

Old Wine in New Bottles

ADAM B. ULAM: *Expansion and Coexistence. The History of Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-1967.*
New York, Frederick A. Praeger, 1968.
HERBERT S. DINERSTEIN: *Fifty Years of Soviet Foreign Policy.*
Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press, 1968.

Reviewed by Tibor Szamuely

IT SEEMS to have become a general rule for each postwar US administration to pass through a regular cycle in its relations with the USSR—a cycle that begins with a phase of optimism and goodwill, then gradually shifts over to disenchantment, and finally ends up in extreme hostility. At present we seem to be witnessing the beginning of another such cycle. And while we must be sympathetic if not charitable towards efforts to secure the triumph of hope over experience, a knowledge of history enjoins a considerable degree of prudence with regard to such hopes. As somebody once said, however, the only lesson of history is that no one ever learns anything from it. Each generation is seemingly destined to learn only from its own experience—emerging, no doubt, the sadder and wiser for it.

This unwillingness to learn is most regrettable—and can also prove rather costly. It can, moreover, no longer be explained by ignorance of Soviet realities, particularly when every important fact about Soviet foreign policy, together with a perceptive interpretation of its basic rules, is readily available in Professor Ulam's excellent, comprehensive, objective and eminently readable new book, which is undoubtedly destined to become a standard reference work on the subject.

Soviet rulers—the present rather uninspiring lot included—have always possessed a far greater

sense of history than the governing classes of other world powers. This is inherent in their Marxist upbringing based on the concept of “historical materialism.” (Professor Ulam shows the crucial importance of Lenin's *Imperialism* as the theoretical foundation of Soviet foreign policy throughout all its fifty years.) It is also a reflection of the traditionalist nature of Russian politics. Paradoxically, the country which produced the greatest revolution of our times is in many respects more traditional, and even more conservative, than any other nation in the world.

The force of tradition, whether Tsarist or revolutionary, goes a long way towards explaining the foreign policies of the USSR. Take, for instance, the question that has puzzled generations of Western statesmen and analysts: What are the respective parts played in Russia's foreign policy by Communist ideology and plain, old-fashioned Russian nationalism? The “conflict” certainly exists—but it had existed, in slightly different form, long before the 1917 Revolution. Russian expansionism had always been both nationalist *and* ideological, the latter factor having been supplied in Tsarist times by the extraordinary notion (sometimes elaborated as “the Russian Idea”) that Russia, *because* she was an absolute despotism, somehow embodied the ideals of equality and social justice. This weird belief in the superior moral qualities of

a despotic Russia was strikingly expressed by the 19th-century Slavophile philosopher Leontiev (not quoted by Ulam), who wrote that Russia's "interests have *in some way a moral tendency* towards supporting the weak, the oppressed. And all these weak, all these oppressed are her partisans. . . . I understand that even the Moslems and Hindus of India have prophecies in favor of the 'Urus' and in disfavor of the 'Ingles.' Such is the curious destiny of this *despotic* Russia." Curious is certainly the word for it—and it became even more curious after 1917.

THE BOLSHEVIK REVOLUTION triumphed because it was led by the supreme political genius of the century. Lenin, the founder of the Soviet state, became the architect of its foreign policy. Every basic principle of present-day Soviet diplomacy goes back to the crucial formative years—1917-21—and to the colossal figure then at the helm. When Soviet ideologists pontificate today about the "Leninist principles of Soviet foreign policy," they are speaking no more than the truth, and we in the West would do well to study closely—with Professor Ulam's able assistance—the early policies of the Bolshevik regime.

Only a few months, or even a few weeks, after the October Revolution, amidst the great hopes it generated for an immediate world revolution, Lenin realistically faced the fact that he now had both a nation-state to govern and an international revolutionary movement to foster. But for him—as for all his successors, Brezhnev included—there could never be any question which of the two was more important: above all, Soviet Russia had to be preserved, and so he literally forced the Brest-Litovsk treaty upon his unwilling party. With the Soviet Union militarily helpless, he was ready to accept any demand, make any concession. At one critical point he even expressed readiness to accept aid from the West—in his own inimitable way: "Please add my vote to those who are in favor of receiving food and weapons from the Anglo-French imperialist robbers."

