

# FOREIGN POLICY SOVIET CONSTRUCT. LESSONS LEARNT

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## **Abstract**

*Soviet foreign policy is a field where theories abound. Most of these theories contend that one or more factors are extremely important determinant factors for Soviet behaviour in all or most situations. Soviet foreign policy has usually been analysed in terms of the leader's objectives, their perceptions and initiatives in the outer environment of the world politics, and their response to development abroad. The main purpose of this article is to briefly examine the internal and external factors that shape Soviet foreign policy and behavior, and to analyse the forces that shape Soviet international behaviour, focusing on the national interest issue. Why Soviet foreign policy? Because we consider that even a brief look into the Soviet foreign policy may represent the key to understanding Russia's current behaviour on the world stage. The first step in constructing viable security strategies is to understand the surrounding political world, as well as what Russia was, is and could be.*

**Keywords:** *soviet foreign policy, decision-maker, country behaviour, imperialist mindset.*

## **1. Introduction**

Our analysis tackles Soviet Russia's foreign policy behaviour, starting from the premises that thoroughly knowing the past is a useful means of understanding the present and, especially, predicting the future. It is no longer a secret that now, more than ever in the past 20 years, we are witnessing a deep change in forces and geopolitical interests and, for this reason, we need proper tools that may help us grasp and assess the behaviour of the "other".

Our analysis aimed at both critical analysing a vast literature on the topic, and at profiling a country's behaviour; certain analysts have so far considered this profile antiquated, but now, given the vicinity, they are under pressure to adapt it. Our approach is an argument in favour of the analyses of the recent evolutions embedded in the course of history.

For a better understanding of our analytical approach we will present the most relevant – in our opinion – aspects referring to the main topic – Russia.

Maybe the best wording to start any material on Russia, be it journalistic or scientific, is Winston Churchill's quote, "a riddle wrapped in mystery inside an enigma."

Russia has always represented a fascination for unknown, vast territories; the mystery that surrounded Russia a few hundred years is due to both vast lands and to foreigners' inability to understand the Russian spirit. Russia's most important weapon (and its greatest vulnerability has been and still is space<sup>1</sup>. Tendencies of territorial nationalism and expansionism, a common trait for most European states, have gained unique nuances in Russia's history. "The historic mission" of the Russian nation as a representative and

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<sup>1</sup> Adam B. Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence*, Praeger Publishers, New York, 1968.

advocate of Eastern Christendom against Catholicism and Islam dates back to Ivan the Terrible or Peter the Great's political visions.

The Russian peasant, the white aristocrat, the Cossack general, the almighty tsar, the Bolshevik, the Trotskyist, the communist, the collectivized peasant, the Russian intellectual converted to communism, the Soviet commissar, the Soviet soldier and especially the leaders of the communist Soviet elite represent for Westerners as many riddles wrapped in mysteries inside enigmas.

From our point of view, one of the major driving forces for crisis periods during the Cold War is the inability or the refusal to "solve" these "riddles."

## 2. Paper Content

### Russian's foreign policy

Russian foreign policy has proven a vast field for Western researchers. The Party, the ideology, in-fighting, the organisation of the state apparatus, have been studied; models of the Soviet decision-making process have been drawn up; Soviet secret services became the key to solving unsolvable equations. The inability to predict Soviet actions in foreign policy, or the inability to establish an analysis model able to predict on a long or short term the Soviet foreign policy decisions were explained through the enigmatic nature of the space in which the Soviet political life developed.

At the end of the fourth decade of the last century specialists considered that although Soviet foreign policy objectives are clear and coherent on a long term, every day diplomatic actions and gestures are whimsical, incoherent and enigmatic.<sup>2</sup>

Studies on the Soviet foreign policy of the Cold War's last decade launch the hypothesis that long term foreign policy objectives increased and became ambivalent once with Westerners' growing ability to understand every day diplomacy, which still remains contradictory and whimsical even after four decades.

An increasingly complex foreign policy decisional process is not a characteristic of USSR; it was highlighted in the foreign policy analysis of the great powers.

Increased academic interest in Soviet foreign policy decision analysis and the need to understand, predict, and correctly analyse a certain kind of behaviour on the international arena have had to overcome several hindrances such as: reduced amount of materials coming right from the source, an insignificant number of monographs and Western analytical studies on the fundamentals of Soviet foreign policy, an intricate interpretation of available documents.

