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Richard Pipes' advice on Russia for policymakers

Rady Richarda Pipesa dotyczące Rosji dla decydentów¹

ABSTRACT:

Richard Pipes, a prolific and influential historian of Russia, had a significantly greater impact as a Sovietologist. The purpose of this article is to distil Pipes's recommendations to Western policymakers on how to deal with the Russians. It is based on a study of Pipes's writings on the topic. He advocated combining social scientific and humanistic approaches, drawing on both “hard” data like polling and census results and “soft” data like literature and history, striving to understand the mindset of one's opponents, and avoiding “mirror imaging”. Pipes viewed Russian political culture as fundamentally authoritarian with xenophobic tendencies; its political system was characterised by elite domination, unaccountability of officials, weak rule of law, and a propensity to militarism and expansionism. During the Soviet era, the ruling elite promoted international tension and instilled a fear of foreign threats. Countering Soviet expansionism required a comprehensive grand strategy that involved leveraging institutional memory, employing propaganda to substitute for a free press, applying economic pressure, and insisting on reciprocity. It was also important to reckon with Russian feelings and urge Russians to follow a Western path. Pipes argued that pressuring the USSR would prompt the Politburo to implement reforms. Reagan's hard line contributed to the selection of Mikhail Gorbachev as Soviet leader, apparently vindicating this approach.

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¹ This article draws in small part on my forthcoming book, *The Man Who Knew Russia: Richard Pipes, Humanist and Cold Warrior* (Stanford University Press).

KEYWORDS:

Sovietology, Cold War, Russia, militarism, expansionism, conservatism, authoritarianism, xenophobia, empire, grand strategy, disinformation

STRESZCZENIE:

Richard Pipes, wpływowy historyk Rosji, odegrał jeszcze większą rolę jako sowietolog. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest wyodrębnienie zaleceń Richarda Pipesa dla zachodnich decydentów dotyczących sposobów postępowania z Rosjanami, na podstawie jego opublikowanego dorobku naukowego. Pipes opowiadał się za łączeniem metod nauk społecznych i humanistycznych, wykorzystując zarówno „twarde” dane, takie jak wyniki sondaży i spisy powszechne, jak i „miękkie”, takie jak literatura i historia. Postulował zrozumienie sposobu myślenia przeciwnika oraz unikanie „lustrzanego odwzorowania”. Rosyjska kultura polityczna, według niego, była zasadniczo autorytarna i ksenofobiczna, a jej system polityczny charakteryzowała dominacja elit, nieodpowiedzialność urzędników, słabość rządów prawa oraz skłonność do militaryzmu i ekspansjonizmu. W epoce sowieckiej elity rządzące podsycaly napięcia międzynarodowe i wzniewały strach przed zagrożeniami z zewnątrz. Przeciwdziałanie ekspansjonizmowi sowieckiemu wymagało spójnej strategii obejmującej pamięć instytucjonalną, propagandę, stanowiącą substytut nieobecnej w ZSRR wolnej prasy, presję ekonomiczną oraz nacisk na zasadę wzajemności. Ważne było także uwzględnianie rosyjskich odczuć i zachęcanie Rosjan do podążania drogą Zachodu. Pipes twierdził, że wywieranie presji na ZSRR może skłonić Politbiuro do przeprowadzenia reform. Twarda linia Ronalda Reagana przyczyniła się do wyboru Michaiła Gorbaczowa na przywódcę ZSRR, co zdawało się potwierdzać słuszność tego podejścia.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:

sowieologia, zimna wojna, Rosja, militaryzm, ekspansjonizm, konserwatyzm, autorytaryzm, ksenofobia, imperium, wielka strategia, dezinformacja

1. Introduction

Early in his career, but only as an avocation, Pipes took a strategic view of the Soviet threat and potential U.S. responses. He carefully observed and analysed developments behind the Iron Curtain, reading the Soviet press, conversing with Russian and non-Russian Soviet citizens and émigrés, listening to shortwave broadcasts, observing Soviet life during his visits, and scrutinising the Soviet Communist Party programs. Journalists frequently

sought out Pipes's opinion on Soviet affairs². He became more engaged in Sovietological analysis in the late 1960s because he believed most influential experts misunderstood the USSR. Even so, except during his service in the Reagan administration (1981–1982), he focused primarily on historical scholarship.

This article distils Pipes's recommendations to policymakers during the late Cold War and early post-Soviet eras, focusing on three topics: what it takes to be a policy analyst, the nature of Soviet and Russian society and political culture, and how best to deal with the Russians. In most cases, wherever the term "Soviet" is used, "Russian" could appropriately be substituted.

2. How to be an analyst

Pipes began his career at Harvard University, where he was closely involved with the Russian Research Center, an institution focused on social science research. Although Pipes rejected the idea that social science models could be applicable across cultures, to the extent of critiquing one of the biggest names in sociology and political science, Max Weber³, his multifaceted approach to political and social analysis integrated key social scientific tools. For example, as soon as reliable polling methodology was deployed in the late Soviet Union, Pipes drew heavily on the data it provided. Such data, gathered in July 1990, indicated that only 14% of the population fully trusted the Communist Party, suggesting that the days of the communist system were numbered. At the same time, however, 75% disliked the cooperative businesses emerging under *perestroika*, suggesting that free enterprise might have difficulty establishing deep roots in Russia⁴. In other words, polling data could be quite revealing socially and politically, especially if one could analyse them critically and creatively.

After the fall of communism, Pipes continued to monitor polling results. Initially, he was optimistic about Russia's evolution toward the rule of law and democracy; however, he soon began to have doubts. By 2000, he found

² For example, "Expert Says New Soviet Rulers Won't Heal Red Split", *Boston Globe* (October 19, 1964), p. 8.

