

## Clear and Present Dangers

DAN CALDWELL

The Soviets are not the only threat to our national security; equally perilous is our lack of knowledge about U.S.-Soviet relations and our reluctance to discuss the topic in school.

77 Herman Neufeld



In October 1962, President Kennedy announced on national television that the Soviet Union had secretly sent missiles to Cuba and that the U.S. demanded their immediate removal. With just cause, anyone who heard President Kennedy's speech feared that war was imminent. Following the crisis, Kennedy estimated that the chances of a Soviet-American war resulting from the crisis had been from one out of three to even—not very reassuring odds given the high stakes involved (Kennedy, 1969).

Over 22 years have passed since the Cuban missile crisis, but the danger of open conflict between the world's two superpowers remains. In fact, the danger has increased significantly in one respect: whereas the U.S. and the Soviet Union possessed hundreds of nuclear weapons in 1962, together they possessed approximately 50,000 by the end of 1984 (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1984).

The U.S. faces clear and present dangers both from the Soviet Union and from our failure to educate Americans about the single most important bilateral relationship in contemporary international relations. Fortunately, there are ways for concerned educators to increase public knowledge. (To test your knowledge of U.S.-Soviet relations, see Figure 1.)

### The Past as Prologue for the Present

Although there are a number of similarities between the Russian empire and the Soviet Union, historians usually clearly distinguish between the two—the former referring to pre-1917

and the latter to the government created as a result of the Bolshevik Revolution (Gaddis, 1978). Relations between the United States and Russia were generally cordial, even though the two competed for control over Alaska and the Pacific Northwest. The Russians came as far south as San Francisco Bay, where they established a trading center at Fort Ross.

When the Bolsheviks, led by Lenin, seized power and overthrew the Romanov dynasty in 1917, many in the West were hostile to the new communist government. In 1918 the United States, Great Britain, France, and Japan even sent soldiers to Murmansk and Archangel in the Soviet Union, ostensibly to protect Western war material (Kennan, 1958). But this expeditionary force also had the not-so-hidden purpose of demonstrating Western opposition to the new government. Few Americans know about this episode in Soviet-American relations; however,

all Soviet school children are taught that the Western capitalist powers attacked the new Soviet state soon after the Revolution.

To the surprise of many Bolshevik revolutionaries, the new government, despite Western opposition, took hold and consolidated its power. Several Americans played important roles in the early days of the new Soviet government. John Reed actively supported the Bolsheviks and was buried in a place of honor in Red Square. Fresh out of medical school, an idealistic young American doctor, Armand Hammer, went to the Soviet Union to help provide adequate medical care for the Soviets. Eventually, at the request of Lenin, Hammer helped to attract American capital to the Soviet Union and to set up some early manufacturing plants.

Following Lenin's death in 1924, Stalin ruled the Soviet Union with an iron fist. He ordered the reorganiza-

Figure 1. Test Your U.S.-S.R. IQ.

#### True or False:

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. The land area of the Soviet Union is two and one-half times that of the U.S.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. A little over half of the people living in the Soviet Union are Russians.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. In World War II, approximately 20,000,000 Soviet citizens died, compared to about 500,000 Americans.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. There are about 20 times the number of automobiles in the U.S. as are in the U.S.S.R.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. The membership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union constitutes roughly 6 percent of the total population.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. The Soviet gross national product equals about 60 percent of the United States' GNP.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. The U.S. sent troops to the Soviet Union to oppose the new communist government soon after it took over in 1917.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. The U.S. and the Soviet Union combined possess about 50,000 nuclear weapons.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Since the end of World War II, Soviet leaders have been reluctant to confront the U.S. with a direct military threat.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. The most serious U.S.-Soviet confrontation occurred in October 1962.

All of the above statements are true.

Dan Caldwell is Associate Professor of Political Science, Pepperdine University, Malibu, California.

