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Themes of Soviet Strategic Deception and Disinformation

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In C.S. Lewis' *Screwtape Letters*, Screwtape, an experienced devil, instructs his young understudy that a key task of a devil is to convince his "patients" that he does not exist:

> My dear Wormwood, I wonder you should ask me whether it is essential to keep the patient in ignorance of your own existence. That question, at least for the present phase of the struggle, has been answered for us by the High Command. Our policy, for the moment, is to conceal ourselves. Of course, this has not always been so. We are really faced with a cruel dilemma. When the humans disbelieve in our existence we lose all the pleasing results of direct terrorism, and we make no magicians. On the other hand, when they believe in us, we cannot make them materialists and sceptics.

Such deception is central to the effectiveness of the evil spirit in exercising his influence. Although some people will serve as his full-fledged and willing collaborators, that is, "magicians," most people will collaborate only if they are unwitting accomplices, if there is no external appearance of evil in their behavior, if they can rationalize their behavior as contributing ostensibly to some greater good, if they can be convinced that there will be no harmful consequences, or if they can be convinced that what they are doing may actually be good or otherwise socially acceptable behavior. In each circumstance, however, the appearance of evil must be modified or concealed in some way for the evil behavior to take place.

Screwtape's lesson is not without merit as a paradigm for the study of Soviet foreign policy. The devil's "cruel dilemma" is the communist's as well. On the one hand, the communist needs to make himself known in order to recruit fully collaborating "magicians." On the other hand, because a large part of Soviet-communist foreign policy is designed to effect political transformations of

foreign countries against the wishes of their peoples and existing governments, the concealment of such policies is essential if they are to be effective. (This observation is based on the historical fact that the full majority of a free electorate has never elected a Communist Party into power, with the exception of tiny San Marino.) Such concealment is the conceptual origin of Soviet strategic deception.

Soviet deception efforts can be broadly placed into two categories: strategic and tactical. Tactical deception concerns questions of military and economic capabilities and political tactics; whereas strategic deception principally involves the question of political-strategic intentions. Tactical deception includes such things as the Soviet practice of *maskirovka*, the concealment and deception techniques having to do with Soviet military capabilities, and the doctoring of production and consumption statistics for the purpose of deceiving the world about Soviet economic capabilities and levels of military spending. Strategic deception, however, involves painting a picture of the entire political climate in which the Soviet Union operates among its allies and its adversaries. It involves the manipulation of concepts that describe the nature of the Soviet system and its leadership, its ambitions, its fears, its constraints. On a tactical level, it involves the manipulation of words that define the conceptual framework through which the Soviet Union is perceived. Its principal goal is to convince the non-Communist world that Soviet global intentions are other than what they are in reality.

The Basic Psychological Technique: Exploitation of Existing Tendencies of Thought

Soviet strategic deception succeeds not so much because of the ability of Soviet propagandists and agents of influence to deceive us, as because of our tendencies to deceive ourselves. Thus, the best Soviet strategic deception efforts are geared toward exploiting existing Western tendencies of thought. Principal among these is our tendency to engage in mirror-image perceptions, that is, where we tend to attribute to the Soviets such behavior as we would attribute to ourselves. to look upon the Soviet political system as similar to ours, to see the Soviet leaders as having motivations similar to our own, and to imagine that the Soviets have the same concepts of peace, common human decency, fair play, and national interest.

Soviet strategic deception also attempts to take advantage of our inclination to engage in wishful thinking or psychological denial. This manifests itself principally in our reluctance to admit the possibility of certain ugly realities. It may take the form of an unguarded optimism about the nature of the international situation or the Soviet threat. (In the context of our contemporary culture for example, it has become a social *faux pas* to adopt an unduly pessimistic assessment about the nature of the Soviet threat to American vital national

interests. And, it is equally bad form to use such taboo expressions as the word "communism" to describe political realities in the Soviet Union.) Solzhenitsyn calls this general category of behavior "the desire not to know." Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick calls it "the will to disbelieve the horrible."

We need only look at certain historical examples to bear out this analysis. We had the evidence that the Jews were being sent to their deaths in Nazi Germany and few were prepared to believe it. It was something that was either too ugly to look at or that we could not believe was possible. We behaved similarly when over two million people were sent to their deaths in Cambodia. Today the Soviets take advantage of such psychological inclinations by exploiting a number of themes that encourage us to believe that they are not so much of a threat to us as in fact they are.

The Central Deception: The Soviet Union Is No Longer Communist

The principal theme of Soviet strategic deception is to convince the West that the Soviet Union is not communist any more. There are two basic objectives that underlie this theme. The first is to encourage us to believe that Soviet global objectives are no longer, of necessity, unlimited, as defined by the very nature of the communist system. Instead, the Soviets would like us to believe that they are a traditional, imperial, great power. As such, their objectives would not necessarily have to be unlimited by virtue of the requirements of their domestic political system. If we could be convinced of this, then it would follow that we would view the USSR as much less of a threat to our national security. First of all, we would no longer consider that the political transformation of the United States into a communist system must be one of the necessary goals of Soviet foreign policy. Secondly, it would follow that a spheres-of-influence policy would be possible between the United States and the Soviet Union. Finally, if we can begin to believe that Soviet goals are limited, then we may be more inclined to view appeasement as a legitimate diplomatic tool in our relations with the USSR. Appeasement, after all, is a legitimate policy option—particularly when the price we must pay to buy off another power is not unacceptably high. But this can be possible only when it can satisfy a limited appetite. Otherwise, if attempted in situations where the power in question has unlimited objectives—as was apparently the case with Naziism—appeasement can only whet that appetite and be perceived as a sign of weakness.