³ R. Pipes, "Max Weber and Russia", *World Politics* 7 (1955), no. 3, pp. 371–401.

⁴ R. Pipes, "The Soviet Union Adrift", *Foreign Affairs* 70 (1990–1991), no. 1, pp. 70–87.

the opinion polls, which revealed hostility toward the West, “frightening”⁵. By 2004, the Russian population had drifted toward authoritarianism. Pipes noted that only 10% of the Russian population desired democratic liberties and civil rights⁶. Few trusted the state. Huge majorities craved order, supported press censorship, distrusted entrepreneurs, viewed Russia as encircled by enemies, desired great power status for Russia, regretted the collapse of the USSR, despised the United States, and did not feel themselves part of Europe⁷. Four years later, polls suggested that most Russians felt like they were living in trenches (“Russkie zhivut v okopakh”), as if they were surrounded by enemies and could trust only the persons closest to them⁸. Such a description might suggest that most Russians would be willing to believe that Ukraine threatened their national sovereignty.

Pipes also drew upon census results to determine, for example, the growth of the proportion of Slavic people in Central Asia from the 1897 census to the 1950s⁹. He continued this practice during the Soviet era, when reliable demographic statistics were often difficult to obtain, for instance, to show that linguistic and, therefore, cultural assimilation of the ethnic minorities had barely occurred¹⁰.

Another important source in the Soviet era was publications on military tactics and strategy produced by active-duty officers with PhDs in “military science”. Pipes found that nearly all Western experts considered “such printed matter to be unadulterated rubbish” because of its lack of sophistication and display of “pseudo-Marxist jargon and the crudest kind of Russian jingoism”¹¹. At the same time, such publications were “written in an elaborate code language. Its purpose is not to dazzle with originality and sophistication but to convey to the initiates messages of grave importance”. What

⁵ R. Pipes, “What Russians Should Do in the Twenty-First Century”, *Russia in the World* (2000), p. 43.

⁶ R. Pipes, “Flight from Freedom: What Russians Think and Want”, *Foreign Affairs* 83 (2004), no. 3, p. 9.

⁷ R. Pipes, “In the Borderland”, *National Review* (December 27, 2004), p. 20.

⁸ R. Pipes, “Russia’s Politics in Light of Her History”, *East-West Review* (Spring 2008), p. 9.

⁹ R. Pipes, “Muslims of Soviet Central Asia: Trends and Prospects”, *Middle East Journal* 9, nos. 2 (1955): no. 2, pp. 147–172 and no. 3, pp. 295–308.

¹⁰ R. Pipes, *Reflections on the Nationality Problems in the Soviet Union*, [in:] *Ethnicity: Theory and Experience*, ed. N. Glazer, D. P. Moynihan, and C. S. Schelling, Cambridge, MA, 1975, p. 465.

¹¹ R. Pipes, “Why the Soviet Union Thinks It Could Fight and Win a Nuclear War”, *Commentary* (July 1977), p. 27.

Pipes found in these documents was the clear conviction that the existence of nuclear weapons did not fundamentally change the nature of warfare for Soviet strategic thinkers. Also striking was the vicious anti-Western and anti-American propaganda continuously printed in Soviet periodicals, something the Western media generally ignored. Such publications needed to be taken seriously. As Pipes wrote in an op-ed in 1977, "Why ignore what the Soviets say?"¹². This lesson remained important under Putin when, in 2008, the chairman of the Russian General Staff, Iurii Baluevskii, publicly affirmed Russia's intention to launch a nuclear first strike to avert an existential threat¹³. People in the West continued to downplay or ignore such menacing words.

History was not destiny, but it was important. The failure to think in historical terms was a common flaw in the writing of many American political scientists. Such scholars explained behaviour "by what is happening rather than by what has happened and tend to treat history as irrelevant"¹⁴. Pipes considered searching for historical continuities methodologically essential. He found that Karamzin's *Memoir*, written in 1812, reflected "a mentality that makes Russians perennially wary of political freedom"¹⁵.

Pipes repeatedly emphasised that history was "not a science (even though it uses scientific methods) but a branch of the humanities that deals with human affairs and, therefore, is closer to literature and the arts than it is to the natural sciences"¹⁶. The failure to acknowledge this aspect of the scholarly enterprise led many Sovietologists (and historians of Russia) to pile up mountains of facts without being able to interpret them. According to Pipes, this inability stemmed from the dominance of logical positivism in the American academy, which "requires all aspects of reality to be reduced to their empirical properties, minus history, ideology, tradition, human values, religion, national ethos, and mass psychology"¹⁷. Just to take one example, the

¹² R. Pipes, "Why Ignore What Soviets Say?", *Washington Star* (July 24, 1977), p. D4.

¹³ R. Pipes, "Putin & Co.: What is to be Done?", *Commentary* (May 2008), p. 33.

¹⁴ R. Pipes, "On Democracy in Russia: It's Not a Pretty Picture", *New York Times* (June 3, 2004), p. B8.

¹⁵ R. Pipes, ed., *Karamzin's Memoir on Ancient and Modern Russia: A Translation and Analysis*, new ed., Ann Arbor 2005, p. x.

¹⁶ R. Pipes, "Remarks at My Dinner on May 3, 1996", Harvard University Archives (HA), uncatalogued.

¹⁷ R. Pipes, *American Perceptions and Misperceptions of Soviet Military Intentions and Capabilities*, [in:] *Intelligence Policy and National Security*, ed. R. Pfaltzgraff, Jr., et al., Hamden, CT, 1981, p. 77.

