

(Historical version)

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PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE -- PAST AND PRESENT

The theme song of Soviet foreign policy since the death of Stalin -- whether a trio sung by Malenkov, Molotov and Beria, a duet warbled by Khrushchev and Bulganin, or a chorus chanted by the full choir of the Central Committee -- has been the song of "Peaceful Coexistence." The West has been told that "there is no disputed or unresolved question that cannot be settled peacefully,"¹ and that the basis of Soviet foreign policy "was, is, and will remain the... ~~Marxist~~ principle of peaceful coexistence among states with different social systems."²

What does this all mean? Has "Peaceful Coexistence" been the policy of the Soviet Union in other periods? If so, what were its objectives? What guidance does the past offer us in interpreting Soviet policy today?

I. RELUCTANT COEXISTENCE.

"Peaceful Coexistence" actually is not a new tune, but a steal from one of the old masters, Maestro Lenin. As early as March, 1918, peaceful coexistence of a sort was endorsed by Lenin in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, by which the Bolsheviks accepted the notion that they would have to coexist with the Kaiser's government for at least a few weeks, until the German proletariat heeded the call of their Russian brothers and rose up in revolt.

¹ Malenkov at meeting of the Supreme Soviet, Pravda, March 16, 1953, as quoted in Current Digest of the Soviet Press, April 4, 1953, p. 5.

² Bulganin's report on the results of the Geneva Conference, Pravda, Aug. 6, 1955, as quoted in Current Digest, Aug. 31, 1955, p. 20.

But peace with Germany was followed almost immediately by war with the various armies of Allied intervention. The "capitalist" world tried to overthrow the Bolshevik regime, and the Bolsheviks in turn exerted what strength they had to overthrow the capitalists. This was the admitted aim of the Communist International, founded in 1919, and of the several attempts of the Bolsheviks to impose Soviet regimes on their smaller neighbors. In those days the Bolsheviks frankly admitted that they had no thoughts of coexisting peacefully with non-capitalist states any longer than they could help.

Despite their expectations, however, peaceful coexistence -- in the form of an armed truce -- was established in 1920-21. The Bolsheviks, repeatedly disappointed in their hopes for other Communist revolutions, reluctantly came to the conclusion that, at least for a while, they would be forced to exist as an isolated Communist island in a "capitalist" world. This was the implication of the treaties of peace with their neighbors and the various agreements for trade, non-aggression, and the like with other "capitalist" states. Thus the year 1921 can be taken as a turning point in the relations of the new Soviet regime with the outside world. There began a period which we might characterize as "reluctant coexistence." The "capitalist" states ceased their active efforts to overthrow the Bolshevik government. The Bolsheviks in turn curtailed the use of military force as a means of spreading Communism. Even in its weakened condition the Soviet regime was strong enough to have conquered tiny Estonia, Latvia, ● Lithuania, ^{or Finland,} but it refrained from doing so for fear that this would lead to another large-scale war against the Soviets. The two worlds retained their mutual hostility, but they called a halt to the armed conflict. The Bolsheviks desperately needed peace in order to heal their wounds and strengthen their regime. They did not give up their

hopes, however, that at any moment other Communist revolutions might break out.

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No successful revolutions took place, however, and a few years later, in December, 1925, Stalin officially characterized the situation as one of "peaceful coexistence":

A certain temporary equilibrium of forces [he said] has been established between our country...and the countries of the capitalist world, an equilibrium which has determined the present period of "peaceful coexistence" between the Land of Soviets and the capitalist countries. What we at one time regarded as a brief respite after the war has become a whole period of respite.

The notion that a Communist state could coexist peacefully side by side with capitalist states, that it could carry on trade and even establish official diplomatic relations with them, was a radical departure from the notions which most Bolsheviks had shared at the time of the revolution. In the early days they had considered it the sacred duty of the new Communist regime to exert every effort to promote world revolution, even to the point of sacrificing, if necessary, the Soviet regime. The new policy of "peaceful coexistence" required, therefore, some sort of ideological justification. This justification was provided by Stalin's famous theory of "socialism in a single country." In this doctrine Stalin did not advocate the abandonment of the goal of world revolution. Instead he simply argued that the best way to achieve world revolution in the long run was to concentrate on building up the economic and military strength of the Soviet Union. Later, when propitious moments arose, this strength could be used to instigate and support revolutions abroad. The period of peaceful coexistence would be used to prepare for a subsequent period of revolutionary upsurge. As Stalin expressed it in 1925:

¹ Report to the 14th Congress of the CPSU(B), December 18, 1925; J. V. Stalin, Works, Vol. VII (Moscow, 1954), pp. 267-268.