The second objective behind the theme that the Soviets are no longer communists, is to confuse us as to what constitutes the true source of U.S.-Soviet tensions. Much of Soviet propaganda, for example, promotes the idea that the "arms race" is the principal source of suspicion and tension between the two sides. If we accept this notion, then we can come to accept the possibility that our

own behavior—our own efforts to defend ourselves—actually contributes to those tensions. And once we accept this, we put ourselves in the position of searching for things we can do unilaterally to reduce those tensions.

What then is the true source of tensions? As George Kennan once explained, a communist power hates America not because of what we do, but because of who we are. The very existence of America as a democracy represents a threat to the security of the Soviet regime. So long as our democracy survives, it will remain a living example of the viability of a system based on several essential ideas: government by the consent of the governed; a recognition of the fallibility of human nature and the consequent necessity of placing limits on those in power; and the idea that all men are created equal and are endowed by the Creator with unconditional rights. These ideas themselves are a major threat to the Soviet internal security system: to the Communist Party, they represent a potential ideological infection that could form the basis of internal resistance to its rule.

Insofar as we are committed to remaining a democracy and defending our sovereignty, we also represent an obstacle to the further advance and ultimate worldwide victory of communism. If Soviet communism ever meets such resistance, it risks suffering further major challenges to its internal security system. That system depends greatly on the continued success of communist expansion abroad. As Vladimir Bukovsky has explained, every time the Soviet regime conducts an aggressive action abroad, it is sending a message to its own people. That message says "Attention, people of the USSR! We can shoot down Korean airliners, invade Afghanistan, and send our Cuban proxies to Angola, yet no even the greatest imperialist power on earth can resist us. The imperialists have nuclear weapons and navies that can sail the seas, and they still cannot stop us. How, therefore, can you people, who are imprisoned behind the Berlin Wall, even contemplate resisting us?" So, if communism fails to advance in America or among America's allies, this may prove the predictions (or "laws") of Marxist-Leninist theory to be incorrect, and thus challenge the basis of the regime's legitimacy. Furthermore, if the U.S. and its allies successfully resist communism, thus halting or reversing the allegedly "inexorable forces of history," then the message is conveyed to peoples within the Soviet empire that, contrary to what the Communist Party would have them believe, resistance against the regime is indeed possible.

Thus, the Soviet regime judges its own historical progress in the world by measuring the political alignment of the world's different countries. Ultimately this measurement is achieved by determining which countries consider the Soviet regime to be a legitimate one. The very fact that we are a democracy means that we can never truly recognize the Soviet government as legitimate. It is this fact and its consequent threats to the internal security of the Soviet system that are the true sources of tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union. Therefore, so long as the Soviets remain communists, and so long as the United

States remains a democracy, there is nothing that we can do short of renouncing democracy and recognizing the Soviet government's legitimacy that could actually reduce the principal source of tensions between the two system.

Disinformation Themes

"The Ideology Is Dead"

Since the Soviets never directly come out and say that they are no longer communists, they have a number of other more subtle means of imparting this fundamental disinformation theme. One of the principal means is to get us to believe that the ideology is dead and therefore no longer politically operational in the USSR. Westerners are encouraged to entertain this assumption in a number of ways. Friendly Soviet trade representatives will make jokes about the ideological orthodoxy to American businessmen over canapes at industrial trade fair receptions. Western journalists in Moscow, who have neither learned Russian nor studied Soviet communism, will be told by the "unofficial sources" supplied to them by the International Information Department (upon whom they excessively rely for information to fill their dispatches) that the new Soviet leadership is more "pragmatic," and less doctrinaire when it comes to trying to solve many of the most intractable problems of the country. We are then showered with press reports that nobody in the USSR believes the ideology anymore. Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin or visitors from the USA Institute in Moscow will conduct "remarkably frank" discussions with an earnest eye to overcoming mutual problems with American congressmen, lobbyists, or other habituees of the Washington diplomatic circuit. With these kinds of reinforcements, it becomes increasingly easy to view the ideology as simply a ritual atavism or antiquated relic that may be used for little more than to supply a veneer of tradition for the regime. It also becomes easy—especially for people who fancy themselves as pragmatic problem solvers—to wonder how anybody in the Soviet Union could possibly believe in the ideology when its predictions have so manifestly not materialized and when Soviet society appears to be such a failure.

This last perception, of course, is very much a function of the mirror-image tendency to apply Western standards of political-economic success and failure to a political system that arguably sets its purposes, defines its success, and establishes its priorities by entirely different standards. The perception that the ideology must be dead because it has failed is also a function of another type of mirror-image thinking, namely, the inclination to think that it is necessary to believe in an ideology for it to be politically operational. While this may be true in the United States, it is not necessarily at all the case in the Soviet Union.

What has been decreasingly understood in the West over the past two decades is that communist ideology is operational in the Soviet Union whether

people fully believe in it or not. There are several reasons why this is so that deserve to be reviewed in this context. They all revolve around the central fact of political life of the Soviet regime—namely, that it does not rule by the people's consent. Because it is an illegitimate government by modern democratic standards, the regime must entertain the suspicion that, if the peoples of the USSR were free to choose their governors, they might not choose the Communist Party. This means that the Party has an internal security problem, the scale of which can be judged only by the scale of the measures imposed to address it: The Party-state's monopoly of information and communications; the vast domestic propaganda and political socialization apparatus; the control of the entire educational system, textbooks, literature, radio, television, newspapers, telephones, films, theater, music, and art; the use of the military as a vehicle of political socialization; the various specialized organs of agitprop such as the Znaniye Society; the KGB; the MVD's domestic militia; the Gulag Archipelago the psychiatric "clinics;" the system of block committees; the system of border controls and customs; the pervasive jamming of foreign broadcasts; the internal passport system; the laws against unauthorized contact with foreigners; the exploitation of differences among Soviet nationalities for domestic security purposes; the Party-state's monopoly over employment, promotion, and job transfer combined with the parasitism laws; the persecution and control of religion; and so on. To make this internal security system work as well as it does the Communist Party considers the ideology as an indispensable element, to be used in both the psychological and physical dimensions of that system.