Russians, he believed, think dialectically about military affairs. In contrast, experts in Europe and the United States tend to distinguish strictly between offensive and defensive weapons and between war and peace, while their Russian counterparts view them as running along a continuum, differing in degree but not in kind¹⁸. Like humanistic scholars, intelligence analysts “have to piece together bits of evidence painstakingly”¹⁹. Nor should they rely excessively on satellites and other mechanical devices that supply purely objective information. It is dangerous, according to Pipes, “to completely divorce any assessment of capabilities from the judgment of intention: the significance of a person purchasing a knife is different if he is a professional chef or the leader of a street gang, although the technical capability which the knife provides is the same in each case”²⁰. Analogously, nuclear weapons in themselves posed no threat to the United States. After all, Americans do not feel threatened by the British and French nuclear arsenals. Soviet nuclear weapons, by contrast, pose a threat precisely because of Soviet (and now Russian) intentions. Most Sovietologists, according to Pipes, misunderstood the Soviet leaders because they “refused to read Soviet novels and poetry, or at any rate to take them into account”, and ignored both history and the writings of émigrés. Thus, he wrote, “they missed everything that was vital in that society and that, in the end, made it unworkable: human aspirations and human discontent”²¹.

Pipes believed there were two ways for analysts to discern the opposing side’s motives. One could try to imagine what he would do in their place, or one could try to get inside their mindset, given what one knows about them. The former, easier approach, often called “mirror imaging”, according to Pipes, characterised the work of most Sovietological policy analysts because they lacked the humanistic understanding required to perform the latter²².

¹⁸ Pipes, *American Perceptions and Misperceptions*, pp. 78–79.

¹⁹ R. Pipes, *Recruitment, Training and Incentives*, [in:] *Intelligence Requirements for the 1980s: Analysis and Estimates*, ed. R. Godson, Washington, DC, 1980, p. 172.

²⁰ R. Pipes, “Team B: The Reality Behind the Myth”, *Commentary* 82 (April 1986), no. 4, p. 29.

²¹ R. Pipes, “Misinterpreting the Cold War: The Hardliners Were Right”, *Foreign Affairs* 74 (1996), no. 1, p. 160.

²² Pipes, “Team B”, p. 29.

3. Background

To understand Russia, one had to begin with its geography. Russia's vast territory and harsh climate rendered it "unconquerable"²³. Moreover, its "Eurasian" location, Pipes wrote, gave it "the unique ability to engage in direct diplomatic and military activity in three of the world's major geopolitical areas: Europe, the Middle East, and the Far East"²⁴. From the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century, Russia launched successive attacks in the Balkans, in Central Asia, again in the Balkans, and the Far East, striking opportunistically at what its leaders considered vulnerable points. At the same time, Russia suffered from geographical vulnerabilities, including poor soil, a short growing season, and low agricultural yields²⁵. This poor geography stimulated expansion, but "each conquest always demands a buffer to protect it from imagined enemies"²⁶.

Pipes was one of the rare Sovietologists who considered the USSR a colonial empire. As such, he noted that the Russian leaders had extensive experience in "administering subject peoples" but little experience dealing with equals²⁷. Although brilliant policy advisors like Henry Kissinger believed that territorial expansion no longer made sense in the nuclear age, the Soviet leaders disagreed, according to Pipes²⁸. They considered it extremely important never to give up any territory their predecessors had taken. Keeping it was, Pipes believed, "in their mind the essential attribute of sovereignty"²⁹. Pipes referred to this attitude as the patrimonial mentality, which consisted in confusing sovereignty and ownership³⁰. Because Russia's development into an empire long preceded its acquisition of national consciousness, Russians became "remarkably insensitive to ethnic problems"³¹. Although the United

²³ R. Pipes, *Expansionism and the Soviet System*, [in:] *Security of the Northern Flank and the Baltic Approaches: Copenhagen, September 21–23, 1986*, ed. A. J. Goodpastor, J. Luns, E. V. Rostow, New York 1986, p. 57.

²⁴ J. H. Hexter and R. Pipes, *Europe since 1500*, New York 1971, p. 1076.

²⁵ R. Pipes, *Russia under the Old Regime*, New York 1974, pp. 5–9.

²⁶ R. Pipes, "Soviet Global Strategy", *Commentary* 69 (April 1980), no. 4, p. 32.

²⁷ R. Pipes, "Why the Russians Act Like Russians", *Air Force and Space Digest* (June 1970), p. 54.

²⁸ R. Pipes, "America, Russia, and Europe in the Light of the Nixon Doctrine", *Survey* 19 (Summer 1973), no. 3, p. 32.

²⁹ R. Pipes, *Some Operational Principles of Soviet Foreign Policy*, [in:] *The USSR and the Middle East*, ed. M. Confino, S. Shamir, Jerusalem 1973, p. 24.

³⁰ Pipes, *Russia under the Old Regime*, p. 79.

³¹ Pipes, *Reflections on the Nationality Problem*, p. 456.

States “never supported the national aspirations of ethnic minorities” in the USSR³², the historical trend favoured its breakup. “History could not have been expected to make an exception for the Russian Empire”, Pipes observed³³. He also predicted that the Russian empire was unlikely to be reconstituted “despite widespread nostalgia for it”³⁴, and despite Moscow’s claim to protect ethnic Russians residing in former Soviet territory³⁵ as well as efforts “toward reintegrating with Russia lost territories of the former Soviet Union”³⁶. Pipes believed that the Russian population was “ready to starve” and would forgive Putin nearly anything if he made Russia great again³⁷. Moreover, should NATO collapse, the countries of Eastern Europe could no longer be safe³⁸.

4. Russian political culture

Richard Pipes argued that Russia’s evolution had to be understood as a continuum stretching across 1917. Just as nature knows no quantum leaps from one species to the next, cultures do not undergo radical transformations overnight. Thus, Marxism did not make the Soviet Union under Stalin a totalitarian state. Rather, the underlying political culture did, with Marxism and Leninism as a theoretical justification. Pipes noted many continuities across the 1917 divide, including official arbitrariness and penal exile as a common form of punishment. Russia retained, he argued, “the same geographical location, the same people, the same language, and the same culture”³⁹. Moreo-

³² Pipes, “Soviet Union Adrift”, p. 75.

