



Russia, Germany, China: Remarks on Foreign Policy

Erich Fromm
(1961h-e)

“Russia, Germany, China: Remarks on Foreign Policy,” was written in 1961 and distributed as typescript.

Copyright © 1961 by Erich Fromm; **Copyright** © 2011 by The Literary Estate of Erich Fromm, c/o Dr. Rainer Funk, Ursrainer Ring 24, D-72076 Tuebingen / Germany. – Fax: +49-(0)7071-600049; E-Mail: frommfunk[at-symbol]aol.com. - Translation into Italian by Daniele Grasso.

The Soviet Union at the outbreak of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 was led by revolutionaries who sincerely believed that the victory of the revolution in Russia and the expected victory in Germany and in other European countries would usher in a new historical period, such as Marx and other Socialists had envisioned it. They made a number of severe mistakes. First of all, they believed that at least Germany would join the revolutionary forces, and there is little doubt that had they known that this was an error, they would not have taken over power in Russia. Aside from this error of misreading the timetable of history, they did not see the dangers resulting from the forces of centralization and bureaucratization, from the suppression of spontaneity and freedom among the workers and, eventually, from the use of violence and terror.

At the time of Stalin's death, his ruthless methods had achieved the goal of creating a powerful industrial basis, which permits not only the buildup of a potent military establishment, but also the beginning of an increasing satisfaction of consumers, needs.

Soviet Russia in its Khrushchevist stage is a state which in no way represents Marxist socialism, which was primarily a movement for the emancipation of the individual and the self-realization of the unalienated human personality. Khrushchevism is a new form of state capitalism, economically effective, humanly impoverishing. Khrushchev has to use communistic slogans about world revolution, Marx and Engels' teachings, Lenin's leadership, etc., because he has no other ideology binding and unifying the minds of the people. But to believe that he is a revolutionary or a socialist, because he talks that way, is about as naive as to believe that the Renaissance Popes were Christians. Russia is today governed by a large industrial, political and military bureaucracy, recruiting itself more and more from its own ranks, with attitudes and interests similar to those of corresponding managerial groups in the United States and in other capitalist countries; these attitudes are being conservative and cautious in outlook, eager to attain more power and higher status for themselves and their children, and more income for the satisfaction of real or status-symbol consumer needs. Actually, Rus-



sia is today no longer a "have-not", but a "have" state, one of the richest and most prosperous countries of the world, and clearly on the way to become more prosperous and richer--and her political aims follow from this.

The Soviet Union, which in 1917 was the leader of the world revolution, is today one of the most conservative powers, based on an increasingly rigid class structure ruled by a centralized, managerial class. Because she binds her masses with traditional communist slogans, she must often speak the language of Lenin, the language of communism, but those in the West who believe that Russia stands for the things she talks about, just fall for words rather than seeing the facts. No doubt Mr. Khrushchev is closer today to the industrial leaders of the United States than he is to Marx or Lenin, the difference being that he probably knows it better than the industrial leaders of the United States do. In fact, the Soviet Union and the United States are, as Nehru said recently, more alike today than any two countries in the world, and he predicted that they would become more similar in the future as "machine civilizations". (*New York Times*, Oct. 10, 1960).

What follows from this for Khrushchev's foreign policy is that being in the position of a prosperous "have" nation, Russia is afraid of the "have-not" nations led today by China. He looks upon China as the capitalist nations looked toward Russia forty years ago--as a potential leader of the revolution of all colonial nations, and incidentally, of the peoples with darker skins against the prosperous white nations.

Again, one must not be deceived by slogans. Khrushchev cannot declare his misgivings about China overtly (although considering the situation, the argument has been pretty overt in the last few months). He must continue to talk Communism and revolution, when he is desperately seeking an alliance with the other great conservative "have" nation--the United States. He is today competing with China for the friendship of the neutrals in Asia and in Africa, and even in Cuba, and he has to make it appear that he is as ardent in his concern for their liberation as the Chinese are. His real interest is essentially that of the consolidation of the world situation by a tacit agreement between Russia and the United States.