At first sight, interpreting available documents may seem a minor issue. In the history of the Cold War, disinformation, manipulation and propaganda represented both parts' favourite methods in their attempt to win people's "hearts and minds." Acknowledging the constant, frequent use of these methods often led to mistrust and superficial treatment of documents or information. To be more specific, we need to say that, especially during crises or in moments when quick decisions needed to be taken, politicians, intelligence analysts, military strategists treated clear data and documents with mistrust and superficiality, labelling them as results of propaganda and disinformation. The fear of falling for the other's lies represented, in our opinion, the main hindrance in analysing and increasing the ability to predict the "foe's" behaviour in the international political game specific to the Cold War period.

It is extremely difficult to analyse available documents. What information do they reveal? Is this information the official standpoint? Can this information shape Soviet Union's

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<sup>2</sup> Edward Crankshaw, *New York Times Book Review*, July 3, 1949, p.4.

true behaviour or is it merely a projection of a desired but difficult to achieve behaviour? How can we establish the extent to which the dissemination method, the source of declarations, their target, is representative from the perspective of international relations study?

During the Cold War period, to establish foreign policy objectives meant to analyse territorial acquisitions, military bases, alliances, distribution of power and influence, as well as their usefulness in increasing power, prestige and security. Ideology, power and fear of the other's power, messianism and suspicion shaped the national interests of the two big international actors USA and USSR; the concepts of independence, territorial integrity, power and prestige were interpreted in different manner.

Hartman (1978) said that hardly ever can the interests of two states be totally opposed or can they completely overlap. There will always be a third state and time will change motivations, attitudes and behaviours. The fluidity of the process does have certain limits, but major changes are possible in defining the national interest, changes that are deeper than the public opinion is ready to understand.

One of the most appreciated Russian geopoliticians, Alexandr Dughin, created in his book, *Fundamentals of Geopolitics*, possible scenarios to relaunch "the Russian empire." Although more than 20 years have passed since the end of the Cold War and Russia's road has had its ups and downs, today's geopolitical, political, and economic reality urge us to present some of Dughin's ideas. We need to mention that these ideas are not at all unique, or of current importance for that matter, but they are nevertheless typical of the Russian imperialist mindset, they are typical of the manner in which Russian personalities, be they tsarist, Soviet or post-Soviet, understood Russia's long-term future: "the Russian people is so tied to the geopolitical reality, that space itself, its internalization, its spiritual perception, has given shape to people's psychology, becoming one of the main determiners for its identity and essence... to give up on the function of creator of the empire means the end of the Russian people's existence as a historical reality, as a civilising factor, it means national suicide."

The solution to the enigma, mystery, riddle that Russia represents is given by the great politician Winston Churchill. The key to decoding the Russian behaviour is its national interest. From our point of view (tsarist, Soviet, today's), Russia's national interest is conquering and dominating the Euro-Asian space.

### **Western studies on Soviet foreign policy**

The vast Russian space has always raised the interest of scientists, diplomats or simple travellers. The Russian revolution and the dramatic change of the existent social order, with its deep implications upon the international system led to an increased interest in research on social organisation, ideology, the Communist Party's organisational structure, elites' development and their action in the decision-making process, the army's organisational model and Soviet military doctrines, the hierarchical structure and the psychosocial models of Soviet intelligence services.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, Western publications are characterized by a high number of papers referring to USSR foreign policy. Aware of the fact the ally will turn into an enemy and the global game of power will be waged between the United States and the Soviet Union, the Westerners tried to find the proper ways and means to analyse and especially to predict the Soviet behaviour in the international arena.

We will try to briefly present the papers that are representative for the reference period.

Volumes, articles, studies in those days are characterised by a various approaches on Soviet politics in the world arena, on USSR's ties within the international state system, including its bilateral and trilateral ties.

Part of the authors belonging to that period put emphasis on the effects that the changes in the Russian social and political system had on an international level. Coates W.P. (1939), Fisher (1930), Harper ed. (1935), Marques-Riviere (1935), Gruliow ed. (1953)<sup>3</sup> are merely a few names of authors whose works represented the basis for further research.

