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# The Soviet View of the Dissident Problem Since Helsinki

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## The Soviet View of the Dissident Problem Since Helsinki

Central Intelligence Agency  
Directorate of Intelligence

May 1977

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### *Overview*

When the Soviets signed the CSCE accords in August 1975, they took a calculated risk that their acceptance of Basket III would not create serious internal difficulties for them. Since Helsinki, however, several developments have heightened the concern of Soviet authorities about dissent within their society.

- The human rights provisions of Basket III became a rallying point for Soviet dissidents with a wide range of views and concerns, thus raising the specter for the first time in many years of a unified "opposition."
- Unrest in Eastern Europe grew, particularly in Poland, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia, increasing chronic Soviet fears of a spillover into the Soviet Union itself.
- The Eurocommunists, including the once docile French Communist Party, became much more outspoken in their criticism of Soviet repression.
- The new US administration's human rights campaign angered Soviet authorities, who fear being put in the dock this summer at the Belgrade review conference, and heartened Soviet dissidents, who were temporarily emboldened to more vigorous and open protests.
- Since the bad harvest of 1975, food shortages have existed in many places in the Soviet Union. Widespread grumbling and isolated instances of active protest have increased Soviet

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apprehension that economic discontent on a mass level might provide the small group of intellectual dissidents with a popular base. The few instances of violence may have also made Soviet authorities fearful that a "freer movement of ideas and people" could introduce into Soviet society new and more threatening forms of protest, such as terrorism, and could lead to a general erosion of discipline.

Objectively, Soviet dissent does not appear to pose a serious threat to the Soviet system. But Soviet authorities are extremely security minded, and they evidently perceive a greater danger than exists in fact. In recent months the Soviets have approached issues of ideology and social control in an increasingly conservative manner. This conservatism has been manifested in reported Soviet pressure on some East European governments to adopt a tougher line with regard to dissent, in pressure on the Eurocommunists to cease their "carping" about human rights violations in bloc countries, in resistance to Western "interference" in Soviet internal affairs, and in somewhat harsher treatment of dissidents within the Soviet Union.

To a considerable extent, these efforts have been successful. The Soviets have persuaded both the Eurocommunists and Western governments to moderate their criticisms, if only for the time being. East European regimes, although employing differing tactics against dissidents, have tended to close ranks with the Soviet Union in the face of Western criticism--whether emanating from Communists or "capitalists." The Soviets are uneasy about the ability of the Polish regime to keep the lid on popular unrest, but they probably remain reasonably confident that no East European regime will turn "revisionist" to the extent of throwing in its lot with dissident elements, as happened in Czechoslovakia in 1968. Meanwhile, the euphoria with which most Soviet dissidents initially welcomed US public expressions of concern about their plight is fading in the wake of the Vance visit to Moscow, which they had hoped would somehow improve their situation.

Given these successes, it is unlikely that the Soviets will see the need to deal with their dissident problem in more drastic fashion. A renewal of Western criticism, combined with a further increase in internal dissent, could lead to some further ideological tightening, if necessary at the cost of damaging their relations with Western countries. And the Soviets would not hesitate to react to a major explosion in Eastern Europe with military force. Clearly, however, the Soviet leadership has no desire, if indeed it has the power, to reinstitute the Stalinist terror apparatus. Although the

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developments since Helsinki have raised doubts in the minds of some leaders, most Soviet leaders probably retain a fundamental faith in the basic loyalty of the bulk of the Soviet population. Their belief in the superiority and success of their system probably makes them generally confident of their ability to keep dissent within manageable limits by continued carrot-and-stick tactics, without reverting to Draconian measures.

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## The Soviet View of the Dissident Problem Since Helsinki

When the Soviets signed the CSCE accords in August 1975, they took a calculated risk that their acceptance of Basket III would not create serious internal difficulties for them. Since Helsinki, however, several developments have heightened the concern of Soviet authorities about dissent within their society.<sup>1</sup>

### I. The Dissident Problem

#### A. CSCE, a Rallying Point for Soviet Dissidents

First of all, the human rights provisions of Basket III provided a common ground for Soviet dissidents with a wide range of views and concerns, thus raising the specter for the first time in many years of a unified "opposition." A basic weakness of Soviet intellectual dissent, especially in the last few years, has been its lack of unity, both in an organizational and in a programmatic sense. Most Soviet intellectual dissidents share a belief in "human rights," but this fundamental commitment has often been inadequately articulated, and overshadowed by the substantial differences existing between dissidents. In addition, most religious and national minorities have tended to define their goals narrowly, failing to relate them to the all-union struggle for civil liberties. CSCE stimulated cooperation among many of these groups.

