

THE PRESENT DANGER

by Maurice Tugwell

Prospects internationally are not reassuring. 1980 may mark a general downturn in world stability and, therefore, for hopes of peace. Two currents are running fast, threatening to carry us from our moorings. One is the deterioration of east-west relations in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan; another is that certain states have adopted terrorist methods of the sort hitherto restricted to small, outlawed groups. The first current is the one most likely to hurl us onto the rocks, but the second may distract and weaken us, so that we cannot cope with the greater danger.

Détente was, and may again become, a means of confining the conflict between, on the one hand, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and, on the other, all those countries opposed to the notion of Soviet world domination, within certain vaguely defined but immensely important bounds. The essence of the arrangement is the avoidance of mutual destruction, which neither super-power accepts as rational. And since "conventional" warfare between these powers could so easily escalate into full-scale nuclear war, this too is to be avoided. The Soviets were always absolutely frank about their interpretation of détente. Their leader, Mr. Brezhnev, told the party congress in Moscow in February, 1976:

"Détente does not in the slightest degree abolish. . . or change the laws of the class struggle. . . We do not conceal that we see in détente the way towards the creation of more favourable conditions for peaceful Socialist and Communist construction."

The reader should understand that by "class struggle", the Soviets mean "the struggle for world domination by the USSR". To the leaders of the Soviet Communist Party, détente is a means towards the same end that has dominated Marxist-Leninist thinking since the 1917 revolution. It allows Russia to benefit by western economic and technical assistance while continuing to work towards the defeat of the west. This defeat is to be accomplished by means short of full-scale war, means which they call détente, but which ought to be recognised as "low intensity conflict".

The Soviets have sought to protect this policy by a "ratchet" device. This useful technique is applied to many communist operations — it is the means by which, once a country, or a trade union, or an individual has been won over to Marxist-Leninism, it is made virtually impossible for the process to be reversed. In the case of détente, the ratchet principle uses the climate of opinion created in the West by an apparent thaw in east-west relations to disarm us, while at the same time the USSR redoubles her efforts in strategic and conventional weaponry. The ratchet should engage the moment a clear superiority has been achieved, since it will no longer be possible for the West to return to a policy of confrontation. Confined to non-military means, the western powers would in

these circumstances succumb to a mixture of political coercion, propaganda, economic and resource warfare, and internal subversion. By the Fall of 1979, the policy had gone far enough to be worrying. However, in spite of a full-scale Soviet diplomatic and propaganda offensive,² the NATO Alliance in December 1979 agreed to accept a new range of theatre nuclear weapons³ which would go some way towards closing the gap between the West's declining capacity and the much enhanced power of the Warsaw Pact. By this decision, NATO caused the Soviet ratchet to slip, so that it could not for the time-being engage. The West had not yet learnt how to conduct the low intensity conflict called *détente*, but they had begun to appreciate the danger of being trapped in unfamiliar terrain.

Still, the advantage in military power already accumulated by the USSR⁴ (the new western weapons will not be in site for at least another three years) allowed the Politburo to embark on a course of action which would almost certainly have been unthinkable ten years ago, when America still enjoyed strategic superiority. The invasion of Afghanistan may have been inspired primarily for defensive reasons, with China as a key factor, and to prevent the spread of fundamentalist Islamic fervour from Iran and Afghanistan into the neighbouring Soviet Central Asian republics.⁵ However, two other factors were doubtless important to Soviet policy-makers: first, the preservation of the "Brezhnev doctrine", which commits the Soviet Union to saving any Marxist-Leninist government from being overthrown — the ratchet; second, the temptation to acquire a country for generations coveted by Russian imperialists, Tzarist and communist alike.⁶ Whatever their motives, the Soviets undoubtedly felt confident that their action would not create a severe risk of nuclear war, and, since no western power possessed the means or the will to challenge them in that geographic area, the danger of the conflict spreading by degrees was also small. Events proved them right.

Afghanistan is discussed in David Charters' article below. The invasion has shaken the West. Cheerful assurances offered by commentators in January, that the invasion was a terrible mistake on Russia's part, inevitably leading them into a new Vietnam, will however only turn out to be accurate if the West makes them so. Some steps have been taken in the right direction, particularly over wheat, technology and the Olympics, but overall strategy and agreement within the alliance seem to be missing. This last issue is one of two ways by which the Soviets could end up as winners: the strain on the western alliance may leave us weakened, whereas the Soviet challenge requires that we emerge strengthened. The other is less obvious. In spite of the chorus of condemnation, UN resolutions and Islamic rhetoric that followed the invasion, the real and lasting psychological reaction to the event on the part of the uncommitted and the *vulnerable nations of the Middle East* may be a *resigned mixture of fear of the Soviets and the respect that springs from it*. "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em" expresses in commonplace terms the thought that may be in the minds of rational leaders in countries such as Pakistan and Turkey. This second danger can only be overcome by prompt but well thought out actions on the part of the West to redress the imbalance of military power, not just in Europe but generally, and in particular to improve our conventional capability. Although the US will be the main actor, it is time that nations such as Japan shared the burden, and it is also necessary for countries like the German Federal Republic and

Canada to expand their politico-military horizons to include the Middle and Far East. Being without defensive structures beyond the NATO boundaries, western responses are weak and ill-coordinated and this weakness increases the danger of irrational response leading possibly to war.