Copyright © 1985 by Dan Caldwell

**“... whereas the U.S. and the Soviet Union possessed hundreds of nuclear weapons in 1962, together they possessed approximately 50,000 by the end of 1984.”**

UPI/Bettman Newsphotos



tion of Soviet agriculture into collectives, and any Soviet peasants who objected were imprisoned or killed. Estimates of the number of peasants killed in the drive for collectivization range from several hundred thousand to 20 million. More Soviets were imprisoned and killed during the purges of the mid-to-late 1930s. Stalin used terror to maintain his power and showed that there was not a great deal of difference between the radical left (communism) and the radical right (the national socialism of Hitler). In both systems, the government was omnipotent.

World War II was a seminal event for both the Soviet Union and Soviet-U.S. relations. Twenty million Soviet citizens died during the war compared to 400,000 Americans. Even today, 40 years later, it is customary for Soviet wedding parties to go directly from city hall to the local war memorial to lay a wreath for all who died in World War II.

During the war, the U.S. under the Lend Lease program provided the Soviet Union with \$11 billion worth of military equipment that was absolutely vital to the Soviet war effort. In June 1942, President Roosevelt promised Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov that the U.S. would open a second front by the end of the year to relieve the pressure on the Soviet Union on the Eastern front. For various reasons, the second front was not opened until June 1944, a fact that caused suspicion and deep resentment among many Soviets.

At the end of World War II, the Soviet Union maintained an enormous standing army, while the U.S. demobilized its forces on a scale unprecedented in world history. Within two years after the war, our military was reduced in size from 12 million to one-and-a-half million. By 1947, a concerned President Truman exclaimed, "So far as I was concerned, the program we were following was no longer demobilization—it was disintegration of our armed forces."

Although the victorious powers established the United Nations in 1945 to preserve peace, the new organization

was founded on the central assumption that the great powers could unanimously agree on the definition and combatting of international aggression. This proved to be a mistaken assumption, and by 1947 the cooperation that had characterized Soviet-American relations during World War II had been replaced by competition and conflict over Eastern Europe, Greece, Turkey, and Iran. The cold war had begun.

### From Cold War to Hot Peace

The cold war was marked by U.S.-Soviet competition and confrontations over various areas and issues, most notably Berlin in 1948 and 1961, and Cuba in 1962. American policy during this period sought to contain the expansion of communism (Caldwell, 1981; Gaddis, 1982).

The Cuban missile crisis marked the most serious U.S.-Soviet confrontation of the post-World War II period. Both Kennedy and Khrushchev realized during the crisis that nuclear war had been a real possibility (Abel, 1966). In the aftermath of the crisis, Kennedy and Khrushchev devised two agreements to lessen the danger of nuclear war. The first was the so-called "hot line." Although Hollywood invariably depicts this as a red telephone sitting on the President's desk, the hot line, in reality, is a teletype link that provides quick, secure, and secret communications between the U.S. and Soviet governments. It has been used on a number of occasions, including the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli wars, and following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.

The second agreement, signed eight months after the Cuban missile crisis, was the Limited Test Ban Treaty, which prohibited the testing of nuclear weapons in the atmosphere and in the oceans. Although both countries continued testing nuclear weapons underground following the signing and ratification of the treaty, it was, at least, an important "clean air act." It was also the first significant arms control agreement signed by the superpowers during the post-1945 period. This treaty marked the first of 20 bi- and multi-

lateral arms control agreements signed by the U.S. and the Soviet Union during the 1960s and 70s.

### Nixon, Kissinger, and Détente

In 1968, American society was stretched taut. An average of 278 Americans per week were being killed in Vietnam, and 30,000 men per month were being drafted. In the 1968 presidential campaign, Richard Nixon promised to end the war in Vietnam. Once in office, President Nixon and his assistant for national security affairs, Henry Kissinger, sought to improve relations with both the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, thereby increasing the probability that these countries would assist the U.S. in withdrawing from Vietnam.