Other authors (some of whom we already mentioned) studied the specific aspects of Soviet foreign policy: Coates (1943), Dulles (1944), Fisher (1946), Konovalov (1945), Sloves (1935) or Taracouzio (1938).<sup>4</sup>

One of the most cited authors, Max Beloff, published in 1949 *The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia*, tackling the issue of Soviet foreign policy from an historical and analytical point of view. His study offers the possibility to analyse the Soviet behaviour on the world stage from various perspectives. The important chronological benchmarks are intertwined with geographic analyses, which represent a synthesis of the works presented before. The second volume of this work, it treats Russia's foreign policy during 1936-1941, starting with the events that triggered the disappearance of collective security (Russia and the civil war in Spain, Russia and Turkey, AntiComintern Pact, Nyon Conference, Munich, Russia and the Far and Middle East) and ending the period of reference with a detailed analysis of the political and historical benchmarks at the beginning of the Second World War.

Another reference work but of a different approach, containing official documents of importance to the analysis of the first years of Cold War, as well as personal comments, is *The Cold War, A Book of Documents*, printed by H.L.Trefousse in 1965.<sup>5</sup>

Decades seven and eight of the past century are considered the most prolific from the point of view of studies dedicated to the Soviet Union and its foreign policy. Studies of those years are mandatory literature: Dallin (1960), Brzezinski (1967), Barrington Moore Jr. (1963), Aspaturian (1960, 1966, 1971), Horelick and Rush (1966), Zimmerman (1960), Hoffman and Fleron ed. (1971), Ulam (1968), Triska and Finley (1969), Laqueur (1959).<sup>6</sup>

Besides the works of the above mentioned authors, works that are thorough studies, analytical approaches on Soviet foreign policy and its relations with other states during the "fight" for supremacy, we need to mention other important works and authors who treated topics specific to Soviet policy, such as the influence of internal factors upon the foreign political decision-making: Bialer (1981), Schwartz (1975)<sup>7</sup>, the military component in

<sup>3</sup> Coates W.P., *World Affairs and the USSR*, Lawrence and Wishart, 1939; Fisher, L., *The Soviets in World Affairs* Cape, 1930; Harper ed., *The Soviet Union and World Problems*, Chicago University Press, 1935; Marques-Riviere, *L'URSS dans le Monde*, Paris, Payot, 1935; Leo Gruliow ed., *Current Soviet Policies*, New York, 1953, apud Beloff, *The Foreign Policy in Soviet Russian*, 1966.

<sup>4</sup> Coates W.P., *A History of Anglo-Soviet Relations*, Lawrence and Wishart and Pilot Press, 1943; Dulles, F.R., *The Road to Tehran – Relations with the USA*, Princeton University Press, 1944; Fisher, H.H., *America and Russia in the World Community*, California, Claremont College, 1946; Konovalov, *Russo-Polish Relations*, Cresset Press, 1945; Sloves, H., *La France et L'Union Sovietique*, Paris, Rieder, 1935; Taracouzio, T.A., *The Soviets in the Arctics*, New York, Macmillan, 1938.

<sup>5</sup> Trefousse, H.L., *The Cold War, A Book of Documents*, G.P.Putnam's Sons, New York, 1965.

<sup>6</sup> Dallin Alexander ed., *Soviet Conduct in World Affairs*, NY, Columbia University Press, 1960; Brzezinski Zbigniew, *The Soviet Bloc*, Cambridge Mass, Harvard University Press, 1967; Barrington Moore Jr., *Soviet Politics: The Dilemma of Power. The Role of Idealism in Social Change*, New York, 1963; Aspaturian Vernon, *The Union Republics in Soviet Diplomacy*, Paris, Librairie Droz, 1960, *The Soviet Union in the International Communist System*, Stanford, California Hoover Institution Studies, 1966, *Process and Power in Soviet Foreign Policy*, Boston Little Brown, 1971; Horelick Arnold and Myron Rush, *Strategic Power and Soviet Foreign Policy*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1966; Zimmerman William, *Soviet Perspectives on International Relations*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1960; Hoffmann Erik and Fleron Frederic ed., *The Conduct of Soviet Foreign Policy*, Aldine de Gruyeter, New York, 1971; Adam Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence, The History of Soviet Foreign Policy 1917-1967*, Praeger, 1968; Triska Jan and David D. Finley, *Soviet Foreign Policy*, New York, Macmillan, 1969, Walter Laqueur, *The Soviet Union and the Middle East*, New York.

