

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
Newport, R.I.

MAJOR RUSSIAN AND U. S.
FOREIGN POLICY OBJECTIVES
1787 - 1944

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INTRODUCTION

The mass of information which is available on both Russian and United States Foreign Policy and from which the minutest objectives and inferences of objectives are presented for each individual act of governments during this period, represents a very confusing array of opinions and interpretations. These are in many instances directly conflicting and in most instances divergent. In this short paper it will be impossible to penetrate very completely into any governmental action in determining the objectives, but rather it must be assumed that most of the overt governmental actions referred to are known in detail to the reader and that the majority of space can be devoted to the ramifications considered to have originated with the current governmental foreign policy objectives.

In order to avoid any semantic misunderstandings it appears wise at this time to define foreign policy objectives as interpreted in this paper. The Brookings Institution¹ defines the National Objective as:

Objective is used to mean a specifically defined goal, or purpose, for which national action is planned in terms of the maintenance of the national interest. Fundamentally, an objective is an aspect of the national interest, delimited and particularized for action in a given context. It can, therefore, be the consequence either of a widely felt threat to the national interest, or of a general conviction that a certain end is desirable.

While this definition can be understood to embody and limit itself to one single action, it can also be considered to extend to a series of actions which might cover a span of years as long as a singleness of purpose is maintained. In the vernacular of one of our current commentators this is "The News behind the News" or the far reaching causative factors on a governmental level which dictate the actions

¹ The Brookings Institution, Major Problems of United States Foreign Policy, 1954, p. 46.

or interactions of nations. These causative factors are never simple in themselves but usually represent the dichotomous interplay of factions and influences operating within a government. It must be assumed however, that the basic national interests and objectives of any nation or government are self-preservation and survival.

It has been apparent in reading the bibliographical material that individuals are given the status of exerting profound influence upon the objectives of a nation. This seems to imply, for example, that Secretary of State Seward in 1867 proceeded almost independently to purchase Alaska in the name of the United States. We know this is not true, but we also know that the historian must give animation to his recitation and what better way than to crystallize the modal thinking of a generation into the effigy of an individual or group of individuals. In an attempt to eliminate this stereotype of personalities the total period covered by this paper has been divided into five sub-periods, each covering approximately thirty years on the assumption that the adult life of a generation is approximately thirty years and that the thinking within any one generation will not materially change in its basic concepts. It is realized that this assumption does not hold true for our immediate thirty year period, however the reasons for this make very interesting speculation.

PERIOD 1787-1820.

Russia. Just prior to this period Russia had gained a position as one of the five great powers of Europe. It had accumulated a broad belt of rich territory from the Baltic to the Black Sea, the western boundary of which lay in the heart of Central Europe. Together the newly acquired regions brought Russia much wealth, new centers of domestic and foreign commerce, and new tax-payers and soldiers. These acquisitions brought also the increased involvement in European diplomatic complexities. Extensive explorations had been carried on to the Pacific Coast of Siberia, down into Kamchatka and into Alaska. Attempts had been made to penetrate China however these had been soundly repulsed thereby discouraging further attempts until 1856.

Throughout all of the periods under discussion the objectives exhibited by the Russian government were those of an individual or of a relatively small group of individuals and did not reflect in any degree the desires of the people of Russia.

The primary foreign policy objectives of the Russian government during this period were directed toward the maintenance of her position in a maelstrom of vacillating alliances which predominated in Europe during the Napoleonic era. Her traditional interests in Poland, the Near East and the Baltic were always paramount and usually dominated her courses of action. The Russian defeat of Napoleon satisfied some of her territorial objectives but more importantly it raised her to a high point of political power within the European colony. As a result of this power she was instrumental in forming the threatening but idealistic "Holy Alliance" for the maintenance of the balance of power. However this alliance committed its members to nothing but platitudes and proved of little influence on the actual policy of Russia or the other members. It did exert a deterring force on other nations in

their international dealings.

United States. The foreign policy objectives of the United States during this period can very well be described as a complete withdrawal from European power politics and diplomacy, with only such necessary intercourse as to continue the growth of American sea trade and the expansion into adjacent territories. The United States during this period was a weak coastal country, surrounded by the territories of the great European powers. It had neither an army or navy capable of defending itself against a European power if such a power wished to commit a moderate number of its forces to this task. Fortunately the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars kept such powers well occupied in Europe for the majority of the period.

