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WITHDRAWAL SHEET

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DOCUMENT NO. AND TYPE	SUBJECT/TITLE	DATE	RESTRICTION
1. memo	George P. Shulz to the President, re Dobrynin delivers a letter to you from Gorbachev (2 pp)	n.d.	P1
2. translation	unofficial, re letter from Gorbachev to Reagan (10 pp)	6/10/85	P1
3. memo	Robert C. McFarlane to Donald T. Regan, re background papers on the Soviet Union	9/10/85	P1
4. paper	re Soviet Union (7 pp)	n.d.	P5, P1
5. paper	re Soviet Union (8 pp)	n.d.	P5, P1
6. paper	re Soviet Union (8 pp)	n.d.	P5, P1
7. paper	re Soviet Union (10 pp)	n.d.	P5, P1
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RESTRICTION CODES

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- P-1 National security classified information [(a)(1) of the PRA].
- P-2 Relating to appointment to Federal office [(a)(2) of the PRA].
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USSR: A SOCIETY IN TROUBLE

Western observers have always been struck by the peculiarly Russian combination of extraordinary political stability amidst appalling social conditions. In any other country, such conditions might be expected to breed constant revolution. In Russia, it took a century of political unrest, capped by four years of devastating war, to bring on the 1917 cataclysm. The authorities there have traditionally been able to maintain control, because they were dealing with a generally passive population. Economic development and the rise of mass education may have made the job more difficult in recent years, but the control mechanisms are as effective as ever. The enormous problems of Soviet society--problems now perhaps greater in extent than at any time in Russian history--still present the regime with an administrative challenge rather than a political one.

Among the intractable and potentially destabilizing social problems plaguing the Soviet scene are:

- rising rates of alcoholism among all major population groups;
- rising mortality rates among children and adult males;
- ever greater incidence of crime and corruption countrywide;
- an obvious decline in the availability and quality of basic public services and consumer goods; and
- a generalized sense that the Soviet regime is no longer capable of meeting the expectations it has generated in the population.

Some of these problems reflect particular cultural traditions; others are part and parcel of the Soviet system. Still others represent the unintended consequences of specific Moscow policies. Each one of them feeds on and reinforces every other, however. Together they have produced in the Soviet population a deep malaise, a sense that not only has something gone profoundly wrong in recent years but that there is little chance it will be put right any time soon.

Alcoholism

Drinking to excess is part of the Russian national tradition, but in recent years the rates of alcohol consumption have risen to unprecedented levels. Last year, Soviet statistics show that the

USSR's citizens spent 10 percent of their incomes on alcoholic beverages, and more than one in eight spent at least one night in a sobering-up station. The Soviet Union as a whole does not lead the world in alcoholism, but it is clearly among the leaders, and the domestic impact is worse than the statistics suggest. Alcoholism in the USSR is more concentrated, with the worst drinking confined to the Slavic regions--the Muslim nationalities have much lower, albeit rising, rates. The Slavic groups thus may have the highest rate of alcohol consumption in the world. Furthermore, the Slavic pattern is binge drinking, drinking to get drunk and lose consciousness. As a result, most of the alcohol consumed is high proof vodka rather than beer and wine.

The consequences both immediately and long term are staggering in terms of lowered industrial productivity and increased accidents at the workplace. Death rates among adult males have jumped, and their life expectancy has dropped. And because women are drinking more, alcoholism has also contributed to a substantial rise in infant mortality through premature births and malnutrition of some children. Such rates of alcohol consumption are expected to lead to other forms of social degeneration, if they persist.

The very blatancy of the problem has frequently led Russian governments, both Imperial and Soviet, to counterattack, but none has had any lasting success. Indeed, many of the campaigns against alcoholism have proven counterproductive; Gorbachev's current effort is unlikely to prove any different. Alcohol is after all very much part of the national tradition, and therefore extraordinarily difficult to root out. And Russians have always shown themselves adept at finding alternative sources of alcohol or resorting to home brew should official supplies be cut off. One classic Soviet novel features an apparently typical worker who will drink anything from lighter fluid to antifreeze when regular liquor is not available. Moreover, depriving Russians of alcohol--the chief form of recreation for many--could lead to domestic restlessness and would certainly reduce state income from vodka sales. These last calculations usually have been decisive with Russian officialdom over the years.

Demographic Disasters

Since the revolution, the USSR has suffered a series of well-known demographic disasters--the world wars, revolution, the Civil War, Stalin's collectivization--but by the 1970s their impact was generally smoothing out. Two new trends have appeared recently, however: a sharply higher rate of infant mortality and an increase in deaths among males in their prime working years. Both are unprecedented in size for modern societies during peacetime and call into question the Soviet claim that the USSR is an advanced modern country.