<sup>7</sup> Bialer Seweryn, *The Domestic Context of Soviet Foreign Policy*, Boulder, Columbia Westview Press, 1981; Schwartz Morton, *The Foreign Policy of USSR: Domestic Factors*, Encino Calif: Dickenson, 1975.

defining the Soviet Union's super-power character: Holloway (1983), Dinerstein (1963), Bell (1962), Wolfe (1979, 1977), Leebaert (1981), Sokolovsky (1975)<sup>8</sup>.

Another topic of interest for Western studies and research is Kremlin, with all that it represents: mysterious centre of Soviet power, hub of the communist elite's political games, of the conduct of Soviet foreign policy, of manifestation of Soviet leaders' various behaviours. Among authors preoccupied with Kremlinology we mention: Crankshaw (1966), Leonhard (1962), Shulman (1963), Laites (1964), Whitney (1963), Bertram (1957), Brzezinsky (1967), Linden (1966), Nove (1975).<sup>9</sup>

Soviet foreign policy decision, the way it was understood or predicted by American leaders and the effects certain Soviet decisions had on American foreign policy agenda were analysed in all the volumes dedicated to analyses of American administrations or to the lives of American presidents.

The tight link between the foreign policies of the two super-powers, most of the time in a cause-effect relationship, led to deeper analyses of the images and perceptions they had towards each other: Schwartz (1977), Welch (1970), Tucker (1963), Finlay, Faget and Holsti ed. (1967), De George (1966), Kennan (1961), Macintosh (1962), Hollander (1973).<sup>10</sup>

The literature includes official documents or even fiction that help the general public better understand the functioning of the Soviet state apparatus, the use of its interference mechanisms in influence spheres, and the link between the Soviet secret services and the political power, including the decision-making power in the foreign policy sphere: Amarlik (1970), Kaiser (1974, 1976)<sup>11</sup>, De Mille, Le Carre, Colin Forbes, J. Archer.

### **The Soviet Union, actor of the international system**

The first step in attempting to understand the Soviet foreign policy is to clearly establish USSR's place and role as an actor in the international system.

Paradoxically, USSR's characteristics on the world stage were similar to its competitors', the USA and China. The Soviet Union presented all the characteristics of a global power, the same way the USA had the same socio-political system as China. Nevertheless, these two important characteristics should not prevent us from considering the Soviet Union's unique character. To reduce the analysis of the Soviet Union to the hypothesis that the Soviet state was a dual entity may lead to misinterpretations; moreover, it cannot provide fundamentals for further predictions.

<sup>8</sup> Bell Coral, *Negotiation from Strength*, London, 1962; Holloway David, *The Soviet Union and the Arms Race*, New Haven Yale University Press, 1983; Dinerstein Herbert, *War and the Soviet Union*, ed. New York Praeger, 1963; Leebaert Derek ed., *Soviet Military Thinking*, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1981; Sokolovsky V.D., *Soviet Military Strategy*, London MacDonald and Janes, 1975; Wolfe Thomas, *The SALT Experience*, The RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, 1979; *The Military Dimension in Making of Soviet Foreign and Defense Policy*, The RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, P/6024, 1977.

<sup>9</sup> Edward Crankshaw, *Khrushchev: A Career*, NY, London, 1966; Wolfgang Leonhard, *The Kremlin since Stalin*, NY, 1962; Marshall Shulman, *Stalin's Foreign Policy Reappraised*, Cambridge Mass and Harvard University Press, 1963; Laites, *Kremlin Moods*, The RAND Corporation RM-3535-ISA, 1964; Thomas Whitney, *Khrushchev Speaks*, Ann Arbor University of Michigan Press, 1963; Wolfe Bertram, *Khrushchev and Stalin Ghost*, NY, 1957; Brzezinsky Z., *Ideology and Power in Soviet Politics*, NY, Praeger 1967; Carl Linden, *Khrushchev and the Soviet Leadership 1957-1964*, Baltimore John Hopkins Press, 1966; Alec Nove, *Stalinism and after*, London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1975.

