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19 February 1987

Dear Derek,

"Whither the Soviet Union?
A Personal View"

I suggested to Malcolm Mackintosh before he left us that he might write a valedictory paper, giving his personal forecast for the Soviet Union under Gorbachev. Here it is. Like anything from this source, it is well worth reading.

I am sending copies to other JIC members.

Yours truly

Percy Cradock
PERCY CRADOCK

Lieutenant General Sir Derek Boorman KCB
Ministry of Defence

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SIR P CRADOCK

WHITHER THE SOVIET UNION? A PERSONAL VIEW

1. The aim of this paper is to offer a personal view of the likely evolution of Soviet internal, external and military policies in the foreseeable future under the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev. It attempts to assess how Gorbachev will exercise his authority at home and abroad, and what his ambitions and his priorities, forced or conceptual, will be as he proceeds to formulate the policies of the Soviet Union.

2. To recall the title of Stalin's wartime military doctrine, Soviet policy-making under Gorbachev will still be dominated by its "permanently operating factors". These include the size of the Soviet Union and its population (now 280 million), the weight of its military power, both conventional and nuclear, and the Soviet Union's economic resources and its inability to exploit them effectively. These factors also include the sense of political mission based on Marxism-Leninism, which added an ideological motive to Russia's ambitions to advance to "top nation" status in the world power balance.

3. Of less certain impact are some very deeply-ingrained elements of the Soviet system which influence policy-making. Some of these actually limit the capacity of any Soviet leader to make major changes in the system or alter the established ways of governing the country or implementing new policies. The massive bureaucracies supporting the Communist Party which in turn creates the government and directs the work of the Armed Forces, the KGB and the economic and scientific communities are dominated by vested interests, rigid social organisation and the principle of "keeping everything as it is". The collective and state farm system in agriculture appears to be sacrosanct. So does the network of Party and KGB controls which has stifled the creativity of a talented people and made many of them all too often act according to the old Russian proverb: "I am a dark (ie ignorant) man and I know nothing" when faced with difficult choices.

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4. These characteristics, coupled with the centuries-old tradition of fear of authority and, particularly among Russia's rulers, a sense of inferiority to other - primarily Western - countries, have done much to create the Soviet Union that we see today. Combined with recent history and ideology, they continue to generate general support for overinsurance in military power over all potential adversaries for defensive or offensive purposes. They help to instil the belief that war, particularly a nuclear war which could cause breakdown to the Soviet system should be avoided. Every effort should be made to achieve Soviet goals by negotiation, intimidation, subversion and propaganda, and very high priority is given to the skilful use of public relations, diplomatic techniques and deception to outwit or corner real or imagined opponents. The Soviet Union, however, will always maintain the forces thought necessary to wage and win any war which might break out.

5. Of all the questions to be asked about the future policies of the Soviet Union probably the most important is whether Gorbachev will turn out to be the last of the "one-man Soviet rulers" of the Stalin-Khrushchev-Brezhnev tradition, or the first of a succession of reforming leaders. The former would doubtless try to modernise the Soviet system without changing it radically. The latter's main priority would be to reform the governmental system and the economy, improve the lot of the Soviet people and bring their powerful state fully into the European tradition. On the evidence of his performance so far Gorbachev probably believes that he can and should direct the future policies of the Soviet Union according to the following principles:

a. to make as clean a break as possible with the personnel and the style of government of the Brezhnev era in the Communist Party, the government, the Armed Forces, the KGB and the economic, scientific and agricultural sectors, including the theorists as well as the practitioners;

b. to streamline the bureaucracies and make them more efficient, better able to implement new ideas - though without the right to initiate major reforms - and develop a greater accountability in all of them to the Party and government leadership;

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c. to make efforts towards radical improvements in the practical functioning of the economy, though without significant changes in the ideological basis of its structure. Gorbachev, as a proud Soviet man and leader, is painfully aware that the backwardness of the Soviet economy undermines Soviet claims to full (ie non-military) super power status. It also weakens the attractiveness of the Soviet system to other countries, and seriously inhibits the projection of Soviet power on a global basis;

d. to concentrate the decision-making process on foreign policy, especially towards the West, in his hands as Party leader;