The first use of the ideology in the psychological sphere is to supply legitimacy to the Party-state. Given its illegitimacy, the Party feels compelled to convince the people that there is a rational, practical, or moral reason why it deserves to be in power. The Marxist-Leninist ideology is the only vehicle that can be used for this purpose; hence it cannot be abandoned. That the question of legitimacy is one of the burning political issues facing the Kremlin can be understood only by extricating oneself from the American democratic political culture, wherein the legitimacy of our government has long been taken for granted.

While the ideology provides a legitimacy in theory to the Communist Party that theory can only serve its purpose if it continues to be convincing. Because of the failure of the theory's predictions to materialize in the domestic sphere, the Party must find some other way to demonstrate that the theory itself is a legitimate one. The solution to this problem is found in the external sphere. So long as communism continues to advance around the world, the Party can plausibly claim that this is the result of an inevitable, law-governed, historical process. Then it can declare that it deserves to be in power because it is riding the crest of that wave of history that cannot be stopped. The global advances of communism thus supply credibility to the Party's claim to legitimacy. But legitimacy in its theoretical aspect cannot by itself assist the maintenance of

internal security in the psychological dimension. What is needed in addition is the message to the peoples of the Soviet Union, as explained above, that the "inevitable" process of global communization spearheaded by the CPSU cannot be resisted either abroad or at home. This is the message that is designed to produce the attitude of fatalistic defeatism that can psychologically incline a people to be resigned to accepting the Communist Party in power.

The Party also makes use of the ideology in the "physical" sphere of internal security. The ideology is used to establish conformity in the society to discourage independent behavior, which could represent a challenge to the regime. The ideology, then, sets the standard against which deviation is measured and by which the self-discipline necessary for advancement within the Party is measured. It becomes the vehicle for determining friends and enemies of the regime, both domestically and externallly. When juxtaposed against the manifold instruments of coercion maintained by the regime, it contributes to what indeed may be the most efficient internal security system ever devised in history.

Under these circumstances, even the most highly placed members of the Soviet leadership must behave according to the ideology whether they believe in it fully or not. While the Party as a whole has it within its power to make doctrinal modifications, attempts by individuals to make such modification in theory or practice risk inviting charges of deviationism. That even the highest leaders are not immune from sanctions derived from such charges can be attested to by the ouster of Nikita Khrushchev whose excessively individualistic pattern of decision making was branded by his subordinates in the collective leadership as "opportunism" of various varieties that threatened the cohesion of the Party and the foundations of its control.

All this analysis is not to suggest that the character of belief in the ideology is utterly irrelevant or that the system could survive with absolutely no one believing any part of it. The question of the character of such belief or nonbelief is too complex to be covered in this context. Suffice it to say, however, that while many if not most Communist Party members may not believe in all the rosy predictions of the Marxian future, it is this writer's contention that most accept, and live by, a large portion of the basic philosophical and materialist premises of Marxism-Leninism. It is this fact that explains how "ideas have consequences" in the Soviet Union and how the consequence of those philosophical premises is the oppressive nature of its political system.

"Hawks and Doves in the Kremlin"

A second related disinformation theme, informally promoted by Soviet diplomats, scholars, trade officials, and others is the whole idea that there are such categories as "hawks and doves" in the Kremlin, or alternatively, Stalinists and moderates, ideologues and pragmatists, proponents and opponents of detente, hardliners and softliners, and so on. If the West can be convinced to accept the

idea that such categories exist, then it follows that the Stalinist, hardline, hawkish, ideologues must be the communists, and, by implication, the moderate, pragmatic, softline doves must not really be communist anymore. After all, isn't there a faction in the Kremlin that must recognize the dangers of war in the nuclear age, and is willing to reach some kind of permanent peace with the West?

The idea that surely such a faction must exist derives, once again, from a mirror-image perception that there must be people in the Soviet leadership who are as rational as we are about problems of nuclear war. We, for example, do not seek actively to bring about the downfall of the Soviet regime. We recognize that any effort to present the Soviets with an aggressive threat to their regime might risk a major confrontation and possibly war. If there are Soviets who share the reciprocal prudent and rational view, then they could not possibly harbor such an aggressive design as the communization of the United States—surely the active effort to achieve such a goal would risk nuclear war. The conclusion of this logic, of course, is that there must be doves in the Soviet Union who are not truly communists.

If we can be brought to believe that Soviet politics represent a competition between polarized factions whose cleavages are so great that they make a considerable amount of difference for East-West relations, then we may well conclude that we should try to make a deal with the "doves," because it would be much more difficult to make a deal with putative "hawks." Similarly, we would have to support the "doves" in power because, should they be ousted by the "hawks," relations between the United States and the Soviet Union would get much worse.

To accept the idea that there are "hawks" and "doves" in Moscow, the division between whom makes a strategic difference, is to fail to understand the mechanisms of conformity built into the Communist Party control system. That system establishes discrete terms of political discourse that delineate certain definite parameters which cannot be exceeded without risking the Party's sanctions. While there may be disagreements within the Kremlin that may occasionally be manifested in the pages of the Soviet press, these invariably are not of a strategic nature. What may appear in the press to be disagreement between members of apparently differing groups within the USSR often represents nothing more than differences in emphasis based on the differing bureaucratic functions and foci of the authors. The genuine disagreements are almost always over differing assessments of the correlation of forces and correspondingly different tactical recommendations and never over system goals or general strategy.[1] As a matter of consistent policy, the Soviet press does not present debates on its pages: there is no juxtaposition of one article in favor versus another against. There are times, however, when the appearance of a debate may be orchestrated by the propaganda authorities: nothing could be easier than to insert an article in *Pravda* with one point of view and another article in *Kommunist* with an opposing view, with the purpose of providing "evidence" of

factional struggle within the Kremlin for Western Sovietologists, whose fine-toothed combing of the Soviet press invariably unearths such "nuggets." Given the nature of deception, of course, it can never be possible to prove such an orchestration. However, to dismiss the possibility (or even the probability, under certain circumstances), given the totally controlled character of the Soviet media, the potential ease of such orchestration, and the testimony of numerous defectors who participated in this system is to indulge either in wishful thinking or in false mirror-imaging.

