

A Statement Presented to the Committee on Foreign Relations

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by

Alex Inkeles

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Well before Stalin's death we were already launched on one of the great debates of our time. Could the Soviet system survive the death of the supreme dictator, and if it did, what would be the nature of its future development? At least five years after Stalin's death the Soviet system still seems very much with us. There are those who still see in it only the seeds of a soon forthcoming paroxysm of political fratricide and consequent dissolution. Most students of Soviet affairs, however, accept the idea that the system will not soon collapse from internal pressures. What then seems the most likely course of Soviet development in the next two or three decades?

Two major and rather polarized positions have come to dominate the discussion. At the one pole there are those who assert that what Stalin wrought was a kind of modern oriental despotism, even more effective than the earlier absolute states, such as traditional China, because the modern instruments of force, communication, and education facilitate even greater mobilization of the population in the service of the dictator. This group holds modern totalitarianism as developed in the Soviet Union to be unchanged and unchanging. Nothing, except the complete destruction of the system, can stop the drive toward dictatorship and nothing can sway the dictator from the absolute exercise of power, from the total mobilization of the population for the ends of the state. In this system there is no such thing as a "concession" to popular will. The dictator acts as he sees fit, now playing soft, now hard, but always according to his

own plan - "from above." Classes are made, and when they grow too powerful unmade. Institutions are created, and when they have served their purpose dissolved. Police controls, censorship, terror, a dark struggle for power at the higher reaches are inherent qualities of the system. Indeed even the leaders are powerless to change the system. They must preserve all its essential features as a total unity. To compromise is to risk destruction, to lose the power which is presumably the main motive force for the leaders.

By extension to the realm of foreign affairs these theorists hold that Soviet policy is undeviatingly committed to the destruction of the free world, and that it is premised on this destruction being ultimately effected by force of arms. All treaties, agreements, arrangements and understandings are purely tactical maneuvers to gain time or other advantage. The Soviet word cannot be trusted, the very idea of good intentions is alien to them, and negotiation with them can have no other useful purpose than to demonstrate our gullibility or our good intentions.

This rather grim picture must be set opposite a much more cheerful political landscape as sketched by others. They see the gradual democratization of Soviet society as inevitable, and indeed claim to have substantial evidence that the process is already far advanced. They maintain that Stalin's system was developed largely to meet the unusual conditions of forced draft industrialization and the threat of war. But in this process the country became industrialized, the farms mechanized. A large urban population was assembled, and trained in the "higher" culture of the cities. Education became very widespread. Most important, a large technically trained, responsible, educated middle class arose which had aspirations for a more sane and rational pattern of life. At the same time,

the leadership itself was changing as more men whose experience lay in this new middle class themselves attained to positions of power and responsibility. Thus, the needs felt by the leaders for rational, orderly, efficient processes, for higher labor productivity, for more spontaneous and intelligent compliance, joined forces with desires for a better life on the part of the population. Together they set in motion a retreat from Stalinist extremism, towards reform and liberalization of the system. These changes are assumed to be irreversible, and therefore are taken to promise the gradual democratization of the Soviet system.

By extension to the realm of foreign affairs those who hold this position claim that the present Soviet leaders are genuinely interested in a peaceful stable world order, within the framework of which they can engage in friendly competition with our democratic capitalist system for world leadership. It is assumed that they seek a reduction of international tension and a consequent reduction in the arms burden in order to free them for more effective action in this competition. The exchange programs they have undertaken are taken to be a genuine expression of their intentions in this direction. They are taken to be reasonable men amenable to reasonable argument.

As is so often true with such theories, one can find substantial evidence in support of both. The release of thousands from forced labor camps; the tremendous reduction of political arrests to the point where they affect only a small proportion of the population; the cessation of obligatory deliveries from the private plots of the peasants; the opening of the Soviet Union to foreign tourists and the permission for Soviet citizens to travel abroad; the numerous programs for the exchange of

scholars and students -- these and a host of other measures taken by the government all argue that a new style of governing has come to the fore after Stalin's death. In contrast to Stalin's time the system is more "liberal," and the process shows some signs of further development.