The most important dissident group to emerge in the Soviet Union since Helsinki, the "Public Group Furthering the Implementation of the Helsinki Agreement in the USSR," exemplified the new tendency to draw together. This group, often called the "Orlov group" after its leading figure, physicist Yury Orlov, was set up in Moscow in May 1976 for the express purpose of monitoring Soviet compliance with the Helsinki Accords. During the last year, branches of the Orlov group were set up in the Ukraine, Lithuania, Armenia, Georgia, and Leningrad. These branches were tiny—under 10 members each—and the degree of coordination between them is not known, but the emergence of a dissident organization having a network of "cells" throughout the country is unique in recent Soviet history.

More important, the Orlov group, by espousing the causes of a wide variety of Soviet dissidents, established some claim to being the center of a broader protest movement. This unifying function is not entirely new. Sakharov has played a similar role, as has *Khronika*, the chief Soviet *samizdat* journal. But Sakharov is a lone individual, and *Khronika* has

1. The strengths and weaknesses of Soviet dissent are covered in [REDACTED] ORPA memorandum, "The Spectrum of Soviet Dissent," [REDACTED] soon to be published.

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performed a reportorial rather than an organizational function, while the Orlov group established extensive contacts with other protest elements.

Symptomatic of the new coordination among dissident groups was a public appeal on March 16 to President Carter issued by 21 people from three different dissident groups: the Orlov group and Sakharov, whose wife is a member of this group; the Pentecostals, a fundamentalist Christian sect; and the Refuseniks, as Jews denied permission to emigrate are called. Especially noteworthy was the participation of the Refuseniks. Although individual Jews have played a major role in intellectual dissent in the Soviet Union, the Refuseniks have been concerned almost exclusively with the specific issue of Jewish emigration, evidently seeing little advantage in associating their particular cause with a larger one. They have previously not attempted to liberalize the system, but merely to escape it.

Groups seeking to emulate the Jewish example by applying to emigrate from the Soviet Union are becoming particularly important as a reservoir of support for the human rights movement. The Helsinki provisions encouraging free emigration have given impetus to the emigration impulse, as has the movement of Germans from East Germany to West Germany. Ethnic Germans in the Soviet Union appear to be applying to emigrate in ever increasing numbers. Since 1972 the Soviets have allowed over 20,000 Germans to leave the Soviet Union, as part of a policy permitting German emigration for purposes of family reunification. But many of the almost 2 million Germans who lack family ties to West Germany, and thus are not eligible to emigrate, also want to leave. In March, for example, a group of ethnic Germans denied permission to emigrate staged a demonstration in Red Square. Soviet officials who are grappling on a miniscale with the same problem that East Germany faces on a large scale may share the frustration of an East German official who grumbled recently that "after Helsinki, they think they can go anywhere they like." The Soviets may also be concerned that the emigration fever will spread to other groups. In some cases, whole villages or communities of religious dissenters have sought to emigrate. Most recently, in February 1977 an entire Pentecostal church congregation from Krasnodar Kray came to Moscow and applied for exit permits.

Other religious and ethnic groups have also become more politicized in recent years, and the Orlov group has associated itself with many of their grievances. The group's first formal protest, for example, dealt with the sentencing of Crimean Tatar dissident Mustafa Dzhemilev, in distant Omsk. Dzhemilev had championed the right of his people, who had been deported to Central Asia in 1944, to return to their homeland. The Orlov group



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produced a petition calling for Dzhemilev's release from prison, said to have been signed by as many as 1,600 Crimean Tatars. (Crimean Tatar dissidents have said they hope to have a representative at the Belgrade review conference.) The Orlov group also defended the Evangelical Baptists—who are said to be excited about the prospect of having a “real Baptist” in the White House—and may have endeared themselves to Ukrainian nationalists by pledging to campaign for representation of the Ukrainian republic, an “independent” member of the United Nations, at Belgrade.

Although this incipient support from religious and national minorities in itself suggests a potential for a mass base for human rights activists, the intellectuals remain estranged from the bulk of the working class population. Cooperation between workers and intellectuals is doubtless impeded by the general failure of the intelligentsia to articulate lower class grievances concerning living standards and material welfare. Working class discontent, which has basically economic rather than political objectives, has thus not converged with human rights activism in the Soviet Union.

#### B. Food Shortages and Unrest

Soviet apprehension that political and economic grievances could draw closer together, that Soviet dissent could follow the path of Poland, has evidently grown since the bad harvest of 1975. Although the supply of bread has increased since 1975, shortages of meat and vegetables continue in many places in the Soviet Union. No significant improvement in the food supply is expected until the summer harvest.