If we can be convinced that there are hawks and doves in the Kremlin, then we will have taken a big step toward believing that the Soviet Union is a great power like any other. As such, its foreign policy would not be principally a proactive policy as it would have to be if it were communist; instead, it would be a reactive policy, which would be more susceptible to external influences. Once we start thinking along these lines, we are well along the road toward applying to the Soviet Union the same stimulus-response model that we are accustomed to applying to any circumstance of international politics. This model, of course, postulates that all that is necessary to change the behavior of another actor in the international arena is to apply the appropriate stimulus and await the reward of a beneficial response. Needless to say, this model is not capable of coping with situations in which the actor may not be susceptible to external stimuli in such a way that could change the fundamental motivating engine of that actor's international behavior. Yet, if we cling to this model in spite of the facts, we put ourselves again in the position of having to search for things we can do unilaterally to improve relations with the USSR.

"The Individual, and Not the Party, Counts in the USSR"

A variation on the hawk-dove theme is the idea that individuals make a significant difference in the Soviet Union—specifically that the accession to power of a new individual can make a strategic difference in the foreign policy of the USSR. Every time we approach a succession in the Party leadership we are regaled with stories about the personality, tastes, and other personal predilections of the individual in question. Western journalists are encouraged by their Soviet hosts to look for every possible clue in the character of the new potential General Secretary, much in the same way that commentators attempt to divine the character of presidential candidates in the United States. The fundamental assumption here, of course, it that a new Soviet leader could bring about the same kind of vast changes in policy that a new president can in the American political system. We are thus encouraged in yet another way to believe that the Soviets are basically just like us and the Soviet political system is no longer communist.

This analysis, of course, is not to suggest that the individual makes no

difference in the Soviet system. The question, once again, is whether the difference he may make is tactical or strategic. Until we have further evidence, we must proceed on the basis of historical experience—that is, that a new individual is not likely to change the basic goals and elements of Soviet strategy. In other words, an individual is unlikely to make the USSR cease to be communist.

"The Soviet Union Has Changed"

Another disinformation theme that contributes to the central deception is that the Soviet Union either has changed or is in the process of changing in a fundamental way. Playing upon our tendencies to engage in mirror-image perceptions and wishful analysis, this form of deception was realized early on by Lenin after he had been forced by circumstances to conduct some real changes in Soviet policy. When the exigencies of economic collapse impelled him to institute market reforms in the Soviet economy in the early 1920's, many in the West began to believe that the Soviet Union had come to its senses and was now willing to join the Western community of civilized nations. Seeing this manifest willingness to extrapolate on limited evidence and to derive wishful conclusions, Lenin saw an opportunity to take advantage of a classic example of the Western capacity for self-deception. He won all the financing, managerial expertise, and Western technology that he needed for the moment, yet continued to implement his communist program as he saw fit.

The wishful thinkers in the West again gave the most benevolent interpretation when faced with evidence that Stalin was restoring Russian nationalism rehabilitating historic Russian figures, and permitting some freedom for the Church. Similarly, the de-Stalinization program under Khrushchev convinced many people in the West that the Soviet system was changing in a fundamental way and that it could no longer be called a totalitarian state. Although the vast numbers of political murders drastically declined after Stalin, none of the political structures and processes that had originally permitted those murders to take place changed at all. Again, when Western observers were confronted with the "Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom" campaign in China and the Democracy Wall, all too many of them were convinced that China was also changing in fundamental way, indeed renouncing communism. In each case, the Soviets and the Chinese encouraged such thinking, and in each case the wishful thinkers were wrong. After a time, many recognized as much. Nevertheless, the immediate purpose of the communist strategic deception was realized: it succeeded in encouraging debate and disunity on policy making in the West.

"Soviet Military Doctrine Is Defense-Oriented"

Yet another set of disinformation themes contributing to this central Soviet deception falls under the rubric of military doctrine. Among these themes is th

idea that the Soviet military is fundamentally deterrence-oriented and defense-oriented. Here Soviet doctrine is set forth in a way that would make it appear that Soviet strategy is essentially a retaliatory one and that Soviet military acquisitions are principally designed in reaction to those made by the West. Of course, not all Soviet military doctrine is presented this way. There are, as one can plainly see, clear-cut differences of opinion that appear within the pages of the Soviet press. However, all too often, Western analysts are inclined to view these as a debate between the different schools of thought or factions within the Soviet politico-military establishment, and rarely is it intimated that some of these doctrinal presentations could be composed primarily for foreign consumption and perhaps even for purposes of strategic deception. For what purpose, other than deception, did N.N. Azovtsev (or his editors or political superiors) completely reverse the message of a key sentence in the new edition of his book *V.I. Lenin and Soviet Military Science*?[2] As William C. Green discovered, the 1971 edition of Azovtsev's book states: "Our military doctrine has an *offensive* character." (p. 285, emphasis added.) However, in the 1981 edition, on the same page in an otherwise similar context, the sentence reads: "Our military doctrine, as already pointed out above, has a *defensive* character, with the goal of the protection of the gains of socialism."[3] (p. 290, emphasis added.)