³³ R. Pipes, “Russia’s Chance”, *Commentary* (March 1992), p. 30.

³⁴ R. Pipes, “Russia’s Past, Russia’s Future”, *Commentary* (June 1996), p. 38.

³⁵ R. Pipes, *The Historical Evolution of the Russian National Identity*, [in:] *The Future of the Nation State: Essays on Cultural Pluralism and Political Integration*, ed. Sverker Gustavsson and Leif Lewin, Stockholm 1996, p. 145.

³⁶ R. Pipes, “Is Russia Still an Enemy?”, *Foreign Affairs* (September/October 1997), p. 71.

³⁷ P. Żuchowski, “Nowa zimna wojna? Prof. Pipes: Zanosi się na to”, *RMF24* (October 27, 2015), https://www.rmfm24.pl/news-nowa-zimna-wojna-prof-pipes-zanosi-sie-na-to,-nId,1661005#crp_state=1.

³⁸ F. Memches, “Naród rosyjski gardzi demokracją – rozmowa z Richardem Pipesem”, *Rzeczpospolita* (November 30, 2014), <https://www.rp.pl/plus-minus/art12130281-narod-rosyjski-gardzi-demokracja-rozmowa-z-R.em-pipesem>.

³⁹ R. Pipes, *The USSR or Russia? The Historical Perspective*, [in:] *The USSR Today and Tomorrow: Problems and Challenges*, ed. U. Ra’anan and C. Perry, Lexington, MA, 1987, p. 27.

ver, Russia was especially prone to continuities because it “is a conservative country. People are afraid of change”, according to Pipes⁴⁰.

This cultural attitude was manifested in a widespread preference for “a strong hand”. Government collapse in Russia tended to result in anarchy, followed by a restoration of authoritarian rule⁴¹. This tendency stemmed partly from the fact that the Russian people “are the least socialised or politicised people on the European continent”⁴². Crucial to this outcome was the Mongol conquest and rule of Russia for most of the 1200s–1400s, when Russian sovereignty rested with non-Russian overlords⁴³. The Russian patrimonial mentality, according to Pipes, derived from this experience. Also detrimental was the centuries-long enslavement of millions of peasants, which inculcated in them “a contempt for law and property and a spirit of stubborn resistance to all authority” and impeded the development of patriotism⁴⁴. Already in 1996, Pipes thought Russia was liable to evolve an authoritarian government like Pinochet’s Chile⁴⁵. Two decades later, Pipes thought “democracy might not take root in Russia for at least 100 years”⁴⁶.

Also highly important was the fact that Russia adopted orthodox Christianity, which imparted to Russian culture “a singularly conservative, anti-intellectual, and xenophobic ethos”⁴⁷. The Soviet belief in capitalist encirclement may have intensified this attitude, but it remained deeply rooted even after the fall of communism. Indeed, according to Pipes, in the mid-1990s, “even the most well-informed officials” tended to believe that all the Western countries were “allied against Russia”⁴⁸. The trend worsened over the following several years; in 2004, polling data indicated that two-thirds of the population worried about foreign enemies, above all “industrial-financial circles in the West”⁴⁹, a number that rose to 75% in 2008. Pipes still traced this attitude

⁴⁰ V. Dymarsky, “Vtoraya mirovaya vojna v istoricheskoy pamyati amerikantsa”, *Ekho Moskvy* (August 10, 2012), <https://echo.msk.ru/programs/year2012/911019-echo/>.

⁴¹ Pipes, “Russia’s Chance”, p. 29.

⁴² Pipes, “Flight from Freedom”, p. 10.

⁴³ Pipes, “Russia’s Politics”, p. 6.

⁴⁴ Pipes, “Russia’s Past”, p. 34.

⁴⁵ Pipes, “Russia’s Past”, p. 38.

⁴⁶ P. Szaniawski, “R. Pipes: Rosjanie zawsze gardzili słabeuszami”, *Rzeczpospolita* (February 19, 2017), <https://www.rp.pl/plus-minus/art2910301-R-pipes-rosjanie-zawsze-gardzili-slabeszami>.

⁴⁷ R. Pipes, “Russia’s Mission, America’s Destiny”, *Encounter* (October 1970), p. 3.

⁴⁸ Pipes, “Russia’s Past”, p. 35.

⁴⁹ Pipes, “Flight from Freedom”, p. 14.

to Russia's religious tradition⁵⁰. He, nevertheless, continuously urged Russians to abandon such fears and seek internal flourishing⁵¹.

According to Pipes, Russia's weakly developed commercial tradition also impeded such an outcome. Russian economic life was dominated by agriculture and extraction. Commercial exchange, however, fosters compromise, "the habits of civilised life", and the tendency to "respect the rights of others"⁵². Moreover, Soviet central state control promoted a sense of zero-sum struggles, in which comforts and privileges could only be acquired "by favour of the state"⁵³.

5. The Russian political system

The Russian political system, which emerged on the foundation of its political culture, has been dominated by elites isolated from society and enjoying great privileges⁵⁴. They see themselves as leaders of "a special nation, the only guardians of true orthodoxy"⁵⁵. They cut their political teeth in a ruthless struggle for survival. To compare such cutthroats to typical American politicians was like "comparing wild animals to domesticated breeds"⁵⁶. As they expanded Russian territory, they extended privileges to the elites of newly conquered lands. Such privileges gave the elites a material interest in maintaining the system, and because reform was difficult, they often preferred to channel scarce resources into foreign aggression⁵⁷. Indeed, the ruling class felt obligated to "win incessant victories" to justify their status⁵⁸. The ruling elites of the communist parties worldwide felt a commonality of interest, knowing, for example, in 1981, "that if Solidarity won, their own position

⁵⁰ Pipes, "Russia's Politics", p. 6.

