

# REVIEWS

## WORLD POWER — SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY UNDER BREZHNEV AND ANDROPOV

Jonathan Steele

Michael Joseph £14.95 287pp hbk  
ISBN 0 7181 22976

## THE MAKING OF THE SECOND COLD WAR

Fred Halliday

Verso £5.95 280pp pbk  
ISBN 0 86091 7525

## COLD WAR OR DETENTE — THE SOVIET VIEWPOINT

Georgi Arbatov

Zed Press £4.95 219pp pbk  
ISBN 0 86232 2057

The arrival of the first Cruise missiles and the breakdown of the INF talks have intensified discussion of the way forward for the peace movement. Whilst the immediate challenge is to make the new weapons inoperable, the discussion has revealed a widespread desire to understand *what* is going on, *why* there is an arms race and *how* it can be ended. Three recent books provide useful background material and arguments.

The most readable, by far, is Jonathan Steele's review of recent Soviet foreign policy and, without doubt, this is the first to recommend to a relatively apolitical newcomer to the issues. Steele is by no means sympathetic to the politics and ideology of the Soviet government and this makes his demolition of the most important myths about Soviet policies all the more convincing — although, at times, a little embarrassing to a committed Soviet supporter!

Steele is an accomplished journalist and uses precise facts and pithy arguments in clear and jargon-free language. Whilst, on occasions, he may oversimplify and overstate his case, notably in dismissing some Soviet success stories (in the Third World, in weapons' development, etc), even these passages provide a useful counterweight to the myths that are generally believed today.

For a newcomer, the clarity of the explanations, more than four hundred source references and the sixteen pages of index entries will be particularly useful for further and more detailed study. But, whilst the book is one of the best ever with respect to 'what' is going on, it does little to explain the 'why' of international conflict.

Next in readability comes Fred Halliday's polemical analysis of the many and intertwining factors that led to the collapse

of detente — definitely a 'why' book though not short on 'what'. Although it is not a difficult read, it does use political jargon which may be unfamiliar to some readers and it does presume, at the very least, sympathy with Marxist and socialist ideas. In consequence, it takes for granted many matters which are contentious within the peace movement and on the Left (notably, in regard to the nature of Soviet aid to liberation struggles).

I am stimulated to attempt a summary of the book in response to suggestions that the book's most useful contribution is its summary of Soviet initiatives to end the arms race and to restore detente. If, indeed, this is the book's most useful contribution and the reader seeks such information, I strongly recommend Arbatov (see below) as a more comprehensive alternative. However, by my reckoning, this simple and somewhat patronising label 'contains useful pro-Soviet material' — though well-intentioned — greatly devalues the entire book. Important as it is to understand Soviet policies and expose anti-Soviet slanders, this is but one aspect of many examined by Halliday.

He describes eight major and several minor factors shaping the course of world events of which the 'Great Contest' between capitalism and communism is only one. He is particularly illuminating when analysing how North-South, West-West and intra-state conflicts contribute to the arms race and the way in which these factors interact. He does not come up with

a simplistic non-Marxist conclusion that one factor dominates all others or that the relative weight of these factors is fixed and immutable by time and events. In short, this is a responsible and creative analysis of the dialectics of international relations and deserves a wide readership.

There are, naturally, aspects of Halliday's interpretation to which some may take exception — notably in regard to the relatively minor role his assessment ascribes to the arms race *per se* in world conflict. But these are matters of judgement and, especially within the peace movement, Halliday's global survey is a useful corrective to much current thinking and is likely to stimulate an outward-looking discussion of the 'why' of the arms race.

Halliday takes great care over defining terms — for example, 'cold war' or 'detente' are *policies* whereas the 'arms race' describes *actions* — and he engages in intense debate with other writers on these issues. For my part however, I find it difficult to enthuse over whether postwar history is best described as an 'arms race' or 'the cold war' or 'two cold wars separated by detente' — unless this in some way affects 'how' we campaign to end whatever we choose to call it.

Last in readability, though perhaps first in importance, is a semi-informal explanation of Soviet attitudes by Georgi Arbatov who is a Director of the Institute of United States and Canadian Studies in Moscow. This is the book to recommend to anyone wishing for an authoritative explanation of



Soviet policies.

From such a source it is unrealistic to expect anything other than a black and white picture of the world with the Soviet Union always reasonable and with the West always responsible for all problems. But the value of this exposition lies, however, not in the arguments but in the authority of his explanations of Soviet government attitudes and the conviction his answers convey in expressing the Soviet peoples' desire for peace and its fear of Western intentions.

By coincidence, as I was completing this review I received a letter from a long-time non-political friend who recently visited the Soviet Union as a tourist. She remarks, 'I do not think I have heard so much about World War II in one week before'. The intense desire for peace of the Soviet people is evident to all travellers to the USSR and comes through in the way Arbatov deals with each question. Terms like 'counter-city' and 'collateral damage' are mentioned only in scornful asides — though sometimes this refreshing directness can be disturbing.

For example, in reply to a question about, in effect, limiting nuclear war, he commented, '... I can't imagine that the

government and military command of a country receiving the news that several thousand warheads are flying in its direction would sit idly by and wait for them to explode, so that they can determine whether it's a counterforce or a counter-value strike, and then start to indulge in these painful reflections and intellectual exercises'.

What this reply illustrates is that deep theoretical studies of the 'rules' of nuclear war — so popular in the West — carry little weight in the Soviet Union. Whilst Soviet insistence that any nuclear war will be a holocaust has the virtue of honesty and directness, their unwillingness to participate in and understand NATO military thinking can be carried too far and, in the past, has meant that Soviet negotiators have been outsmarted by their more sophisticated American opponents.

Similarly, Arbatov displays apparent ignorance of the different nature of weapons of deterrence and those that might be used as part of a first-strike and, in consequence, cannot understand why Soviet insistence on military parity (as opposed to military sufficiency) means that the Soviet Union is developing weapons

perceived in the West as *intended and only usable* for a 'first-strike'. What Arbatov does not seem to appreciate is that Soviet insistence on parity in weapons will be interpreted as wanting parity in military intentions.

By another coincidence I have just received a strongly-worded letter from an address in the GDR objecting to a speech I made to the Communist Party Congress describing as 'idiotic' Soviet plans to have the same weapons as NATO. The points I made then were endorsed by a 20 to 1 majority in December at the CND Conference: namely, that the Soviet Union has no need for weapons with the accuracy and travel times required for a first-strike, that these counter-measures were incompatible with the Soviet pledge never to be first to use nuclear weapons and that such weapons made the USSR more likely to invite a pre-emptive first-strike from the US.

So the welcome refusal of the Soviet Union to engage in the same military thinking prevalent in the West also leads them into stupid errors that fuel the arms race. It is a matter for regret that Arbatov, like my correspondent from the GDR,

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does not appreciate how Soviet actions are interpreted in the West and that this can undermine the efforts of Western peace movements. Whilst Arbatov is invaluable in helping the West to understand Soviet attitudes, one is left in despair about the ability of the Soviet Union to understand the West.

**John Cox**