

OBSERVATIONS ON U.S-SOVIET RELATIONS

by Henry A. Kissinger

Ed Feulner, ladies and gentlemen, I very much appreciate this applause. I know how hard it is to applaud and shrug your shoulders at the same time. Two or three years ago, my friend Norman Podhoretz invited me to the anniversary party of *Commentary*, and I stated that, if General Custer had survived Little Big Horn and been invited to the celebration of the victors, he would feel as I did when I addressed the neoconservatives in New York. Now I can say the same thing in addressing the conservatives in Washington.

Today, however, rather than engage in debates of other years, I thought I would state my views on Soviet-American relations in general, and then specifically as applied to the current situation.

I think U.S.-Soviet relations pose a particular problem for a society that never in its history has known irremediable disaster and that through most of its existence was secure from foreign danger. For the greatest part of American history, the British Navy and two great oceans protected this country so that the possibility of fundamental disagreements or of mistakes that cannot be remedied has not really been part of the American psyche.

Liberal-Conservative Debate. Indeed, the normal American tendency is to believe that foreign policy disagreements result either from a misunderstanding or from the temporary appearance of evil doers, to be removed either by strenuous good will or by conversion. And with all due respect to this distinguished group, I must say that some of the debate between liberals and conservatives in this country concerns precisely the subject of Soviet intentions. Both seem to agree that on some magic day an act of conversion will take place. The disagreement is that the liberals assert the conversion has already occurred, and the conservatives, being more suspicious, await that moment — as yet to come.

I hold a somewhat different view. I believe that the Soviet Union represents a challenge to the United States of two parts. One is geopolitical — its size, its extent, its power would present a geopolitical and strategic problem for the government of the United States no matter who governed. Russia has not been any joy for its neighbors, under either tsars or commissars. And therefore, I believe that the problem of how to deal with the Soviet Union is not one that can be addressed in terms of the intentions of Soviet leaders, fundamental changes in Soviet society, or any of the plethora of psychiatric analyses of Soviet intentions.

Second, of course, I believe also that Soviet ideology gives a particular urgency to this geopolitical thrust and creates a particular complexity in negotiating with Soviet leaders. Soviet leaders have been confronted for decades by Westerners who are convinced that

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He spoke at The Heritage Foundation on January 14, 1988.

ISSN 0272-1155. ©1988 by The Heritage Foundation.

they have a special relationship and a special key to understanding the Soviet leadership groups. And those are the people who have suffered the greatest shipwrecks.

The one thing that no Soviet leader can afford to do is to return from a meeting with a capitalist, especially an American, and report that he has met the most charming American President; that he has found swimming pools in the backyards of America, and that therefore, concessions ought to be considered that had not been part of what was believed to be the objective balance of forces.

Nixon's Assessments. In my view, not unanimously shared in this room, the most successful U.S. President in dealing with the Soviet Union was Richard Nixon, who, not being convinced of the permanent good will of Americans, was not about to trust the Russians. I defy anybody to find any statement of President Nixon concerning fundamental conversions of the Soviet system, changes of the Soviet attitude. Whatever differences might exist with respect to agreements that Nixon made, they were based on an assessment of relative benefits and of geopolitical trends, which, as any other assessment, might have been wrong. But they were not based on the assumption that we were dealing with a fundamentally new phenomenon in the Soviet Union.

This idea that we are dealing with a problem not of foreign policy, but of conversion of a system, is not new at all — the Soviets abolish their claim to world revolution every decade. In 1943, Stalin abolished the Comintern, and Tom Connally from Texas — not one of the more arch-typical liberals — said in response, “The Russians for years have been changing their economy and approaching the abandonment of communism, and the whole world will be gratified by the happy climax of their efforts.”

Essence of Stalinism. *Fortune* magazine (I'm picking non-liberal publications) at about the same time said, “Russia will prepare for the peace of Europe to its communization.” The argument in favor of this assumption is that Russia will be too weak for aggression in Europe, even ideological aggression, after the War. It is the essence of Stalinism to use communism as an instrument of Russian nationalism, foreign policy, and so on and so forth.

There are literally tons of quotations that say the same thing, which any researcher will find in every decade. In 1959, Averill Harriman said, “I think Mr. Khrushchev is keenly anxious to improve Soviet living standards. He looks upon this current seven-year plan as the crowning success of the communist revolution and a historic turning point in the lives of the Soviet people. He also considers it a monument to himself. However, he is finding it difficult to attain that ambitious goal so long as armaments are making such heavy demands for scientific genius, technical skill and capital investment.” This was a year before the Berlin crisis, two years before the Cuban missile crisis.

And these are not selective quotations. There's another one, which I will paraphrase, in which the *Herald Tribune* wrote about the Geneva summit meeting that other people might have pitted strength against strength, but it was President Eisenhower's achievement to draw the little band of visitors from the other side of the Elbe into the magic circle of his good will, and thereby, change their attitudes, if not their policies.

Yearning for Normalcy. My point is that there is in America a yearning for normalcy — a refusal to face a contest that has no end, in which progress can be made only incrementally. In the end, peace can be achieved only by hegemony, or by balance of power. There is no other way. We are too isolationist to achieve the former, and we have been too moralistic to achieve the latter. And that is at the core of our difficulties.