Consumerism is not a potent political force in the Soviet Union, as it is in many East European countries, but consumer expectations have risen in recent years. The Soviet population has come to expect a gradual improvement in the standard of living. Recently, an official in Magadan, complaining to Moscow in a private conversation about the food supply in his province, remarked that the people in his area had developed the “habit” of eating an egg a day. The food shortages, aggravated by an inefficient distribution system, have caused widespread grumbling. Over the last year and a half, there have been reports and rumors, most of them unconfirmed, of a number of instances of active unrest and protest.<sup>2</sup>

2. Examples of these rumors and reports:

- (1) A local party meeting at Vologda was disrupted by a demonstration protesting food shortages; the militia dispersed the demonstrators.
- (2) Workers in Krasnomaisky refused to work until they were supplied with meat.
- (3) A one-day strike of 10,000 workers protesting food shortages took place at a tire plant in Bobruysk.
- (4) There is some reason to suspect that labor unrest may have occurred in Murmansk.
- (5) A Tallin warehouse containing meat scheduled for shipment elsewhere in the Soviet Union was burned.
- (6) Work stoppages to protest food shortages occurred in Tula.
- (7) Dock workers in Riga organized a strike to protest meat shortages.
- (8) “Serious disturbances” took place in Leningrad factories in protest of the meat shortage.

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The only serious incident of violent sabotage in protest of the food shortages that we *know* took place occurred in Moscow in January, when three homemade bombs exploded on the same day, the most damaging one at a metro station. The perpetrators were reportedly young men from Tula, who came to Moscow to buy food on the weekend, and found the food stores closed. Last year, many Moscow food outlets began closing on Sunday, presumably to prevent nonresidents from shopping in Moscow on their day off.

A few other violent incidents not necessarily related to economic conditions have occurred, especially in the turbulent republic of Georgia. Notably, there have reportedly been several assassination attempts on Shevardnadze, the head of the Georgian Communist Party, and in April 1976 a bomb exploded in the Georgian Council of Ministers building. The violence in Georgia is probably related, at least in part, to Shevardnadze's campaign against crime and corruption, but nationalist passion against Russification policies runs high in Georgia, and the possibility of a political motivation behind some of the violence and turmoil in that republic certainly cannot be excluded.

The fact that the leaders have thus far not taken emergency measures available to them to alleviate the food shortages—such as purchasing large quantities of meat abroad—suggests that they have considered the food situation manageable. Clearly, however, they have been worried about the mood in the country.

[REDACTED]

official to watch the temper of the people closely. Brezhnev's trip to Tula, where he made a speech in January, was reportedly prompted by workers' active dissatisfaction with the lack of goods.

[REDACTED]

The scattered instances of violence which have occurred have not been connected with dissident activities, and the authorities probably know this.

[REDACTED] And the authorities reportedly decided that no dissidents were involved in the metro bombing.

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The dissidents, for their part, have wholeheartedly disavowed any connection with violent activities, believing that they are vulnerable as potential scapegoats. Thus, Sakharov charged Soviet authorities with bombing the Moscow metro station as a provocation, rather dramatically comparing the incident to the Reichstag fire of 1933. Jewish dissidents in Moscow have expressed shock and revulsion at the violent actions of Jewish extremists in New York City. They believe that such actions can only hurt their position.

Nevertheless, some reporting suggests that the Soviet leadership may not always distinguish clearly between different sorts of criticism. Some Soviet officials may vaguely sense some connection between intellectual dissent and popular discontent.

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**C. Morale Problems in the Military**

Official apprehension that a general erosion of discipline could take place in Soviet society may also be fed by continuing morale problems in the Soviet armed forces.<sup>3</sup> Two recent incidents dramatized these problems: the mutiny and attempted escape to Sweden in November 1975 of a crew aboard a ship in the Baltic fleet; and the defection to Japan of MIG pilot Belenko last September. [REDACTED] "mockery and distortion of disciplinary practices" is pervasive in the military. Alcoholism, desertion, and suicide are serious problems, and are recognized as such by high-level officials.

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[REDACTED] In an effort to combat morale and discipline problems, Defense Minister Ustinov has placed greater emphasis on political and ideological indoctrination in the military.

