclude variety of means. Given basic agreement on the need to move forward, there is ample room for confronting ideas and defining lines of action geared to particular situations. The question is, therefore, one of optimization of political polycentrism within the Alliance.

To some, especially in the US, the need for a unified approach to East/West relations is of paramount importance. They believe that presenting the USSR with a clear-cut set of alternatives on all issues would curtail the scope for Soviet policy aimed at capitalizing on potential divisions within the West. This, in turn, would contribute to overall stability.

Co-ordination is certainly important. Differences, however, exist and should be used to widen the panoply of Western policies within the terms of reference of commonly defined aims.

The imperatives of geographic proximity and mutual advantage in trade and economic co-operation should be kept in proper perspective : interdependence, as mentioned earlier, is not necessarily a negative factor in itself. A more pragmatic approach could also reduce East/West divisiveness on some issues, especially in the field of trade.

It is difficult to overstate the impact of ost-politik on the countries of Eastern Europe. Even setting aside specific intra-German aspects, it has probably been the single most significant political factor in East-West relations since the end of the Cold War, and one that has posed by far the greatest challenge to Soviet influence in considerable parts of its European empire. German ost-politik is often reviled in these days as a form of appeasement. It is not; its destabilizing potential for Soviet interests could be usefully exploited by the West through better co-ordination in the Alliance.

Some feel that the very reference to ost-politik is tantamount to the concept of divisibility of détente, meaning that the US would be left with the burden of ensuring Western security, while Europe would feel free to carry on ambiguous and economically advantageous flirtations with the East. This is of course not so; a firm commitment of the European partners to a fair share of the defence burden (starting with INF) is an essential precondition of any effective policy.

"Divisible détente" is also a misleading concept. The aim should rather be one of "selective allocation of political resources" or "international division of political labour". Ost-politik is just one example of such an approach; others,

albeit on a more limited plane, could be made for other countries in the Alliance. By making full use of its diverse political means, by making judicious use of co-operation without needlessly overstretching confrontation, the West could effectively turn to its advantage the numerous weak spots in the Soviet position.

Such a policy would require a far wider range of consultation and interaction than at present, but rewards would be considerable. Given basic Western understanding of the odds at stake and of long-term priorities, serious thought should be given to how the West can best manage this goal in the common interest.

Notes and sources

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- (6) "A few fresh hints", The Economist, November 27, 1982, p. 52.
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- (8) For a comparative analysis of the Hungarian and Soviet models, see Gérard Duchene in Le Monde de l'Economie, November 22, 1982.
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- (14) Robin Renwick, "Economic Sanctions", Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, 1981, pp. 76-95.
- (15) For a general assessment see Joseph L. Noguee, "The Soviet Union in the Thrid Wolrd, Successes and Failures", The Soviet Union and the Third World, Boulder, Colo., 1981.
- (16) Roberto Aliboni, "European Security and the Third Wolrd : the case of the Middle East" discussion paper submitted to the C.E.P.S. Conference, December 1982, p. 36.
- (17) Hans Dietrich Genscher, "Towards an Overall Western Strategy for Peace, Freedom and Progress", Foreign Affairs, Fall 1982, pp. 42-66.
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