⁵¹ "Druzei? a podderzhki ot nikh pochti net", *Argumenty i fakty* (November 12, 2012), p. 15.

⁵² Pipes, "Russia's Mission", pp. 10–11.

⁵³ R. Pipes, *Détente: Moscow's View*, [in:] *Soviet Strategy in Europe*, ed. R. Pipes, New York 1976, p. 7.

⁵⁴ R. Pipes, *Domestic Policy and Foreign Affairs*, [in:] *Russian Foreign Policy: Essays in Historical Perspective*, ed. I. J. Lederer, New Haven, CT, 1962, p. 147.

⁵⁵ Pipes, "Russia's Mission", p. 5.

⁵⁶ R. Pipes, *Statement before Joint Committee on Atomic Energy, Congress of the U.S., February 20, 1974*, Washington, DC, 1975, p. 6.

⁵⁷ R. Pipes, "Russia's Politics: Fatigue for the Elite", *Interplay: The Magazine of International Affairs* 4 (February 1971), no. 2, pp. 5–8.

⁵⁸ Pipes, "Soviet Global Strategy", p. 32.

would be unstable”⁵⁹. Likewise, officials throughout the system feared “the West as the source of subversive ideas”⁶⁰.

Among such ideas was the rule of law, as officials throughout Russian history have often been above the law, and the security services exercised unconstrained power over ordinary citizens⁶¹. These problems were deeply rooted before 1917 but gained enormous force in the Soviet decades, when mutual trust among citizens plummeted and corruption swelled. By the beginning of the new millennium, Pipes thought Russia seemed to be “the most criminalised and the most lawless” of all the major countries⁶². His prescription for resolving this deficit emphasised increasing trust between officials and the population, as well as among citizens.

Pipes saw a plus in this lack of trust: the Soviet leaders would probably seek to avoid a protracted war, fearing dependence on the population⁶³. Nevertheless, the Soviet leaders were highly militaristic. Pipes considered the militarisation of politics to be the main contribution of Leninism. Attracted to Marx’s emphasis on class war, Lenin “was the first public figure to view politics entirely in terms of warfare”⁶⁴. The militaristic Leninist approach continued to serve after his death because the Soviet leaders, like him, found themselves “without a popular mandate or any other kind of legitimacy to justify their monopoly of political power except the alleged demands of class war”. Soviet propaganda harped constantly on alleged foreign threats, encirclement, and escalating worldwide class struggles⁶⁵. According to Pipes, Soviet leaders were inspired by Hitler’s tactic of “cultivating the public stance of violent and unpredictable men whom it would be unwise to provoke”⁶⁶. The optimistically minded Americans struggled to understand the Social Darwinian mindset of their Soviet counterparts. But from the Soviet point of view, it made perfect sense. The global revolution had failed, and the USSR could not compete economically with the free-market West. “Military might

⁵⁹ Pipes, “Expansionism”, p. 58.

⁶⁰ Pipes, “Russia’s Chance”, p. 31.

⁶¹ R. Pipes, *Basic Soviet Institutions Have Not Changed*, [in:] *Decline of the West? George Kennan and His Critics*, ed. in Martin Herz, Washington, DC, 1978, p. 63.

⁶² Pipes, “What Russians Should Do”, p. 46.

⁶³ Pipes, “Why the Russians Act Like Russians”, p. 55.

⁶⁴ Pipes, “Some Operational Principles”, p. 8.

⁶⁵ *Détente and the Preconditions of Mutual Benefit, a Conversation in Three Parts with R. Pipes*, [in:] *Détente*, ed. G. Urban, London 1976, p. 176.

⁶⁶ Pipes, “Some Operational Principles”, p. 14.

alone”, by contrast, “has never disappointed it”⁶⁷. This assessment had deep roots. Pipes quoted Sergei Witte, the Prime Minister of Russia in 1905–1906, boasting that only military power had enabled the transformation of the “semi-Asiatic Muscovite tsardom into the most influential, most dominant, grandest European power”⁶⁸.

Consequently, the Soviet leaders placed huge emphasis on military preparedness. They did not radically distinguish between military and non-military means of conducting foreign policy and saw diplomatic, economic, psychological, and military means of operation as a continuum⁶⁹. In this sense, according to Pipes, Lenin turned Clausewitz’s ideas upside down. War for Lenin was paramount, whereas “politics, as well as military force, economic resources, ideology, etc., were the means” of conducting the inevitable global battle⁷⁰. Therefore, the Soviet leaders devoted great attention to analysing the relevant factors in light of the “correlation of forces” between the socialist and capitalist “camps”⁷¹. Strongly contributing to this correlation was the strength of morale and basic infrastructure. For this reason, Soviet doctrine prioritised attacks against civilian infrastructure to demoralise the enemy⁷². Also important were various weapons of the weak because the Soviets knew the free-market West was vastly more powerful. Thus, Lenin urged the deployment of “thorough, careful, attentive, skilful, and *obligatory* use of any, even the smallest, rift between the enemies” and analogous subversive methods⁷³. Nor did the Soviet leaders expect to avoid war. Horrific conflicts inevitably resulted from the historically driven clash between social systems⁷⁴. Still, Pipes believed that all the Soviet military might was intended foremost to intimidate and blackmail the Western powers and only secondarily for

⁶⁷ Pipes, “Détente: Moscow’s View”, p. 33.

⁶⁸ R. Pipes, “Militarism and the Soviet State”, *Russia: A Quarterly Review of Contemporary Soviet Issues* (1981), no. 1, p. 15.