Instead of the period of flow of the revolutionary tide that we observed in Europe in the years of the post-war crisis, we now see a period of ebb. This means that the question of taking power, of the proletariat capturing power any day, is not now on the order of the day in Europe. The period of rising revolutionary tide... still lies ahead....We are in a period of accumulation of forces, which is of great importance for future revolutionary actions.¹

For the Soviet Union to be able to build "socialism in a single country" and to accumulate strength, the avoidance of war was of course an absolute necessity. Hence Stalin sang the song of "peaceful coexistence," although he was still rather honest in declaring that the Soviet Union would resume the revolutionary offensive as soon as it was powerful enough to do so. In fact, at the very time that "peaceful coexistence" was being preached, the Soviet Union was actively aiding revolution in China.

Both Lenin and Stalin were usually frank enough in the 1920's to admit that they wanted peaceful coexistence only for a while -- only until the Soviet Union was strong enough to overthrow capitalism. One of Lenin's statements on this point was quoted over and over again by Stalin:

...The existence of the Soviet Republic side by side with imperialist states for a long time is unthinkable. One or the other must triumph in the end. And before that end comes, a series of frightful collisions between the Soviet Republic and the bourgeois states will be inevitable.²

Lenin's remarks on another occasion are equally instructive. The Soviet Union, he said,

¹ Report to the Fourteenth Party Congress, Works, VII, 271-272.

² Lenin made the statement in the report of the Central Committee to the Eighth Congress of the R. K. P. (B.) on March 18, 1919. It can be found in Lenin, Sochinenia (3rd ed.), XXIV, 122. It was quoted by Stalin in 1926 in "Concerning Questions of Leninism," Works, VIII, 70, in his report at the Fifteenth Conference of the C. P. S. U. (B.) in 1927, Works, VIII, 275-276, and has been repeated in many editions of Voprosy Leninizma (Problems of Leninism).

must take advantage of the antagonisms and contradictions between... the two systems of capitalist states, inciting one against the other. As long as we have not conquered the whole world, as long as we are, from the economic and military standpoint, weaker than the remaining capitalist world, we must adhere to this rule....

.....
...If we are unable to defeat them both, we must know how to dispose of our forces in such a way that they fall out among themselves.... But as soon as we are strong enough to defeat capitalism as a whole, we shall immediately take it by the scruff of the neck.¹

The policy of peaceful coexistence followed by the Soviet Union before 1934 could not properly be equated with the type of peaceful coexistence being preached today. It was, as I said, a kind of reluctant coexistence, in which the Soviet leaders continued to proclaim their revolutionary goals and made no attempt to form alliances with any of the states of the capitalist world. The theme song of peaceful coexistence was rather popular in Soviet circles in those days, but there was a considerable amount of disharmony between it and the revolutionary songs being sung at the same time.

II. THE POPULAR FRONT PERIOD.

The first period in which the peaceful coexistence theme swelled into a mighty chorus, loud enough to drown out all conflicting melodies, began around 1934. The reason was the rise of Hitler and his subsequent alliances with Italy and Japan. The Soviet regime felt that it was directly threatened with attack, so threatened that it was willing to make great efforts for the establishment of peaceful coexistence with any countries willing to resist the aggressors. This policy was in fulfillment of the dictum of Lenin that the Soviet Union must make use of "the antagonisms...between the two groups of capitalist states, inciting one against the other."² Steps taken by the Soviet Union along this line in the years after 1933 would have been inconceivable a few years earlier. It marked a shift in Soviet foreign policy not unlike the one we have seen in the past two years.

¹ Speech on November 26, 1920, Sochinenia, XXV, 498, 500. Italics added.

