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## The Nature of the Soviet Challenge

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## THE NATURE OF THE SOVIET CHALLENGE

**Mr. Brian Crozier\***

The title of my talk is "The Nature of the Soviet Challenge". I propose to say a few words, first, about the nature of the Soviet state, because unless one defines the beast, one has difficulty in grappling with it. I shall then go on to say something about the things that the Soviet Union is doing in the world at the moment, which, in effect, constitute a challenge. And then I shall have the impertinence to say something about the way this country is reacting to that challenge. And after that, discussion will be wide open.

I think the thing that distinguishes the Soviet state above all is its arbitrary character in legal terms. The KGB, or Commission on State Security, is the last of a long string of initials, including familiar ones such as the MVD and MKVD and many others, tracing back to the cheka of Czarist days. In effect, the KGB is above the law. And the Soviet Union is, perhaps, the prototype police state and still possibly the most pervasive police regime in the world. And by "police regime", of course, I mean a regime in which the police are universally prevalent but invisible.

I'm addressing an audience consisting largely of lawyers, but I myself am not one. I have a piece of paper here. I notice that Admiral Mott was giving suspicious glances in my direction, because he doesn't believe in people using notes. But I can assure him that these are not notes. I'll tell you what they are. They are quotes and excerpts from a fundamental book written years ago by the late Andrei Vyshinsky, who was at one time the Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union, called "The Law of the Soviet State," which I reviewed in the "Sidney Morning Herald" in 1949. And although many things have changed in the Soviet Union since 1949, these fundamental passages still underlie the Soviet concept of the law. Each one of them, however, deserves a

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few lines of comment. And we always used to say that comment is free but must be carefully distinguished from fact. This isn't always observed by my journalistic profession, but we feel that it ought to be.

Well, on *the right to work*, Mr. Vyshinsky said, "The right to work is the foundation whereon the Soviet citizen's rights and freedoms rest. Capitalism, on the other hand, cannot exist without a vast reservoir army of unemployed, ever lowering the pay for work and service."

Well, of course this is a pious aspiration, but in the Soviet Union, particularly at the time when Vyshinsky was writing, the population of the concentration camps, the labor camps, was variously estimated at between thirteen and twenty million. So, in effect, this was a disguised unemployment. Later Mr. Khrushchev, after years of denying that there was such a thing as a concentration camp in the Soviet Union, told a visiting party of French Socialists led by Monsieur Guy Mollet, that the concentration camps had been closed. So something that didn't exist had been closed. And since then, there's been a revival. I don't know what the present population of the labor camps is, but it's certainly over the million.

So intent were the rulers of the Soviet Union on maintaining the fiction that there is no unemployment in the Soviet Union that there were no labor exchanges until a few years ago, because since there were no unemployed, people could not possibly be looking for work. Now there are a few.

*The right to education:* "Only in the USSR have the toiling masses gained free access to education, including higher education."

Well, of course, unless you educate people, you cannot efficiently exploit them. In the first ten or fifteen years of the Soviet Union the economic trend was mainly backward, in the sense that it was only about 1927 that that vast country caught up with, for example, the cattle population of Czarist times, and, indeed, industrial production, in general. But the one thing that really did make progress, and made progress very fast, was education. The fight against illiteracy made giant strides. In about ten years, or fifteen years, the percentage of illiterates fell from something like eighty percent to something like nine percent. And this is an

achievement that must be recognized, but the underlying purpose of it should not be forgotten.

*Freedom of conscience:* "Encroachment of any sort upon the freedom of conscience of citizens is subject to prosecution by law."

On the other hand, if one tries to preach against the religion of communism, against its god, Karl Marx, or against its prophets, Lenin and Stalin, then the results are not compatible with freedom of conscience.

*Freedom of speech, press, and meetings:* "These freedoms," wrote Vyshinsky, "are the property of all the citizens in the USSR, fully guaranteed by the State."

Now, Mr. Vyshinsky himself made appropriate comment on this particular passage, and this time I quote him directly: "In our state, naturally, there is and can be no place for freedom of speech, press, and so on, for the foes of socialism. Every attempt on their part to utilize to the detriment of the State — that is to say, to the detriment of all the toilers — these freedoms granted to the toilers must be classified as a counter-revolutionary crime."