On the other hand, those who argue for the unchanging nature of the system can point to the fact that people are still arbitrarily arrested by the secret police -- even if they are fewer in number -- and sentenced without open trial. The dark struggle at the top continues -- as Beria and his associates were first to discover, and Molotov and company not so long after. The use of force on a mass scale against a whole population was amply demonstrated in Hungary to the horror of the entire world. Hence, in essence, they would argue, the system remains unchanged.

Both of these positions suffer from a certain degree of rigidity which makes them inadequate for an assessment of future Soviet development. They are rigid in that both assume that totalitarianism is an "either-or" proposition rather than a matter of degree. In our opinion each of these contrasting views depicts one of the two sets of forces at work in the Soviet Union, one stemming from the nature of the totalitarian system established under Stalin, the other from the nature of the industrial society which has grown up beneath the totalitarian structure. The two sets of forces have already demonstrated a certain measure of compatibility, and the pertinent question is not one of which will triumph, but what the concrete resolution will be.

It seems highly unlikely that the Soviet system, any more than any other modern industrial society, can be, or indeed has been, unchanging. It may be true, for example, that the shift from mass terror to political

arrest limited to a small group at the top is not a change in principle, but merely in degree. Yet for the hundreds of thousands of Soviet citizens who now sleep more securely, without the continuous fear of the early morning knock at the door, the change is real enough. They would think us mad to argue that this was not a "real" change. Yet such changes do not add up to democratization. Although few are arrested, no man is granted a true immunity from arbitrary arrest, and none can assume they will be protected by proper safeguards of due process if they are arrested. There is very little evidence of any deliberate move for the Communist Party to share power, or even to observe democratic processes within its own organization. The term "liberalization" of the system seems granting too much if we insist on giving the word liberal an even moderately strict limitation, and there certainly seems nothing inevitable about the process.

Indeed, inevitability is a rock on which most theories of history founder; Marx's theory being not the least example. We can assume neither the inevitable stability nor the inevitable democratization of the system. In any event, either designation is largely a label we apply to a social process. Rather than argue about the labels we might do better to go directly to the social processes which the labels presume to describe. In doing so we need to keep distinct three aspects of the problem: popular feeling and opinion, the desires and aspirations of the middle ranks of Soviet leadership, and the intentions of the ruling elite.

With regard to the rank and file of the population, my extensive studies of former Soviet citizens, supplemented by recent travel in the USSR, lead me to put forward the following conclusions:

1. Stalinist rule created a deep and long lasting impression in the Soviet people, and left a residue of bitterness and resentment against

arbitrary, violent, and despotic patterns of governing with which all subsequent governments must reckon. There is a widespread feeling that this was a terrible aberration, and a general determination that it must not happen again.

2. The prolonged depression in the standard of living associated with collectivization of the farms and the years of forced industrialization was a source of resentment second only to the terror, and a widespread basis for questioning the legitimacy of the regime. The same deprivations would not again be accepted without large scale passive resistance and the generation of tensions which would threaten to become explosive.

3. While consciously resenting the deprivations which Stalinist rule introduced into their lives, most Soviet citizens were nevertheless strongly, albeit more subtly and unconsciously, influenced by the processes of social change which Stalin set in motion. These changes are to be measured not merely in terms of the usual census categories of increasing education and urbanization, but more in terms of changed attitudes, values, and life patterns. The values of the peasant family rooted in the local community, devoted to the soil, and consecrated to the continuance of religious and social tradition have suffered enormous attrition. We believe these patterns, though they still exist, now characterize only a minority of the population. In their place the culture of the cities, the values of the rapidly changing industrial order, have now been en-  
sconced. The "consumption ethic" has come to Russia as it has in other industrialized countries. Indeed, it is our impression that this quality is almost as strong in the Soviet Union as it is in the United States. It is obvious that to manipulate the Soviet population the regime will be less effective if it uses force or coercion than if it juggles opportunities and rewards in the form of occupational advancement and other

tangible and intangible goods.