<sup>10</sup> Schwartz Morton, *Soviet Perceptions of the United States*, Berkeley University of California Press, 1977; Welch William, *American Images of Soviet Foreign Policy*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1970; Robert Tucker, *The Soviet Political Mind*, *Studies in Stalinism and Post Stalinism*, Change, NY, 1963; Finlay D.J. and Holsti O.R., Fagen R., *Enemies in Policy*, Chicago, Rand McNally, 1967; Robert De George, *Patterns of Soviet Thought*, Ann Arbor University of Michigan Press, 1966; George Kennan, *Russia and the West under Lenin and Stalin*, Boston, 1961; J.M. Macintosh, *Strategy and Tactics in Soviet Foreign Policy*, London, Oxford University Press, 1962; Paul Hollander, *Soviet and American Society; A Comparison*, NY, Oxford University Press, 1973.

<sup>11</sup> Amarlik Andrei, *Will the Soviet Union Survive until 1984*, NY, Harper and Row Publishers, 1970; Kaiser Robert, *Russia – The People and the Power*, NY, Atheneum, 1976; *Cold Winter, Cold War*, NY, Atheneum, 1974.

The Soviet Union was in fact a multiple entity whose components were often in a conflicting, competitive situation. "Separate interests of these components intermingled, were in conflict, sometimes overlapped, and were inspired by a multitude of reasons."<sup>12</sup>

From a theoretical point of view, the Soviet Union represents the only multiple actor on the world stage. According to Aspaturian (1971), we can identify five "distinct institutional personalities": the state, the party, the Russian nation, non-Russian nations, and the multinational federation.

The foreign policy analyst's misunderstanding might come, according to the quoted author, from certain responsibilities and obligations that sometimes led to an erosion of the central role undertaken by the Soviets in politics, i.e. that of a hub of revolutionary movements.

As a world revolutionary hub, the Soviet Union undertook the following roles: ideological guardian of the existent socio-political order – the socialist society, initiator and architect of its further development – the communist society, ideological and organisational leader of all communist parties, a source of inspiration and logistic support of the communist movements worldwide.

The history of role intermingling between the party and the state has always been characterized by controversies and rivalry, since each of these "identities had a different manner of inspiring, attracting and responding to internal or foreign components."<sup>13</sup>

The mission of the party structures was to transform certain characteristics of the international organisation system in order to facilitate the Soviet state's functioning at its best. Paradoxically, the Soviet state adapted to the international organisation system becoming part of it, moreover, becoming a global power, therefore the main viable functioning coordinate of the system. Consequently, "the fight for the victory of communism" on an international level not only did it jeopardize the very existence of the international system, but also undermined the global power of the Soviet state.

The Russian nation is another cause for confusion in the Soviet foreign policy analysis. As a historical and juridical successor of the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union functioned as a heir to the Russian nation's interests (53% of the USSR's population was of Russian nationality), thus preserved and extended Russian values, interests and historical objectives. Not only were the Russian values and traditions transmitted over, but they also acquired new dimensions through their assimilation by the Marxist ideology, by internationalization. The exclusivist national feeling in the Russian tradition has taken several forms throughout history: from considering Moscow as "the third Rome" and Mother Russia as the place of true orthodox belief, to labelling foreigners as dangerous or subversive; all these translated into continuing the state authority's behaviour from the Tsarist Russia to the Bolshevik Russia. In the years 40-50, much of the legislation that regulated Soviet citizens' life was borrowed from the Tsarist period. Peasants couldn't establish in cities if they didn't have a passport, a citizen of Russian nationality could not establish in Moscow or Leningrad without a residence permit, there were travel restrictions for foreign citizens on the Soviet-Russian territory and severe restrictions regarding the free flow of Soviet-Russian citizens in the West.<sup>14</sup>

Foreign Soviet policy radically changed after adopting the 1936 Stalinist constitution. The need to present the world a Soviet Union as viable discussion partner for Western democracies, the change of foreign policy discourse due to frequent use of the concepts of free security, common and indivisible peace represented only intermediary stages in achieving the short term goal – to reach the status of world power.

<sup>12</sup> Vernon Aspaturian, *Soviet Foreign Policy*, in Macridis ed., *Foreign Policy in World Politics*, 1985, p.174.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, p.178.

<sup>14</sup> Alec Nove, *Stalinism and After*, London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1975, p.15-16.

### Stalin's heritage

The Soviet leader Iosif Visarionovici Stalin (Djugashvili), of Georgian origin, raised and educated in a religious seminar in the spirit of maintaining and respecting Mother Russia's traditions, was the one who imposed the first guiding lines of political reconstruction in the Soviet Union.