So you have freedom of speech so long as you don't actually use it.

*The inviolability of the person:* "This means the legally established guarantee of the citizen against unlawful arrest, and against searches, seizures, and inspection of personal correspondence, and other measures illegally limiting the citizen's personal freedom."

This one always speaks for itself, because it is a *reductio ad absurdum*. Does that sound sufficiently legal, Admiral, for you?

Well, to come rapidly to the present, some people have supposed that the Soviet Union is rapidly liberalizing itself because there is, at the moment, a fair amount of dissent, and this dissent is being talked about and is known in the West. Many underground publications are being smuggled out, and the self-publishing newspapers, known as *samizdat*, are circulating in the Soviet Union. They are not being suppressed, although quite obviously they could be very rapidly suppressed if the KGB were so minded.

Well, it's true, of course, that things are not as bad as they were in Stalin's day. It would be absurd to pretend

that they are. But State terror takes different forms. The forms that are now practiced in the Soviet Union are relatively mild, in the sense that there are fewer people being physically liquidated than there used to be. But the atmosphere of terror is, I understand, still very much present. I'm reading an interesting book, which I commend to you, "Message from Moscow," which unfortunately is anonymous but appears to be very authentic. And it's undoubtedly true that it is very difficult to hold dissenting opinions in the Soviet Union and to express them, and that one faces all kinds of penalties, which are usually the result of arbitrary administrative action. A man may be deprived, for instance, of his job, or maybe exiled, within the Soviet Union, to some distant village, and, in many cases, actually sent to labor corrective camps, or—and this is a refinement of recent years—sent to a mental home, which has been the fate of many dissidents in the last ten years.

There are two categories of dissidents in the Soviet Union, and they are not, in my opinion, of equal importance. The ones that have commanded most publicity in the West are, of course, the literary dissidents, people like Solzhenitsyn, or Amalrik, or Ginsburg, or Daniel or Sinyavsky, people who either have been sent to labor corrective camps or have been threatened with that kind of thing or expelled from the writers' union, which, in effect, means that they can no longer have their works published.

They are, of course, important, but not in the sense that they constitute a challenge to the regime. Of course, the regime doesn't like what is written about these people and what is written about their cases in the West. I think, to some extent, they are sensitive on this score. But they can always keep news of the comments of the West out of their newspapers, out of their media, since there is total control over all forms of information and publicity. But these men—the Solzhenitsyns of this world—do not constitute a direct challenge to the power of the regime, which is exerted through the Party, through the "naked sword of the revolution", as Vyshinsky termed it—that is, the secret police—or the armed forces, which are themselves deeply penetrated by the KGB through its Fourth Directorate, in effect, the KGB within the armed forces, to make sure that they do not

deviate too much politically and come to threaten the regime from within.

The second category of dissidents I believe to be more important, potentially, because dissent has now spread to the scientific and technological community. And this is fundamentally more important to the regime, for it can do without writers, in the last resort, but it cannot do without scientists, nuclear physicists, and people like that, on whom the progress of the regime, in terms of its attempt to maintain military technological parity with this country, or to surpass this country, in the last resort, depends.

There has been dissent in the scientific community for a number of years, through people like the famous physicist, Kapitza, and Lev Landau, another famous scientist whose work was abridged through a terrible motor accident. But recently there's been a change in the character of dissent, in this sense, that whereas criticism of the regime until the last few years consisted mainly of criticism *within* the ideological framework, now criticism is going *outside* that framework. And this is, in itself, a worrying factor for the rulers of the Soviet Union.

At one stage, in effect, this was true in Trotsky's day, true of the Trotskyist opposition in the 1930's and 1940's, and was true until quite recently. In those days, people, in effect, said, "Well, this is not what Marx really meant," or "This is not what Lenin really meant, and we have created a kind of bureaucratic dictatorship, a kind of opposite of meritocracy and mediocracy, and this is not what socialism meant, this is not what communism was intended to bring."

And this, to some extent, was, even from a strict regime point of view, philosophically, at any rate, acceptable, although it didn't prevent, of course, the terrible retribution that was always taken against such people.