² ~~Speech on November 26, 1920, Sochinenia, XXV, 498.~~

Ibid.

(3rd ed.)

No longer did the Soviet leaders speak as though peaceful coexistence was something that had been imposed upon them by the force of circumstances. They now hinted that they had given up all ideas of promoting world revolution and would accept coexistence with friendly capitalist states for an indefinite period of time. The policy of reluctant coexistence was replaced by what might be called enthusiastic coexistence.

The first radical step of this "New Look" in Soviet policy was its entry into the League of Nations in 1934. This action, said Litvinov in his maiden speech as official delegate, was a manifestation of the principle of the "peaceful coexistence of different social-political systems":

The Soviet state [he said]...has never excluded the possibility of some form or other of association with states having a different political and social system, so long as there is no mutual hostility, and if it is for the attainment of common aims.¹

Entry into the League was followed by the treaties with France and Czechoslovakia in 1935, the first occasions on which the Soviet government went so far as to commit itself to mutual assistance pacts. At about the same time the Comintern, which had originally been founded for the avowed purpose of overthrowing the "capitalist" order, initiated a radical shift to the "popular front" program, and offered its support to those "capitalist" states and those "bourgeois" parties that cooperated in opposing fascism. Communist propagandists now preached not world revolution but peaceful coexistence, not class struggle but collaboration with the bourgeoisie, not internationalism but nationalism, not Communism but praise of bourgeois democracy.

The object of all this was to keep Russia out of war. And when a few years later it appeared to Stalin that the likeliest method of staying out of a big war was to ally with Hitler, ideological differences were not permitted to stand in the way. The Nazi-Soviet Pact and the shift in orientation which

¹ League of Nations Official Journal, Special Supplement #125, pp. 66-69, as quoted in Victor A. Yakhontoff, USSR Foreign Policy (New York; 1945), p. 114.

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it necessitated, was probably the most extreme example of the Soviet Union's willingness temporarily to jettison its revolutionary program and "peacefully coexist" with a state professing a completely antithetical ideology. The motive, as before and since, was to forestall a military threat to the security of the Soviet regime. But while the Soviet Union was "peacefully coexisting" with Nazi Germany, it followed the opposite policy with its less powerful neighbors -- Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Finland, and Rumania. They experienced not "peaceful coexistence" but ~~the~~ military aggression.

III. PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE DURING WORLD WAR II.

After the Nazi attack in June 1941, cooperation with the fascist bloc of "capitalist" states came to an end, and the Soviet Union looked for new allies among the other "capitalist" bloc. The Soviet regime was now more seriously threatened than it had been at any time since 1919. The Red Army was in desperate need of all the help it could get, and the Communists worked diligently to persuade the West that all possible aid should be given. Soviet propaganda was purged of references to world revolution. The emphasis was not on Marxism, but on patriotism and unity in the struggle against fascism. Countries with different systems could not only coexist -- they could even fight together as allies. Communists in the allied countries posed as the best of patriots. In 1942 the American Communist Party disaffiliated from the Comintern, and the following year Moscow announced that the Comintern itself had decided to dissolve. This step, said Stalin in an interview, "exposes the lie of the Hitlerites to the effect that 'Moscow' allegedly intends to intervene in the life of other nations and 'bolshelize' them."¹

¹ New York Times, May 29, 1943, pp. 1-2. Also in Pravda, May 30, 1943, p. 1.

This wartime campaign to convince the allies that the Soviet Union had abandoned its goal of bolshevizing the world and that states with different political and economic systems could live together in peace and friendship is the closest parallel in history with the present Soviet tactics. Since we were involved in a war against a common enemy, the campaign had considerable success. Americans from all walks of life were inclined to believe in Stalin's good intentions. For example, Eddie Rickenbacker on returning from a trip to the Soviet Union declared that the dissolution of the Comintern was "sincere and permanent." General Douglas McArthur, in characteristic prose, stated his opinion that "the hopes of civilization rest on the worthy banners of the courageous Russian Army." General Eisenhower, after his famous visit to Moscow in 1945, advised Congress that "nothing guides Russian policy so much as a desire for friendship with the United States." Even Churchill, old enemy of Bolshevism that he was, told Parliament in 1945 that "Marshall Stalin and the other Soviet leaders wish to live in honorable friendship and democracy with the Western democracies."¹