"The Soviets Have a Self-Interest in Mutual Arms Control"

Related to this is the whole theory that the Soviets have a self-interest in arms control—that is, in limiting *their own* arms production. This theory is buttressed by two critical ideas that Soviet propaganda encourages us to entertain. One of these is the idea that the Soviets would prefer to spend their money on domestic, economic purposes, rather than on military purposes. This, of course, is the mirror-image of the situation in the United States. The problem with this proposition is that there is simply no evidence whatsoever to demonstrate that domestic economic goals have ever held a higher priority than the buildup of the Soviets' means of coercion.

Despite the tremendous volume of Soviet propaganda boasting of economic achievements on the one hand, and more recently, emphasizing the necessity of reforms to spur domestic production on the other, the purposes of the Soviet Party-state are just not the same as those of the American republic. Whereas increasing the standard of living for the greatest number is arguably one of our society's principal purposes, the same cannot be said of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, given the pattern of Soviet strategic deployments, there is no evidence to demonstrate that arms control has ever been used by the Soviets to divert resources from the military to the domestic economy. To the contrary, the weight of historical evidence shows that the Soviets have been willing to spend

whatever they deem necessary, no matter what privations their people may suffer, to achieve their military-strategic goals.

It is plausible that the Soviets would not want to permit a full-blown arms race to bring about the collapse of the very industrial infrastructure that sustains military production in the first place. But that is not the same as saying that they would prefer to spend their money on the domestic economy. It is merely to point out that they do not want to see their military production capabilities destroyed by what, in effect, would be a major crisis in their system.

This gives rise to a second idea that buttresses the theme that the Soviets, especially in recent years, have had an interest in limiting their arms production through arms control agreements. This idea is that the Soviet economic system, and perhaps even the political system, is facing a tremendous crisis—one brought on by the strains of the arms race, which has allegedly pushed the Soviet economy to its limits. Although the Soviet economy may be facing some strains, there is a risk in applying too many mirror-image criteria to this analysis as well. Measured by standards of success and failure that we set for ourselves in the West, the Soviet economy may indeed be facing a crisis. But measured by the standards that they have set for themselves, especially judging by the priorities by which they choose to dispose of their resources, it is not clear that the Soviet economic system is facing any crisis at all. In fact, the case can be made that until the Soviets face: a crisis in their means of acquiring and adapting Western technologies; a crisis in their instruments of power and coercion—their military power, their secret police, and the internal cohesion of the Communist Party; a crisis in their means of maintaining ideological and political conformity and mass mobilization; and a crisis in their underground economy, which is the single vehicle for ensuring the survival of the population and compensating for the inefficiency of the planned economy; then there is some doubt as to how much we can say that the Soviet system is facing such a crisis that would render them desperately in need of the respite that an arms control agreement could accord them. Although tactical methods of economic and statistical disinformation may be involved here, the main deception may lie in the effort to convince the West that the Soviet system is not governed by priorities dictated principally by communism, but rather by priorities that are very much the mirror-image of those which we establish for ourselves in the West.

"The U.S. Is Not under Attack": The Indirect Approach

For a long time, the Soviets have been attempting to convince the United States and the West that we are not under low-intensity attack and that we are not the targets of communist political ambitions. There are two forms that this kind of deception has taken: an indirect approach and a direct approach. The indirect approach has emphasized the Soviet attempt to avoid any decisive confrontation

with the main enemy in the imperialist camp. In the earlier years, this was done not only for the purpose of deception but also for the purpose of avoiding the risk of losing everything in such a confrontation. One tactic in this indirect approach is the use of localized conflict and a strategy of attrition: it is better to attack the principal center of imperialism by nibbling gradually around the edges of the Free World than by engaging in a major conflict. The use of proxies is another technique here. If it is Cubans, Bulgarians, or East Germans who are conducting the dirty work, then it is easy to convince enough people in the West that neither the Soviets nor the international communist movement have anything to do with it. Communist front organizations, of course, are yet another way of accomplishing this same objective. Although many people do recognize that front organizations are organized explicitly for the purposes of serving Soviet foreign policy objectives, enough people are misled by these organizations so that the Soviets can claim some success in sowing disunity within the ranks of the West.

"The U.S. Is Not under Attack": The Direct Approach

The effort to convince us that we are not under attack also takes the form of a much more direct approach. The peace movements in the West as well as Soviet peace propaganda work tirelessly to convince us that the Soviet objective is "peace" or "peaceful coexistence," as we understand those terms in the West. In fact, as the Soviets understand these expressions, peace is synonymous with communism, and peaceful coexistence is merely another form of class struggle, where all forms of struggle are permissible except all-out war. The Soviet policy of detente serves these purposes in a very direct way as well. An intrinsic part of this strategy is the effort to convince the Western business community that peace, as we understand it, can be made more possible by increasing the links between the two societies. If Western businessmen can buy the theory of "peace through trade," then by implication, they are convinced that the Soviets are not really communists and that, therefore, the communization of the West is no longer a Soviet goal. The very conduct of negotiations can also be seen to be a part of this kind of direct strategic deception. By merely sitting at the negotiating table, Soviet interlocutors encourage us to believe that *political* compromise is possible and to accept the idea that the Soviets have an identical interest in peace, stability, and world order.

"International Communism No Longer Exists"

Related to the idea that the Soviet Union is no longer communist is the persistent theme that the international communist movement no longer exists and that, therefore, the expression we have now expunged from our vocabulary, namely "international communism," should properly be considered archaic.

