A resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union dated January 31, 1977, declares that "the victory of October [1917] is the main event of the twentieth century, one that radically changed the course of development for all humanity." The reason is simple: That victory produced the world's first Socialist state.

"Under Communist Party leadership the workers of our country successfully coped with the most complicated task of the socialist revolution—the creative." This was done, we are told, under most difficult conditions, starting with the low level of productive forces and culture inherited from czarist Russia and including the hardships imposed by a series of external attacks.

"The achievements of the homeland of October over six decades are persuasive testimony that socialism has ensured historically unprecedented tempos of progress in all aspects of the life of society." The national income increased sixty-five times from the prerevolutionary level (1914 or 1917?); the share of world industrial production from 4 per cent to 20 per cent.

After cataloging many gains at home and abroad, the resolution affirms that "the positions of the world Communist movement—the most progressive and influential political force of our time—are growing stronger." "Proletarian internationalism" (that is, adherence to Soviet leadership) is called a "prerequisite" for strengthening the positions of Communist parties internationally. Similar evaluations abound elsewhere in the Soviet press.

Soviet commentaries dwell on the achievements of sixty years, thus leaving us with a one-sided appraisal. How does the balance sheet look to Western observers? I drafted my own appraisal in late 1976 and then asked other Soviet specialists to list five to fifteen major achievements and major failings, 1917 to the present, given what they believed were the objectives of the Soviet leaders over time. Respondents were also asked what they believed were the most important factors explaining the successes and failures they listed. The survey sample was not selected scientifically, but it included many specialists visiting the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies in Washington, D.C.² George F. Kennan, Fred W. Neal, and Peter H. Vigor graciously offered their own evaluations in long, focused discussions. To help put all this in perspective, a similar set of questions about U.S. foreign policy was put to a number of Americanists, and long, analytical discussions were held with Henry S. Commager and J. William Fulbright.

Though it is difficult to know what Soviet objectives have been over time, a consensus did emerge about Moscow's achievements and failures. Surprisingly, appraisals did not vary greatly between hard-liners and those more moderate in their policy orientation. Variations in respondents' listings hinged more upon their own geographic interests or concerns with particular time periods. Some were more intrigued than others with the ironies of history—what we achieve may be different from what we seek—and with the problems of distinguishing short-run and long-term results.

Rather than reporting individual responses, I have used the survey to widen and deepen my own appraisal. What follows, then, is one person's balance sheet, aided greatly by the generosity and wisdom of many colleagues.

Successes

1. The Russian Communists' greatest and overriding achievement has been to seize and hold power at home, consolidating their regime and driving off both domestic and foreign challengers. The Soviets cultivated a round-
ed armarium to pursue their aims at home and abroad, making tactical flexibility almost a shibboleth, guided by Lenin’s maxim that morality is what serves the interests of the proletarian revolution (redefined to be synonymous with Soviet state interests).

Despite its roots in an idealistic zeal to right the world’s wrongs and an all-embracing ideological vision, Soviet foreign policy quickly fell into step with the strictures of Machiavelli and Bismarck. Its primary instrument was a hard-driving Realpolitik that sought to defend and extend Soviet power regardless of ideals or ideology. Thus, when the Kaiser’s armies threatened to resume their eastward drive toward Moscow, Lenin persuaded his colleagues to endorse the March, 1918, Treaty of Brest-Litovsk as a way to buy time and rebuild Soviet forces. Lenin dismissed as idle dreamers those who wanted to await salvation from a German proletarian uprising or to embark on a revolutionary offensive.

The Brest-Litovsk strategy succeeded, for the Kaiser fell some six months later, and the Bolsheviks repudiated the treaty—indeed, as Lenin boasted, they had already violated it time and again. The success of Lenin’s approach helped form a habit of hard-headed power politics in Soviet foreign policy, one that produced repeated accords with Germany—under Wilhelm, Weimar, Hitler, Adenauer, Brandt, and Schmidt—despite serious ideological, geopolitical, and economic differences. When a choice had to be made, raison d’état usually prevailed over revolution.