Yet, from the very beginning, Lenin made it clear that Russia was to be preserved not just as an ordinary state but also as the powerhouse of world revolution. These two basic and contradictory strains of Soviet diplomacy were already enshrined in Lenin's first foreign policy statement, the Decree on Peace, which simultaneously appealed to all established governments for peace, and to their populations to rise against those very governments.

The same combination of incongruous principles baffled the German representatives at Brest-Litovsk—and have continued to baffle many other dignified diplomats of the old school ever since.

Brest-Litovsk was the turning point: from that time on, the "capitalist" West has, step by step, come gradually to acknowledge the Soviet Union's right to conduct its foreign policy along previously unthinkable lines—*i.e.*, combining orthodox diplomacy with organized subversion. Thus, a new style of diplomacy was born—one that is now being increasingly adopted by governments of the "Third World" and can justifiably be called the 20th-century style of diplomacy. Its features are utter realism in power relationships; the end of the old "gentlemanly" conventions; contempt for accepted international law; the use of propaganda as diplomacy and of diplomacy as propaganda; insistence on the legal right of nations, in peacetime, to subvert other recognized governments; a system of double moral standards; and an attitude which regards international treaties as worth no more than the power sustaining them.

This last was probably the most important of Lenin's foreign policy principles. Professor Ulam formulates it as "the clear assumption that there was no nonsense about the sanctity of treaties; once power relations were changed, Soviet Russia would claim her own." This principle has been pursued undeviatingly by Lenin's successors. Even the rather colorless Molotov showed a nice sense of humor in his negotiations with von Ribbentrop, remarking that the proposed Soviet-German non-aggression pact might be modeled on the Soviet Union's existing treaties with Poland, Latvia and Estonia—*i.e.*, on the very agreements he was now pledging to destroy. (The Nazi-Soviet Pact was probably the only treaty ever broken by the Russians' treaty *partner*; hence their constant pained references to Nazi "perfidy.")

The 1939 episode is now widely regarded as an instance of pure Stalinist wickedness. Nothing could be further from the truth. Lenin viewed international agreements—with equal, if not greater, cynicism—as measures of expediency to be annulled as soon as the "revolutionary" situation permitted. In 1919 he consoled a heartbroken Bukharin: "We shall conquer power, wait a while, and then go as far as you like." An opportunity presented itself in 1920, and Lenin promptly declared a national and revolutionary war against Poland. When it failed, the "revolutionary situation" was said to be temporarily at an end—until better times. Meanwhile, however, the Bolsheviks quietly

annexed Georgia and made Mongolia the first Soviet satellite on the old Russian principle of “taking whatever lies around badly guarded” (*brat chto plokho lezhit*). Such earthy Russian sayings perhaps have no place in the rarefied vocabulary of the social scientists, but this one conveys the essence, as well as the menace, of what is usually referred to approvingly as “Soviet flexibility” far better than such euphemistic formulae as, for example, Professor Herbert Dinerstein’s (about whose book more later) novel concept of a “rolling” or “movable” status quo. In practice, the latter means much the same thing—i.e., piecemeal Soviet expansionism—but how infinitely more soothing and scholarly it sounds!

ON THE OTHER HAND, practical “flexibility” has always been the obverse of ideological intransigence. The international Communist movement was inevitably, rapidly and ruthlessly transformed into an instrument of Russian policy, and the “Russian path to socialism” was imposed upon every Community party. This was generally accepted, for was not Russia the sole “socialist” state? At the Second Comintern Congress, the German Communist leader Paul Levi, in a fit of enthusiasm, exclaimed (in English): “Russia expects everybody to do his duty!” Levi soon discovered that he was not quite up to it, but there were always others—and then still others.

