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History, Social Science, and the Study of Soviet Foreign Policy

EXPANSION AND COEXISTENCE: THE HISTORY OF SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY, 1917–67. By *Adam B. Ulam*. New York and Washington: Frederick A. Praeger, 1968. viii, 755 pp. \$12.95, cloth. \$4.95, paper.

SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY. By *Jan F. Triska* and *David D. Finley*. New York: Macmillan, 1968. London: Collier-Macmillan. xix, 518 pp. \$9.95.

The nearly simultaneous appearance of two significant works on Soviet behavior in world politics provides an opportunity to consider and contrast divergent approaches to the study of Soviet foreign policy. *Expansion and Coexistence* and *Soviet Foreign Policy* make a methodological inquiry particularly interesting and apposite because of the authors' fundamentally different modes of analysis.

A professor of government, Ulam has nevertheless written an interpretive history, one in which the emphasis is on specific events, trends, external and internal circumstances, and the leaders who have made policy. Largely chronological in its basic organization, the book exhibits the hallmarks of historical scholarship in its thoroughness and judicious presentation of information. Devoid of abstractions but not of interpretation as to the contemporary implications and relevance of history, Ulam's book is a one-man tour de force—a comprehensive and often brilliant study that surpasses any other previous effort in making the history of Soviet foreign policy intelligible.

Triska and Finley concern themselves with the systematic study of recurring patterns in Soviet policies and especially with the dissection of the decision-making process in the Soviet system. Disaffected by contradictory interpretations, they attempt to overcome the primary limitation of historical and intuitive knowledge, that of "perceptive relativity" (i.e., that different observers perceive the same phenomenon differently). They seek causality based on statistical experimentation and inference, assuming that the facts, relationships, and conclusions thus established will compel agreement by all observers. To accomplish their objective they employ a wide variety of such empirical methods and approaches as content analysis, decision theory, role theory, bargaining and game theories, a "multiple symmetry" model, as well

as elaborate statistical and mathematical techniques. To the social scientist they demonstrate the attraction and usefulness of systematic empirical research in the study of Soviet politics in general and of foreign policy in particular. To the historian and humanist who is unaccustomed to the language, symbols, typologies, and techniques of modern social science *Soviet Foreign Policy* may well seem overwhelming at first, surprising later, but probably provocative and stimulating in the end; at the least, however, the authors will have imparted a sense of understanding about the need for precision and refinement in Soviet studies.

Broadly speaking, there are, of course, two kinds of data used in all political and historical research—"words" and "deeds." Of the two, scholars generally rely on *words*, since they seldom have the opportunity to observe deeds. In the study of Soviet foreign policy, our sources therefore inevitably include the Soviet political elite's communications about the goals, instruments, and implementation of foreign policy. The crucial methodological question—one that is explicitly raised by Triska and Finley—is *how* to use the voluminous Soviet literature on foreign policy.

The importance of this question lies in our preoccupation with, and perhaps somewhat uncritical acceptance of, what the Soviet leadership professes to be doing or would do in the future. What Samuel L. Sharp once called the "doubtful art of quotation" has long characterized not only the Kremlinological literature but a good many other scholarly works on Soviet foreign policy as well; in varying degrees these works create the impression that Soviet communications accurately reflect Soviet behavior. That this assumption, taken literally, is questionable becomes apparent in the following admittedly absurd illustration: Suppose that a Soviet leader should happen to threaten an American audience by saying, "We will bury you!" Do we interpret his statement to mean (a) that he will definitely do it, (b) that he would like to do it and do it now, (c) that he would like to do it in the future, or (d) that he would do it now or in the future but only if and when the opportunity arose and he had the resources to do it? In fact, can we even assume that the word "bury" has the same meaning for him as it does for his audience and its country's decision-makers? Surely there can be no correct or valid answer to the question, insofar as the Soviet leader could also have intended to make the statement in order to pacify the Chinese, warn the American military establishment, or provide source material for Bob Hope.

Absurdity aside, the public statements of foreign policy makers obviously represent a hazardous source of information about foreign policy *behavior*. But they represent a particularly hazardous source for understanding foreign policy *intentions* because of the seemingly perpetual discrepancy between human wish and human action—the discrepancy between what any man or group would like to do and what he or the group may actually decide to do or is capable of doing.

To the extent, moreover, that Soviet society appears committed to the perfection of man and his environment and hence promotes high hopes about the future, such discrepancy in the Soviet Union is especially acute. Accordingly, textual analysis of the Soviet elite's descriptive or prescriptive communications presents a major methodological challenge to students of the Soviet political system: they must decide *how* the printed word emanating from the Soviet Union may be used.