Though Soviet Realpolitik has often been marred by misperception and ideological blinders, as in Stalin’s dealings with Hitler, it has functioned to preserve, defend, and—over time—extend Soviet power well beyond the borders of 1917 or even 1941. Optimal it was not, but it has been serviceable.

2. Soviet foreign policy has served and been served by the mobilization of human and material resources within the USSR. Realpolitik has been dedicated to establishing a prolonged breathing space in which the Kremlin could organize the country’s assets, first to defend Soviet state interests and then, if conditions matured, to extend them internationally. Though Soviet Russia was wracked by civil war and foreign intervention until 1922 and was wasted and bled by World War II, Soviet diplomacy has otherwise succeeded in minimizing the USSR’s involvement in costly wars detrimental to internal development.

While the Soviet Communists have generally wanted to limit their country’s participation in foreign wars, they have also manipulated war and antiwar propaganda to justify their own rule and the sacrifices it has entailed. They have used the reality or threat of foreign
intervention—during the years of War Communism, in the period 1926-28, in the late 1930's, during World War II, the cold war, and, more recently, in conflicts with China—to persuade Soviet citizens to rally round the flag.

Widespread Russian nationalism became almost tangible for the first time in history during what Moscow calls the Great Patriotic War. Internationalism fell by the wayside as Stalin pulled out all the stops—praising Alexander Nevsky and Ivan the Terrible, rehabilitating the Orthodox Church, having the Red Army swear devotion to the Motherland (rodina)—to mobilize the Soviet population.

Even in the awful years of gulag, Stalin's regime won support from a widening circle of privileged persons receiving special material and prestige rewards from the state. Later, as Khrushchev and Brezhnev expanded commercial and cultural ties with the West, these circles have widened still more, creating vested interests in the perpetuation of the regime. Though the number of people benefitting directly from East-West ties is still limited, Moscow's ability to avoid eroding their domestic support. Although the Bolsheviks, before Woodrow Wilson, understood the potential of a public relations system of open diplomacy that could be pursued by nongovernmental as well as governmental agencies. Regarding the masses of Europe and Asia as their potential allies, the Bolsheviks addressed them over the heads of their rulers. Bolshevik diplomacy cut with a double-edged sword, sending messages to other governments that, if accepted, would undermine their objectives but that, if rejected, could erode their domestic support. Although the Bolsheviks hardly favored spontaneity at home, they sought, sometimes successfully, to agitate mass movements abroad.

The Bolsheviks soon gave organizational form to their public relations diplomacy, organizing in 1919 the Communist International to help conduct Soviet policy on a "nongovernmental" basis. Moscow's claim to lead on a "nongovernmental" basis. Moscow's claim to lead in the world leader in production indexes from the perpetuation of the regime. Though the number of people benefitting directly from East-West ties is still limited, Moscow's ability to avoid eroding their domestic support. Although the Bolsheviks, before Woodrow Wilson, understood the potential of a public relations system of open diplomacy that could be pursued by nongovernmental as well as governmental agencies. Regarding the masses of Europe and Asia as their potential allies, the Bolsheviks addressed them over the heads of their rulers. Bolshevik diplomacy cut with a double-edged sword, sending messages to other governments that, if accepted, would undermine their objectives but that, if rejected, could erode their domestic support. Although the Bolsheviks hardly favored spontaneity at home, they sought, sometimes successfully, to agitate mass movements abroad.

The Bolsheviks soon gave organizational form to their public relations diplomacy, organizing in 1919 the Communist International to help conduct Soviet policy on a "nongovernmental" basis. Moscow's claim to lead this "Third International" was the twentieth-century equivalent of its sixteenth-century claim to be the "third Rome" after Byzantium fell to the Turks. The organizational weapon rested on a claim to superorthodoxy—although now it was Marxism rather than the true faith of Christianity: in time, a variety of "front" organizations appeared; from the Profintern to the World Federation of Democratic Youth. The post-World War II years have seen the Kremlin establish special agencies for dealing with other governments; with other Communist parties, ruling and nonruling; and with a wide range of target audiences, from capitalist traders to national liberation movements.