To categorize the actual pertinent events of this period; Louisiana and all of Florida were annexed or forcibly taken primarily to remove European territory from the immediate borders and to allow for expansion. The War of 1812 was similarly an attempt on our part to take Canada from the British. With the revolt of the Latin American countries under Simon Bolivar from European dominance, the United States offered immediate recognition in order to further eliminate European influence in the Western Atlantic.

Economically the United States foreign policy of isolation had to be modified. American sea trade was vital to this young country. To this end it made many treaties of commerce with European countries, and during their war years insisted upon the freedom of the seas and the rights of neutral shipping to trade with belligerents without interference. This in all cases was not accomplished, however the United States was without the effective power of political or military recourse.

PERIOD 1820-1850.

Russia. During this period several trends in Europe influenced

Russian foreign policy objectives. Foremost of these were the uprisings against absolute dynasties and their surprising success. Russia itself was experiencing increased peasant revolt which necessitated the institution of a controlling bureaucracy and a consequent reduction of the power and influence of the nobility. Russia's increased agricultural exports to a growing mechanized Europe was imposing a monetary economy upon Russia which required she tread softly in Western Europe.

The termination of the Russo-Franco War had satisfied Russian needs in Western Europe consequently her objectives in this area were to maintain the balance of power and the status quo. This objective was accomplished mainly by the absence of any overt action.

Two objectives dominated the Russian actions during this period. The first was to maintain and support the monarchy form of government where it was threatened. To this end it helped to suppress the revolt within Hungary. The second objective was the weakening and destruction of the Ottoman Empire. To this end she helped Greece gain her independence as a means of weakening the Ottoman Empire. She then again went to war with Persia and the Ottoman Empire and as a result gained the very rich Transcaucasian area of Georgia. She further believed she was plotting with England for the eventual dissection of the Ottoman Empire which would give her complete control of the Black Sea and the Straits, however England, to maintain the balance of power was endeavoring to strengthen the Ottoman Empire.

United States. During this period the United States continued to maintain its objective of remaining aloof and isolated from European entanglements. However, the phenomenal growth of its foreign trade coupled with the development of resources and continental expansion required the expression of its national adolescence. This pronouncement came in the form of the Monroe Doctrine. This statement of the national

interest contained three main points: (1) there should be no extension of territory in, or further colonization of, either of the American continents by non-American States; (2) there should be no European interference in the affairs of the new states of these continents; and (3) it would remain the firm intention of the United States to stay out of European affairs. This doctrine was strongly supported by Great Britain and several of the new Latin Republics and would have been made as a joint declaration or alliance but for the United States insistence of not committing itself to a course of action with another nation. The survival of this doctrine was made possible only by the British domination of the seas and its territorially non-aggressive attempt to maintain world wide commerce and financial dominance.

The first application of this doctrine as an objective was against the "Holy Alliance" which seemed on the brink of sending a French expedition to overcome the new American States, while the second was against Russia who had decreed its claims extended to the 51st parallel on the Pacific Coast. This latter claim was objected to and with the support of Britain was resolved peacefully at the famous 54-40.

The Monroe Doctrine was not meant to be a self-denying principle which would prevent the United States from seeking further territorial expansion. This was exemplified by our fifth column tactics into Mexico and the subsequent annexation of a free Texas and by the war with Mexico for the annexation of the New Mexico and California territories.

Politically and economically the United States changed little in basic fundamentals from the first period considered, however the degree and vocal intensity of such actions was considerably increased under the non-interfering security afforded by the British naval domination of the world seas.

PERIOD 1850-1890.

Russia. During this period internal changes took place in Russia which though not immediately apparent in her foreign relations allowed for changes to transpire in the future. Peasant reforms were instituted which ended this form of slavery but which also was the complete undoing of the nobility which formed the ruling class. Quasi-representative forms of governmental bodies were formed as dumas, however their effectiveness was negligible. Army reforms were also instituted which closely resemble our own Universal Military Training.

The Crimean War which resulted from Russia's objective to gain the Black Sea Straits and territory at the expense of the Ottoman Empire, was thwarted by the intervention of England and France. This Russian defeat lowered her prestige and relative position in Europe to such a degree that she was unable to regain her previous stature again till 1945. As a small by-product of this action Russia realized that she could not effectively maintain Alaska, which had not proved to be productive, and therefore offered it for sale to the United States.

As a continuing objective, based on governmental self-preservation, Russia attempted to maintain the monarchies of Europe. To this end it was instrumental in forming the esoteric alliance known as the "Three Emperor League" in combination with Germany and Austria-Hungary. Within the alliance, by the exercise of benevolent neutrality, Russia was able to maintain her land areas in the West by suppression of the Polish revolt.