4. Despite great hostility to the Stalinist rule of terror, and profound resentment against the depressed standard of living, the great majority of Soviet citizens seem to find much that is acceptable in the system. This applies particularly to the idea of government ownership and operation of industry, transportation, and most trade, and to the concept of the welfare state exemplified in government guarantees of work, medical care, and education. Opportunities for social mobility are sensed and appreciated, probably beyond what the actual situation warrants. There is great pride in the industrial attainments of the society, and in the apparent "cultural" development of the country, as represented in the theatrical arts, music, literature, painting, sculpture and, to a lesser degree, architecture. The performance of both the government and the people during the war and the period of reconstruction is a source of admiration and pride, tinged with a sense of wonder. By extension, the central position of the Soviet Union in world affairs is a source of gratification. "The Soviet power" is a big thing, which no one takes lightly.

5. Resentment of the oppressive features of the Soviet system took, in some instances, violent and explosive form -- a total or global rejection of everything "Communist" and Soviet. However, for most people grievances tended to be highly concrete and specific. The main themes were "end the terror," "slow up the pace of economic life," "improve the standard of living," and so on. The execution of the program, rather than the conception itself, was deemed bad. Even though the essential disparity between the Soviet system as idea and as reality was grasped, there was still a woeful failure to generate alternatives which commanded respect or attention. The Soviet refugees often left us with

with the impression that there was not only little understanding, but little need felt for the strictly constitutional apparatus of guarantees, rights and safeguards which characterize the democracy of Western Europe. Good rulers, kind, considerate rulers, who "cared" for people, did not terrorize them or push them too hard, would be quite acceptable, especially if they provided an increasing standard of living and opportunities for personal advancement.

6. Most Soviet citizens seem to have accepted the main outlines of the official image of foreign affairs disseminated by the official media. They see the United States government as dominated by powerful groups who seem committed to waging a war of destruction against the Soviet Union and other countries. They imagine a vast conspiracy by the West to prevent colonial and underdeveloped areas from attaining their independence and achieving their rightful national aspirations for peaceful economic development. They take substantial pride in Soviet strength and the image they have of the USSR as a leading world force. They believe the Soviet government to be a champion of peace and a defender of the small and weak. They are eager for peace and the smaller burden of arms a stable world order would yield. But they do not assume they understand the complexities of world politics, and incline overwhelmingly to leave these issues to the leaders "who understand these things, and know best."

After Stalin's death his successors acted with intelligence and forcefulness to eliminate or reduce most of the prime sources of popular resentment and discontent which Stalin left them as part of their political heritage. They did this by drastically reducing the application of terror, taking measures tangibly to improve living standards, and giving



more meaning to the welfare state guarantees of free education, medical care and old age security. They also reduced the intensity of the pressures put on intellectuals and the enormity of the controls placed on administrators and economic managers, and made substantial concessions to the peasants. No one of these concessions and grants to the people is necessarily "permanent." Neither do they represent "permanent" solutions of the several social problems to which they were a response. Their significance lay mainly in the evidence they offered that the leaders were aware of the greatest sources of tension and the worst grievances in the system, and were willing and able to take effective measures to deal with the situation. This suggests, therefore, that even within the structure of the perhaps unstable Soviet oligarchy, there are greater capacities for change and adjustment than many have been willing to allow.

The leaders' capacity to make such adjustments argues well for the short-run stability of the system. It does not, however, insure its long range stability, nor does it give us many sure guide lines as to what that long range stability will be like.

The most crucial argument posed against the compatibility of the Soviet political system and its newly-developed modern industrial order is that the very development of Soviet industry and the modernization of Soviet society -- with its emphasis and rationality, its dependence on science and research, its ever increasing corps of well-educated and well-trained engineers, managers and other professionals -- has made the usual Soviet pattern of operation unsuited to the needs of Soviet society and unacceptable to the new managerial class which ultimately holds power in its hands.