Here are a few examples for this assertions Khrushchev was trying to get a foothold in the Congo, but probably more in order to prevent the Chinese from getting in there, rather than in order to make new conquests. In fact, he did very little. He sent fifteen commercial planes, may be some arms (the Chinese are said to have sent 2 1/2 million dollars worth) and he withdrew after Lumumba's defeat. All he did in reaction to this political defeat was some shouting and threatening. The same, I think, holds true in the case of Cuba. He again has to ward off the competition of the Chinese, and has to continue his ideology of helping the colonial nations. But I think the fact that he did not make his much-heralded visit to Cuba is a clear, symbolical expression of the fact that he does not really want Cuba to become a satellite, much less a military base, since his political aim is still



that of an alliance with the United States. Recently he made this perfectly clear by declaring that the offer of Soviet military aid to Cuba was meant only "symbolically", and also in his hesitant attitude toward giving the Castro government all the economic help it needs.

The grave error of United States foreign policy and of the foreign policy of those countries in Europe which follow our lead is that we completely misread the nature of Khrushchevist communism, that we do not see its conservative and reactionary character, that we believe in words as if they were facts, that we do not understand the dialectic relationship between political ideologies and political facts, and eventually, that we do not see clearly that Khrushchev represents the conservative and essentially peace-minded wing in Russia, and that he is fighting for his political life against the Chinese and the aggressive Stalinist wing which still exists in Russia. We believe that every defeat of Khrushchev is a victory for us, and forget that it is actually a victory for the Chinese and their Russian Stalinist allies. We forget that Khrushchev, who by no means has the all-powerful position that Stalin had, will have to resign or to adopt (opportunist that he is) the policy of his opponents, if he fails in his aims and then, indeed, we shall be confronted with an aggressive expansionist China and a corresponding Russian leadership, closely allied with each other.

An agreement between the United States and Russia will constitute an agreement of two conservative powers which one might like as little as one would have liked an alliance between the United States and Czarist Russia. But considering the fact that the overriding concern of man today is the avoidance of war, a Russian-American understanding is a necessity, because it is the condition for the ending of the arms race, and hence for ending the probability of a nuclear holocaust. Such an understanding leaves also the hope that the uncommitted nations, especially the former colonial nations, will adopt forms of democratic socialism which put them neither in the Russian or Chinese camp, nor in the camp of the United States or her allies.

What stands in the way of a Russian-American understanding? In the first place, as I already said, a misreading of the Russian political structure, a mistaken assumption that Russia as a revolutionary power wants to conquer the world for communism. Like every bureaucracy in a strong imperialist power, I assume the Russians want to gain for themselves certain advantages in the world, just as the British, French and Russian statesmen of the 19th century tried to get such advantages; yet these statesmen were very careful not to take the step which would lead to war. They were also intelligent enough to differentiate between slogans and facts, and to know that public declarations for the ears of the governed do not necessarily express any serious intentions or ideas of those who govern. Undoubtedly, Khrushchev is not less intelligent or realistic than the statesmen of the 19th century were, and hence he knows that it is not only desirable but necessary to avoid nuclear war.



It is important, first of all, for our political leaders to learn to understand the difference between ideology and fact, to know something about the crude Marxist concepts which the Russians use, and then they would not be so shocked by a statement of Khrushchev's, "we will bury you", which is a conventional, though crude formulation of Marxist philosophy of history, referring to the "laws of history", not to war.

But even if those misunderstandings can be cleared up, there is one very serious element which blocks an agreement between the United States and Russia, and hence threatens war. And that is the rearmament of Germany.

We make the same mistake here as we make with the Soviet Union, namely that of taking words for facts. Germany was the last of the great countries of Europe which arrived on the scene when the world had already been divided among older colonial powers. In a short time Germany developed a most potent economic and industrial machine, and this potential, together with German feudal militaristic tradition, created a dynamic mixture with the aim of expanding and gaining new territories partly as markets, and partly as sources for raw material. The first time Germany made this attempt was under the Kaiser, and she almost succeeded, and yet failed because the German leaders underestimated the power of the United States.