Coping with these major problems is made difficult by the second current pulling at the West — terrorism unleashed or encouraged by one state against another. The most visible instance is Iran's holding of American hostages; however, Iraq's likely implication in the London embassy siege, Libya's campaign of assassination,⁷ and Cuba's training and deployment of terrorists throughout the Caribbean and Latin America⁸ are further examples. Our international responses to terrorism have in the past been slow to emerge and limited in effectiveness by Third World reluctance to agree to necessary measures. The United Nations has not proved a particularly effective agency of control because too many of its members are ambivalent about or frankly supportive of terrorism.⁹ If the new trend of state terrorism directed at other states continues, it will be important that the likely target nations — the western alliance — make haste to coordinate their responses. Not all terrorism, whether state or group inspired, can be strictly classified as belonging to the conflict of détente, but since it is the liberal societies which are usually the victims of this persecution, the Soviet Union and other totalitarian states are automatically the beneficiaries. Our attention is diverted and our interests are divided: the result, as shown by the Iranian hostage-taking, can be a weak response to the major threat posed by the Soviet Union.

The threat of global war increases as our ability to cope with world events by rational means diminishes. Our current weakness springs from a threatened imbalance in nuclear and conventional power, particularly the latter, combined with our inability and apparent reluctance to understand the meaning of détente and to operate effectively at the low-intensity end of the spectrum of conflict. Neither can be corrected by a divided alliance. An arrangement for western exchange of information, joint analysis and discussion, and policy development and coordination on a global scale is urgently needed. The West can never match the Soviet Union as a monolith: however, by planning ahead and developing a philosophy and a policy, it could outmatch the Communist Party of the USSR by the diversity, originality and untrammelled qualities of its thought and determination. For the smaller nations of the alliance the need for this coordination is especially great since, without it, they may become pawns in a game over which they have no control, but from which there is no escape.

Canada's diplomatic skills saved the Western Alliance in 1956 after the Anglo-French Suez adventure had brought it close to collapse. Moreover our geographical situation and cultural heritage equips this nation as interpreter between Europe and the United States. With these assets, Canada should surely cease contemplating the national navel and instead grapple with world responsibilities by offering to set up and oversee the type of consultative and policy-making apparatus that the West so urgently requires. If we are to act effectively in such a forum, Canadians have first to understand the nature of the problems confronting them, and this underlines the importance of the article by Dominick Graham which concludes this issue of *Conflict Quarterly*.

FOOTNOTES

1. *Izvestiya* (Moscow, February 25, 1976).
2. See *CIA Study: Soviet Covert Action and Propaganda*. Presented to the Oversight Committee, Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, House of Representatives, 6 February 1980, by the Deputy Director of Operations, CIA.
3. 464 Cruise missiles and 180 US Pershing II ballistic missiles to be based in Western Europe by late 1983.
4. Referred to by analysts as the Soviet "window of opportunity" or as the West's "present danger".
5. Estimates of the number of Muslims in the USSR vary from 40 to 50 million — a fifth of its total population — and, due to differential birth rates, the population of the predominantly Muslim Central Asian Republics (Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tadzhikistan, Turkmenia and Kirgizia) is growing at five times the rate of that in the Slav USSR. By the 1990s Muslims may account for a third of the total population, and by the year 2000 the Russian Slav population will be a minority. See Shahram Chubin, "Soviet Policy Towards Iran and the Gulf", *Adelphi Paper* no 157, (London, 1980).
6. In 1934, the Soviet Army was ordered into Afghanistan to support the pro-Russian Amir. However, before the troops reached the frontier the Amir's regime collapsed and the orders to advance were revoked by Moscow. See Ken Booth, *The Military Instrument in Soviet Foreign Policy*, (London, 1973).
7. Gaddafi warned Libyan dissidents abroad that they were "doomed" unless they returned home by June 11 to face his justice. By mid-May, five had been murdered, in Rome and London.
8. See Samuel T. Francis "Latin American Terrorism: The Cuban Connection" *The Heritage Foundation Backgrounder*, No 104 (Washington, 1979).
9. See Paul Wilkinson *Terrorism and the Liberal State* (London, 1977), pp. 231-234.

RESISTANCE TO THE SOVIET OCCUPATION OF AFGHANISTAN: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

by David Charters

In the immediate aftermath of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, many journalists and analysts expressed well-founded doubts about the prospects for effective opposition to the Soviet occupation forces. Six months later the resistance continues but the doubts persist. This article will attempt to analyse the anti-Soviet resistance to date, to examine the problems and prospects confronting it in the months to come, and attempt to answer the question: is effective resistance to Soviet domination possible?

What is Resistance?

M.R.D. Foot, authority on the European resistance, starts his recent study of the subject with the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* definition: "an organized underground movement in a country occupied by enemy forces carried on with the assistance of armed fighters for the purpose of frustrating and damaging the occupying power."¹ The principal political task is subversion, which