**D. Under Attack from the Eurocommunists**

After Helsinki the Eurocommunists, including the once docile French Communist Party, became much more outspoken in their criticism of Soviet internal policies.<sup>4</sup> The Spanish party has gone furthest, but the French and Italian parties—because of their influence and their greater chance of coming to power—pose the more serious problem for the Soviets. From the Soviet perspective, the chief importance of Eurocommunism is not that it has

- 3. [REDACTED]
- 4. [REDACTED]

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diminished Soviet influence in West European Communist parties, but that it offers a Marxist alternative to the Soviet model in Eastern Europe, and perhaps ultimately within the Soviet Union itself. Moscow has also been upset by Eurocommunist support to dissidents in Eastern Europe.

Over the last several years, electoral considerations have increased the desire, and greater domestic sources of financing have increased the ability, of the French and Italian parties to assert their independence from Moscow and their acceptance of Western political traditions. Specific events in 1975 gave impetus to this trend. The antidemocratic actions of the pro-Soviet Portuguese Communist Party impelled the Eurocommunists to shore up their credibility by putting new stress on their own commitment to political freedom and their patriotism.

Since late 1975 the Italian Communist Party has permitted its press to reprint items critical of the Soviet Union that had previously appeared in non-Communist newspapers. At the French Communist Party Congress in February 1976, the French renounced two doctrines that once served as articles of faith for the international Communist movement: "proletarian internationalism" (which the Soviets have taken to imply Soviet domination) and "dictatorship of the proletariat" (one-party rule). Since that time the two parties have been more critical of the Soviet Union than at any time since the aftermath of the invasion of Czechoslovakia.

Their denunciations reached a peak in January of this year, when both Marchais and Berlinguer spoke out strongly against human rights violations in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Particularly embarrassing to the Soviets was an unprecedented visit in late January of an Italian Communist delegation to dissident Marxist Roy Medvedev in Moscow. The Italians presented Medvedev with an Italian edition of one of his books and reportedly asked him to write articles for an Italian party historical journal.

#### E. Unrest in Eastern Europe

The growth of unrest in Eastern Europe,<sup>5</sup> especially in Poland, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia has increased chronic Soviet fears of a spillover into the Soviet Union itself. The Polish situation, in particular, has many of the earmarks of a "revolutionary situation:" a fragile economy and a regime whose sufferance depends on its ability to satisfy growing consumer demands, a military which might not prove reliable in a domestic crisis, a generally hostile population, and, most important, an assertive working class whose interests are defended by two other elements—the Church and the intellectuals.

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5. [REDACTED]

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If the lid should blow in Poland, the Soviets would have good cause to expect repercussions elsewhere in the bloc. CSCE had a catalytic effect on East European dissent, which has become a movement cutting across national borders. The Czechoslovak dissident cause, Charter 77, which has issued a manifesto on human rights signed by several hundred Czechoslovak intellectuals, has to some extent served as a pegpoint for protest in other countries, including the Soviet Union itself. Sixty-two Soviet dissidents signed a statement supporting the Chartists in early March.

In addition, according to a recent report dissidents in several East European countries, including the Soviet Union, are evidently coordinating their activities to a limited degree.<sup>6</sup> Contacts between Polish and Soviet dissidents date from the early 1960s, and emissaries from Poland are now being sent periodically to Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Vilnius, and Kaunas to coordinate actions and to supply Soviet dissidents with Western literature. The same report indicates that Lithuanian and Polish Catholic students also maintain contacts with each other, as do Polish Catholics and Ukrainian Uniates ("Byzantine Catholics," who recognize the authority of the Pope in Rome, and are closely associated with Ukrainian national feeling). Leading Polish clergymen, including the head of the Polish Catholic church, are reportedly sympathetic to Ukrainian Uniate congregations.

Soviet authorities have always been alert to the danger of a political "virus" from Eastern Europe spreading into the polyglot borderlands of the Soviet Union. The intermingling of nationalities in some of these areas, as well as their geographic proximity to Eastern Europe, make them more susceptible to influences from that quarter. In 1968 sympathy for the Czechoslovaks created enough unrest in the Ukraine to make party officials there jittery. There is evidence that the Soviet leadership's familiarity with Ukrainian conditions and its fear of a domino-effect were factors in the decision to invade Czechoslovakia.

#### F. The US Human Rights Initiative

A final reason for heightened Soviet concern about the dissident problem was the new US administration's human rights "campaign." Official US protests about Soviet repression, and especially the personal involvement of President Carter in public appeals on behalf of Soviet dissidents, angered Soviet authorities, who already feared being put in the dock this summer at the Belgrade review conference. At the same time, the US human rights

6. One of the dissidents mentioned in this report as being involved in coordination with dissidents in other countries is East German Professor Havemann, who as early as 1964 evidently had close contacts with leading academics in the Soviet Union, including Bonifat Kedrov, until recently chairman of the Soviet Institute of Philosophy.