Blocked in the West, the expansionist objectives of Russia were satisfied in the East with the revelation of China's weakness at the beginning of this period. Areas toward North China to the limits of Vladivostok were absorbed and a rich trade with China developed.

United States. During this period the United States continued to grow internally, however to all intents and purposes its objectives of

isolation from Europe were maintained. The recently completed Maine and Oregon border disputes indicated an aggressiveness within the people, which were it not for the preoccupation of Britain and the imminent Mexican War would have entangled the United States in a war which might have required a complete reorientation of national interests.

The foreign policy objectives during the Civil War were generally directed toward insuring a unified nation and as an adjunct, that Europe, especially Britain, did not provide the Confederacy with logistic and monetary support. The Trent Affair and the Alabama Case provided issues which could have been disastrous to these objectives.

The purchase of Alaska from Russia during this period did not reflect any change in objectives, however its special separation from the then United States caused the transaction to be unpopular with the people.

Economically the United States was beginning to experience an industrial revolution which was to change the complexion of the country and rapidly improve the means of communication. The power of the press was beginning to be an important factor in moulding public opinion and consequently the policies of the government.

Two incidents during this period indicate how lack of public support for projects away from the United States frustrated foreign policy objectives held by the administration. The administration took interest in the Cuban Revolution of 1867 and would have liked to provide aid against Spain. However public support for such action was lacking and consequently aid was impossible. Similarly in 1867, the United States had obtained Canal Rights from Honduras for a canal to be built in the future. However in 1879 when a French Company started work on a Panama Canal, public apathy precluded any governmental action to stop this work.

In 1880, the commissioning of the first United States all-steel hulled naval vessel marked the beginning of an era of military support of foreign policy objectives.

PERIOD 1880-1910.

Russia. During this period Russia experienced increasing domestic unrest with numerous revolts against authority which required the further institution of social reforms in the way of greater representation in national government. Though these national dumas afforded little internal government, they created an atmosphere abroad for the popular acceptance of Russia within Western European democracies. There existed also a growing Russian financial dependence on France and England due to their large investments in Russia, though a majority of Russian trade was carried on with Germany.

The foreign policy objectives with regard to Western Europe represent a confusion of short range policies, many of which conflicted with the actual interests of the country. Generally it can be said that the majority of policies lined up with France and Britain for the containment of Germany and Austria.

The completion of the Trans-Siberian Railroad, though not intended to expand the territories of Russia, upset the balance of power in the Far East. From this condition the objectives of Russia developed for further expansion and more favorable port facilities. The Russo-Japanese War discouraged these objectives and lost for Russia a good part of the territory it had gained in the Far East over the past twenty years.

United States. This period in United States history and diplomacy might be termed the "coming of age of a world power". The Monroe Doctrine was invoked against both Great Britain and Germany in their troubles with Venezuela, and the United States possessed enough naval power to substantiate its actions. Similarly a new version of the Monroe Doctrine was introduced whereby the United States took direct action within American countries to keep their affairs in order and to remove cause for foreign intervention. This was even considered to

apply in the fostered revolution in Columbia and the formation of the State of Panama which allowed us then to build a canal across the isthmus of Panama.

The emergence of the United States as a world power with foreign possessions seems to have occurred more by accident than by design. There are many versions as to the causality for the armed intervention in Cuba, however the results and correlary annexations of and during the Spanish American War changed the foreign policy objectives of the United States from the continental sphere to the global sphere. The basic objectives of remaining clear of the European power struggle, fostering American world trade and insuring territorial integrity were reoriented to the new international stature of the United States, but essentially were not changed. As all acquisitions had been in the Pacific or in our immediate waters the special separation from Europe allowed this to remain a fact. The mediation of the Russo-Japanese War by the United States is considered to be the first instance that this country assumed its responsibility as a world power. The "Open Door" policy for China is considered to be the first departure from the traditional objectives, however this can still be argued on the basis of maintaining free American world trade.

PERIOD 1910-1944.

Russia. During this period Russia passed through a most crucial evolution of social revolution and after a period of relative isolation emerged as one of the super powers of this world.

The foreign policy objectives which led Russia to attack Austria in defence of Serbia and begin the first world war are obscured in a multiplicity of past history and confused decisions emanating from Tsar Nicholas. It can be assumed that it bore on maintaining a balance of power in what was considered a rather restricted area. The transient governments within Russia during the revolution presented the basic objective of survival of a country. They wished to maintain what they

had and terminate the hostilities. The ascendancy of the Bolshevik regime produced the objectives of nationalization and immediate peace. Disclaiming the actions of preceding governments, they strove for this peace on a non-imperialistic basis, without annexation or indemnities, and with governmental self-determination of people.