e. to maintain and improve the capabilities and superiorities of the Armed Forces, providing them as far as possible with the defence allocations which their new leadership - to be carefully chosen by Gorbachev and his advisers within the next year or two following the departure of Marshal Sokolov - can justify to the Politburo. Gorbachev, recognising the vital importance of this power base, will seek to avoid Army-Party conflicts, especially those which could weaken military support for Soviet foreign policy or arms control initiatives, while not allowing the Armed Forces to challenge Party authority in any aspect of military affairs;

f. to preserve and improve the competence and authority of the KGB, its subordination to the Party and its internal and external role in Soviet policy. Gorbachev will ensure that the KGB's leadership is totally loyal to himself; he may, however, try to improve its image at home by increasing its accountability to Party organs;

g. to correct and, if possible, eliminate the more damaging defects of Soviet society by encouraging greater debate and discussion in approved circles than heretofore. This will be aimed not only at rooting out corruption and resistance to all change, but at improving the morale of the people as a whole. Gorbachev's ideal

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would be to create new horizons of opportunity for the up-and-coming generations of Soviet people, to re-discover enthusiasm, and to find ways of promoting active interest among young and old in the task of bringing the Soviet Union into the Twenty-First Century while adhering to those elements of Marxist-Leninist ideology which are accepted by Gorbachev as valid and correct.

6. If these are indeed the likely bases of Gorbachev's thinking, and on the assumption that their implementation does not lead to his fall from power by a "Palace Revolution" - the only known method of changing the Party leader in the Soviet Union - the Soviet Union is likely to develop along the following lines in the years ahead.

7. On the domestic front, Gorbachev will reorganise and streamline the upper reaches of the Party and government, reducing the number of senior leaders and ministers, and creating more State or Party Commissions - such as those now in charge of agriculture and certain parts of industry - with greater direct subordination to the Party Secretariat and the Politburo. The Politburo will be manned by proven supporters of Gorbachev, and their staffs in the Secretariat will be reduced in size and closely monitored by their Politburo masters. Gorbachev will exercise his authority to select or dismiss subordinates to the full; the latter will be aware of his readiness to discipline or remove those who fail. This principle will be extended down through the Party apparatus, the government, the commissions, and, indeed, the ruling class or "Nomenklatura" - to give this group its Soviet title.

8. The economy will show evidence of some inroads by Gorbachev along the lines already put forward at the 27th Party Congress in February-March 1986. Some Soviet economic structures may be altered to allow for increased supervision by high-level commissions over the work of the enormous bureaucracies supporting the main elements of the Soviet economy: agriculture, heavy and light industry, science and technology and the exploitation of the country's natural wealth, including mineral

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and maritime resources, and energy. Gorbachev will relentlessly press for modernisation and for the adoption of new ideas: greater use of computers and labour-saving techniques, for example. Some of these may lead to a good deal of unemployment which would be, where possible, concealed by the Soviet propaganda machine - though not entirely by the media.

9. In foreign affairs, which will increasingly become one of Gorbachev's most active personal as well as professional interests, the maintenance of the Soviet Union's super-power status - whose basis he will try to extend from the military sphere only into politics, economics and trade - and the relationship with the United States will be the most important priorities. Looking beyond the current phase in relations during which the Soviet Union will try to pursue its goals in bilateral contacts with the Reagan administration, Gorbachev may move quickly after the appearance of a new American Government in 1989 to restore something like the super-power "special relationship" with the United States of the 1970s, though in a significantly updated form.

10. In the first instance he will seek strategic nuclear arms control agreements with the new American government aimed initially at reducing the degree of damage which could be inflicted by the nuclear forces of the United States on the Soviet Union in any major war which might break out. Gorbachev's ultimate aim would be to eliminate the nuclear arsenals of both sides altogether, though he cannot expect to achieve this goal in the foreseeable future. As part of this process the Soviet Union would direct its energies to persuading a future United States Administration, in negotiations and wide-ranging publicity campaigns, to abandon the Space Defence Initiative (SDI) of President Reagan and to give up other plans to use space for military purposes in any significant way. It is impossible to predict, however, what concessions in arms control Gorbachev might offer in return for the US abandonment of SDI so far ahead in the future.

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11. The Soviet Union would also try to work for a super-power "crisis management" arrangement with the United States, on a regional or global basis. The Soviet aim would be to eliminate the risk of escalation of a war in the Third World to an East-West military conflict, and to prove to the rest of the world that the United States recognised the Soviet Union as its equal in international relations. In carrying out all its policies the Soviet Union would hope to expand Soviet-American trade and to see an end to current American limitations on technology transfer, in the defence and civil fields.