4. The Soviets also raised to new levels of efficiency the traditional play of divide and conquer—what they called "exploiting contradictions" among their adversaries. Bolshevik foreign policy aimed not only at goading the masses of target countries against their rulers but also at aggravating differences among foreign governments in order to prevent coalitions threatening to the USSR. This tactic was explored several times during the years of War Communism, but emerged in 1922 as the basic instrument for Soviet conduct with bourgeois governments. Moscow's delegation to the Genoa Economic Conference sought to split the "pacifist" and "semipacifist" from the reactionary bourgeois elements of Europe and to exacerbate conflicts between France and Britain. Having failed to reach an accord with the Versailles victors, Moscow concluded a side deal with Weimar Germany, forging a common front that linked the two outcasts of Europe against the League of Nations "haves."

A variation of the divide-and-conquer technique was brought to spectacular refinement in 1939 as Stalin's emissaries negotiated with two sets of potential allies simultaneously. While the record of Soviet diplomacy from 1934 to 1938 shows that Moscow preferred collective security arrangements with the League "haves" against the revisionist Axis powers, the failure of France and Britain to take a stronger stand against Hitler led Stalin on the road toward the August, 1939, Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. This pact, in turn, permitted Moscow and Berlin to split up much of Eastern Europe between them.

Moscow has endeavored with less success to divide the NATO powers among themselves; it has been more successful in exploiting contradictions between Third World countries and the erstwhile imperial regimes and in strengthening "sober forces" in the West against reactionary "madmen." It has also repeated the 1939 tack of negotiating with two sets of potential allies simultaneously; for example, sending the Chinese home empty handed in 1963 to make way for the Averell Harriman test-ban delegation.

5. Though Stalin's regime failed to prevent German invasion of the USSR, it managed by 1943 to stem the tide and later carry the counteroffensive all the way to Berlin. This effort mobilized all the resources of the country—spiritual and material, domestic and foreign support—consuming human beings and economic assets on a scale unknown in history. Though Western aid was enormously helpful, little had gotten through until 1943, after the battle of Stalingrad. While Russia's victory was expensive in terms of human and material costs that would not be made up for generations, it resulted in the fairest extension ever of Russian power westward and eastward.
6. Soviet diplomacy helped to forge the Grand Coalition that defeated the Axis powers, extracting from the alliance many gains for Soviet interests both during and after the war. Considering the ill will between Moscow and the West (particularly in Britain) before Hitler's June, 1941, attack, the ability of the anti-Fascist powers to close ranks in a common cause was a remarkable feat. Soviet diplomacy did its share to minimize past and present grievances, while pressuring the West to recognize Soviet territorial gains before 1941, extracting commitments for an early opening of a Second Front, and helping to lay the basis for Soviet expansion and postwar cooperation. Though Moscow seems to have explored a separate peace with Germany in 1943, Stalin proved on the whole a reliable and valuable ally to the West. On the eve of Yalta at Churchill's request Stalin opened a new offensive to siphon off German pressures on Western armies during the Battle of the Bulge. Stalin also proved far more interested and knowledgeable about postwar plans for international organization than most U.S. diplomats admitted at the time. My own conclusion is that he would have preferred a harmonious continuation of the Grand Alliance into the postwar era, and resorted to unilateral measures harmful to the alliance largely in response to what he saw as Western breaches of good faith, especially on reparations.

Moscow managed to still Western anxieties about Soviet ambitions, going so far as to kill the Comintern in 1943. Soviet diplomacy also kept Westerners from perceiving the full extent of the damage suffered by Russia during the war. And it contrived to achieve agreements with London and later with Washington that seemed to legitimize a decisive role for Moscow in shaping the destinies of many East European countries.