Nixon and Kissinger sought to engage the Soviet Union in a number of negotiations concerning different issue areas, including the control of strategic nuclear arms, trade, and scientific and cultural cooperation. The hope was that agreements in these areas would so intertwine the U.S. and the Soviet Union that neither side would break the relationship (Caldwell, 1981). This policy came to be known as *détente*. It was, in essence, a complex strategy of behavior modification in which the U.S. would employ both positive and negative incentives in order to mold Soviet international behavior to America's liking. The heyday of *détente* lasted from the Moscow summit meeting between Nixon and Brezhnev in May 1972—at which time they signed the first two Strategic Arms Limitation Talks agreements—to October 1973, when Egypt and Syria attacked Israel with Soviet foreknowledge.

Following the October war, several other events raised U.S. concern over the Soviet Union's commitment to the principles of *détente*. Likewise, Soviet leaders questioned whether the U.S. was committed to these same principles. Clearly, the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union in late 1979 marked the final demise of *détente*.

In 1980 Ronald Reagan campaigned on an anti-*détente*, pro-defense platform. He called for the strengthening

**"... relations between the two countries will continue to be the single most important bilateral relationship in world politics for the rest of this century."**

of U.S. defenses and, if necessary, confronting the Soviet Union and its allies with U.S. military might.

Once in office, President Reagan and his advisors embarked on a foreign policy toward the Soviet Union that was characterized by five elements: (1) rhetorical assertiveness, (2) a desire to compete with the Soviet Union, (3) unilateralism, (4) linkage, and (5) a tendency to view regional problems in the overall context of East-West relations (Caldwell, 1985). These characteristics distinguished the Reagan administration's policy toward the U.S.S.R. from previous administrations.

Relations between the U.S. and the Soviet Union are now at a turning point. The Reagan administration has set and trimmed its sails for a second term. The Soviet government is enduring a prolonged period of transition, and it is unclear who will be the next long-term leader and what his policies toward the U.S. will be. What is certain is that relations between the two countries will continue to be the single most important bilateral relationship in world politics for the rest of this century.

## Why Study U.S.-Soviet Relations?

Given the importance of U.S.-Soviet relations, one might assume that this topic would receive attention proportionate to, or at least reflecting, its importance at all levels of American education. Unfortunately, this is not the case. During the past several years, university, foundation, and government officials have noted the ill health of Russian and Soviet studies at the graduate level, and a number of encouraging efforts have been made to remedy this deficiency. For example, the Rockefeller Foundation recently announced major grants for the study of Soviet international behavior to three programs sponsored by Columbia University, the University of California at Berkeley and Stanford, and UCLA and the Rand Corporation.

Unfortunately, concern over the poor state of health of Russian and Soviet studies has not been paralleled by similar concern over the almost nonexistent consideration of the Soviet Union and U.S.-Soviet relations at the elementary and secondary levels. The omission of these topics from the curriculum is dangerous for several reasons.

First, if our educational systems do not provide the opportunity for young Americans to study the history, culture, and politics of the Soviet Union and the realities of U.S.-Soviet relations, students will turn elsewhere. During the past year, I have been alarmed by the number of adolescents who, after learning that I am a specialist on American-Soviet relations, ask if the Russians could really invade the U.S.—as depicted in the recent box office hit, but completely implausible movie, *Red Dawn*. (An earlier box office smash, *The Russians Are Coming, the Russians Are Coming*, also portrayed the Soviets in very different—and equally distorted—terms.) The Soviet Union has taken over a number of countries since the end of World War II, but it is unlikely to attack the U.S. for fear of retaliation. That is the reality, but how will this be learned if our schools do not teach this?

Second, today's students are acutely aware of the danger they face from a potential U.S.-Soviet conflict. A recent public opinion survey revealed that 78 percent of those under 30 believe that if the U.S. and the Soviet Union keep building missiles instead of negotiating to eliminate them, it's only a matter of time before they are used (The Public Agenda Foundation, 1984). Nearly half of those under 30 say that all-out nuclear war is likely within the next decade. These percentages are significantly higher than those of other age groups in our society. Surely there are real and profound reasons to fear the threat posed by nuclear weapons. At the same time, the best way to cope with fear is through increased knowledge. Elementary and secondary schools should provide students with a basic understanding of the Soviet Union and U.S.-Soviet relations so that they will be able to confront and deal with anxieties and make informed decisions as voters. In fact, since most Americans do not complete college, that may be their only opportunity to learn about this vital issue.