The Soviets long ago recognized that it is not in their interest to encourage the West to be conscious of an international communist threat to its bourgeois existence. Hence, they disbanded the Comintern and later, the Cominform. The same functions served by these organizations are carried out today by the International Department of the CPSU Central Committee. But the Soviets know that the International Department is effectively invisible to the West in comparison to its predecessors, with most of its political operations concealed from public view. If the international communist movement does not even have an organization that people can see, then how could it exist? The whole phenomenon of polycentrism, of course, supplies considerable fuel to this general analysis and, to be sure, the Sino-Soviet split, the Tito-Soviet split, and Albanian separatism have demonstrated that international communism is not a monolithic phenomenon. But there is a considerable difference between saying that it is not monolithic and saying, or assuming, that it no longer exists. How else can one explain the presence in Nicaragua in recent years, of Czechs, North Koreans, Bulgarians, Vietnamese, East Germans, Cubans, communist elements of the PLO, as well as of Soviets? Under the circumstances, it should not be beyond the realm of possibility that the Soviets could attempt to use what differences may exist even within the Warsaw Pact, such as Romania's independence on certain foreign policy issues, for purposes of encouraging us to believe that international communism no longer exists, even within the Soviet bloc.

Exculpatory Themes: "The U.S. Military Threat" and "Soviet Insecurity"

Another set of disinformation themes serves not only the purpose of strategic deception but also the political purpose of exculpating Soviet behavior. One of these themes is designed particularly to justify the Soviet military buildup. This is the theme that the United States poses a military threat to the USSR. Once again exploiting our mirror-image perceptions, the Soviets encourage us to put ourselves in their shoes: "If you had nuclear missiles pointed at you, wouldn't you have reasonable cause to be afraid?" Since the U.S. has such missiles pointed at the Soviets, it follows that they must have a legitimate cause to be afraid, and that the very existence of these missiles is prima facie evidence of a hostile American intention.

What is assiduously obscured in Soviet propaganda is the fact that the Soviet leadership for years has realized that the United States poses no offensive military geopolitical threat to the USSR whatsoever. They know that even during the most intensive periods of American anticommunism, periods that witnessed the American nuclear monopoly and military superiority, the United States maintained a consistent policy of avoiding any action that could possibly risk a military confrontation with the Soviet Union. They know that now, during

the period of rough nuclear parity and in the wake of Vietnam when we have been even less anticommunist than we were in the 1950's, there is even less of a political constituency in favor of taking any hostile, offensive action against them. Instead of hearing, unequivocally, that Soviet leaders know these things, we hear a chorus of other themes that are designed to bolster the idea that they face a *military* threat which they can legitimately fear.

We often hear from Western commentators the theme about Soviet "paranoia." Paranoia can be either an irrational fear or a rational fear. Given that there is no military threat that the Soviets can fear rationally, the paranoia theme is something that amounts to nothing more than an insanity plea—in other words, an effort to excuse the behavior of an antagonist on the grounds that he could not perceive reality properly. While the Soviets are not necessarily the originators of this theme, they do encourage its repetition in the West. Constant reference to the "capitalist encirclement" helped fuel this perception of Soviet "paranoia" for many years. More recently, Soviet actions such as the shoot-down of the Korean airliner and the Kremlin's defense of the crime as a legitimate act of self-defense encourage Westerners to believe that such extreme Soviet touchiness about even the most innocent mistaken instrusions could only stem from paranoia.

Similarly, we hear Westerners repeat the argument about "traditional Russian insecurity" as if the Soviets, on the basis of a few experiences of external invasion, somehow have greater reason to feel insecure than any number of their neighbors. Again, while the Soviets may not necessarily have invented this expression, they do encourage its repetition by constantly reminding everyone, from scholars to tourists, of the times Russia and later the USSR were invaded, while scrupulously neglecting to mention the vastly larger number of times that they themselves were the aggressors. (In *Survival Is Not Enough*, Richard Pipes cites a study produced in 1898 by the Russian General Staff that recounts the history of Russian military engagements over the previous two centuries. Of the thirty-eight campaigns, the editor proudly observes that thirty-six of these were offensive, while only two were defensive.)[4]

Into the same category we can also place the constantly repeated theme about the "traditional Russian penchant for secrecy," a theme that is also designed to complement the Soviets' alleged paranoia and, therefore, to excuse their conduct when it comes to such things as the verification of international agreements. While the regimes of the tsars may indeed have necessitated secrecy, it is difficult to assert with confidence that this secrecy could be distinguished from that employed by either rulers or subjects in any other authoritarian, despotic, or militarily active regime throughout history in which secrecy served to protect insecure rulers, opposition movements, military operations, or national security. The Soviets, of course, have made secrecy an integral element of their apparatus of repression and their military buildup. Nevertheless, their travelling officials and propagandists encourage their West-

ern interlocutors to believe that this is virtually a genetic characteristic born of the habits of old Russia. Although each of these themes has its own separate tactical utility, each works to bolster the fundamental strategic deception, namely, that Soviet objectives, motivations, and behavior may be explained by phenomena that are distinct from communism, phenomena that derive from national, historical, and cultural propensities.

Themes to Keep the United States on the Defensive

Some disinformation themes are designed for the specific purpose of keeping the United States on the defensive. Principal among these is the Soviet attempt to define the boundaries of the battleground in the struggle between the two political systems. Although the expressions are not often used currently, the Soviets have divided the world into the "peace zone," the communist world, and the "war zone," those countries in which capitalism and imperialism (the source of war) continue to prevail. Proceeding from this division, Soviet propaganda encourages the West to believe that anything that occurs within the peace zone is something off-limits for international concern, whereas anything that occurs in the war zone is something that should be the focus of such concern. A scrimmage line, therefore, has been drawn, and it is impermissible for the West to cross it. The inviolability of that line is bolstered by the constant threat that war would break out should that line be breached. One must commend the Soviets for the remarkable success that this psychological conditioning operation has enjoyed over the years. In 1956 this deception had already succeeded in convincing the United States against giving any material support to the Hungarian Freedom Fighters lest World War III break out.