Now, however, the new phenomenon has come about. People are actually questioning the basic tenets of Marxism. They are arguing that socialism is not likely to work, at least not socialism as Marxist and Leninist thought construed it. They noticed that the standard of living, although it's improved in the Soviet Union, has not improved as fast as it has in some other countries which never had the benefit of Marxism behind them — this country, for instance, or

Sweden, or countries like that, which, in many respects, are in advance of the Soviet Union, even in the provision of welfare services. This is particularly true of Scandinavia and, to some extent, of Great Britain.

And so the basic tenets of the State philosophy are being questioned, and this, in itself, is a worrying thing.

Recently there have been a number of interesting cases, such as that of the biologist, Medvedev, who was briefly sent to a mental home. But there are a number of interesting things about his case, one of which was that his fellow scientists passed resolutions and put pressure on the Party, and Medvedev very shortly after was released. This in itself is something new, the Party yielding to pressure of this kind. And, of course, there have been others. There has been Sakharov, whose case is extremely important. He wrote a very influential pamphlet that was smuggled out of the Soviet Union some years ago, on coexistence, in which, again, he wrote entirely outside Marxism. In effect, he argued that the problems of the Soviet Union were the same in kind as those of other countries, including the United States, and that these problems were common to humanity — they had to be faced together — and that the doctrine of permanent hostility, which animates the foreign policy of the Soviet Union, was, in effect, obsolete.

These people are people who are *needed* by the Soviet Union. I stress that. And if dissent spreads in that community, it is bound to have far-reaching consequences. I myself am not optimistic in the short or medium term. I think the apparatus of repression is so strong that it is unlikely that we shall get a change in the immediate future. The only possibility of a change I foresee is in certain circumstances in which the hold over power, the monopoly of power of the ruling Party, may come to be challenged because the system is no longer delivering the goods.

There were signs of this some years ago, when Professor Lieberman started using dirty words, such as “profit,” “consumer interest,” and things of that kind. At that time the Soviet economy was marked by a tremendous stockpiling of shoddy and unnecessary goods, which people were not buying, and so some attention had to be paid to the profit motive within individual factories, and also to the needs of

the consumer, at the receiving end of a system which had tremendous successes in the production of such basic heavy industry products as steel. But, as somebody noticed, you can do a lot of things with steel, but you can't wear it, and you can't eat it.

And so this was the beginning of a challenge from within, in the sense that people in high places in the Soviet Union began to question whether the system itself was going to deliver the goods. The crucial point, it seems to me, is not so much whether the Soviet Union is being economically outstripped, because if the newest prediction or forecast, presented at the Twenty-fourth Party Congress has any meaning, then certainly the challenge from the Soviet Union is not a thing to be ignored, even in economic terms. But the really important thing is whether there is going to be a growing gap in military technology. For some years, at the time of the Cuba crisis in 1962, and from that point onwards, there was, indeed, a gap in military technology between the Soviet Union and the United States. That gap appears to have been closed. And so I don't think the regime is threatened at all in the immediate future. But if at any future stage the gap were to reappear, and the armed forces, in particular, could argue that the monopoly of power of the ruling Party was no longer justified because the system was enabling the United States and its allies to outdistance the Soviet Union, in terms of defense, then, at such a stage, the internal security of the regime would, I believe, be threatened. But we are not yet in sight of that.

Now, that is, briefly, as I see it, the nature of the regime and the nature of its internal problems.

To turn to the nature of its challenge. To some extent it is inherent in the things that I've been describing, but it is important to realize that the Soviet Union is now in a phase of full forward-looking expansion in the foreign policy domain; and that this represents a change of emphasis. Under Khrushchev there was, indeed, a forward-looking policy, but only until the Caribbean crisis of October, 1962. Thereafter Khrushchev, to some extent, soft-pedaled the whole business of the forward policy. There are a number of instances of that.

For example, in Laos, the Russians had got themselves rather deeply involved because they had responded to an



appeal for military aircraft, from the neutralist Prime Minister, Prince Souvanna Phouma, at a time when the neutralists, under Captain Kong Lae, were in alliance with the communist forces of the Pathet Lao — which, of course, are directly controlled by North Vietnam. But after the debacle of 1962, Khrushchev showed every sign of wishing to pull out of Laos. Now, there was a contributory factor there which should be mentioned very briefly, and that is that the planes which had been sent to help the neutralists and their communist friends were being used to bomb the communist forces, because the neutralists had split with them; and Khrushchev took a dim view of this. And Mr. R. A. Butler — now Lord Butler — who at that stage was, very briefly, Britain's Foreign Secretary, visited Moscow and talked over Indochina with Khrushchev, because the British and the Russians are Co-Chairmen of the Geneva Conferences on Indochina — the one of 1954, which brought the Indochina War to an end, and the one of 1961-62, which was supposed to have settled the fate of Laos; and Khrushchev said to him, in effect, "If you want to go and hang yourselves on that meat hook, go ahead, but we're getting out."