Now, let me apply this to the current situation. Those of you who read my writings — which of course I would assume is everybody in this room — know that I was not swept away by the Gorbachev euphoria. I have met him twice. He is an interesting and intelligent man. On the other hand, he has never held any job except cadre in the Communist Party. It is a competition that leaders do not enter who do not have an enormous thirst to prevail, because there is only one winner, and fundamental penalties — to put it kindly — for losers. He was the protege of Yuri Andropov, the head of the KGB, and of Mikhail Suslov, the chief ideologue since the days of Stalin, from which occupations I draw the perhaps unworthy conclusion that neither was a closet dove. It is, of course, possible that Mikhail Gorbachev fooled them all, in which case we live in a truly historic period, when the leaders of the two superpowers are both former actors. So I assume that he, as in the case of all Soviets, may not know much about running an economy. In fact, we don't have to assume that, that we know — but they are experts in political warfare. That is the communist specialty, finely honed in internal struggles and in theoretical reflections about the nature of one party dictatorship.

Gorbachev's contribution to the current situation — and it is considerable — is that he has recognized two things: One, he has correctly analyzed the internal weaknesses of the Soviet system, and I believe he is sincere in attempting to remedy them. He has also correctly analyzed the internal weaknesses of the American system, and I believe he is equally sincere in attempting to utilize those for his purposes.

Gorbachev's Dilemma. With respect to his domestic system, he faces a nearly insoluble dilemma. You cannot run a modern economy by central planning. But equally, you cannot run a communist society without central planning. What to do about the Communist Party in a communist state has been the paradox that no communist country has been able to solve. If it maintains a monopoly position of power, it becomes a mandarin group. If you attempt to thwart that, you then have at best something like the socialized countries, the welfare states, say Britain of 30 years ago, with great inflexibility of labor, nationalized industries, and no incentive for modernization. So the Soviet economic problem is almost insoluble.

And second, Gorbachev recognizes that decentralization will soon run up against the nationality question. Therefore, it may be no accident that the Soviet reformers have on the whole conducted very adventurous foreign policies — both Khrushchev, who was clearly adventurous, and Gorbachev, who is clearly very daring.

Now let me turn to my analysis of the Gorbachev foreign policy and to my concerns about the present state of affairs. Gorbachev confronts us with three propositions: one, he is a new type of Soviet leader; two, arms are the cause of tension, and therefore, strenuous efforts must be made to reduce the level of arms beginning with nuclear arms; and three,

political conflicts cannot be dealt with simultaneously and must be left to the good will that will be engendered by the other two developments.

A New Type of Soviet Leader. With respect to the first proposition, we all know that astonishing progress has been made and that all over the world it has achieved wide acceptance that Gorbachev is a new type, and that therefore he is entitled to concessions that might not have been made to his more pedantic predecessors. A peculiarly American wrinkle is to believe that the economic strengthening of the Soviet Union is a good in itself, independent of the foreign policy that it may pursue — the view that a strong adversary is better than a weak adversary, which is something that could be held only by a society that has never suffered any form of foreign policy shipwreck.

The second of Gorbachev's propositions — the dominance of arms control — is the overwhelming challenge to our current foreign policy. When I was a young professor and had written some articles and books about the proposition that reliance on general nuclear war and mass extermination would sooner or later lead to a dead end of pacifism and unilateral disarmament, I also joined some study groups, which very modestly tried to analyze the new impact of the mass destruction technology. In such seminars, the theory of arms control was born, in which it was argued, and I believe correctly, that the new weapons added a new dimension to strategy and that special consideration should be given to that dimension in the elaboration of strategy and foreign policy. We asked modestly for some place in strategy for arms control. Thirty years later, we are in a position where the reverse is occurring, where arms control is becoming almost its own end, and its relationship to strategy and foreign policy is not very easy to determine.

Congressional Cuts. In the early seventies, in the agreements that were made at that time, there was a theory that many of you will disagree with, but at any rate, there was an attempt to break the momentum of a Soviet buildup in the middle of a period of near civil war in this country, when it was impossible — the Congress every year was cutting our defense requests by 10 percent. And there was an attempt, with respect to ABM, to sell it to the public before Congress killed it, since Congress already had reduced the number of our stations from 12 to 8 to 4 to 2, and was clearly heading to zero. This may or may not have been correct policy. I'll be glad to debate it afterwards with anyone who chooses.

Today I find it difficult to understand the advantage to our security in any of the agreements that have either been concluded or are in the process of negotiation. As many of you know, I have had the gravest doubts about the INF agreement. I may say I have been nearly alone in fighting that battle, because the isolationist streak in some of the conservative groups did not mind so much any weakening of the Europeans' confidence in us, when the belief is that they are getting just about what they deserve.

Be that as it may, my concern with INF is less in the military than in the political field. It fundamentally has affected our relationships with Europe. And it is presented in an extraordinarily schizophrenic manner. It is presented as an historic achievement that, however, makes no difference strategically. That is not a proposition self-evident to me.