There is in this argument more assertion, or perhaps faith, than hard substance. To begin, there is hardly much evidence to support the assertion that education by itself generates a love of freedom. It was, after all, a country with one of the best educated populations, and one with the largest groups of industrialists, engineers, scientists and other educated men, which treated us to the experience of Hitlerite Germany. And there are few who will deny the widespread, indeed pervasive, support he received among the educated classes in the military, business, industry, education, and other realms. In the second place, and perhaps more important, there is good reason to believe that the underlying principles of Soviet political control over the ends of economic and administrative behavior are accepted by most Soviet engineers and managers, indeed are willingly supported by them. They accept these as "political" decisions to be decided by political specialists. They are, in other words, largely withdrawn from politics, "organization men" similar to their counterparts in the United States. Their main complaint in the past was not over the principle of directing the economy, but rather over arbitrary political interference in predominantly technical decisions, the unreasonably high goals often set in the face of insufficient resources to meet them, and the treatment of failures in judgment or performance by management as if they were acts of political defiance or criminal negligence. Since Stalin's death such abuse has been tremendously reduced. Soviet managers seem, on the whole, quite satisfied with the situation.

Of course, there is always the risk that the political leaders will overreach themselves, and in seeking to maintain their own initiative will violate the rights of the managerial class so flagrantly as to provoke retaliation. The facts of recent experience indicate such a sense of outrage is not easily aroused. The top political leadership has been

able to effect massive changes in the formal structure of economic administration in the Soviet Union without any sign of major resistance or even disturbance. Indeed, even the outstanding military leader of the country has been dismissed summarily without apparent serious repercussions. While these very events were in progress the Soviet Union successfully launched no less than two earth satellites, which hardly argues that it is having great difficulty either in motivating its scientists and engineers or in organizing their efforts effectively around important governmental programs.

This conclusion should not be taken to mean that the regime will not make further adjustments in its domestic administrative arrangements in the interests of efficiency. Such changes may, on occasion, be popular with the technicians and administrators, may even be taken at their suggestion. But it would be unwise to see in such adjustments some kind of managerial revolution, the forerunner of some basic reorientation of Soviet policy.

There is, of course, one group which could reorient that policy --the ruling political elite of the Soviet Union. No one can, of course, assert with confidence that he knows the intentions of the Soviet leadership. Yet it is essential that we make some estimate. The following represents one such estimate, which is humbly submitted for your consideration.

1. Soviet leaders still believe that fundamentally there is an imminence in history, which requires that it progress through certain clear stages towards an eventual world condition in which all "capitalist" societies, including what they call its "bourgeois democratic" forms, will have been replaced by "Communist" societies. They read recent history as validating this proposition, and they see the process of transition as in full swing. As Molotov expressed it, "All roads lead to

Communism."

2. The roads to Communism are, however, not all straight nor easy. The process of Communization is complex, and proceeds not only through wars and revolutions, but also through nationalism, economic crises, diplomatic maneuver, cultural exchange, and other means.

3. What advances this movement at any particular moment cannot be decided by chance, but rather requires a guiding intelligence and active support from some base of strength. The base of strength they assume lies in the Soviet Union, a conviction which makes it easy to identify and indeed even to confuse Russian national interests with those of the international Communist movement. The guiding intelligence is assumed to be provided by the leadership of the Soviet Communist Party, which makes it easy to blur the distinction between the domestic power interest of that group and the power interests of the leaders of Communist movements in other nations.

4. The Soviet leaders will take no action which seriously endangers either the Soviet home base or their position in command of it. This means that they will not undertake any action which they are reasonably certain would precipitate a global war with the newer weapons of mass destruction. It seems to me highly unlikely that they would risk a surprise war, even if they had a substantial technological edge. Although here we cannot be so sure, it also seems unlikely that they would support another Korean type action, that is, an action which meant putting troops across a major national border we have given fairly clear intention to defend, for fear of the extension of such conflict to the respective home bases.

5. At the same time, the campaign to spread Soviet influence, to weaken the Western world, and to capture additional areas for Communism

will continue unabated. The main front for action will be the former colonial and other underdeveloped areas in the Middle East, Asia and Africa. The campaign will, however, continue to have a definite "new look," in which the national aspirations of former colonial people are seemingly supported, economic aid will be extensive, cultural exchange featured. The Soviets have, indeed, launched a massive campaign intended to create an image of themselves as leading scientific, cultural, social, and humanistic force in the world. This puts great strain on the Soviet system, however, and makes any reasonable and safe reduction of the arms burden of substantial interest to them.