7. The Soviets have helped establish Communist regimes in many parts of the world, in many cases contributing to both the power and the ideological interests of the USSR. Between 1939 and 1949 the USSR regained most of the border territories formerly part of the czarist empire and, in some cases, expanded Soviet frontiers into new regions, such as Ruthenia. Moscow also helped establish Soviet-type regimes in all of Eastern Europe, East Germany, and North Korea. Russian aid facilitated Communist victory on the Chinese mainland in 1949.

Sovietization of Eastern Europe laid the basis for Russia's leap to superpower status—geographically, economically, politically, ideologically, and militarily. Not only did it produce a wide security zone and a yawning shadow over Western Europe, but it put the USSR into direct contact with the advanced technologies of the Baltic countries, Germany, Silesia, and Czechoslovakia, and the resources of all the region. The USSR could import German scientists and use their skills (more valuable to the Soviets than to America) to accelerate its drive to become a nuclear-missile power.

Moscow thus succeeded in surrounding the USSR with a geographic-political glacis, although not a stable one. Yugoslavia broke away in 1948. The Asian Communists have tended to go their own way. China becoming a major adversary. But Russia has managed to perpetuate its hold over most of Eastern Europe, using naked force, material subvention, and some diplomacy to quell serious troubles in 1953, 1956, 1968, and the 1970's.

8. The Soviets have kept their version(s) of Marxism alive as the legitimizing doctrine for their own rule and have also made Marx and Lenin household names all over the world. Granted that local nationalisms have been more powerful than universal ideologies in twentieth-century politics, the fact remains that no ideology commands wider obeisance than Marxism-Leninism. To be sure, many of its adherents renounce and denounce the Kremlin's interpretation and application of this ideology. Schisms among self-proclaimed adherents of Marxism-Leninism add a powerful ingredient to Moscow's troubles with leftist forces all over the world—from Yugoslavia to China to the pro-Peking New Zealand Communist Party. Granted also that claims by such countries as Mozambique to be guided by Marxism-Leninism must be taken with caution, since their leaders might never have heard of Marx and Lenin if Soviet power had not survived in Russia and extended its voice abroad.

Surely "Marxism-Leninism" is as popular a slogan in the world today as "democracy" or even "human rights." The Soviet Union has claimed to be the most important supporter of all these progressive ideas and ideals, cultivating them at home and carrying them like beacons to the darkness beyond.

These achievements have built on the other successes noted above: the development of a public relations diplomacy anchored not only in public declarations but in the organizational networks of the Communist International and other front groups; an ability to exacerbate differences between workers and peasants on the one hand and their putative oppressors on the other; an ability to reconcile passionate nationalism with the lofty banner of "scientific socialism," thereby permitting Third World and other political actors to celebrate their native roots while still dressing up in the garb of universal truth.

9. Moscow has extended its ideological and material presence to become a major competitor with Western and Asian powers in the Third World. This achievement could be discounted by asserting that the Communists have merely modernized techniques already utilized by the czars—commercial penetration, showing the flag, subversion, bribes, and so forth. But I would argue that Lenin and his colleagues proved enormously prescient in their analyses of fin de siècle imperialism and its policy implications. They perceived the national liberation forces of the Third World as actors, not just passive subjects, in world affairs, and moved deliberately to make them friends or allies of Soviet power. Always the realist, Lenin urged that Moscow align with the national bourgeoisie rather than with local Communists in the Third World until economic and social conditions became ripe for Communist victories.

Armed with these insights, Soviet diplomacy quickly gained influence all along Russia's southern front, from
Turkey to China. The Bolsheviks’ initial words and deeds were so persuasive that they swept away many negative memories of czarist pillaging in the same arena. To be sure, the Soviets were surprised when their nationalist client Chiang Kai-shek turned on and almost exterminated the Communists in 1927, but this setback and analogous problems elsewhere (Turkey and Egypt) did not mean the basic strategy was wrong as a way to make the most of Soviet aims over time.