Ideology remained pure, but the revolution was defeated in the West. Whereupon Lenin arrived at the idea of an alliance between Soviet communism and nationalist movements in Asia (and Africa). Here, again, true to form, he was far more “flexible” than in his dealings with Western Communists. “Don’t paint nationalism red,” he warned. Gradually it came to be accepted (though never explicitly stated) that in the West “imperialism” could only be destroyed by force of Soviet arms, while elsewhere nationalism would do the job.

Such, by and large, have been the basic principles of Soviet foreign policy through fifty years. Stalin enriched them by his Byzantine savagery; Khrushchev added his demagoguery and recklessness; Brezhnev & Co. have superimposed their own brand of oafish brutality. Yet the essentials are unchanged. Even more remarkable than this consistency has been the Western world’s persistent failure to recognize the glaring truth. The “liberal” West, it seems, has never really understood the nature of the thing that hit the world in 1917. Western statesmen and experts have spent nearly fifty years in a

futile search for Soviet “moderates” whom they could support against the “doctrinaires” (or “doves” against “hawks,” in more modern parlance). A particularly striking example of such self-deception was the late U.S. Secretary of State Edward Stettinius’ notion that Russia started the cold war because “Marshal Stalin had difficulties with the Politburo . . . for having been too friendly and for having made too many concessions to the two capitalist nations.”

Indeed, nothing better epitomizes Western failure to comprehend the realities of Soviet foreign policy than the wartime conferences between the USSR and the Western Allies. While the Russians were fighting tooth and nail for territories, boundaries, puppet governments, and spheres of influence, the Americans were striving to obtain Stalin’s signature to various declarations, statements and charters of the highest nobility of purpose. This was seemingly regarded as a fair *quid pro quo*. As Harry Hopkins remarked to President Roosevelt at Yalta, “The Russians have given in so much at the conference (over UN voting procedure) that I don’t think we should let them down (over yielding up Eastern Europe).” Twenty years later, the Russians still retained the same nonchalant attitude toward platitudinous moral declarations: Professor Ulam makes the telling point that while the Americans acclaimed the 1963 nuclear test-ban treaty as “a major breakthrough in the cold war,” the Soviets could hardly have cared less.

BUT HOPE SPRINGS eternal in the human breast—even that of a Western Sovietologist. Professor Dinerstein’s brief account of postwar Soviet-American relations—rather inaccurately entitled *Fifty Years of Soviet Foreign Policy*—exudes hope, optimism, satisfaction and general good feeling. It would seem that all is for the best in the best of all possible bipolar worlds. Cold war? According to the author, it has been over for ages. And to the extent that it ever did exist, it was due largely to “misperceptions”: the West misperceived the Soviets, the Soviets misperceived the West, and both misperceived each other. Furthermore, in Mr. Dinerstein’s view there is nothing about those “misperceptions” that can’t be solved with a little goodwill on both sides. He sees goodwill everywhere—even in the Soviet reaction to the U-2 flights, which provided Russia’s leaders with “reassurance that Eisenhower was pursuing his moderate policy toward the Soviet Union in full knowledge of the great disparity between Soviet

and American forces. Had Eisenhower's moderation been based on overestimates of Soviet strength, it might have been abandoned when he became undeceived." Why, then, did Khrushchev have a U-2 shot down? Pure high spirits, Mr. Dinerstein suggests, no more: he "yielded to the temptation" to indulge in some "rough joshing" of the American president.

Professor Dinerstein is no less sanguine in his estimate of trends in Eastern Europe. "Few on both sides," he writes, "foresaw in the late 1940's that Soviet control in Eastern Europe would start to recede so soon." I hate to have to say it, but in the light of what has transpired in Czechoslovakia, I would venture that even fewer people foresee this in the late 1960's.

The fact is that while a lot has no doubt changed in the USSR in the last fifteen years, Soviet foreign policy is today even more ossified and uncompromising than it was under Lenin or Stalin. Professor Ulam is right when he remarks that Stalin's death put an end to "the prospect of any fundamental and lengthy *détente* with the United States." In an autocracy only an autocrat can change the direction of foreign policy decisively. Even such lesser Tsars as Peter III and Paul I were able to switch alliances in mid-war; and Stalin could treat with Hitler without seeking anybody's permission. Today, however, the Soviet Union is that terrifying thing—an autocracy without an autocrat. The "collective leaders" are slaves of the past, of old commitments and old rhetoric,

of fixed boundaries and fixed mentalities. They have no leeway; they cannot afford to sign anything away, to effect the slightest change in the status quo. All they can do is cling to power for dear life.