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offensive heartened Soviet dissidents, and temporarily emboldened them to make more vigorous protests and to channel their appeals directly to the US administration.

## II. The Soviet Response

In the face of these related pressures, the Soviets mounted a counteroffensive on all fronts. In recent months the Soviet approach to issues of ideology and social control has been increasingly conservative. This conservatism has been manifested in reported pressure on some East European governments to adopt a tougher line with regard to dissent, in pressure on the Eurocommunists to cease their "carping" about human rights violations in bloc countries, in bitter criticism of Western "interference" in Soviet internal affairs, and in somewhat harsher treatment of dissidents within the Soviet Union.

### A. In Eastern Europe

Over the last six months, the Soviets have been less interested in imposing a uniform policy toward dissent on all the East European regimes than in insisting that these regimes somehow come to grips with the problem on their own. Increasingly, however, their mounting concern over unrest in Eastern Europe has reportedly been translated into pressure on the more moderate regimes to take a harder line toward dissidents. Of the regimes which have employed a relatively moderate approach, Poland is more vulnerable to pressure than Hungary, since no serious unrest exists in Hungary.

Soviet concern over the dissident problem was reportedly manifest at the Warsaw Pact summit in late November in Bucharest. At this meeting Hungarian party chief Kadar and East German party head Honecker argued about how best to handle dissent. Consistent with their past policies, Honecker argued for a tougher policy, while Kadar supported a softer approach. The Soviets may have preferred to take a back seat, letting Honecker make the case for harsher tactics, but the Soviet position during this period is not clear. Kadar made a trip to Moscow in December, and reportedly won Brezhnev's approval for preservation of a moderate line.

At the mid-December meeting of Warsaw Pact ideological officials in Sofia, the participants again disagreed, not only about policy toward dissidents, but also about what measures should be taken against elements sympathetic to Eurocommunist ideas within East European parties. The Soviets reportedly lined up with the East Germans, Czechoslovaks, and Bulgarians against the Hungarians, while the Poles stood somewhere between the two extremes.

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As late as February, however, the Soviets were still thrashing about in search of a satisfactory approach. In that month CPSU Central Committee Secretary Kapitonov traveled to Prague, where he reportedly criticized the Czechoslovaks on two counts: for not moving soon enough against the Chartists to nip the movement in the bud; and for then overreacting to the Chartist problem with heavyhanded repression, thereby stirring up more dissent. Husak must have felt that he was "damned if he did, and damned if he didn't." The impression conveyed is that Moscow expected the Czechoslovaks to solve their problems but that the Soviets themselves hardly knew what sort of action was required.

At least by early March, when East European ideology secretaries met again in Sofia, it appears that the Soviets decided to come down in favor of a tough approach. They dispatched three Central Committee secretaries—Ponomarev, Zimyanin, and Katushev—to this meeting, an indication of the importance they attached to it. Most reporting indicates that the Soviets pressed harder than previously for a policy of firm repression. Although the Hungarians once again defended their more flexible line, the Soviets reportedly argued for tough action. The Poles, who also were not enthusiastic about implementing a crackdown, have reportedly been pressed by both the Soviets and the Czechoslovaks since the conference.

#### B. The Eurocommunists

In an effort to bring the Eurocommunists to heel, the Soviets have since January used every lever available to them, including the "power of the purse," and the threat of compromising some West European parties by revealing details of their past collaboration with Moscow. The Soviets have even raised the possibility of attempting to infiltrate and split recalcitrant parties.

It is possible that some Soviet leaders have reached the end of their patience with the Eurocommunists, and have decided that for their own interests in Eastern Europe it is more desirable to have small loyal parties in Western Europe than large rebellious ones. Ponomarev in early February, referring to Berlinguer as a "monstrous opportunist," reportedly stated that it would be "worthless" for the PCI to come to power by means of an election. Ponomarev indicated that he regarded the Eurocommunists as the main prop for East European dissidents, and believed their ideas were infecting the entire Communist movement.

At the Sofia meeting in December, the Soviets are reported to have expressed the opinion that although the influence of the Eurocommunists was growing, this influence was of questionable value because the

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Eurocommunists had renounced the principle of the "dictatorship of the proletariat." The Soviets also apparently raised the possibility of attempting to split some West European parties, and they may have made good their threat. Whether or not the Soviets were directly involved, one Western party has already divided. In late February the doctrinaire faction of the Swedish Communist Party formed a new pro-Soviet party; the split came over the issue of human rights. Finnish Communist Party leaders have long suspected that Moscow is providing stronger backing to the Stalinist wing of their party.

