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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY



"A VIEW OF EAST-WEST RELATIONS"

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

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There is something about the past which seems to make some Englishmen uneasy about visiting Boston. Personally, I have never understood why. Indeed, as a member of the House of Lords - and thus as someone condemned to pay taxes to the British Government without the right to vote in Parliamentary elections - I find myself much in sympathy with your forebears. And I don't much like tea anyway.

I am not, of course, here as an Englishman, but as an international civil servant. Those of you who have had occasion carefully to tread the narrow path between cliché and indiscretion in expounding in public the view of one government, will understand what it must mean to represent sixteen. All that carefulness can be a bit dull, and I am very grateful to the World Affairs Council for having taken the risk: I am also not at all sure that this is the sort of thing one ought to be doing on the 1st of April.

Be that as it may, you will I hope be relieved to hear that I do not propose to attempt a comprehensive assessment of the state of East-West relations; and still less to explore the qualifications and nuances which my sixteen masters would no doubt wish to suggest if I did. Instead, I should like to think aloud a bit, about and around the subject.

We spend quite a lot of time trying to work out what the Soviet leaders are up to, and it is very much the accepted thing to emphasise how difficult it is to understand them and their country. An enigma wrapped in a mystery, as someone once said. We spend rather less time wondering what the Soviet Union thinks about us; and we think about ourselves much as Professor Higgins thought about the male sex: eternally noble, historically fair - why can't the Soviets be more like us?

I suspect that we may appear a little less straightforward than we would like to believe. Spare a thought for the professional America watchers in Moscow, who have recently been called upon to analyse and predict the actions of a Republican President who signed a lot of agreements; of a Democratic President who did not; and of another Republican, who came to office ... I am afraid that I have forgotten the Russian for "come back Jimmy, all is forgiven". But I would in any case hope that the Soviet leaders have by now concluded that they must deal with President Reagan on the basis of his record in office - and of his clear determination to make progress on arms control and disarmament - instead of deluding themselves with a distorted cartoon image which their own propaganda has done so much to foster.

Soviet Western Europe watchers don't have it any easier. France and Italy, for example, have large communist parties; but the socialist President Mitterand is impressively robust in the politics of defence, and the socialist Prime Minister Craxi is deploying CRUISE missiles. Meanwhile, democratic left-wing parties in Northern Europe exhibit a marked uneasiness about the defence policies of the Alliance - and an equally marked inability to come up with a better alternative.

One could go on in the same vein, but there is no need to labour the point. I have raised it not because these inconsistencies may give the Russians a hard time, but because they give us in the West a hard time.

A good example of what I mean can be found in the field of disarmament, where we are trying to negotiate with the Soviet Union agreements which are not intended to undermine their security, but which are - and certainly ought to be - very clearly designed to prevent the undermining of our own.

One can, of course, only guess at what may happen when a proposal for such an agreement is considered by the Politburo. Someone, presumably, is there to say that the security of the Soviet Union will not be impaired; that it would allow resources to be better applied - to the benefit of the civilian as well as the military sector; that there would be foreign policy advantages in going ahead; and, in any case, that nothing more was to be squeezed out of the Western negotiators. The crucial point will be what is said next.

There are two arguments on the other side which I suspect would weigh heavily with the Politburo. The first goes something like this:

"What Comrade Bloggins says about the Western negotiators is all very well as far as it goes: they are professionals; and they've been given the political backing to bargain hard. But wait until the elections in X. If the opposition get in - and our ambassador says that their chances are being underrated by the capitalist press - there'll be all sorts of trouble for NATO. By the time they've sorted that out, our negotiating team should have been able to pick up another trick or two at the least."

The second argument runs:

"But what about the protest movements in the West? They are useful to us, and we should be careful not to undermine them if we can help it. As you know, they've been having difficulty over unilateral disarmament, and I'm afraid that Andropov didn't help by saying in public that the Soviet Union would never be so naive. But our reports suggest that they are making some headway with the argument that multilateral disarmament is all very well in theory, but that it doesn't work - so what is wanted is a unilateral initiative or two to get things moving. I grant you that this may not be for tomorrow; but don't forget that if we sign this agreement, we shall be helping Western Governments to convince their public opinion that the multilateral process can deliver the goods."