A balanced appraisal of Soviet achievements in the Third World must be specific as to time and place. I would argue that these achievements were greatest in the early 1920’s and mid-1950’s. Failures in the 1960’s and 1970’s will be discussed later.

10. The USSR has become a military and economic superpower with the capacity to reply devastatingly to attack from any quarter or quarters. By the mid or late 1950’s the Soviet regime had acquired, for the first time in Russian history, the military means to deter aggression by any rational foe not wishing to invite a nuclear second strike on its own homeland. The Kremlin moved from a minimum deterrent capacity in the late 1950’s and early 1960’s to a posture of strategic equivalence with the United States by the end of the decade. Neither side, despite refinements taking place in the 1970’s, has any real prospect of acquiring a first-strike force able to disarm the other and prevent retaliation at unacceptable levels of destruction.

Soviet diplomacy has done much to augment the raw-material power available to the Kremlin. When Russia has been weak, these weaknesses have been camouflaged. When Moscow became stronger, these assets were multiplied in Soviet public relations. Though the USSR in the 1970’s possesses less than half the economic strength of the United States, and perhaps half the number of strategic warheads, Moscow enjoys the image of superpower parity. At times the Soviet approach has backfired, leading Western governments to rev up their own arms production to overcome some mythical bomber, missile, or other gap, but Moscow seems to prefer that its power be feared, even if it must then work harder to overcome the real gaps with U.S. strategic capabilities.

Soviet diplomacy has also succeeded in hamstringing Russia’s opponents, inhibiting them from using their material advantages against Soviet interests, and reducing Western access to bases and raw materials in the Third World.

11. The Khrushchev and Brezhnev regimes have succeeded, with the cooperation of Western leaders, in turning from cold war tensions toward détente, arms limitation, trade, and other forms of scientific and cultural exchange. Leaders on both sides have at times shown foresight and magnanimous statesmanship, but I would credit Khrushchev with “breaking the ice.” It was he who responded to Eisenhower’s demand for “deeds,” not mere words, in ways that persuaded the U.S. president in 1955 that the time was ripe for a summit meeting in Geneva. There, according to participants, each side reached the important understanding that the other feared and did not want a nuclear exchange.

Both Khrushchev and Brezhnev staked their careers and reputations on the desirability and feasibility of coming to terms with the West. Granted that Soviet behavior has often been injurious to détente, the fact is that the Soviet leaders have contributed their share—perhaps more than could be expected—to overcoming the cold war. They did this in spite of several factors. First, the inferiority complex that haunts the Kremlin makes Soviet leaders desperate to overcome their “Avis” position in world affairs. Second, it is harder for the weaker side to generate initiatives for peace when it has little margin for error. And third, as it appeared to Soviet eyes, there were many provocations by the West (ringing the USSR with bases, overflights of Soviet territory, upping the ante in test-ban negotiations after Soviet concessions, exaggerating the Soviet threat in order to expand Western forces, campaigning for human rights, and others).

Though détente has generated many problems for the USSR and its allies, they probably take considerable satisfaction in the West’s formal recognition of Europe’s present territorial arrangements expressed in a variety of accords from the 1970 Bonn-Moscow nonaggression pact to the 1975 Helsinki Final Act.

These, then, may be deemed eleven successes of Soviet foreign policy since October, 1917. Next month we evaluate its failures and assess the basic forces shaping the achievements and shortcomings in Moscow’s conduct of foreign relations, forces that Western policies will help influence in the years ahead.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Sh. Sanakoev, “A Resolution That Changed the World.” International Affairs (June, 1977); also S. Dallin, “Oktiabr’ i politicheskai kartta mira,” Miruvui ekonomika i mezhunarodnye otношения (May, 1977).


3. For background see my “Kto Krov?” The Present Danger, as Seen From Moscow,” Worldview (September, 1977).