After her defeat and the Treaty of Versailles, it took Germany only a few years to get not only to where she had been before the defeat, but to build a more modern and effective industrial system, and a streamlined military organization. The same expansionist forces of industry and the Junkers began to operate again, only a few years after the defeat. However, the German industrialists and generals were handicapped in their expansionist plans by the power of the working class and some groups of the liberal middle class which together constituted only a little less than a majority in Parliament. A half-crazy man with his declassed and resentful lower middle-class adherents offered his services not only to destroy the left and liberal parties and the trade unions, but also to provide the ideology and passions which were necessary for the new attempt at military expansion. Again Germany would have almost succeeded; again she made the mistake of under-estimating the power of the United States, aside from making other military and political blunders, which was not surprising considering their talented and yet half-mad leader. Now, only 15 years after a crushing defeat, Germany is the most potent country from an economic standpoint and is acquiring the most powerful military machine in Western Europe.

The forces which were underlying the expansionism of the monarchy and of Hitler are still the same, and they are rallying. This time the fuse of nationalistic sentiment is being prepared as effectively as the Kaiser used the feelings of patriotism and of the fight against Russian autocracy, and as Hitler used the resentment against the Treaty of Versailles. The German government has never officially recognized the Oder-Neisse line, and only recently a member of the Ger-



man cabinet stated that the German population has a right to return to the "stolen territories", adding only that Germany will not try to recover them by force. This latter formulation was also used by Hitler until shortly before the outbreak of the war, and is meaningless, since it is clear that neither Russia nor Poland will return these territories to the Germans voluntarily. The demand for the return of those territories is not even justified from any realistic or moral viewpoint. While a treaty which forced millions of people to leave the soil on which they had lived for centuries was an immoral and unjust demand, it would be equally unjust and immoral to force those who live there now to leave again. But actually the former inhabitants of these backward parts of the former German Reich in Silesia and East Prussia do not even want to return. They are very well integrated in the German economy which is so prosperous today, that they have to import workers from Italy and other countries. The whole talk about the recovery of the "stolen territories", is the same as the talk about the unification of Germany; it is not meant seriously, but is used as an emotional fuse to unite the German people behind their military and industrial leaders.

We have made the mistake, and are still making it, to think that what was wrong in 1914 was the bad intentions of the Kaiser; or that what was wrong in 1939 was the racism and irrationality of Hitler; and we do not see that William II and Adolf Hitler were, historically, only different trappings of the same basic reality; German expansionism led by her industrial leaders and by her generals. Just as we believe that Khrushchev is a revolutionary because he talks that way, we believe that Adenauer is for peace because he talks that way. What else is he supposed to talk about, before he has raised German military and economic strength to a point where it will be impossible for another power to curb him? We make the mistake of believing that the execution of the Nazi leaders and the process of denazification (which has actually left many Nazis in leading positions) meant that Germany is now a "peaceful" nation. All these procedures (including the reparations paid to the State of Israel, and the official line against anti-semitism) are only attempts to change the Nazi façade of German expansionism into a peaceful "democratic" façade. But the façade does not make any difference. Even a country with democratic forms of government can be expansionist, if its fundamental economic and social forces aim at expansion.

Most American observers of the German scene make the mistake of not understanding Germany dynamically, that is, the process and movement of German society, but rather, they look at her statistically, that is, as she is at a given moment, and one cannot understand any living phenomenon (and this insight was Hegel's great contribution to the understanding of man and history) unless one sees it as a process--hence, if one can judge where it moves from, and where it moves to.

Germany is moving from a position of defeat to a position of new strength, driven by the same industrial and military forces which have moved her since the



beginning of this century. In order to do that, German politicians have to talk peace and democracy and have to use the help of the United States, offering themselves (like Hitler) as the necessary ally for the fight against "Communism." By now the process of German military revival has progressed so far already, that some of the democratic trappings can be dropped. (A few recent examples: the "memorandum" of the German generals "demanding" from the Government atomic rearmament and general conscription; the change of those military rules which demanded that a soldier has to salute and to obey only the officers of his own military outfit, and only during military activities; a growing nationalism, instigated both by the Adenauer party and by the social democratic party, with the aim of competing for votes.) Unless one sees these changes as part of a process, one will be as blind as to where Germany is going as the world was from 1930 to 1937 in regard to Nazi Germany.

All this does not mean that Adenauer is lying when he says he is in favor of peace. He may not be fully aware of the historical process he is supporting (and actually, whether he is or is not, makes little difference historically). It also does not mean that Adenauer will necessarily try to begin a war. His economic position in Western Europe, combined with his military superiority which is urged upon him by the Western policy, will soon be so overwhelming that he will be able to dictate to the West in forms we are accustomed to witnessing in the life of the great corporations. There will be "mergers" and nice looking "contracts," rather than the march of infantry and the flight of bombers.