I am not trying to suggest that these negative arguments will always prevail in the Politburo. It is clear that they have not always done so in the past; and I am optimistic that there will be business to be done also in the future. But it will be made that much more difficult if we in the West cannot establish a stable consensus about our security, and about our approach to the Soviet Union; and then stick to it for long enough to convince the Soviet leadership that we mean what we say and that we shall be saying the same thing tomorrow.

This job of building and maintaining consensus is an important part of what NATO is about. At the intergovernmental level, it does it very well. There is a wide measure of agreement among member governments on the political and military strategy which we need. And our consultative procedures have shown themselves to be both flexible enough and intensive enough to work this through from the general to the particular: in the face, for example, of the Soviet campaign against the deployment of CRUISE and PERSHING missiles in Europe; and, most recently, in the run-up to the negotiations at Geneva.

What is more difficult - and this must ultimately be a national responsibility - is to reach beyond governments to widen the consensus. I am not suggesting that East-West relations, or defence policy for that matter, should be fenced-off from political debate - no consensus worthy of the name could come in that way. But when Henry Kissinger called in Brussels last year for a restoration of bipartisanship in the United States, on the grounds that national interest does not change every four or eight years, he was saying something which all of us in the Alliance could usefully take to heart. And which we must take to heart if we are to make some impression on a Soviet leadership which, to put it mildly, works to a political calendar much longer drawn-out than our own.

A Soviet leadership, incidentally, which is surely a much more complex affair than the more superficial kind of Western analysis would suggest. They are not all Jekyll nor all Hyde; and I very much doubt that they come neatly divided into the hawks and doves of popular journalism. But to the extent that there are hawks and doves in the Kremlin, or hawkish and dovish streaks combined in different proportions in the make-up of individual members of the leadership, then we must be careful to draw the right policy conclusions.

My own instinct is always to be rather suspicious when I hear someone arguing for a change in a Western position, not because there is some firm quid pro quo on offer, but because such a gesture will in some way "encourage the doves". To my mind, the best way - and probably the only way - to encourage such doves as there may be is to make it quite clear that hawks will not have things their own way. And that too is an important part of what NATO is about.

Making sure that the hawks do not have it their own way is by no means only a question of military strength. Shrewd political analysis; a sense of political strategy as well as of tactics; the courage to seize opportunities and the stamina to follow through: all these are equally necessary. But these qualities can never be an alternative to an adequate military capability; and neither are they likely to flourish in its absence.

NATO is a defensive alliance - we have pledged that none of our weapons will ever be used except in response to attack. So what we mean by an adequate military capability must very largely be determined by the military capabilities of the Warsaw Pact and, more particularly, of the Soviet Union. As things stand, that capability can be broadly said to comprise strategic nuclear parity with the United States; a very marked preponderance of intermediate range nuclear weapons in Europe; and an advantage in conventional forces in Europe quite superfluous to a purely defensive role.

One of the abiding questions in East-West relations is why do Soviet leaders feel that they need all this. Is it because they are not entirely convinced that the wheel of world history is turning inevitably towards Communism; and that they think that military power will allow them to give it a helpful shove? Or is there a more innocent explanation?

If the matter came to court, counsel for the defence would naturally argue that there is. The argument usually starts by recalling a traditional Russian military tendency to over-insure in terms of numbers; and by emphasizing the extent to which this tendency may have been reinforced by the experience of two world wars and the immense suffering they brought. It then goes on to talk of the Soviet Union being surrounded by hostile or potentially hostile powers; and to claim that the Soviet Union has no interest in military superiority, but is merely responding to an arms race initiated and fuelled by the United States.

The point about the importance of numbers in Russian military history is fair enough; and we should never underestimate the effect of the two devastating wars of this century. But the latter part of the argument contains a lot of special pleading and some downright rubbish; and we must be careful to see it for what it is.