⁶⁹ Pipes, “Detente and the Preconditions of Mutual Benefit”, p. 177.

⁷⁰ R. Pipes, *Developing a Counter-Strategy for the West*, [in:] *The Grand Strategy of the Soviet Union*, ed. B. McDonald, Toronto 1984, p. 133.

⁷¹ Pipes, “Militarism”, p. 18.

⁷² Pipes, “Militarism”, p. 19.

⁷³ Pipes, “Soviet Global Strategy”, p. 34.

⁷⁴ R. Pipes, “Soviet Strategic Doctrine: Another View”, *Strategic Review* 10 (Fall 1982), no. 4, p. 53.

use against them⁷⁵. The final objective of the Soviet grand strategy, according to Pipes, was “to transform the entire world into its own image”⁷⁶.

Pipes rejected the widely held claim that Russian expansionism stemmed from fear of invasion. “After all, a country does not become the largest state in the world”, he wrote, “merely by absorbing or repelling foreign invasions”⁷⁷. The Imperial Russian General Staff published a history of Russia’s wars from Peter I to 1898. It listed thirty-eight wars, of which it counted only two as defensive. Many countries have gone through aggressive phases, but “in Russia it remained a constant”⁷⁸.

The Soviet leaders accused Western countries of intending to attack Russia, a claim they knew was false (the Americans refused “to take advantage of their nuclear monopoly” during the early Cold War⁷⁹), but “totalitarian regimes have a habit of ascribing to others their own intentions to disguise their aggressive designs”⁸⁰. Since the totalitarian system generating expansionism was the problem⁸¹, the West’s main goal “should be to compel the Soviet Union to turn inward, from conquest to reform”⁸². Moreover, post-Soviet Russia’s striving to restore its great power status only pushed Russia away from the West, whose developmental assistance was “vital”⁸³. Unfortunately, polling data indicated that large majorities of Russians yearned for great power status, whereas “only 22 percent wanted Russia to be seen as ‘affluent and thriving’; . . . and a mere 1 percent as ‘law-abiding and democratic’”⁸⁴.

The Soviet leaders felt the same. From the beginning of their rule, the Bolsheviks rejected the idea of an international order of sovereign states, each with a right to exist⁸⁵. Moreover, the ruling elite did not think in terms of a stable world order⁸⁶. Perhaps most telling, the Soviet security services, the KGB and the GRU, often played a more important role in foreign relations

⁷⁵ Pipes, *Developing a Counter-Strategy*, p. 135.

⁷⁶ Pipes, *Developing a Counter-Strategy*, p. 134.

⁷⁷ Pipes, “Militarism”, p. 15.

⁷⁸ Pipes, *The USSR or Russia?*, p. 32.

⁷⁹ Pipes, *Some Operational Principles*, p. 27.

⁸⁰ R. Pipes, “How to Cope with the Soviet Threat: A Long-term Strategy for the West”, *Commentary* 78 (August 1984), no. 2, p. 14.

⁸¹ Pipes, *Developing a Counter-Strategy*, p. 137.

⁸² Pipes, “Soviet Global Strategy”, p. 39.

⁸³ Pipes, *What Russians Should Do*, p. 44.

⁸⁴ Pipes, “Flight from Freedom”, pp. 14–15.

⁸⁵ Pipes, *Domestic Policy*, p. 163.

⁸⁶ Pipes, “Why the Russians Act Like Russians”, p. 52.

than the Foreign Ministry⁸⁷. Again, due to mirror imaging and intractable positive thinking, Western policymakers imagined that entangling the Soviets in trade relations would transform Russia into a responsible member of the international community. “The Soviet Government views these matters very differently”, Pipes noted wryly⁸⁸.

Above all, the Soviet leaders thrived on crisis. The free world was “a constant reproach” to the Soviet elites, which felt compelled to foment crises and “pretend the West is seeking to attack them to justify military expenses and their own aggressiveness”⁸⁹. They feared their own population, which, left to its own devices, would likely be drawn to the Western world’s freedom and plenty⁹⁰. Thus, whereas Western leaders sought to maintain international stability and the free flow of traffic, capital, information, and people, the Soviet leadership sought “ossification within its own camp and constant instability in areas outside of its control”⁹¹. Pipes advised Western leaders to familiarise themselves with the Soviet leaders’ mentality, for example, keeping in mind Lenin’s statement in 1918: “History suggests that peace is a breathing space for war”⁹². This attitude reemerged even after the fall of communism. In 2008, Pipes predicted that managing Russia’s leaders’ efforts to foment “a state of constant tension with the West” would “remain a central and highly arduous task confronting Western diplomacy”⁹³.

The Soviet leaders maintained an “unshakable belief in the irreconcilable hostility of the communist and capitalist social systems”⁹⁴. Due to the powerful American nuclear capacity, they did not wish to engage in direct conflict with the U.S. Instead, they conducted “the most venomous hate campaign”, which American policymakers did not take seriously and, therefore, for the most part did not counter⁹⁵ (the head of the United States Information Agency never even attended National Security Council meetings during Pipes’s

⁸⁷ Pipes, *Some Operational Principles*, p. 9.

⁸⁸ R. Pipes, *Moscow’s Quest for Western Technology*, [in:] *Soviet Foreign Policy: Its Many Facets and Its Real Objectives*, ed. J. M. Mackintosh, Paris 1975, p. 28.

⁸⁹ Pipes, *Developing a Counter-Strategy*, p. 132.

⁹⁰ Pipes, “Why the Russians Act Like Russians”, p. 53.

⁹¹ Pipes, “Soviet Global Strategy”, p. 39.

⁹² R. Pipes, *Dealing with the Russians: The Wages of Forgetfulness*, [in:] *U.S.-Soviet Relations: The Next Phase*, ed. A. L. Horelick, Ithaca, NY, 1986, p. 279.