6. While this process of nibbling away at the periphery is in progress, it is essential to neutralize or minimize the extent of the opposition from the Western world, and to soften it up as much as possible for its eventual fateful days of transition to Communism. This demands (a) Disarming the Western alliance by weakening its awareness of the ultimate threat to its way of life. The peace campaign is the main weapon. Intellectual, cultural, and other exchanges are part of this campaign, though not solely based on such considerations; (b) Weakening the Western alliance. This has the objective of weakening concerted action to resist Soviet expansion in the uncommitted areas, and of reducing the extent of the active military threat to the Soviet home base, should something go awry and total war ensue.

7. Beyond this Soviet leaders have no clear program, since they clearly now entertain serious doubts as to the instability of the free societies of the West. They hope that while they work on the periphery, which can surely occupy them for two decades or more, the long expected domestic economic crises in America and Europe may yet come to pass.

There are three main sources from whence a fundamental change in the pattern of Soviet development may spring, especially as it affects the Soviet impact on the rest of the world. One possibility is that the problem of the succession crisis will never be solved, eventually one of the struggles for power at the top will break out in the open, and in the process of resultant conflict the old order will be destroyed. Although we regard such an event as being of a rather low order of probability, it certainly cannot be discounted. But I believe it an error to assume that the inevitable outcome of such a struggle would be a democratic Russia. On the contrary, I believe it highly likely that whoever was the victor in such a struggle would in his turn impose the standard pattern of totalitarian rule, and probably with renewed vigor.

A second possibility is that a future breakup of the Soviet satellite empire, as exemplified by the revolt in Hungary, and the relative defection of Poland, might have sufficiently serious repercussions within the Soviet Union to change materially the path of Soviet development. Although there are major sources of instability in the Soviet empire, or coalition, we do not believe that it is markedly unstable. But even if there were serious defections from Soviet control, there is no absolute reason to assume the response within the Soviet Union would be in the direction of democracy. On the contrary, there is greater likelihood that, under such circumstances, there would be increased totalitarianism in an effort to recapture lost or ebbing control over the satellites.

A third prospect is that the industrial maturation of Soviet Russia, the mellowing of its social structure will "erode" the dictatorship and set in motion important processes of social change which will lead to a democratization of Soviet society, and perhaps also a transformation of its foreign policy. While such a transformation is to be hoped for, it

seems hardly to be counted on. The Soviet system has changed. But in my opinion the formidable challenge which faces the world rises not from the unchanging character of the Soviet Union, but precisely from the fact that its present leaders have been able to make adjustments in the structure which have adapted it to take account of the earlier development of the society. The crucial point is that they have done so without sacrificing the basic features of the system - the monopoly of power in the elite of the one-party system, the absolute dominance of the state in the control and direction of economic life, the limitation of freedom of opinion and expression to those few cases and to that degree which the regime regards as politically harmless, and the use of force or extra-legal measures, however selective, to impose the will of the leaders in such a way as to make an ultimate mockery of the law and constitution. It is no less autocratic and certainly not more democratic, in the sense of the supremacy of law and individual rights. But such a society is more, not less, a challenge to the free world. The leadership may have lost some of its freedom of maneuver, in the sense that it can no longer so readily commit the whole nation to an assault on objectives the people do not support. But the regime is far compensated by the vastly increased popular support for the objectives to which it has committed the nation. And it presents an immeasurably improved facade to the world.

In the balance hangs the decision as to what the dominant cultural and political forms of human endeavor will be for the remainder of this century and perhaps beyond. It is, perhaps, only a little thing that separates the Soviet world from the West -- freedom. Inside the Soviet Union there are some who ultimately are on our side. But they are a minority, perhaps a small one. Their ranks were first decimated by Stalin

and later thinned by the refugee exodus. We had therefore better turn our face elsewhere, rest our hopes on other foundations than on the hope that the Soviet system will mellow and abandon its long range goals of world domination. We must look for our defense to the capacity of our own social order to yield fuller, richer, more dignified life under freedom not only for ourselves, but for the uncommitted, the half committed, the neutralists, and even those who have already cast their lot with the Soviet Union. If we are not equal to the task, we will leave it to the Soviet Union to set the pattern of human existence for the next half century.