During the period between the first and second World War the Soviet leaders directed the foreign policy of the USSR toward two objectives; the preservation and strengthening of the Soviet State and the promotion of revolutionary movements abroad. The first objectives were coupled with a sincere effort to maintain peace for the country and to establish assurance that, if the peace should be broken elsewhere, Russia would be kept free of the resulting conflict. This was exemplified by many disarmament and non-aggression pacts participated in by the Russian government. The promotion of revolutionary movements abroad was actually broadened to include widespread espionage, both of which caused distrust of the USSR in most countries of the world.

At this point it is interesting to note that in February of 1928, Litvinov the USSR Foreign Minister, presented to a commission on disarmament of the League of Nations a proposal for complete and rapid disarmament of all nations, to be guaranteed by a permanent system of international inspection.

During the years of 1938-1939, the USSR became increasingly alarmed at the strength of Germany and Japan and directed her actions toward the objectives of establishing alliances with Britain, France and the United States in order to establish a measure of collective security. In these objectives she was not successful, so she shifted her approach to a non-aggression and sphere of influence pact with Germany and Japan. These co-existence pacts lasted only as long as interests did not conflict.

The basic objectives of the Soviet Government while a member of

the Allies during World War II did not appreciably change except for the desire to enlarge its sphere of influence and enlarge its border territories. The political policies and actions it took relative to accepting the Atlantic Charter, the Moscow Declaration, etc., seem to have been expediences to satisfy the immediate situation.

United States. During the majority of this period the foreign policy objectives of the United States followed the traditional precedence of isolation and avoidance of foreign entanglements. This was not always in consonance with the international economic actions of the nation and caused much misunderstanding within the world powers. The United States can be considered to have presented a position of unilateral actions which required other states to change and adjust their own policies to suit the situation.

The advent of the first World War brought the realization that previously in our applications of the Monroe Doctrine we had had the preponderance of power in the region involved. Now, in support of our world trade and interests, we were dealing with equally powerful European states who were extending their influence over large sea areas, and we were unable to exert an influence sufficient to alleviate the situation. The United States declaration of war came when this situation was fully realized and a related event could crystallize the support of the people. It is to be noted that the United States entered the war as an associate and not as a partner with the Allied Nations.

The idealistic concept of a League of Nations advanced by President Wilson was not subscribed to by the people of the United States who still felt that isolation and independent action were paramount objectives in maintaining peace. Though our policies reflected this dictum, our actions conformed to and at times exceeded the international requirements set by international tribunals and conferences. The United

States conformed not as a member but by acting independently along parallel lines. Though political isolation was considered feasible, it was not in consonance with the international economic position occupied by this country and the multiple interests associated therewith. This then placed the requirement that though the United States was unwilling to officially act as a world power, unofficially it would conform and exert its influence on international affairs.

The world depression of 1929 caused few changes to the United States foreign policy though economically it required a complete reorientation due to the tendency of other nations to attempt to establish economic self-sufficiency. United States attempts to promote trade were either too little and late or were blocked in some measure by isolationist legislative tactics at home. The growth of self-sufficient Germany, Italy and Japan were the results. The Neutrality Acts were a form of foreign policy objectives designed to prevent any dealings to maintain a balance of power and maintain a stable peace.

The fall of France in 1940 brought about revolutionary changes in the expressed foreign policy objectives of the United States. By the Lend-Lease Act, the Atlantic Charter, the Declaration by United Nations and the Moscow Declaration of 1941 the United States asserted principles intended to universalize American policy and post war objectives. These included liberal trading principles, international functional agencies, the freedoms of rule and government, and the establishment of an international organization for the maintenance of peace and security. These agreements committed the United States to accept responsibilities of continuous international co-operation. By these commitments the United States abandoned its traditional foreign policy of isolation and absolute freedom of action.

SUMMARY.

The foreign policy objectives of both Russia and the United States evolved and were fostered by the requirement of self-preservation and survival in a generally hostile environment. Both nations required territorial aggrandizement to achieve their goals. Russia, starting the period as a predominant European power, followed the pattern of endeavoring to maintain the balance of power till this proved unsuccessful and required a period of isolation till she could again emerge as a very strong power. The United States on the other hand, began the period as a new and minor nation following a pattern of isolation and individual action till she was forced to assume her role as a world power. Geographical configurations partially account for these divergent patterns, however it is believed that the diametrically opposed concepts of government and economic policies play equally prominent roles.

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