The historic aspect of the achievement is said to be that it reduces two categories of weapons, that it eliminates two categories of weapons. That makes sense only as a first step

to removing, to eliminating, all categories of nuclear weapons, an objective that has now been enshrined in two summit communiques. We are therefore in a position where the weapon on which the West has relied for 40 years, rightly or wrongly, has been stigmatized by the nation that has been its chief arsenal, while the conventional weapons have been left to some future negotiation. That, in itself, is no mean achievement.

Damage Cannot Be Undone. Second, as I have stated publicly, I endorsed ratification of the INF agreement, not because I see any merit in it, but because I think the damage of not ratifying it would be greater. The damage cannot be undone, the weapons cannot be kept in Europe anymore, and therefore, it would only be a means of enabling the Soviets to hold on to the SS-20s without achieving any real benefit.

But it is my view that this process must not be repeated with the 50 percent reduction that is now under negotiation. Before we proceed on so fateful a course, we have to understand in what specific way it is supposed to add to anybody's security. So far as I can tell, it does not alter the vulnerability of any of our forces. Quite the contrary, the ratio of warheads to missiles of our land-based forces will go from 3 to 1 to about 5 to 1. Now, that may not make any difference, but it is not a great achievement either. Our submarines will be reduced to about 18, while the anti-submarine forces of the Soviet Union are not part of the agreement.

I cannot visualize an inspection system that could adequately verify this. And I do not know how countries that depend on us can adjust to the twin shocks of the removal of our forward-based system and the total revision of our strategic arsenal without understanding what the strategic doctrine is that it is based on, or without at least a fundamental modification of our strategic forces so that the number of aiming points is reduced and we go to single warhead missiles, as a result of which we will not only not save money, but have to spend a lot more money.

Causes of War. It is a challenge to everybody in the West. Some relationship has to be established between nuclear disarmament and conventional disarmament. And some relationship has to be established to the political issues that are the ultimate causes of political tension. I know of no war — at any rate, we will all agree that few wars have been started by arms races, and that the overwhelming majority of wars, if not all wars, have been caused by unresolved political issues. And it therefore seems to me absolutely imperative that this be addressed.

Now, since you have often had occasion to express your less than total agreement and admiration for my views, less strong than my mother's, let me make a few comments about some of the conservative contributions to this state of affairs.

For years, the real issue has been one that my friend Norman Podhoretz never tires of raising with me, which is that the sort of foreign policy that I have studied, so-called *realpolitik*, balance of power, is not sustainable by the American people — that the U.S. needs an ideological mission. There is a lot of merit in what he is saying. But we now have proved to ourselves that we cannot maintain an ideological foreign policy for eight years, and therefore we may be left without an anchor.

Theological Cast. In obscuring the real issue, which I admit is a valid one, the opposition has often raised three other objections: verification, reduction, and human rights. We run a great risk of finding that each of these slogans can be used against a long-range sustainable strategy. I have already stated my views about reduction. Somebody has to explain two things to the American people — in what specific way the reductions being discussed improve our security. That should be something that is objectively determinable. And what other consequences flow from this reassessment of the strategy? I do not believe that is very easy. And therefore many of the current discussions have a theological cast.

Second, verification. Verification cannot create a good agreement — it cannot make a bad agreement valuable. It can only make a good agreement enforceable. And I believe that, if you study the INF agreement, for example, you will find that the verification provisions may be barely adequate with respect to INF, which reduces itself to zero, and in which the Soviets have already achieved a great deal by the fact of the agreement, and therefore have a low incentive to violate it.

Analyzing Violations. But when you get into strategic forces, it is not enough to extol the benefits of the reductions. There has to be a careful analysis of the scale of the violation necessary to overturn the equilibrium, in which the lower the total numbers, the greater the possibility that an otherwise minor violation could be decisive. And there has to be some analysis of what to do when a violation is discovered.

We have known about a radar in Krasnoyarsk, which happens to be 1,000 miles from where it is permitted. But our public discussion has been whether it is significant strategically. It is a new doctrine that insignificant violations of an agreement are permitted — an insignificant violation the size of three football fields, 1,000 miles from where it is permitted to be. These are problems that require analysis.

Need to Develop Criteria. Now I am not saying that we cannot and should not negotiate with the Soviets. I believe it has been clearly demonstrated that we will not maintain public support or alliance cohesion without negotiation. But we need to define properly the causes of tensions. We need to define the remedies.

The Chinese approach to negotiations with the Soviets in effect says, "*Glasnost*" is your problem, and we don't care what kind of suits you wear. We have three problems in our relations with you: Soviet troops at our borders; Soviet troops in Afghanistan; and above all, Vietnamese troops supported by the Soviets in Cambodia. One of them has to be solved before there can be improvement. Three have to be solved before there can be normalization.

I hold no brief for those three objectives. But they have the advantage of concreteness, and they permit criteria by which progress can be measured. Is it impossible for the democracies to develop their own set of criteria? On a basis that takes everybody's interests into account, but still precise criteria on which a truly reciprocal negotiation can be based? That is the fundamental issue of our period. It cannot be solved by slogans. And in that sense, I think the real issue of East-West relations is within ourselves.



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