Soviet infant mortality, Western estimates suggest, has risen 30 to 50 percent over the last 15 years. It now stands at three times the rate in the United States and at a level equal to that of the most advanced third world countries. The situation is so embarrassing that the Soviets stopped publishing statistics on this question in 1975. (A recent crack in this ban--in a republic medical journal from Central Asia--states that mortality among children in Tajikistan has risen 38.3 percent since 1970, well within Western estimates.) These high rates reflect the large number of abortions used by Soviet women for birth control (currently six to nine abortions per woman), alcoholism and inadequate diet among pregnant mothers, poor medical services, pollution, and the poor quality of the baby formulas which must be used because most Soviet mothers are forced to return to work soon after giving birth. As a result, both the size and quality of future generations are affected; the next generation faces serious medical and educational problems; and observers have every reason to question Soviet claims that in the USSR "children are the only privileged class." The obvious cures nevertheless seem to be beyond the interests and resources of the Soviet government.

The rising death rates among adult males are equally striking. Over the last 15 years, the life expectancy of Soviet males at birth has apparently dropped to only 56 years, the sharpest decline in any modern society ever, and one that cuts into the working life of most Soviet men, thus reducing the size of the labor pool. The current high levels reflect industrial accidents, chronic diseases, inadequate diet and medical services, pollution, and alcohol consumption. The most recent increases, however, appear traceable to alcoholism alone, a pattern that gives special urgency to Gorbachev's campaign.

Crime and Corruption

Crime of all kinds afflicts the Soviet Union, but corruption is a structural feature of the system, absolutely essential for its operation in its current form, since prices do not reconcile demand and supply for the goods and services that people want. Official prices are set artificially low for political reasons; shortages are endemic, so access to goods and services is determined by other means. Since many Soviet citizens have more money than access to goods, the cash is used to obtain things "on the side," a pattern which has led to the creation of an enormous second economy.

Furthermore, the planning process which encompasses virtually all spheres of activity encourages another form of corruption, both when targets are set and when efforts to meet them are made--be these targets the average grade of a particular school class or the levels of factory output. Every person seeks to make

his plan as easy to meet as possible in order to assure his bonus. As there is no impersonal market mechanism to set these plan targets, they are determined by other means, including corrupt ones. And since the authorities view plan fulfillment as more important than legal niceties, they tend to "overlook" illegalities which produce the results they want.

Finally, all Soviet citizens are conditioned to participate in ideological deception and self-deception, to say and do things they know to be false. Enormous cynicism results, a form of corruption more corrosive and less susceptible to correction than any other.

Every Soviet citizen is thus trapped either as a direct participant in corruption, or as an observer who must report what he sees or choose to remain silent about illegalities. All the alternatives contribute to public demoralization.

Little of this is likely to change. Prices set to clear the market would rise to levels that would make existing shortages even more blatant. Plans set by market forces would erode or destroy the role and power of the party. And if ideological deceptions were eliminated, the Soviet Union would cease to be the Soviet Union: no party leader is likely to want to commit suicide.

Declines in Public Services

The abysmal quality of goods and services available to the public in the USSR is legendary. The Soviet system has always underfulfilled plans for consumer goods; shortages are endemic and appear to have gone from bad to worse recently. Perhaps the clearest picture of the situation is provided by a single Soviet statistic: between 1979 and 1984, the number of hours spent by Soviet citizens to acquire consumer goods rose from 180 billion hours a year to 275 billion, 35 billion hours more than Soviet citizens spend at the workplace. Most of this extra time is spent by women waiting in line for basic foodstuffs. Indeed, Soviet sociologists report that Soviet women now spend 40 hours a week at the job and another 40 hours a week making purchases and doing the housework.

The remedy would require an enormous investment of funds and a willingness to change the system. Neither is in large supply in Moscow.

Unrealized Expectations

Perhaps the greatest problem, and certainly the one which has thrown the others into relief is the currently widening gap between popular expectations and the capacity of the regime to

meet them. From the 1950s to the mid-1970s, the Soviet people experienced a growth in real income averaging more than 3 percent annually. Soviet citizens could reasonably expect some upward mobility both for themselves and their children. And because of the special experience of World War II, they generally shared the values of the ruling elite and accepted the explanation that remaining difficulties were traceable to the war. Recent developments have called all this into question. The Soviet economy is stagnating. Opportunities for upward mobility are fewer, thus freezing existing class distinctions. Demographic developments have placed severe constraints on the regime's ability to push economic development as it has in the past by increasing labor inputs. And both mass and elite groups are acquiring a broader and more divergent set of values. Despite heavy jamming, nearly one Soviet adult in six now listens to foreign radio broadcasts at least once a week, and many are willing to discuss and criticize domestic Soviet policies now that the costs of doing so have declined.