As demonstrated by Ulam, on the one hand, and Triska and Finley, on the other, this is where the historian and the social scientist begin to part. The former seeks to be "discriminating and judicious," the latter "methodical and systematic." There is a difference. For example, in his chapter on Khrushchev's foreign policy from 1956 to 1965 Ulam discusses the Twenty-second Congress of the CPSU. He observes, *inter alia*, that "Khrushchev's language was still opprobrious (the West, previously referred to as 'the capitalist nations,' was now almost invariably described as the 'imperialist' ones), his tone threatening (as in his relating of the latest and biggest Soviet atomic tests). But there was a hint of moderation in the language about Germany . . ." (p. 656). Ulam then concludes that the Soviet leadership experienced a period of hesitation and perhaps confusion in regard to foreign policy at this time. Though his argument seems sound and the reconstruction of the background of the congress is well rounded, another reviewer might take issue with Ulam's selection of what constituted the important parts of the various speeches dealing with foreign policy and ask for "hard" or more conclusive evidence to support his conclusions.

In contrast, Triska and Finley examined the printed record of the Twenty-second Party Congress with a view to seeking *verifiable generalizations* about the specific question of the role of doctrine in the formulation of Soviet foreign policy. They were interested in the frequency of doctrinal stereotypes in the various speeches on foreign policy. For this reason they prepared fourteen specific "propositions" (pp. 119-22), through which they sought to determine, for example, if the impact of doctrine was generally greater in the Soviet public analysis of long-range policies than in the analysis of short-term policies (proposition no. 8, p. 120), or if the older members of the foreign policy elite speaking at the congress used doctrinal stereotypes more frequently than the younger members did (proposition no. 14, p. 122). Their data (which "clearly confirmed" both propositions) were arrived at through "quantitative content analysis," which the authors describe as "one imperfect but promising method by which modern social scientists seek to overcome the obstacles to investigating motivation in human behavior. Basically, quantitative content analysis discovers the frequency of use of selected verbal symbols and semantic formulations and uses this information as one ground for concluding some of the attitudes or beliefs of the speaker" (p. 116). In this study, words or phrases prejudged to have a high doctrinal loading were counted: "A word/phrase

list for this purpose was developed and amended during the analysis. Terminology was included or rejected according to our prior judgment as to whether or not it constituted a short-hand symbol for a concept or relationship or characteristic property clearly derived from Marxist-Leninist theoretical formulation. The results of this analysis were then expressed by a fraction representing the number of doctrinally stereotyped words or phrases in proportion to the total number of words in the statement analyzed. We called this fraction a *Doctrinal Stereotype Quotient (DSQ)*" (pp. 118–19).

What did the DSQ reveal about the role of Marxist-Leninist ideology as an "active ingredient" in foreign policy decisions? The substantive conclusions which emerged indicated that the older members of the elite and those whose life had been devoted mainly to party work tended to use doctrinal formulations more frequently than others. Those who were chiefly preoccupied with domestic politics also adopted Marxist-Leninist terminology more often than those whose main concern was foreign affairs. Moreover, the authors report that broad generalizations about the international situation and about Soviet foreign policy intentions seem to have led to the inclusion of more ideological referents than specific conclusions about a particular policy situation. (In fact, analysis of additional data about Khrushchev's communications during the 1962 Cuban missile crisis offers the optimistic conclusion that the possibility of recourse to ideology in time of international crisis is not very great at all.)

Such generalizations still need to be measured against three assumptions. The first assumption—that there exists a properly identified foreign policy elite in the Soviet Union—is one whose validity Triska and Finley convincingly demonstrate in a chapter on "The Men Who Make Soviet Foreign Policy" (pp. 75–106).

The second assumption is that the generalizations offered by Triska and Finley are reliable. The reliability of all generalizations must be ascertained by further testing, with different observers using the same instruments. If such tests produce similar results, we shall have gained partial confirmation of important propositions about the function of doctrine in the thought processes of the Soviet foreign policy elite.

The third—ininitely more complex—assumption is that political communications in the Soviet Union (or, for that matter, elsewhere) actually reflect the leaders' *thought*. So far as it goes, the validity of this assumption has been shown by linguists and psychologists who have confirmed the existence of a positive relationship between communications and thought patterns; indeed, if such a relationship could not be postulated, there would be little or no substance to scholarly research in the social sciences and humanities, which is based, as such research must be, on the printed word. But the relationship confirmed is between language and thought and *not* necessarily between language and *action*. In other words, we know that what a person communicates has an impact on others and is an expression of his thought patterns; we do

not know whether his political communication discloses what he is *doing* or intends to do. Given this uncertainty, the strictly policy-oriented student of Soviet foreign behavior may well be somewhat disappointed by and skeptical about the ultimate practical or applied value of textual analysis of any sort, for at best it can reveal what the Soviet leaders think and not necessarily what they do. (What they do is likely to have been preceded by contemplation, of course, unless one wants to postulate their irrationality!) At any rate, even systematic textual analysis raises a number of perplexing questions about language, thought, policy, and their relation—questions which become particularly troublesome in the study of foreign policy.