Imposing severe restrictions and humiliating peasants as a social group, the fear of intelligentsia and eliminating all liberal elements from the cultural life (writers, composers, directors, ballet dancers, professors, researchers, historians, painters<sup>15</sup>), promoting Russian nationality in the state apparatus and party elite, blocking any informational contacts with the West, incarcerations and assassinations of heads of the "glorious" Soviet army – are all benchmarks of the internal terror started under Stalin's rule.

Some authors<sup>16</sup> consider it possible that Stalin's governing concept, the despotic power he had always desired, the repression and terror that characterized the Soviet society, the paranoia and suspicions which had become "characteristics of the state" represent only the effects of a hostile foreign environment.

The foreign policy construct was largely due to the manner in which Stalin perceived the outer world and the Soviet Union's position in it. Suspicious by nature, paranoid, an adept of the conspiracy theory and of the permanent existence of possible imperialist plots, Stalin had adopted a tough position in the international arena in order to cover what he considered Union's weaknesses.

Russia's physical security (analysis of security from a geopolitical point of view) has always been linked to the characteristics and size of the territory, the same way psychological security was obtained through political centralization.

On the occasion of the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Moscow, Stalin himself declared<sup>17</sup>: "The importance of Moscow resides in the fact that it became the fundament for unifying a torn Russia in a single state having a single government and a single leader. Only a centralized state can be able to manifest its independence and force, can achieve spectacular cultural and economic progress."

Soviet foreign policy, even during the Stalinist period, was characterized by two conflicting traits: voluntariness and determinism.

The literature offers us countless controversies linked to the aspects of the changes or continuity of Soviet foreign policy in the Stalinist and post-Stalinist period, and the impact of internal or external factors upon the Soviet behaviour abroad. Researchers of the Soviet society, advocates of the saying "those who ignore the mistakes of the past will repeat them," have tried to identify the elements of continuity and change in the Soviet foreign policy.

Charles Gati, comparing the Stalinist period with the post-Stalinist one concluded that elements of continuity are more significant than those of change. The author admits that the changes of the international system in the aftermath of the Second World War triggered deep changes both in establishing foreign policy objectives and in the means of achieving them; nevertheless, he considers as USSR's constant trait the consolidation of a pragmatic and cautious kind of power, preoccupied preponderantly with competition and cooperation in a international environment based on peaceful coexistence. "If there was indeed a behaviour model in the Soviet foreign policy from Lenin to Brejnev, it was characterized by the persistent yet cautious pursuit of the opportunities offered by the functioning of the

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<sup>15</sup> The effects of the campaign of ensuring total obedience of Russian intelligentsia towards the party could be seen in the scientific life as well. Studies in genetics, cybernetics, mathematical economy, modern scientific theories and ideas, from the theory of resonance to cybernetics, were ignored and banned, since they represented "bourgeoisie's reactionary nonsense."

<sup>16</sup> Nove, *Stalinism and After*, London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1975; Zimmerman, *Soviet Perspectives on International Relations 1956-1967*, Princeton University Press, 1969.

<sup>17</sup> 11 September, Pravda, 1947.

international system; persistent, since the major objectives of increasing the Soviet influence in the world haven't changed, and cautious, since the Soviet leaders adopted the tactics of gradual and sometimes subtle increase of this influence, such as, more often than not, forcefully counteracting this influence by the West seemed unjustified."<sup>18</sup>

Gati's main argument in favour of the continuity in the Soviet foreign policy hypothesis is that of the differences between the de-Stalinization period criticism on internal issues and external policy between the years 1928-1953. The Soviet foreign policy construct in the Stalinist period, construct based on circumspection, pragmatism, expansionism, preventive behaviour, revolutionary tendencies, or peaceful coexistence, proved to be a useful tool for the Soviet interest for such a long period, that it became embedded in the Soviet thinking even after Stalin's death.

Gati mentions that Russia's relationship with the West generally remained unchanged compared to the Stalinist period; it gained new aspects, the Union's interests diversified (Soviet foreign policies in the Third World), but its refusal to make decisions that could have jeopardized its super-power status or the Union's security on a longer or medium term was clearly stated in the Soviet foreign policy even in the post-Stalinist period. Khrushchev used to say: "Imperialists consider us Stalinists. Yes, when we speak of the fight against imperialists, we are Stalinists."<sup>19</sup>

Gati considers that the general opinion that the Soviet foreign policy was characterized by changes is mainly due to the Soviet behaviour during World War II and its aftermath. The expansion and unprecedented aggression era in the Soviet foreign policy construct began with imposing its domination in the Eastern Europe, causing the Berlin crisis, the tensions linked to imposing the Marshall plan; all these coordinates are completed with harsh discourses and international political behaviour that could hardly be called diplomatic.