IV. SOVIET EXPANSION AFTER THE WAR.

But if many in the West ^{believed} ~~took seriously~~ Stalin's disclaimer of intentions to bolshevize other nations, Stalin himself did not. The period of his greatest success in preaching "peaceful coexistence" was used to plan and prepare for the period of greatest Soviet expansion. The old stalwarts of the Comintern who signed the announcement of its dissolution -- among them Dimitrov and Kolarov of Bulgaria, Pauker of Rumania, Rakosi of Hungary, Gottwald of Czechoslovakia, Pieck of Germany, Thorez of France, and Togliatti of Italy --

¹ Paul Willen, "Who Collaborated with Russia?" Antioch Review (Fall, 1954), pp. 273, 270, 275, 277.

were in the Soviet Union during the war, busily plotting the strategy which would be used as soon as the period of "peaceful coexistence" was ended. When they returned to their native countries at the end of the war, the tactics which they used (particularly in Eastern Europe) displayed a degree of similarity which could have resulted only from careful and unified planning. The wartime period of "peaceful coexistence" turned out to be, to use Stalin's statement of 1925, "a period of accumulation of forces...of great importance for future revolutionary actions." The phase of peaceful ebbing of the world Communist movement was followed by a great flood tide which engulfed much of Eastern Europe and Asia.

At the end of World War II the Soviet Union was not "strong enough to defeat capitalism as a whole," but it was certainly strong enough to defeat "capitalism" minus the United States. The Soviet Union made use of its increased military power to take capitalism "by the scruff of the neck" in many places, and ^{all the} ~~those~~ areas penetrated by the Soviet Army, with the ~~one~~ exception of Finland and Iran, came under Communist domination. There is good reason to believe that had the United States not been in possession of the atom bomb, Iran, as well as the whole European continent, would have suffered a similar fate. As Stalin stated in his famous letter denouncing Tito, the Soviet Army "unfortunately" was not able to render the Communist Parties of France and Italy the same "assistance" which had been given the comrades in Eastern Europe.¹

To summarize, Stalin spoke of peaceful coexistence on many occasions. He first spoke of it, in the 1920's, as a condition which the Soviets ^{accepted only} ~~were~~ ^{because they} ~~were~~ not yet strong enough to bring ^{it} to an end. Later, however, in the era of the Popular Front and also after June 1941, Stalin tried to convince the world that he welcomed peaceful coexistence, and that it would last indefinitely. Peaceful coexistence became the theme of a vast Soviet propaganda

¹ The Soviet-Yugoslav Dispute (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1948), p. 51.

campaign, designed to prove that the Soviet Union would be a faithful ally of those who wished to fight against fascism. On both occasions when this line was adopted, the reason behind it was the serious military threat to the Soviet Union, and the object was to woo allies from the "capitalist" camp. Both periods when the Soviet Union preached "peaceful coexistence" were also followed by the Soviet Union deserting its allies and embarking upon a program of territorial expansion. "Peaceful coexistence" quickly came to an end as soon as the Soviet Union found a favorable opportunity to expand; it was merely the prelude to military conquest. Until his death Stalin consistently talked peaceful coexistence with capitalism, but at the same time Communists throughout the world, supported if possible by the Soviet army, were bringing about the destruction of "capitalism" wherever they could muster sufficient power.¹

V. STALIN'S SUCCESSORS.

Thus the current Communist hit tune of "peaceful coexistence" is far from new. What is new is that the present arbiters of Communist musical styles have backed up words with at least some deeds. Although Stalin talked peace, his actions meant war. His post-war policy was seemingly designed to frighten the ~~world~~^{free nations} into uniting and rearming. ~~His policies~~^{It} led directly to the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, the rallying of the United Nations behind America in the Korean War, and to Western rearmament.