The Soviets also have tried to influence the Eurocommunists by peer pressure. In early January, at a secret meeting in Moscow of pro-Soviet West European Communist parties, Suslov reportedly rallied the faithful to the banner of "proletarian internationalism," and warned them against being seduced by Eurocommunist ideas. The Soviets have relied heavily on the loyal Austrian Communist Party to make representations for them, and sent Cunhal of Portugal on a tour of European capitals to drum up support for their human rights stand. They even employed the head of the Uruguay Communist Party, reportedly to remind the Eurocommunists that they were only one portion of a larger, international movement centered in Moscow.

Moscow also employed more direct pressure, especially on the Italian Communist Party. A Soviet delegation to Italy in January reportedly threatened to expose publicly past support of the Italian party for Soviet activities, which could prove embarrassing to the party, if the Italians did not cut back their criticism of Soviet internal policies. Having brandished the stick, the Soviets produced the carrot. Later in January they reportedly offered generous funding to an Italian party delegation to Moscow, provided the Italians would tone down their criticism. At this meeting Ponomarev threatened the Italian delegation with a public condemnation, vowing that "if you don't stop, we will attack you frontally." Reportedly, the Soviets also threatened to cut off funding of the Danish Communist Party if it took a "foolish" position on the human rights issue. The Danes were reminded bluntly that without Soviet support, they would amount to "zero."

### C. The US

Meanwhile, the Soviets reacted to US public efforts to intercede on behalf of beleaguered Soviet dissidents in an uncompromising manner, not only by public denunciations of US "interference" in Soviet internal affairs, but also by taking actions against some of the dissidents specifically mentioned in US public protests.

✓ Although the Soviets <sup>may not</sup> have been ~~not~~ as alarmed and angry as their public pronouncements made them appear, they were clearly taken aback and at

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least initially confused by the new US administration's concentration on the human rights issue. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] the intensity with which the US administration raised the human rights issue had surprised and disturbed the Soviet leadership. KGB chief Andropov reportedly told his [REDACTED] counterpart that the leadership found President Carter's statements on the issue "bewildering."

There was also a search for ulterior motives behind the US attention to the human rights theme. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Brezhnev and other leaders had "closed minds" about the human rights controversy. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Some Soviet officials chalked up the human rights "campaign" to President Carter's "inexperience," failure to recognize the structural limits to the flexibility of the Soviet system, and "misunderstanding" of the differing historical experiences of the Russian and American people. Others claimed to see the "campaign" as an effort by the President to improve his domestic political position, or a tactical move to lower Soviet prestige in the eyes of the world.

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Still others may have believed their own propaganda, and regarded the human rights offensive as a deliberate effort at subversion by the US. This was one view put out by Soviet officials in [REDACTED] conversations with Western and East European officials. A staff member [REDACTED] told a [REDACTED] in late February that some Soviet leaders viewed the President's letter to Sakharov as a fundamental effort to undermine the Soviet system. Hungarian party officials indicated to [REDACTED] that the human rights issue was seen by the Soviets as more damaging to Soviet-US relations than the Vietnam war had been, because "then you were bombing Hanoi, but now you are bombing Moscow."

The charge of subversion was also adopted by Soviet propagandists. On March 4 *Izvestia* attacked two former US embassy officers and one current officer (all of them Jewish). On the basis of their contacts with Jewish dissidents in Moscow, *Izvestia* charged these officers with engaging in espionage. In February several Jewish dissidents were arrested while entering the US embassy with embassy officers, whose company had previously

afforded them protection. In January, for the first time since 1970, a US newsman was expelled from the Soviet Union, probably because of his contacts with dissidents. Meanwhile, the major Leningrad daily implied that the contacts of the West German consul general with dissidents also constituted involvement in espionage. In this way, the Soviets attempted to limit the access of Westerners in the Soviet Union to the dissident community.

#### D. Internal Repression

The current campaign against dissent, however, predates the change in US administrations. It had its origin in the Soviet desire to clean house and silence the dissidents before the Belgrade review conference was convened. Indeed, some dissidents have charged that the climate in the Soviet Union worsened immediately after, and as a direct result of, the signing of the Helsinki Accords. Bukovsky, among others, charged that conditions in his prison "tangibly worsened" after Helsinki. Particularly ominous have been suggestions that violence and threats of violence against dissidents have increased since Helsinki. There have been several mysterious "accidental" deaths, and more than the usual number of beatings and anonymous death threats.