Finally, there are all the traditional reasons for studying any foreign culture. Such study gives students a better appreciation and understanding of other cultures and societies, as well as their own.

## What Educators Can Do

Suppose that you accept the basic thesis of this article—that both the Soviet Union itself and our lack of knowledge about U.S.-Soviet relations pose clear and present dangers to our national security. What can educators do to lessen these dangers?

The best place to begin is at home; that is, educators can start with themselves. Learn something about the Soviet Union; read one of the excellent books by correspondents once stationed in the Soviet Union—for instance, Smith (1977), Kaiser (1976), and Shipler (1983). In addition, Ground Zero—the nonpartisan, non-advocacy organization devoted to nuclear war education—has sponsored the writing and publication of *What About the Russians—and Nuclear War?*, which is an excellent general

## Curriculum Materials Available from Ground Zero

**What About the Russians—And Nuclear War?** An excellent introduction to the historical, cultural, economic, and political factors that influence Soviet-American relations, as well as a consideration of Soviet nuclear weapons policy. Suitable for high school students and older. \$3.95 per copy with a 25 percent discount for 20 or more copies.

**Secondary School Educational Package on the Soviet Union and U.S.-Soviet Relations.** Contains the book described above plus a curriculum guide for using it in high school classes. In addition, the package contains materials on religion in the U.S.S.R., Soviet teenage life, the Russian alphabet and language, a statistical comparison of the U.S. and U.S.S.R., and an excellent, concise bibliography. \$9.95.

**Educational Package for Elementary Schools.** Contains materials on children's art in the U.S.S.R., Russian fairy tales and children's stories, and people and geography of the Soviet Union; does not contain any material on Soviet politics or U.S.-Soviet relations. \$9.95.

**Russian Fairy Tales and Growing Up in Russia.** A 60-minute audiotape narrated by a native of Moscow. \$5.95.

**Global Ladder.** A package designed to enable American school children to communicate with Soviet children through letter writing. Included are a sample letter, a brief Russian-English dictionary, and addresses of a school and city in the Soviet Union to which letters may be sent. \$9.95.

Write to: Ground Zero Resource Center, P.O. Box 19329, Portland, OR 97219.



introduction to both the Soviet Union and the nuclear war issue.

If one agrees that American-Soviet relations are vitally important, it follows that school and community libraries should be stocked with resources that will enable students and citizens to educate themselves about the issue. The books and articles listed at the end of this article constitute a good basic collection on U.S.-Soviet relations for secondary and community libraries.

Almost all elementary and secondary schools hold assemblies where guest speakers present their views. The Committee for National Security (2000 P St., N.W., Suite 515, Washington, DC 20036) has recently organized a speakers bureau of experts on the Soviet Union. Upon request, the Committee will provide any educational institution with a list of these speakers. The U.S. Department of State also sponsors lecturers (contact the Bureau of Public Affairs, U.S. Department of State, Washington, DC 20520).

Educators might even want to examine the possibilities of travel to the U.S.S.R. Opportunities are very limited under the Fulbright Program. Howev-

er, several private organizations regularly arrange visits to the Soviet Union for groups of Americans with specialized interests. The largest of these is the Citizen Exchange Council (18 E. 41st St., New York, NY 10017). For years, the Center for the Study of Socialist Education at Kent State University (406 White Hall, Kent, OH 44242) has conducted tours of schools in the U.S.S.R. and other countries. The Forum for U.S.-Soviet Dialogue (22 Hemlock Hill, Amherst, NH 03031) sponsors annual meetings for young professionals from the United States and Soviet Union.