"It is unlikely," remarks Professor Ulam, "that their wartime experience with American diplomacy left the Russians with an excessive respect for it." It seems even less likely, one might add, that their postwar experience in the same area—save, perhaps, for the Truman interlude—would have increased that respect. The history of the past fifty years is the story of how, on the one hand, the Bolsheviks parlayed a few almost non-existent assets into a great military empire, and of how, on the other hand, first the British and then the Americans frittered away a seemingly impregnable dominance.

As a consequence, Western diplomacy has lost one opportunity after another in dealing with the Soviet Union. "What," exclaims Professor Ulam despairingly, "could a really enterprising diplomacy do if confronted with a conflict of the magnitude and complexity of the Sino-Soviet one!" What, indeed? With a little more insight and imagination, it might well be able to alter the whole world balance of power and put the Russians on the defensive for the first time since the war. But, of course, it will not happen unless the West comprehends that the search for a *détente* with the Kremlin is about as realistic as chasing a will o' the wisp. To gain this comprehension, a reading of Professor Ulam's magnificent book is mandatory.

Friendship without Friends

MICHAEL P. GEHLEN: *The Politics of Coexistence: Soviet Methods and Motives*.
Bloomington, Ind., and London, Indiana University Press, 1967.
ROBERT H. MCNEAL, ED.: *International Relations among Communists*.
Englewood Cliffs, N. J., Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967.
ADAM BROMKE and PHILLIP E. UREN, EDS.: *The Communist States and the West*.
New York, Frederick A. Praeger, 1967.

Reviewed by William Zimmerman

IN THE PAST DECADE we have witnessed major changes in the style and tactics of Soviet policy towards Western states, Communist states, and non-ruling Communist parties. Consequently, it has become increasingly evident that a thorough re-examination of the nature of both East-West and inter-Communist relations is in order. To what extent do the tactical changes reflect a transformation of Soviet motives and goals in the international arena? Is the assumption, so common at one time, that ideology is paramount in Soviet foreign policy still valid? Given the far-reaching transformation of the world Communist movement, to what extent have the changes in inter-Communist relations—and especially those between the CPSU and other parties—altered the nature of East-West relations? These—among others—are the questions examined by the authors of the books under review.

Of the three, Mr. Gehlen's *The Politics of Coexistence* goes furthest towards reassessing the motives behind Soviet foreign policy and the relationship between Soviet ideology and behavior. It is Gehlen's view that Leninist concepts have played a modest role at best in determining the goals and methods of Soviet foreign policy since 1965. The major exception is the Leninist doctrine of imperialism, which continues to facilitate the identifica-

tion of the main enemy and "makes the Soviet leaders especially sensitive to some policies of their opponents, such as emphasis on military strength, and dulls their vision of other policies, such as occasional voluntary withdrawal from colonial countries" (p. 250). But the author points out that at the 20th Party Congress, Khrushchev adapted Lenin's views on imperialism to the atomic era by rejecting the inevitability of war, by admitting the possibility of peaceful Communist accessions to power, and by making peaceful coexistence relevant for an entire period of historical development and not merely a strategy or tactic. Gehlen finds that Soviet decision-makers have since shown little propensity for risk-taking and have avoided the use of force except when reacting to situations which, in their view, have directly threatened Soviet security, e.g., the 1956 Hungarian revolution. (It would be interesting to know whether the author would consider the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia, which occurred after he had written his book, a parallel to the events in Hungary in 1956.)

Specialists may dispute some of Gehlen's major arguments. (For instance, to bolster his contention that recent Soviet foreign policy has been fundamentally cautious, the author attempts—not very convincingly—to explain away five of the eleven