Now, this is just an indication, among others; and we do know that Khrushchev and Mao, who were already not on very good terms, really fell out at this period, because the Chinese reckoned that the Russians were letting them down. However, Khrushchev was overthrown in October, 1964, two years later. And from that moment, there's been a resumption of the expansive and aggressive foreign policy of the Soviet Union. For instance, Khrushchev had kept the Soviet Union out of the Indochina War; and it was not until November, 1964, a month after the overthrow of Khrushchev, that the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam — in other words, the political organization that controls the Viet Cong — were allowed to open an office in Moscow. They already had offices in Havana, in Algiers, in Jakarta, in East Germany, and so on. In February, 1965, Mr. Kosygin, the Soviet Premier, went to Hanoi with a very powerful delegation, including people from the defense establishment. And while they were there, the Viet Cong attacked American installations in South Vietnam, and the great escalation began. But the Russians were — and this is the important part — already committed to providing massive support in modern

armaments for North Vietnam, and that support has gone on ever since. This was after the overthrow of Khrushchev.

About the same time as Khrushchev was overthrown, there was a change in regime in the Sudan; and the Russians were given staging rights for planes sent from Egypt, provided by the Soviet Union, to provide arms for the insurgents fighting in the Congo. This, again, was an example of the forward policy.

There has been the tremendous build-up in Egypt, which, of course, was not initiated by Khrushchev's successors, but has been greatly escalated since Khrushchev was overthrown. There has been the build-up in the Mediterranean, and now we have the new and very significant build-up in the Indian Ocean. At the same time, there is an extremely active Soviet policy in Africa and in Latin America.

In Africa, for instance, insurgents from certain areas—that is, from the Portuguese territories, particularly Angola and Mozambique, from Rhodesia, and from South Africa—that is, all regimes that can be labeled by such choice epithets as neo-colonialist, imperialist, or feudalism—are being trained by the hundreds in Moscow and on the borders of the Crimean and the Black Sea region.

At the same time, they are involved in a forward-looking policy in Latin America, which is an extremely complex one, which I can't analyze in any detail at the moment. But I'll just give you an example. The highly-disciplined Communist Party of Chile has achieved a share of power in the government of Allende. This is, undoubtedly, the result of one of Moscow's policies, which is in line with the policy of the Italian Communist Party—the winning of a share of power and the creation of the local Communist Party as a respectable party of order, which is an alternative government. You saw that—to digress very briefly—in May and June, 1968, in Paris, when rioters almost overthrew the government of General de Gaulle, and the Communist Party, contrary to a lot of popular misconceptions, emerged as the part of order, by means of a general strike, and saved the regime, by not going into an alliance with the students.

And you've got the same kind of phenomenon in Latin America. Following the example of the Allende coalition, in which the communists, as I say, have a share of power, the

Communist Parties in Venezuela, in Brazil, and in Uruguay are denouncing the terrorist excesses of the Tupamaros of Uruguay, and other urban terrorists, and proposing the formation of popular fronts. At the same time, there are grounds for believing that the Russians are, at the same time, encouraging the terrorists, possibly providing them with money, and certainly providing them, in some cases, with training facilities, and, of course, throughout this period, providing financial and economic support to the regime of Fidel Castro in Cuba, which offers extensive training facilities for terrorists from Latin America and also from Africa.

So, on the one hand, the Russians are encouraging local Communist Parties to present themselves as alternative governments, respectable, and worthy of being helped; and, on the other hand, they are encouraging terrorism, because terrorism undermines the regimes. If the regimes fall, the communists then gain their chance of getting to power. And so the paradox is only apparent.

Admiral, I think I've probably used up my allocated time, and I will, therefore, sit down; but if there are any questions, I shall only be too pleased to answer them. Thank you.