⁹³ Pipes, “Putin & Co.”, p. 36.

⁹⁴ Pipes, “Détente: Moscow’s View”, p. 33.

⁹⁵ Pipes, “Soviet Global Strategy”, p. 36.

time in the White House⁹⁶). In 1984, for example, the Soviet Minister of Defence, Marshal Dmitrii Ustinov, likened the global imperialistic role of the contemporaneous United States to that of Nazi Germany in World War II, "Just imagine if [Secretary of Defence] Caspar Weinberger said anything remotely similar", Pipes noted hypothetically⁹⁷. Other "weapons of the weak" the Soviets deployed were "driving wedges between citizens of democratic societies and their elected officials, aggravating relations among social classes and ethnic and religious groups, sowing discord among allies", and supporting "terrorists of every political hue"⁹⁸. "Disinformation" and "active measures" were also potent tools in their arsenal (although this sometimes backfired, as when Khrushchev's claim of missile dominance led to an American military expansion⁹⁹). One powerful method involved well-orchestrated propaganda campaigns, especially those promoting "peace"¹⁰⁰, aimed at convincing citizens of Western societies that getting along with the Soviets, given the danger of nuclear war, was paramount, even if this meant bowing to Soviet demands and compromising Western values and ideals¹⁰¹. Moreover, the Soviet leaders kept up these tactics even when détente was flourishing¹⁰².

6. Negotiating with the Russians

To deal effectively with the Russians, one needs to understand their mentality. Western political figures should "reckon with Russian feelings", accept their deep yearning for great power status, and avoid publicly questioning that status¹⁰³. Anti-missile interceptors should be installed in central Europe, but NATO should not be expanded to Ukraine¹⁰⁴. Pipes worried that

⁹⁶ Pipes, *Dealing with the Russians*, p. 283.

⁹⁷ Pipes, *Developing a Counter-Strategy*, p. 140.

⁹⁸ R. Pipes, "How Vulnerable is the West?", *Survey* 28 (Summer 1984), no. 2, pp. 9, 11.

⁹⁹ Pipes, *Some Operational Principles*, p. 27.

¹⁰⁰ Pipes, *Some Operational Principles*, pp. 8–19.

¹⁰¹ Pipes, *Detente: Moscow's View*, p. 29.

¹⁰² Pipes, *Expansionism*, p. 57.

¹⁰³ V. Ryzhkov and V. Dymarskiy, "Dym Otechestva: Vse vypuski Russkaya istoriya: khozhdenie po grablyam", *Ekho Moskv*y (June 21, 2009), <http://echo.msk.ru/programs/smoke/599353-echo/>.

¹⁰⁴ "Craving to Be a Great Power", *Moscow Times* (July 15, 2009), <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/opinion/article/craving-to-be-a-great-power/379522.html>.

such expansion could play into the hands of Russian hardliners. Even so, he doubted the likelihood of Russian aggression in Eastern Europe, given how difficult it was for Russia to prosecute the First Chechen War in 1994–1995¹⁰⁵.

It was often difficult for American policymakers to square off with their Russian counterparts, many of whom exercised their functions for years or even decades. Ronald Reagan's first Secretary of State, Alexander Haig, was "no match for Gromyko. He . . . has no strategy and no knowledge of his opponent. Time and again, Gromyko drove him into a corner"¹⁰⁶. This might seem surprising because Haig had a reputation for toughness. But Andrei Gromyko served as Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1957 to 1985 – nearly thirty years. In contrast, Pipes found that the Department of State had "virtually no institutional memory". During his time in the Reagan administration, he was unable to locate a complete set of exchanges between U.S. and Soviet leaders¹⁰⁷. Western diplomats needed to "carefully study documents from Soviet negotiations, such as the 1918 Brest-Litovsk negotiations, or the 1939 Nazi Soviet negotiations".

Thanks to their longevity in office, Soviet diplomats understood their American counterparts well, knowing they wanted "to get things done"¹⁰⁸. Consequently, Soviet negotiators advanced excessive demands and refused to compromise, knowing that the Americans would likely make concessions. Moreover, the Soviets often engaged in talks "not to reach an agreement but to attain some other objective, such as ascertaining how strong their opponents' determination is on a given issue, splitting hostile alliances, or influencing world opinion"¹⁰⁹. When the Soviets wanted a deal, especially when they were threatened, such as by the Nazis in 1939, they would come to terms expeditiously. "History has taught Russian rulers", Pipes wrote, "to accommodate themselves to a superior power with cunning when they are weak and to act in an unmistakably imperial manner when they are strong"¹¹⁰. The Soviets complicated matters by pursuing détente under a variety of guises, whenever the country was too weak to advance in its "inevitable" conflict

¹⁰⁵ "Rosyjska racja stanu", *Polityka*, no. 17 (April 29, 1995), p. 11.

¹⁰⁶ NSC Journal, November 23, 1981, HA, uncatalogued.

¹⁰⁷ Pipes, *Dealing with the Russians*, p. 276.

¹⁰⁸ Pipes, *Some Operational Principles*, p. 22.

¹⁰⁹ Pipes, *Some Operational Principles*, p. 5.

¹¹⁰ Pipes, *Diplomacy and Culture*, p. 155.

with the capitalist West”¹¹¹. In confronting the Russians, it was necessary to exhibit extreme patience, meticulously detailed knowledge, and unflappable firmness, because “the Soviets are inclined to interpret ambiguity as equivocation, equivocation as weakness, and weakness as a signal to act”¹¹². Not surprisingly, Soviet hardline stratagems yielded few results when applied to a similarly hardline, strategically oriented adversary, Communist China.