The argument about being surrounded, if counsel for the defence is in fine rhetorical form, can be taken right back to the Middle Ages. From whence is conjured up the image of a defenceless Moscow, hiding in the forest from more powerful states on one side and the Mongol hordes on the other. That the rulers of Moscow did not have an easy time of it cannot be denied. But it is surely fair to point out that their frontiers have expanded a bit over the centuries; that they expanded a bit more as a result of the last war; and that the inviolability of these frontiers, as a matter both of international law and common sense, is now beyond question.

If that has not made the Soviet leaders feel more secure, it is difficult to see what would. And a system of security which required the Soviet Union constantly to enlarge its perimeter could hardly be accepted as legitimate by the rest of the world.

The case for the defence is also rather more vulnerable on the arms race point than assiduous Soviet propaganda on this issue would like us to believe. It was, for example, the Soviet Union which took the the lead in the development of long-range ballistic missiles in the 1950s; it is the Soviet Union which has deployed and is currently up-grading an anti-ballistic missile system; and it is the Soviet Union which has developed the only operational anti-satellite system. And, of course, it is the Soviet Union which has established, maintained and developed a conventional superiority in Europe which the West cannot afford to disregard.

Counsel for the defence, in short, is rather less than wholly convincing. And counsel for the prosecution, had I the time to call him, would no doubt have a point or two to add. Some practical points, about Soviet use of force in Eastern Europe and Afghanistan; some theoretical points, about the Messianic streak in Communist ideology; and some technical points about Soviet military doctrine and the way the Soviet armed forces are equipped.

Which leaves counsel for the defence to make his final appeal to the jury, on the lines of "you don't really think that the Soviet Union is going to drive its tanks through to the Rhine, do you?"

As a matter of fact, I don't. For a number of reasons, of which I will list three:

- first, that we have 2.4 million men under arms in NATO Europe today, of whom 300 thousand come from the United States;
- second, that this figure would rise to 4.4 million after full mobilisation and reinforcement, of which the US contribution would be just over one million;
- and third, that we have a nuclear capability including short and intermediate range nuclear weapons based in Europe, to act as a credible deterrent against conventional attack as well as against a nuclear first strike.

These are not only very powerful disincentives to the use of force against us. They also serve to neutralise both an explicit threat of force; and the implied threat which is inevitably present if a massive military capability is left without an adequate counterweight.

That, as it seems to me, is the important point. The experts will argue till the cows come home about why the Soviet Union has built up that massive military capability. But the fact is that the capability is there, that we cannot be sure that the intention is and will remain benign; and that we therefore need a defence policy which takes realistic account both of the capability and the risk. What the Soviet Union does, and what it is able to do, in the face of our own defensive strength is one thing. Let us never make the mistake of assuming that Soviet actions, and Soviet influence, would remain the same if the Western capability were to be seriously weakened or undermined by neglect.

My view of East-West relations would, in short, be a gloomy one if I felt that Western governments were about to do any such thing. Happily, they are not.

Where nuclear weapons are concerned, Allied governments on both sides of the Atlantic recognise that, whatever results may emerge in the future from research into the strategic defence initiative, we have no present alternative to the deterrent. And the deployment of CRUISE and PERSHING II missiles in Western Europe, despite a massive Soviet campaign to prevent it, is surely a very convincing demonstration that your allies are determined to carry their share of the burden, and have the political courage to do so.

The same is true of conventional defence. This is a field where we certainly all need to do more, in terms of effective output, to prevent the balance from tilting dangerously in favour of the Warsaw Pact. But you do not encourage people to do better by ignoring what they have done already; and it should not be forgotten that the European Allies have increased their defence effort by an average of some two and a half percent a year in real terms over the last decade. More recently, I am glad to say that Allied Defence Ministers, at their meeting last December, took practical steps to improve our performance on infrastructure and sustainability; and that they underlined the political importance of the conventional field by instructing the permanent machinery to come up with proposals for "a coherent effort to improve NATO conventional defences".