The impact of economic stagnation is particularly great. For many Soviet citizens, it calls into question the implicit social contract established after the death of Stalin which linked popular support for the regime with the regime's ability to deliver the goods. Further, it has reduced the regime's ability to use material incentives to drive the workforce. As a result, the authorities are forced to rely more on ideological ones--typically less effective--and may be compelled to turn again to coercive ones in the future, even though the latter would probably be less productive now than they were in the past. This stagnation has also contributed to the expansion of blackmarketeering and other forms of corruption. Once again, the obvious remedies are either unwelcome or impossible, a fact that both Soviet citizens and their leaders recognize.

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Even taken together, these problems do not now threaten the stability of the Soviet system. Nor have they led to the crystallization of an active opposition. Instead, they have produced an alienated society, something which may prove more difficult for the regime to control than is the relatively small dissident movement. In the near future, the most obvious impact of these problems will be to force the regime to devote greater resources to its control mechanisms in order to insulate both itself and its goals from these popular attitudes. Over the longer haul, their impact may prompt a Soviet leader to seek major reforms, but at every point he will be frustrated by powerful groups which have a stake in the status quo, even though that status quo has locked Soviet society into a dissatisfied, cynical, and aimless present.

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THE SOVIET UNION'S NATIONALITY PROBLEM

The Soviet Union is the most ethnically diverse country in the world. It has more than 130 national groups each with its own language, culture and attitudes. Often these affect Moscow's ability to implement its domestic policies and at a minimum require the Soviet authorities to maintain a tighter control on the population than would otherwise be the case. These problems are compounded by the fact that the Soviet Union is the only major country in which the dominant nationality--in this case, the Russians--forms only a bare majority of the population and may soon become a minority. Up to now, Moscow has been able to cope with this situation through a combination of ideological and organizational measures and an often displayed willingness to use force against any opposition.

The Ethnic Mosaic

The USSR is a veritable ethnic museum housing more than 130 different, often exotic groups. They range from small reindeer-herding tribes in Siberia with no written language or independent political tradition to ancient Islamic civilizations in Central Asia to large, modern industrial societies in the Baltic region which were independent countries until World War II. While each is, of course, important to its members, most are politically irrelevant: The smallest 100 nationalities make up less than 2% of the total population. Indeed, their current prominence in the Soviet federal system reflects Moscow's long-term policy of divide-and-rule, of preventing the formation of large communities by sponsoring small ones. The larger nationalities that do matter can be divided into five major ethnographic groups:

(1). The Russians. Now forming 52% of the population, the Russians are the traditional core of the state. They dominate its central apparatus and military and determine both the political culture and official language of the country. They have paid a heavy economic price to maintain their dominance, enjoyed few benefits from their possessions, and are now in demographic decline. Indeed, sometime within the next decade, their low birthrates and high death rates when combined with the high birthrates among Central Asian Muslims will make them a minority in their own country. In an authoritarian political system, this shift will not have any immediate political consequences; but it has already had the psychological effect of giving many Russians a sense of insecurity and uncertainty about the future.

(2). Other Slavs. The Ukrainians (16% of the population) and Belorussians (4%) are culturally similar to the slavic Russians. When these three nationalities stand together--and it is an arrangement Moscow has long sought to promote--they form 72% of the total, a healthy majority unlikely to be challenged for several hundred years. But on many issues--including russification and economic development--these groups find themselves in conflict, a pattern that suggests any Slavic brotherhood may contain as much hostility as agreement.

(3). The Muslim Nationalities. Now forming 18% of the total population, the historically Islamic peoples of Central Asia and the Caucasus are culturally, linguistically, and racially distinct from the slavic majority. In addition, they represent the fastest growing segment of the Soviet populace: In Turkmenistan, for example, one woman in six has at least 10 children. Because of their rapid growth, they form an increasing share of military draftees--now more than 30%--and of new entrants to the workforce--up to 50% by the mid-1990s.

(4). The Christian Caucasus. The ancient Christian nations of Georgia and Armenia together form 3% of the population. While each is culturally distinct and has enjoyed independence in the past, both are more than usually loyal to the Soviet system and enjoy special privileges. The Armenians see Moscow as their protector against Turkey, and both enjoy access to the large official and black markets of the USSR. Because of their churches and emigre communities abroad, both play a role in Soviet foreign policy. Perhaps for this reason, they both have been able to retain their distinctive alphabets--the only other nations who have are the Baltic states who were incorporated into the Soviet Union only at the end of World War II--and to defend many of their specific national traditions.