The Citizen Exchange Council, as well as other groups, also sponsors visits by Soviet citizens to the U.S. As a practical matter, Soviet visitors to the U.S. always reflect the Soviet government's position on issues. When inviting a Soviet visitor to speak at a school, educators may want to balance the program by inviting a speaker from the U.S. Department of State or a Soviet specialist from a local college or university.

I strongly believe that material on the Soviet Union and U.S.-Soviet relations should be introduced into the

curriculums of elementary and secondary schools. Fortunately, there are several superior curriculum resource guides. Ground Zero has published excellent materials for both elementary and secondary schools (see box, p. 54). In addition, Educators for Social Responsibility (23 Garden St., Cambridge, MA 02138) has published *Perspectives: A Teaching Guide to Concepts of Peace*, which contains activities for K-12 students (reviewed in *Educational Leadership*, April 1984, pp. 81-82).

**"Nearly half of those under 30 say that all-out nuclear war is likely within the next decade."**





President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Soviet Commissar of Foreign Affairs V. M. Molotov.

(UPI/Bettman Newsphoto)

## Reducing the Dangers We Face

We face a twofold danger from the Soviet Union, one external and one internal. I believe that for various reasons—historical, cultural, political—the United States and the Soviet Union will continue to compete with one another in the foreseeable future. Whether this competition will remain limited, however, is uncertain. The United States must defend its interests and those of its allies against Soviet encroachment. At the same time, the United States should seek through negotiations to reduce the danger it faces from the Soviet Union and nuclear weapons. An informed citizenry is crucial to this task, and the education of our citizens is one of the principal tasks of American education. □

## References

Able, E. *The Missile Crisis*. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1966.

Caldwell, D. *American-Soviet Relations: From 1947 to the Nixon-Kissinger Grand Design*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981.

Caldwell, D. "American-Soviet Political Relations: A Regional Assessment." In *AEI Defense and Foreign Policy Review*. Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, January 1985.

Gaddis, J. I. *Russia, the Soviet Union and the United States: An Interpretive History*. New York: John Wiley, 1978.

Gaddis, J. I. *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.

Halle, L. *The Cold War as History*. New York: Harper and Row, 1967.

Ground Zero. *Nuclear War: What's in it for You?* New York: Pocket Books, 1982.

Ground Zero. *What About the Russians—and Nuclear War?* New York: Pocket Books, 1983.

"How to Deal with Moscow." *Newsweek*, November 29, 1982, pp. 30–38.

"Inside the USSR." *Time*, (Special Issue), June 23, 1980, pp. 20–88.

International Institute for Strategic Studies. *The Military Balance 1984–85*. London: IISS, 1984.

Kaiser, R. G. *Russia: The People and the Power*. New York: Pocket Books, 1976.

Kennan, G. F. *The Decision to Intervene*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958.

Kennan, G. F. *The Nuclear Delusion: Soviet-American Relations in the Atomic Age*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1982.

Kennedy, R. F. *Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis*. New York: Norton, 1969.

Public Agenda Foundation with the Center for Foreign Policy Development. *Voter Options on Nuclear Arms Policy*. New York: The Public Agenda Foundation, 1984.

Shipler, D. *Russia: Broken Idols, Solemn Dreams*. New York: New York Times Books, 1983.

Smith, H. *The Russians*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1977.

*Soviet Life*. (This is a monthly, Soviet-published periodical, which is, roughly speaking, the Soviet equivalent of *Life* magazine.)

Talbott, S. *Reagan and the Russians*. New York: Vintage Books, 1984.

Ulam, A. *Dangerous Relations: The Soviet Union in World Politics, 1970–1982*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1983.

## Future Topics in This Series

Future Contemporary Issues will include "Economic Inequality" (September) and "Human Rights" (December/January). Readers who have suggestions for other social issues affecting education should write to: Alex Molnar, Contemporary Issues, c/o Educational Leadership, 225 N. Washington St., Alexandria, VA 22314.

**"... school and community libraries should be stocked with resources that will enable students and citizens to educate themselves about the issue."**

Copyright © 1985 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.