The whole idea that the USSR is not only strong and ruthless but unbeatable is designed specifically to complement this delineation of the international battleground. By creating a climate of fear and intimidation, the West is encouraged to remain solely on the defensive, while the Soviets and the international communist movement choose the time, place, and venue of offensive action. Whether intended for such purposes or not, the way the Soviets handled the aftermath of the shoot-down of the KAL 007 demonstrated their ability to take advantage of such a situation for deceptive purposes. By embracing the shoot-down as a legitimate act of state policy and threatening to do it again if similar circumstances arose, the Soviets served their enduring purpose of convincing the world that the USSR makes good its threats. If we can become convinced of this, then it follows that we should be all the more restrained in any behavior that could conceivably be interpreted as the smallest step across the inviolable scrimmage line.

Themes to Keep the U.S. from Taking the Offensive

A final set of disinformation themes designed to serve the broader purposes of Soviet strategic deception consists of those that have the ancillary purpose of preventing the United States and the West from taking the offensive. First among these is the notion that the USSR has no domestic vulnerabilities. From this we are supposed to infer that there is no need to exploit any vulnerabilities. Primarily, we are encouraged to believe that there is no domestic opposition to the Soviet government and that the peoples of the Soviet Union have willingly resigned themselves to Soviet rule. Essential to this general disinformation theme is the continuous effort to conceal the existence of millions of people within the USSR whose relatives and friends have been victims of the regime over the years. This, of course, principally consists of deception by omission rather than commission. Just as the Soviet media never report on such domestic disasters as airplane crashes, neither do they mention the occurrence of strikes, demonstrations, riots, or other forms of civil unrest within the country, which are much more widespread than is commonly believed in the West.

Structural/Institutional Deceptions

In addition to themes that are disseminated by the Soviet propaganda apparatus and implanted in the Western press and academic literature through other means, the Soviets have constructed a panoply of various institutional entities that serve the broader purposes of strategic deception. Their main purpose is to encourage Westerners to accept Soviet ersatz reality as genuine reality. Once again the goal is to convince us that the Soviet state is a state like any other and not a communist state with unique objectives that are irreconcilably opposed to the very existence of democracy in the world. The key to the success of each of these deceptions is semantic manipulation and distortion. These structural/institutional deceptions are too numerous to spell out individually, but suffice it to mention a few. For example, the Soviets have a "constitution." The purpose of this, of course, is to convince the West that the Soviet Union is governed by the rule of law, just as we are in the United States. Even American presidents have cited the Soviet constitution as evidence that certain rights and freedoms are guaranteed in that country.

The Soviets also conduct "elections." These have very high "voter" turnouts, which are designed to impress the world with the broad base of social support enjoyed by the regime. Rarely are we reminded that in these "elections" there is no choice on the ballot for the "voters" except for the Communist Party candidate and that the high voter turnouts are nothing more than ritual exercises

in coercive mass mobilization. The people being elected serve in such capaciti as members of the Supreme Soviet, a "parliamentary" body that engages interparliamentary exchanges with American congressmen. The very existen of this Supreme Soviet and its bogus parliamentarians is designed to encoura us to believe that these parliamentarians actually represent real constituencie

The Soviets have the institution that they call the *kolkhoz*—the "collecti farm." The impression one is supposed to get is that this is a cooperati enterprise on the part of a number of individual farmers, whose combined effo are designed to produce greater efficiencies, economies of scale, and so fort The reality, of course, is that these are farms directed by an external bureaucra that operate under a system of repression. The farmers work when they are tc to do so and not according to their own judgments about the time to sow and t time to harvest. They are told what to plant and what not to plant, and th receive only such fruits of their labor as the state will authorize them. A mc accurate term to describe these people would be *serfs*. And what they c *kolkhozy* or *sovkhozy* (the state farms) would more accurately be called *plantatic* for want of a better term. So long as more accurate words are not used to descri such phenomena, Soviet semantic manipulation will continue to encourage us believe that ersatz Soviet reality is genuine reality.

The Soviets publish things that they call "newspapers" and the artic written in these so-called newspapers are written by people they call "journ ists." The United States government gives journalistic credentials to th writers who appear at news conferences at the State Department and Wh House. Sometimes they participate in journalistic exchanges. In fact, th people are nothing more than paid propagandists who are hired to pres current realities entirely within the context of the Marxist-Leninist world vi and to serve the foreign policy interests of the USSR.

The Soviet government has a division called the "Ministry of Forei Affairs." This ministry establishes embassies in foreign countries, that manned by diplomats, who negotiate with Western governments various agr ments, which are part of the broader framework of "bourgeois" internatio law by which the Soviet government abides from time to time. While the Sov Foreign Ministry indeed performs these functions, the impression the Wes supposed to get is that this ministry is just like the U.S. State Department or foreign ministry of any other normal state—that is, the principal institut making foreign policy and conducting foreign relations.

What is obscured by this institutional deception, however, is that the US has other foreign affairs institutions whose role in policy making is considera more important than that of the Foreign Ministry. One is the Central Comn tee's International Department, whose job is to further the interests of Party-state and international communism, regardless of the strictures of bo geois international law and to work to transform that body of law into commu international law: that is, a new law based on the principles of proletar

internationalism. The policy conducted by this department works deliberately at cross-purposes with that conducted by the Foreign Ministry. Whereas the latter ostensibly accepts the legitimacy of bourgeois states, the former works toward the overthrow of those states. Another institution is the Central Committee's Department for Liaison with Communist and Workers' Parties of Socialist Countries, which is the principal policymaking institution in charge of relations with other Communist Party-states. Since, according to the principles of proletarian internationalism, relations with fraternal parties are more important than state-to-state relations, the kind of foreign relations conducted by this department represents the ideal model of the relations desired by the Kremlin. Finally, in contrast to the usual practices in Western foreign ministries, which have their own control over personnel policies and most diplomatic assignments, all personnel appointments to key foreign policy posts in Moscow and to foreign diplomatic posts abroad are controlled by the Central Committee's Party Organs Department. What is obscured, in other words, is that the Communist Party's institutions are the leading foreign policy agencies and that the foreign policy of the USSR is a bifurcated one with one part deceptive conventional diplomacy and the other part the foreign policy of international communism.