12. The Soviet Union's policies towards Europe will probably be based on the assumption that Europe is the traditional area of Russian foreign policy and that the Soviet Union has a "right" to exercise domination over the continent in one form or another. The Russians will try to exploit intra-European differences, and divide Western Europe from its North American allies by a combination of blandishments and intimidation. Gorbachev will not consider a war of aggression against Western Europe as long as NATO's deterrent capabilities - including its nuclear forces - remain credible in Moscow. But he will seize every opportunity through diplomacy, blackmail, subversion and propaganda to undermine Western Europe's stability and weaken NATO's cohesion, and hope for practical results from sustained campaigns with those aims in view. Gorbachev has shown undoubted skills in using blandishments and deception in presenting the Soviet case, especially on arms control, to Western governments and peoples, and this will certainly continue in the future.

13. Soviet policy towards China would depend on the extent and speed of China's recovery from poverty and internal Party and government squabbles; and on the effectiveness of her military forces, including her nuclear capabilities, in the years ahead. Gorbachev's experience of dealing with China - the disappointing Chinese reaction to his speech in Vladivostok in July 1986, for example - if it continues, will not encourage him to believe that China would ever return to the Soviet-dominated Communist fold. So he will probably assume that China

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will be a major power of enormous size and growing economic and military strength which will act as a "third" and basically independent super power, especially in Asia, pursuing its own policies for Chinese national or ideological reasons, and uncommitted to either the Soviet Union or the West.

14. It is in the Third World where Gorbachev may try his hand at introducing a slight change of emphasis in Soviet policies. In recent years the Soviet Union has concentrated on securing Soviet interests, sometimes by the use of force, in the "peripheral areas" close to the Soviet border, such as in Afghanistan. Soviet policy paid less attention to direct involvement in more distant areas, especially when a suitable "proxy" such as Cuba was available. These priorities and "divisions of labour" are likely to continue. But Gorbachev may come to believe that the Soviet Union should redirect Soviet policies in important Third World countries towards changes in regimes which would significantly damage the West and might benefit the Soviet Union. These policies might involve greater preparation and effort through subversion, propaganda and "active measures" by the KGB, paying increased attention to and, where possible, penetrating, the youth movements and dissident groups of traditionally pro-Western countries such as Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Indonesia, the Philippines and Malaysia. In the short term the Russians would probably avoid Latin American countries, where Soviet activities might lead to an unwanted clash with the United States. Gorbachev would, of course, have no high hopes of immediate success from these activities. But if they moved the balance of power in the relevant area in Soviet favour even marginally, they might encourage him to undertake more active policies in such areas of the Third World on an opportunistic basis.

15. In order to plan and carry out these policies towards the United States, Western Europe, China and in the Third World, Gorbachev will complete the formation of a team of very senior professional Soviet diplomats, economic experts and KGB officers as Party Secretaries, Ministers or their deputies. They will be men like Anatoly Dobrynin, the

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Head of the International Department of the Party's Central Committee, who are experienced in these important areas, and whom Gorbachev will trust to draw up realistic, and, where appropriate, imaginative foreign and arms control policies. Gorbachev may form a new foreign-and-defence policy "directoriate" in the Party Secretariat, where these senior experts can meet and report to Gorbachev, the Politburo and the Defence Council, bypassing Ministers or other officials of the Secretariat. Such evidence as we have suggests that this is the kind of administrative reform favoured by Gorbachev, and could appeal to him as he assumes full responsibility for Soviet foreign policy in the years ahead.

16. A brief and very personal assessment of the future policies of the Soviet Union inevitably omits discussion of many important aspects of Soviet affairs. These include defence (where no great reorganisation of the Armed Forces or military doctrine is to be expected), social developments, (whose evolution away from bureaucratic rule may be quite extensive), the detail of possible economic changes, and increased freedom of expression - though within Gorbachev's own current guidelines. On the basis of the topics discussed here, it may be possible, however, to answer the question posed earlier on Gorbachev's place as a leader in Soviet history: as a repairer of the present system or a radical reformer? The answer is likely to be the former. Gorbachev, whatever his personal visions of Soviet power may be, will be remembered as the man who tried to make the present system work more efficiently rather than as the one who reformed it radically and gave the West a new and more amenable super power with which to deal.

Mackintosh

MALCOLM MACKINTOSH

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