(5). The Baltic Republics. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are the most passionately anti-Soviet and anti-Russian regions of the Soviet Union; but forming only 3% of the population, they have seldom been in a position to act on their feelings. As one Moscow official is reputed to have told a Baltic communist in the late 1940s, Soviet nationality policy in that region consists in having enough boxcars ready--a reference to the brutal mass deportations which followed the Soviet annexation in 1945. These three republics are the most European in the USSR and enjoy a standard of living far higher than the Russians do. At the same time, they feel profoundly threatened by the influx of slavs into their homelands and by the ongoing russification of their local institutions.

These nationalities, like most others, have their own Soviet-created national territories in which they have at least some cultural and political institutions in their native

languages. Indeed, that is the essence of Soviet federalism. But nearly one Soviet in five--some 55 million people--lives outside his national home. The Russians have no real problem because there are Russian-language institutions virtually everywhere. For the other, however, native-language institutions do not exist outside their national territories; and many of them find themselves victims of discrimination and are being forcibly assimilated.

The Major Problems

There are a number of major issues in which the multinational aspect of the population plays an especially important role.

Regional Development. Any movement of labor and capital in a large multinational state tends to become invested with ethnic meaning or to be limited by ethnic considerations. The Soviet Union is no exception. Central Asians in the Soviet "sunbelt," for example, are very reluctant to move to the industrial heartland which is located in the less hospitable north; and Russians are reluctant to send capital away from their own "rustbelt" to build factories in Central Asia--where most of the new labor is to be found. Consequently, Moscow is forced to choose between economically rational development strategies which would exacerbate ethnic feelings (be it by changing investment patterns or forcing movement of workers) and an ethnically responsive ones which result in slower economic growth.

Military Staffing. An increasing fraction of new draftees for the Soviet Army come from Central Asia, and many of them do not know Russian well. As a result, the Soviet military has been forced to spend an increasing amount of time teaching such recruits Russian, the language of command; and the Central Asian soldiers have their national sensitivities heightened by the experience. To date, the army has been able to cope; but Soviet generals often complain about the poor quality of soldiers they get from non-Russian areas. As the percentage of such soldiers rises, this problem too may become worse.

Russification. Every country needs a lingua franca, a language in which everyone can do business. In the Soviet Union, that language is for historical and political reasons Russian. For many nationalities, learning Russian poses no threat to national identity; indeed, it may even heighten it by bringing individuals into contact with other groups. In other cases, however, language is central to identity; and any suggestion that another language should be acquired is seen as a threat to national existence. In Georgia, for instance, people rioted at the mere suggestion that Russian should be

legally equal to Georgian in that republic. Clearly, some Soviet officials believe that learning Russian is the first step toward the assimilation of non-Russians into the Russian nation; but more and more they are recognizing that a knowledge of that language may have exactly the opposite effect.

Combatting Foreign Influence. The Soviet government has always tried to seal off its population from any foreign influence. For both geographic and political reasons, this effort has been least successful in the non-Russian periphery of the country. Central Asian Muslims are very much aware of what is going on elsewhere in the Muslim world; and the Baltic peoples look to Poland and the West more often than to Moscow. As a result, many Russian officials in Moscow view these groups as virtual Trojan horses for foreign influences, an attitude that reinforces what for many are natural prejudices.

Dissent in the Non-Russian Areas. Dissent there is very different from that at the center. It is generally hidden from foreign view. It has the potential for violent massive protest because it has deeper roots in the local population. And, under certain conditions, it may even enjoy a certain sympathy with and hence protection from local officials who may also oppose Moscow's line. As a result, Moscow's ability to suppress dissent is somewhat limited--especially in regions such as Georgia and Estonia where the local language is virtually inaccessible to Russians on the scene.

Prospects for the Future

The Soviet Union is likely to face increasing national problems in the future. Economic progress has meant that more Russians and non-Russians are coming into direct competition, often for the first time, while the recent slowing of economic growth means that there is a smaller pie to be divided among groups that are growing at very different rates. And the federal structures originally created to be symbolic of national rights are acquiring defenders and becoming ever more real. In the past, Moscow has been able to manage through a combination of guile and force. In the near term, that is likely to be enough. But over the longer haul, these nationality-based tensions may weaken the Soviet system or prompt its leaders to return to a more harshly coercive policy.

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