Soviet communications about foreign policy, then, lend themselves to different modes of analysis. The historical-traditional approach provides the reader with commentary about the *inputs* and the *outputs* of Soviet foreign policy, stressing the probable causes and consequences of the most dramatic developments of each period. With the emphasis on events that are unique, there is little attempt to reach generalized conclusions that would hold true in the future. As used by Triska and Finley, social science approaches offer, or seek to offer, verifiable propositions about the decision-making process (even if some of these propositions are gained from nonrecurring data) which provide insights mostly about the *inputs* of Soviet foreign policy—how incoming information is selected and interpreted, goals formulated, and decisions reached.

The mode of analyzing Soviet policy actions or *deeds* also separates the historian and the social scientist. Understandably enough Ulam is interested in, and fascinated by, the great events and conflicts of the past fifty years (the conclusion of World War I, relations with Germany and with the Allies before World War II, the origins and development of the Cold War, the significance of Stalin's death, the emerging Sino-Soviet conflict, the confrontation over Cuba)—events whose uniqueness he explicitly recognizes. Though he does offer occasional generalizations about Soviet policy, Ulam prefers to concentrate on the concrete event and the leading personality. His method is in good part intuitive. He seeks objectivity and fairness in the treatment of Soviet actions, but his handling of the data suggests that he finds impartiality beyond reach if not actually repugnant.

On the whole, Ulam's judgments are based on his appreciation of the relationships between Soviet domestic and foreign policies, the impact of Russian tradition, and the role of leading personalities (rather than the larger foreign policy elite), and his conviction that Soviet behavior abroad can best be understood in terms of power politics. His treatment of the Cold War, for example, is thus "conventional" in the sense that he accepts Soviet policies as essentially inevitable—as if, given Soviet goals and perceptions and Western policies, the Soviet leaders had no real options other than those they actually chose. To suggest inevitability in retrospect but at the same time deny the

possibility of generalizations of the "if . . . then" variety concerning future Soviet actions is the historian's self-imposed, and perhaps unnecessary, limitation.

In contrast, Triska and Finley seek to ascertain the relative importance of factors and the impact of major events in the international system on the formulation of Soviet foreign policy. In order to arrive at generalizations they examine fifteen recent international events, ranging from the civil war in Laos to the COMECON integration problem of 1961–63 (pp. 127–48). They classify the Soviet leadership's perception of these events as indications of success, failure, threat, or opportunity, and conclude—on the basis of subsequent Soviet reactions—that perceptions of failure and threat are "more likely to induce abrupt changes" in Soviet policy than perceptions of success and opportunity. In other words, "failures" and "threats" abroad constitute an important factor to which Soviet leaders respond and adopt policies accordingly. Significantly, few such events perceived as failures or threats are thought to have led to lasting change in Soviet policy (p. 145). Thus Triska and Finley emphasize continuity and stability, and believe that radical change can be expected only with a change of elite personalities. "If an 'ideological purist' were to attain 'dictator' status in the USSR," they observe, "we might expect an abrupt rise in the application of doctrinal propositions, especially in the crisis context." However, since only the older members of the elite are said to be doctrine-oriented, Triska and Finley consider the prospect of such change unlikely (p. 147).

Thus Triska and Finley focus on the permanent and repetitive elements in Soviet behavior. They are far more concerned with verifying empirical generalizations than with analyzing the causes and consequences of unique historical events. Although the evidence they have so diligently collected is restricted in both time and place, their qualifications are not always sufficient to dispel an unfortunate impression of finality. Paradoxically, the qualifications they do introduce significantly weaken the scope and degree of confirmation of their generalizations, in part because of the great number of complex variables on which they depend.

What we have here, then, are two impressive and stimulating studies of Soviet foreign policy. Their substantive conclusions are certainly compatible, although their views of what constitutes understanding, what questions should be studied, and what kinds of information should be gathered are profoundly different. One is conventional and highly readable, the other is experimental. Ulam seeks understanding of *what*, *when*, and *who*; Triska and Finley of *what*, *who*, and *how*. The authors of both books address themselves to questions of *why*—Ulam by intelligent and highly sophisticated speculation, Triska and Finley by systematic and controlled investigation of propositions about presumed relationships. Together the two books underline the widening gap in Soviet studies between the methodologies of history and social science.