If I were General Rogers I would, of course, be asking for more. And as a matter of fact, I have every intention of asking for more as Secretary General, because maintaining a sound conventional defence is not something which we can't afford to do. On the contrary, it is something which we can't afford not to do. I don't think that anyone in the Kremlin today is advising Mr. Gorbachev that we would be a pushover; but we must make quite sure that we keep it like that.

Mr. Gorbachev is of course now very much at the centre of attention; and one can't take a view of East-West relations without asking oneself whether he is going to make any difference.

What we are experiencing, after a brief and confusing interregnum, is the changeover from Brezhnev to a significantly younger man.

Brezhnev, were he alive today, would be 78. Which would make him ten years old at the time of the Revolution; and a teenager during the Civil War. Someone who, for better or worse, was beginning to make a career during collectivisation; and was pursuing it throughout the Great Purges. Someone who experienced as an adult the events which led up to the German invasion of June 1941; the disasters which followed; and the long fight back to a victory well-earned, but earned at a staggering cost.

Gorbachev was fourteen when the war ended.

This is by any reckoning a dramatic difference in personal experience. So much so, that it would be surprising if Gorbachev were not seen as being, at least to some degree, inclined towards change. And, if that can be no more than a guess, it is a guess which appears the more plausible when one recalls the succession to Andropov. The fact that the choice then fell on a member of the older generation who had lived his political life very much in Brezhnev's shadow, and who was clearly not in the best of health, certainly fits well with the hypothesis that Gorbachev was associated with change in the mind of his colleagues; that there was a reluctance to take the large step implicit in handing power to someone so young; but that the opposition had to be content with something which must have been seen at the time as no more than a stay of execution.

Even if all this is right, it does not follow that Gorbachev is either going to make changes quickly, or to look first at foreign policy. The Soviet system is in fact a deeply conservative one. It has reacted first to Stalin and then to Kruschchev by building up the idea of collective leadership at the top; and this has served, not by accident, to reinforce as well as to reassure the vested interests below. If, as there is some reason to suppose, Gorbachev is concerned to strengthen the economic performance of the Soviet Union, and to address the social problems which are relevant to it, he will have his work cut out at home. And he is likely to need patience, as well as all the energy and determination he seems to possess, to do what needs doing.

I do not mean to suggest that Soviet foreign policy will be confined to the back-burner. The pairing of Gorbachev and Gromyko seems, on the contrary, to be very well suited to a period of active and high profile diplomacy. The fresh impact of the one and the vast experience of the other may make a considerable impression on the world scene without changing the fundamentals of Soviet external policy. And it will be the easier to convey the impression of change, without much change of substance, because the cycle of East/West relations is now once again at the stage when the ice is breaking and traffic beginning to move.



We must watch things carefully as they develop; and try, as economists would do, to distinguish the Gorbachev effect from changes which we would in any case have expected at this stage in the cycle. But we must be careful also not to let a quite proper sense of caution become a prescription for immobility on our side.

No-one can prove to us today that 1985, with the resumption of negotiations in Geneva and the accession to power of Mr. Gorbachev, will be the beginning of a lasting turn for the better in East-West relations. It certainly won't be if we in the West do not continue to do what is necessary to maintain a sufficient defence; or if we fail to give our negotiators the consistent political support which they will need to come back with agreements which are fair, and which can be relied upon to remain so. But neither will we get the improvements in East-West relations which we want if we do not have the imagination to create opportunities and the political courage to seize them.

That is exactly the sort of confident approach which we ought to be taking, whether or not Mr. Gorbachev's accession to power leads to a greater dynamism in Soviet foreign policy.

The Atlantic Alliance has passed safely through a difficult and depressing period in East-West relations. It has done so by confirming the main lines of a policy which will stand us in equally good stead in what I hope will be a more constructive period ahead. If we stick to that policy, which makes clear our determination both to maintain our defences and to work for a more constructive relationship with the Soviet Union, then I see no reason why we should not look to the future with confidence. Not because I expect Soviet policy to change fundamentally in the short term. But because there is so much to be done which is in the interests of the East as well as the West. And which can be done, if we in the West have the good sense and the patience to work steadily for it.