That a romantic and vain French general does not see these realities is not any more surprising than the fact that the French generals in 1939 did not see that an unfinished Maginot line was just as good as no Maginot line at all. Once Germany has reached her full power again, she may turn against England or against the United States, but more likely against Russia. The Russians are afraid of this. It is likely that they are sincere in the expression of such fear, since they have been invaded twice by the same legions of an imperialistic Germany. But even if Khrushchev is not as afraid of a rearmed Germany as he says he is, the continuous rearmament of Germany is the symbol which decides on the failure or success of his policy. He has said in the clearest way again and again that the rearmament of Germany is a crucial point which stands in the way of a Russian-American understanding. By bringing up the Berlin question which is the only spot in Western Europe where he is in a position to do something, while we are not, he has tried to force some concessions out of us. We were even willing to make some symbolic concessions at the time of the Khrushchev-Eisenhower meeting last year, until under Mr. Adenauer's pressure, as it is he who influences American foreign policy today considerably, we declared that all concessions were off. Thus we were again exactly at the point where we were before the Geneva Foreign Ministers' Conference and the Camp David negotiations. In reaction to these declarations, Khrushchev made his tough Baku speech, which did



not produce any effects on the Western side.

Our intransigency in the German rearmament and the Berlin questions, combined with the inept and, in fact, insulting way of handling the U-2 incident, left Khrushchev no other way out but to talk tough, unless he was to lose his prestige inside Russia and his fight against his opponents. But even after the Summit Conference, in his speech in Berlin, he did not deviate from his Camp David promises about not rushing changes in Berlin, and even now he declares that he is going to postpone them until the spring of 1961.

But time is running out for Khrushchev. If we go on following the dictates of Adenauer and Willy Brandt--that is to say, if we go on with the unrestricted rearmament of Germany and with a complete unwillingness to make even some symbolic concessions in Berlin, Khrushchev will lose out, and it will matter little to us whether his enemies will replace him, or whether he will carry out their policy in order to save his political life.

If this happens, then indeed, the chances for peace will have been reduced to almost zero, and the Chinese or Stalinists will call the tune. Quite obviously the Chinese are less afraid of atomic war than we and the Russians are, and they may have good realistic reasons for this, if we forget human values.

It is a fallacy to believe that our alternative today is between Soviet Communism, and American Capitalism. The real conflict lies today between the expansionist countries under the leadership of China, and the conservative countries represented by the United States and the Soviet Union. However, if an agreement is reached between the United States and the Soviet Union, and furthermore, if China is given a seat in the United Nations and becomes a part of a general disarmament pact, there is reasonable hope that the aggressive wing of the Chinese Communists will be superseded by the more peace-minded one--because of the fact that a world without armament will offer China economic possibilities which make military expansion unnecessary.

What follows for United States foreign policy is:

1. More victories over Khrushchev will mean eventually his downfall, and the victory of the Chinese and Russian Stalinists.

2. Disarmament of Germany (West and East) is a necessary condition for peace.

3. The un-committed people of Asia and Africa can only be won over by an appeal of Democratic Socialism, and not by showing them the beauties of capitalism.

4. Massive economic aid to the underdeveloped nations is a condition for the peaceful evolution of the colonial peoples.

5. Universal disarmament, including China, is a necessary condition for avoiding nuclear war, since even given the will of both the American and the Russian leaders to avoid war, its outbreak is likely within the next ten years (as a result of false calculations of the opposite's moves, and through the atomic ar-



Propriety of the Erich Fromm Document Center. For personal use only. Citation or publication of material prohibited without express written permission of the copyright holder.

Eigentum des Erich Fromm Dokumentationszentrums. Nutzung nur für persönliche Zwecke. Veröffentlichungen – auch von Teilen – bedürfen der schriftlichen Erlaubnis des Rechteinhabers.

mament of desperate or expansionist nations.)

6. The seating of Communist China in the United Nations, and her diplomatic recognition by the United States, is a necessary premise for universal disarmament and the lessening of international tension.