The US administration's statements defending Soviet dissidents apparently did lead to an acceleration of the crackdown. Since the turn of the year, the Soviets have moved to cripple the Orlov group and its regional subgroups, arresting leading members, encouraging others to emigrate, harassing or threatening others.

✓ In addition, the Soviets have recently made efforts to link the dissidents with espionage activities. Early ~~last~~<sup>last</sup> month the mother of recently arrested Jewish dissident Shcharansky was told by prison officials that her son "might" be tried for treason. The *Izvestia* article which accused US embassy officers of engaging in espionage made similar charges against several Jewish dissidents on the basis of their contacts with US officials. And in early March, in a demarche to Ambassador Toon, First Deputy Foreign Minister Korniyenko used unusually threatening language against Sakharov, denouncing him as a "renegade," and an "enemy of the state." Almost certainly, the use of such language is merely a scare tactic. Although several dissidents were questioned as to their whereabouts on the day of the metro bombing, a US newsman was unofficially told that the authorities did not intend to charge dissidents with this act. Not since Stalin has an intellectual dissident been tried for treason.

Even during the last few months, the Soviets have made a few conciliatory gestures. Last month Jewish dissident Shtern was released from

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prison before his term was up, and Leningrad dissident Borisov was released from a psychiatric hospital. The authorities continue to allow some dissidents to emigrate, and to try to win over those on the fringes of the dissident movement. Recently they have attempted to co-opt "unofficial" artists into the system by relaxing restrictions on unconventional art and by offering some of the artists membership in official artists' unions. This month a controversial symbolist play, suppressed for over a decade, was allowed to open in a Moscow theater.

### III. A Current Assessment

To a considerable extent, Soviet attempts to silence internal and external critics have paid off. The Eurocommunists have toned down their criticism, if only for the time being. Italian Communist Party Secretary Cervetti, who traveled to Moscow in late January reportedly promised the Soviets that the Italian party's criticism of East European violations of human rights "would not go too far," agreed to stop preparation of a party critique of East European repression, and assured the Soviets that Berlinguer would try to prevent Marchais and Carrillo from using the coming "summit" between the three Eurocommunist leaders as a platform to criticize the CPSU. At the Madrid summit in early March the three Eurocommunist leaders issued a tepid communique endorsing the "full application" of the Helsinki Accords without mentioning the Soviet Union or other East European countries. The Eurocommunists will continue to be a thorn in Moscow's side, but for the moment they have succumbed to Soviet pressure and have retreated.

The US, even before the Vance visit, began to make its statements on human rights less pointed. The Soviets must also be pleased that, generally speaking, West European governments have not enthusiastically supported this aspect of US diplomacy. Reportedly, the Soviets would have regarded the human rights controversy much more seriously had West European governments unequivocally followed Washington's lead.

Even the more independent East European regimes have, like the Soviet Union, firmly rebutted Western criticism—whether emanating from Communists or capitalists. Support for Eurocommunism in Yugoslavia and Romania is based essentially on a desire for independence from the Soviet Union, not on a commitment to human rights. Neither Tito nor Ceausescu is likely to accept Western Communists' tutelage in this area. The Yugoslavs and Romanians are willing to be in the same camp with the Soviets in pursuing a firm policy against dissidents when the only alternative is internal instability.

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In Eastern Europe the Soviets probably continue to find it difficult to impose a uniform tough policy. Were it not for their desire to enforce a crackdown elsewhere in Eastern Europe, Kadar's continued moderation would probably not disturb them, since Hungary has no major dissident problem. But making an exception in the case of Hungary weakens the Soviet case for a repressive policy in Poland; the Soviets remain uneasy about Gierek's ability to keep the lid on popular unrest. Nevertheless, they perhaps console themselves that neither Poland, Czechoslovakia, or East Germany—the three countries where unrest has been greatest—has a government that is disloyal to the Soviets or seriously infected with Eurocommunist ideas. They probably remain reasonably confident that no East European regime will turn "revisionist" to the extent of succumbing to the pressures of dissident elements, as happened in Czechoslovakia in 1968.

Meanwhile, the euphoria with which most Soviet dissidents initially welcomed US public expressions of concern about their plight is fading in the wake of the Vance visit to Moscow. Even earlier, Roy Medvedev had reportedly expressed the view that President Carter's statements were harming rather than helping the dissidents, a criticism which provoked Sakharov to call Medvedev a "traitor." Medvedev, however, had always disagreed with Sakharov about the value of nonsocialist Western support. More indicative of the changing mood was a statement Aleksandr Ginsburg's wife made to US embassy officers before Vance arrived. While she applauded the US stand on human rights, she said that she now felt that only "quiet diplomacy" could bring Soviet authorities to release her husband. Since Vance's departure, other Soviet dissidents have been extremely depressed. They had expected much from the visit, believing that it "just must" improve their situation.