Stalin also provided a lobbying service for anti-Soviet legislation. Whenever a bill for foreign aid or military expenditures was having trouble in Congress, Stalin usually could be depended upon to take some aggressive step that would assure its passage.²

¹ Stalin spoke out in favor of "peaceful coexistence" to Alexander Werth in September 1946, to Elliot Roosevelt in December 1946, to Harold Stassen in April 1947, and to Henry Wallace in May 1948. A number of Stalin's post-war utterances on this theme have been collected in For Peaceful Coexistence (New York: International Publishers, 1951).

² An example is the Communist seizure of power in Czechoslovakia in February, 1948, which occurred just a few days before the Senate vote on ~~E. R. P.~~ *the European Recovery Program.*

The new policy of Stalin's successors is much less open and much more difficult to deal with. As Lenin once remarked, a policy of "liberalism," of "concessions," is "more crafty" and therefore more dangerous than "the method of force, the method which rejects all concessions."¹

What then are we to conclude about the meaning of the loud and insistent chorus of Communist voices which today is singing the song of "peaceful coexistence"? Are the gestures of friendship by Khrushchev, Bulganin and Company merely parlor tricks designed to mesmerize innocent Americans? Is the "spirit of Geneva" merely a drunken stupor resulting from too much vodka? In short, has Soviet policy really changed?

The facts of the matter would seem to indicate that the present rulers of the Kremlin mean what they say by "peaceful coexistence" in a certain limited sense -- in the same sense that Stalin meant it in the 1930's. At that time Stalin desperately desired to avoid getting involved in a big war, for the simple reason that he feared such a war might bring about the destruction of the Soviet regime. Today the Soviet rulers desperately wish to avoid a big war, for the simple reason that a thermonuclear blitz might mean the extermination of half the population of the Soviet Union. ~~It is reasonable to suppose that they are no less aware than the rest of us that in such a war there would be no victors, that the only real alternative to coexistence is coextermination.~~

The recent Soviet moves to reduce international tension probably were inspired by a number of considerations -- economic, political and military -- but two objectives stand out. One is to reduce the danger of war by effecting a

¹ "Raznoglasia v evropeiskom rabochem dvizhenii," Sochinenia (3rd ed.), XV, 7-8.

relaxation in the diplomatic atmosphere, ~~to eliminate the possibility that~~
~~the advocates of so-called "preventive" war will come to dominate American~~
~~policy~~, to bring to an end the ^{situation} ~~war like atmosphere~~ in which some accident could
serve as the Sarajevo of an atomic war. With this objective we should have
the greatest sympathy, for in such a war our civilization would suffer along
with theirs.

But a second objective of the present Soviet "peace" policy may be
to lull the West into a false feeling of security, to get us to relax our
guard, to quarrel among ourselves, and thus make it possible for the Soviets
to inflict a diplomatic or atomic Pearl Harbor. The theme of peaceful coex-
istence may be a siren song designed to lure the free nations off their course
and wreck them on the shoals of **dis**unity, disarmament, pacifism and neutralism.
It would be foolish for us to assume that the Soviet Union will refrain from
using atomic weapons if our defenses should become so vulnerable or our retal-
iatory power so weak that they could defeat us in a surprise attack. However,
if we should ever permit them to attain overwhelming military superiority, it
probably would not be necessary for them to attack; we might find ourselves
forced to give in without a struggle.

Even if we assume that the Soviet rulers today, like Stalin in his
time, are eager to avoid a large-scale war, this is far from saying that they
have given up the goal of a Communist world dominated by the Soviet Union, or
that they have ceased working for it, even temporarily. Nor have they abandoned
most of the insidious methods by which they traditionally pursue this goal.
It should not be forgotten that Soviet foreign policy has always been conducted
on several different levels and by many different agencies simultaneously.
Moscow is still supporting and manipulating its fifth column Communist parties

throughout the world. It is still engaged in a gigantic propaganda campaign, spreading the big lie through all media of communication. It finances and controls the World Peace Council, the World Federation of Trade Unions, and countless other Communist "front" organizations. It is engaged in sabotage, terrorism, provocation, and kidnapping. In doing so, it is simply carrying out the injunction of Lenin and Stalin that a Communist Party must do "the utmost possible...for the development, support and awakening of the revolution in all countries."¹