The Soviets have organizations that they call "trade unions," the members of which they call "trade unionists." Sometimes these people try to come to the United States to meet with "fellow" trade unionists. However, there is at least one organization in our country that understands this form of structural/institutional deception and which takes it seriously—that is the AFL-CIO. The AFL-CIO recognizes that when such a trade unionist comes from the Soviet Union, he is not, in fact, a genuine trade unionist representing the interests of the working people, but is rather a Soviet agent of influence disguised as a trade unionist who is trying to come to this country for other political purposes.

The Soviets permit the continued existence of the Russian Orthodox Church. They like to emphasize, vocally and often, that there is freedom of religion in the USSR. In fact, in 1917 there were 77,000 churches in Russia alone. Today, in the entire Soviet Union there are only some 7,000 churches. Nevertheless, whenever somebody such as the evangelist Billy Graham shows up in Moscow to pursue his ministry, the Soviets trot out a couple of well-trained metropolitans who strive to give the visitor the impression that religion is free and prospering within the Soviet Union. Somehow we rarely hear about the fact that many of these "prelates" have either been coopted by the KGB or, in fact, are KGB agents who have received seminary training and who have entered the Church to ensure that it does not acquire a momentum of its own or deviate in any substantial way from what is expected of it by the Soviet regime.

A brief survey of such structural/institutional deceptions should not go without mention of the vast apparatus known as Soviet "tourlandia." This is the modern-day series of Potemkin villages that have been set up by the regime to impress all foreign visitors in the Soviet Union. This part of the Soviet Union,

which comprises about 1 percent of the land area of the country (the other 99 percent being off-limits to foreign visitors), receives the lion's share of the state's resources to give the impression that the Soviet Union is a more modern and prosperous country than in fact it is. Visitors and tour groups are given the benefit of an Intourist guide, who invariably is a direct agent or cooptee of the KGB. This guide ensures that visitors see only what the regime wants them to see and that individuals do not stray too far from their tour group. While it is possible, with some effort, to see things that the regime would prefer to keep from the view of the Western public, the average visitor will encounter certain simple, yet generally effective, obstructions. It is difficult, for example, to take a day train from Moscow to Leningrad, because the regime prefers that travellers not see the nineteenth century living conditions in the Soviet countryside. The only train usually available for this journey leaves at midnight and arrives at 8:30 the next morning. Some tours of the Soviet Union include a visit to the Soviet War Memorial at *Khatyn*. This memorial to the Soviet war dead was constructed specifically to confuse visitors about what happened at *Khatyn* where 10,000 to 15,000 Polish officers were massacred during World War I by the red Army and shoved into mass graves. Visitors are encouraged to lay wreaths at numerous war memorials and are constantly reminded that the Soviets lost millions of people during World War II and, because of this, never want to see war again. These same visitors never get to see the graves of Soviet soldiers who lost their lives in Afghanistan.

Conclusion

It is the combination of the various disinformation themes, tactical policies, and institutional/structural deceptions that makes up the overall Soviet effort at strategic deception. Taken together, they are aimed principally at influencing the entire intellectual-analytical climate in which the USSR is perceived by the West. In addition to taking advantage of our tendencies to engage in mirror imaging and wishful thinking, we must not forget that Soviet strategic deception exploits yet another related Western tendency of thought—our frequent inability to discipline ourselves mentally in such a way as Alain Besancon counsels us to do when analyzing the USSR—namely to force ourselves to believe the unbelievable. This may be especially difficult when the popular culture and contemporary etiquette (which is surely much more important than truth) consider a focus on communism and particularly on its more unbelievable features a subject of humor and ridicule: It is to see a "bogeyman—a communist—under every bed." As Screwtape observes, under such circumstances deception is all the easier to achieve:

> I do not think you will have much difficulty in keeping the patient in the dark. The fact that "devils" are predominantly comic figures in the modern imagination will help you. If any faint suspicion of your existence begins to arise in his mind, suggest to him a picture of something in red tights, and persuade him that since he cannot believe in that (it is an old text book method of confusing them) he therefore cannot believe in you.

Since we are so unaccustomed to believing the unbelievable, lest we risk being branded as analytical extremists, the Soviets know that Danton's strategic advice is particularly applicable here: "*De l'audace, et encore l'audace, et toujours l'audace!*" Hence the enduring success of the technique of the "big lie"—not only does it disturb the comfortable parameters of our perceptual frame of reference but it also works to desensitize us to the significance of deceptions—such as front organizations—that we have long taken for granted. Only when we grasp the nature of our perceptual vulnerabilities and realize that the intent of Soviet deception is to translate those vulnerabilities into politico-military-strategic vulnerability, will we begin to understand that Soviet strategic deception itself is a form of low-intensity aggression against the United States and the forces of freedom in the world today.

Notes

1. For a more extensive analysis of how disagreements within the Party are principally on matters of peripheral political significance, see John Lenczowski, *Soviet Perceptions of U.S. Foreign Policy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982), ch. 7 and conclusion.

2. N.N. Azovtsev, *V.I. Lenin i Sovetskaia voennaia nauka* (Moscow: Nauka, 1971 and 1981).

3. William C. Green, *U.S. Interpretations of Soviet Publications on the Nuclear Weapons Policy of the USSR 1950–1980*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Southern California, 1986, ch. 5: "1975–1980 Polarization and Politicization." See also ch. 7: "Soviet Disinformation and Strategic Deception Concerning Its Nuclear Weapons Policy."

4. Richard Pipes, *Survival Is Not Enough* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), p. 38.