The Soviets originally believed that they could afford to permit a greater degree of contact between their citizens and the outside world, or they would never have entered into the Helsinki agreement, allowed greater contact between East and West Germany, or stopped jamming some Western radio broadcasts to the Soviet Union in 1973. The events of the past year and a half, however, have given the Soviets pause, and reason to reexamine their policies. Some leaders have probably decided that acquiescence on Basket III was a mistake. [REDACTED] the Soviet government misjudged the reactions of its own citizens and of Eastern Europe to Helsinki.

#### Conclusions

Objectively, Soviet dissent does not appear to pose a serious threat to the Soviet system, but Soviet officials may perceive a greater danger than

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exists in fact. Both Russian history and Leninist ideology impel them to exaggerate the potential importance of opposing groups, however small. They have always been preoccupied with problems of control.

It is not merely intellectual dissent that disturbs the Soviets. They fear that the "freer movement of people and ideas" which they conceded on paper at Helsinki, and which to a certain extent the circumstances of a modern technological world force upon them, will open their society to a whole host of ideas and influences from the West that are, in their view, not only politically subversive but socially disruptive and morally unhealthy. Identifying Western concepts of liberty with license, they are apprehensive that extensive contact with the "decadent" West will expose the Soviet people not only to alien political ideas but also to crime, terrorism, pornography, and drugs, which could combine to produce a general breakdown of order and discipline. To the extent that they are concerned about the stagnation of their economy, the Soviets may also fear that consumer dissatisfaction will become a more serious political problem in future years.

Differences exist within the leadership as to how best to handle dissent. Ironically, there is some reason to suspect that KGB chief Andropov is less inclined to move in the direction of more repression. Senior party secretary Suslov, the chief party ideologist, and Ponomarev, head of the Central Committee International Department, favor a harder ideological line at home.

The importance the leadership as a whole attaches to dissent can be seen by the fact that decisions about individual dissidents are sometimes made at the Politburo level. Over the last few years Politburo members have reportedly made the decisions on such matters as [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] conductor Rostropovich's application for a passport extension, and artist Neizvestny's application to emigrate.

Soviet leaders probably realize they cannot eradicate dissent altogether. They could round up several dozen of the more visible dissidents and forcibly deport them, but such a "surgical strike" would only temporarily cripple the dissident movement. Dissent has become endemic to Soviet society; new dissidents would appear to replace those who had departed. Indeed, except for Sakharov, the most important individual involved in dissent since Helsinki—Orlov—is a man who was unknown to the West two years ago. In any event, campaigns of repression are difficult to sustain for long periods, since they run the danger of aggravating the problem they were

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intended to solve. Thus, the Soviets have not attempted to "solve" their dissident problem, but merely to control it through a combination of coercive and conciliatory measures.

In view of their recent successes, it is unlikely that the Soviets will see the need to deal with the dissident problem in the Soviet Union in more drastic fashion. A renewal of Western criticism, combined with a further increase in internal dissent, could lead to some further ideological tightening and to further restrictions on contacts between Westerners and Soviet citizens, if necessary at the cost of damaging relations with Western countries. The Soviets could, for example, begin jamming Western broadcasts again, prohibit dissident meetings with Western newsmen and diplomats altogether, and prevent correspondence and telephone calls from reaching dissidents.

Clearly, however, the Soviet leadership has no desire, if indeed it has the power, to move in the direction of reinstating the Stalinist terror apparatus. The bureaucracy itself suffered greatly in the past from arbitrary and irregular proceedings, and feels more secure with the modicum of legality which now exists. Probably the most important restraint on Soviet behavior toward dissidents is the world view of Soviet leaders themselves. Although the developments since Helsinki have raised doubts about the popular mood in the minds of some leaders, most Soviet leaders probably retain a fundamental faith that their policies are generally accepted by the bulk of the Soviet population. Their belief in the superiority and success of their system probably makes them generally confident of their ability to keep dissent within manageable limits by continued carrot-and-stick tactics, without a reversion to Draconian measures.

The Soviet appraisal of the dissident problem in Eastern Europe is much more pessimistic. Last winter some Soviet leaders were probably genuinely alarmed that post-Helsinki conditions were creating an unstable situation there, especially in Poland, where the climate is still tense. Should a major explosion yet occur in Eastern Europe, the Soviets would not hesitate to respond with military force, accompanied by harsh prophylactic measures against dissidents within the Soviet Union itself.

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