This is not to say that the "New Look" has brought no diminution in overt Soviet efforts to promote Communist wars and revolutions. The wars in Korea and Indo-China have been suspended. The status quo in the Formosa straits has been temporarily accepted. There has been a considerable change in the tone of some phases of the anti-Western propaganda campaign. It is even possible that an order has gone out from the Kremlin to all Communist parties that, for the time being, no coup d'états or similar aggressive acts should be attempted. But this does not mean that the world-wide conflict between Communism and freedom has ended. ~~Whether we fully realize it or not,~~ We are *still* engaged in a massive struggle for the loyalties of the peoples in every country of the globe.

Although the Soviets know that they might lose in military warfare, they are convinced that they are bound to win in the other varieties of warfare. One advantage on their side is the fact that they have had thirty-eight years or more of experience in political warfare, whereas Americans are comparative amateurs and are inclined to think that such activities are a dirty business

¹ Stalin, "The Political Strategy and Tactics of the Russian Communists," Works, V, 82, quoting from Lenin, The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky.

The many varieties of Soviet propaganda during the year 1954 are surveyed in: F. Bowen Evans (ed.), Worldwide Communist Propaganda Activities (New York: Macmillan, 1955).

which democracies should eschew. Or, like Senator Malone of Nevada, we look upon our propaganda program as an extravagance which can be curtailed on the strength of a few Soviet smiles. Communists have long assumed that the conflict between Communism and capitalism is never ending, although the weapons and tactics may vary from time to time. Democracies, on the other hand, still tend to think in terms of total war or total peace, with peace as the "normal" situation. Actually, we are involved in a war whether we like it or not, a war of ideologies, a war of economic systems, and a war for scientific and military supremacy.¹

We should remember that Communists have always looked upon periods of peaceful coexistence as temporary. Peaceful coexistence has been preached only when the Soviet Union was felt to be in great danger, and when the tide of world revolution had momentarily ebbed. At the present time some of the weapons of the Communists have been temporarily laid aside. But this does not mean that they have been thrown away. Rather we can be sure that these weapons are being repaired, improved, and replenished in preparation for future use. We cannot afford to forget that the last period when peaceful coexistence was the dominant theme of Soviet foreign relations -- that is, the period of World War II -- was followed by the years of greatest Soviet expansion.

How then might we summarize the basic principles of the Soviet policy of "peaceful coexistence" since the death of Stalin?

First, the Soviet leaders desire above all else to prevent an atomic war, unless they can be certain of winning such a war without suffering serious damage themselves. Since such certainty is presently inconceivable, we need not fear a thermonuclear blitz from the USSR so long as we possess effective defenses and retaliatory power.

¹ Communist political warfare, together with proposals for American counter measures, are discussed in: John Scott, Political Warfare (New York: John Day, 1955), and David Sarnoff, Program for a Political Offensive Against World Communism (New York, 1955).

Second, the Soviet leaders also hope through their peace policy to bring about Western disarmament, to foster neutralism, and to create an atmosphere in which the non-Communist states feel they can afford to fight among themselves.

Third, this does not in the least mean that the Soviet leaders have abandoned the goal of world Communism. We can expect that they will continue to support and direct the ^{world} Communist movement, although they will do so in less spectacular ways so as to avoid alarming the West.

Fourth, the Cold War will continue indefinitely, although on the level of formal diplomacy it may be conducted in more gentlemanly language. But we should bear in mind Stalin's cynical remark that "fine words are a mask to cover shady deeds."¹ And when we read that Khrushchev has praised American methods of growing corn, we must not forget that at the same time Communist propagandists in India are picturing Americans as fascists, racists, war mongers, and imperialist exploiters. When Eisenhower and Zhukov reminisce about the "good old days" of World War II, we should also recall the American G. I.'s who were tortured, brain-washed, or starved in Communist prison camps.

The situation today may be one of coexistence, but it is a highly competitive coexistence. The open struggle of the past ten years is merely going under cover. It is war, but with certain weapons barred. It is, to reverse the phrase of Clausewitz, war continued by other means.

¹ "The Elections in St. Petersburg" (1913), Works, II, 285.