We can conclude at the end of our presentation that Stalin was an adept of *Realpolitik*; his perception upon the international reality was not that affected by ideology as one could expect. Personal experience and psycho-biographical traits, the characteristics of a new reconfiguration of the international system and the heritage of the great Russian empire – all these were imprinted upon his perception of the international environment reality and of the place the Soviet Union had or could have on the world stage. From the point of view of actions taken, Stalin had always represented a cautious guard of Russia's interests; and when we say cautious, we mainly think of those diplomatic compromises, of the ability to sacrifice certain ideological interests for the much more valuable national interest.

Stalin's foreign policy movements were many a time contradictory (from his relationship with Chaing Kai-shek Kuomingang and the organisation of multiparty free elections in Bulgaria and Hungary, up to supporting the Zionist movement during an anti-Semitic internal campaign). Paradoxically, Stalin is the one who offered a new interpretation to the older concept of "antagonistic contradictions", according to which communism and capitalism will never coexist without conflict.

According to Adam Ulam,<sup>20</sup> during his last years, Stalin "created a tension that not only did it represent a potential threat, but it also proved useless." In other words, during his last years, sickness, age, paranoia and a permanent psychic tension typical of Kremlin, made Stalin abandon his pragmatism and compromise less in international relations.

Soviet foreign policy aggression in the aftermath of World War II is partly due to new geopolitical opportunities. The expansionist foreign policy, which at the time meant achieving national interest objectives, proved inefficient on a medium and long term. The aggressive

<sup>18</sup> N. Khrushchev, in Thomas Whitney, ed. Khrushchev, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1963, p.2.

<sup>19</sup> N. Khrushchev, in Thomas Whitney, ed. Khrushchev, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1963, p.2.

<sup>20</sup> Adam B. Ulam, Expansion and Coexistence, NY, Praeger, 1968, p.543.



expansionism for the control of influence areas was nothing but the trigger of the sceptical, even paranoid behaviour that would lead to a wrong perception of the other.<sup>21</sup>

The term that can best characterize the way Stalin perceived international policy is “mobilization”, a term which has both political and military connotations.<sup>22</sup> William Zimmerman, who often polemicized with advocates of the continuity and inflexibility of the Soviet foreign policy, considered that this idea of continuity only leads to denying the moderate character of the Soviet foreign policy after the 50s and its effect was maintaining a tough line in its policy of confining the USA.

Along years, analysts of Soviet foreign policy were split between sceptics and believers, with respect to USSR’s structural ability to adapt under the influence of other international actors. Zimmerman considered that one of the main changes in the Soviet foreign policy in the 70s is triggered by a redefining of the Soviet elites’ perception on the international environment.<sup>23</sup> The author considers that this change in perspective and in the Soviet foreign policy is due to its ability to influence the West, especially the United States, a sign of structural adaptability of the Soviet behaviour.

### 3. Conclusions

This comparative analysis of the works dedicated to understanding the Soviet behaviour in the Cold War era leads us to conclude that at the time – today as well – the West was/is unable to grasp the intimate drives of the functioning of the Russian “soul”, it was unable to understand the intrinsic motivations of Soviet foreign policy decision. This gap in our understanding wouldn’t be so dangerous if we hadn’t been speaking today of a new cold war, a much more dangerous one, since we are witnesses to new instability hotbeds, to history wounds which have been opened once again, to an escalation of extremism and nationalism, to new ideological conflicts.

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<sup>21</sup> For further data and studies referring to the aspects of creating an own image about „the other”, the Russian-American perceptions and how they were constructed and influenced, see *The Other Side, How Soviets and Americans Perceive Each Other*, Beyond the Kremlin Collection, 1991.

<sup>22</sup> William Zimmerman, *The Soviet Union and The West, The Conduct of Soviet Foreign Policy*, ed. Hoffman, Fleron, NY, Aldinede Gruyter, 1980, p.664.

<sup>23</sup> William Zimmerman, *Soviet Perspectives on International Relations 1956-1967*, Priceton University Press, 1969.

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