7. The West's response

To stand up to Russia, given the enormous advantages conferred by geography and its dictatorial nature, Western countries needed to develop their own grand strategy. Pipes began sketching out his proposal early in the Reagan administration. It consisted of a military buildup, verifiable arms control, increased pressure on Soviet proxies, strengthening U.S. alliances in Europe and Asia, reducing Western technological flows to the Eastern bloc, promoting liberalisation in Eastern Europe, spotlighting deficiencies of the Soviet system, increasing communication with the Soviets, and offering both leaders and citizens of the communist world a positive vision of the future¹¹³. These principles lay at the foundation of the National Security Decision Directive 75, which was authored primarily by Pipes and adopted by Reagan in January 1983.

The positive vision Pipes had in mind was of a westernising Russia gradually integrating itself into the global community. It was, therefore, necessary to persuade Russians that “they belong to the West and should adopt Western institutions and values: democracy, multi-party system, rule of law, freedom of speech and press, and respect for private property”¹¹⁴. Pipes was a proud and confident advocate of westernisation. In his homage to Andrei Sakharov, presented to the U.S. House of Representatives, Pipes argued that Western culture was “not merely one of several possible alternative ways of organising the modern world; it is the only realistic alternative. Only the

¹¹¹ G. Urban, “A Conversation with R. Pipes: USA–USSR: The Preconditions of Detente”, *Survey* 21 (Winter/Spring 1975), no. 1/2, p. 45.

¹¹² Pipes, *Some Operational Principles*, p. 23.

¹¹³ Pipes to R. Allen, July 16, 1981, Box 10 Chron files, f. 19, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Pipes Papers.

¹¹⁴ R. Pipes, “Pride and Power”, *Wall Street Journal* (August 22, 2009), pp. W1–2.

West has developed the institutions for political expression and legal adjudication that make it possible for diverse communities and interest groups to coexist in the complex modern world”¹¹⁵.

Moreover, Russia has every reason to evolve (yet again) toward the West. “No one would regard Pushkin, Tolstoy, Tchaikovsky, or Chagall as anything but Western”, he noted in 1996. Holding up Western culture as the model for a contemporary society did “not imply racial superiority. For various reasons”, Pipes argued, “Europe was the first continent to develop the institutions which are the foundations of modern life”¹¹⁶. Unfortunately, after the fall of communism, it would be much easier for Russia to catch up militarily than to implement all the reforms needed to westernise. Yet, according to Pipes, this “would be an error of historic proportions”¹¹⁷. This choice was complicated by the fact, however, that “Russia has never been able to make up its mind where it belongs in the global community of nations”¹¹⁸. Yet failure to choose the western path would condemn Russia to “irrelevance”¹¹⁹.

Western countries had few means of nudging Russia toward westernisation, according to Pipes. One was to supply the Soviet citizenry with accurate information about domestic affairs and foreign policies, to “perform the function of a non-existent Soviet free press and inform Soviet citizens of the failures and misdeeds of their government”¹²⁰. Another approach was to use economic pressure to make it more difficult for Soviet leaders to avoid reform. It was “absurd for the West to enhance Soviet industrial potential while preparing at great cost to match its military capability”, given that “military power rests directly on industrial might”¹²¹. The massive technology transfer that the West had permitted since 1921 had to stop¹²². In particular, helping the Soviets build a gas pipeline to Europe made little sense when it obviously promoted “the maintenance of an odious and dangerously aggressive

¹¹⁵ R. Pipes, *Homage to Sakharov*, *House of Representatives*, May 21, 1986, HUG(FP)98.45, box 6, HA.

¹¹⁶ Pipes, “Russia’s Past”, p. 31.

¹¹⁷ Pipes, “Is Russia Still an Enemy?”, p. 77.

¹¹⁸ Pipes, “Putin & Co.”, p. 34.

¹¹⁹ R. Pipes, *Rossiia v bor’be so svoim proshlym*, [in:] *Rossiia na rubezhe vekov, 1991–2011*, ed. V. P. Buldakov, Moscow 2011, p. 47.

¹²⁰ J. M. Goshko, “Stepped-Up Radio Propaganda Campaign Planned against Soviets”, *Washington Post* (March 12, 1981), p. A5.

¹²¹ Pipes, *Dealing with the Russians*, p. 286.

¹²² Pipes, “How to Cope”, p. 27.

totalitarian regime"¹²³. Unfortunately, this problem remained a constant, and it was difficult to get the Europeans to recognise the danger, because Europeans cared primarily "about economic benefits, not world politics"¹²⁴. A third method was to display firmness. When dealing with the Soviets, Pipes asserted rather hyperbolically, adopting "the proper mental attitude" was "more important than another three aircraft carrier groups"¹²⁵. In any event, President Carter's efforts at détente did not prevent the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, whereas "the Politburo chose, in response to Reagan's anticommunism, a man committed to perestroika and disarmament"¹²⁶. Yet it was also necessary to be realistic. By 2008, Pipes concluded that the "best we can expect from Russia is that there will be a legitimate autocracy", that is, one that "will respect its own laws so that people can feel secure"¹²⁷.

Conclusion

Using both social scientific and humanistic approaches, Richard Pipes viewed Russia as predisposed to authoritarian government, an insufficiently developed civil society, weakly rooted legal institutions, and anaemic protections for civil and political rights. He viewed these conditions as strongly influenced by geography and historical development. The Russian people leaned toward conservatism, a preference for strong rulers, mistrust of foreigners, and an unwillingness to compromise. A narrow elite has dominated Russian politics, enjoying great privileges, power, and immunity from legal accountability. Poor agricultural conditions within a vast territory call for "conquests; conquests demand a large military establishment; a large military establishment saps the productive forces of the country, perpetuating poverty"¹²⁸. Given the centrality of militarism and expansionism to Russian statehood, its leaders, at least since the Bolsheviks seized power in 1917, have profited from

¹²³ R. Pipes, "L'URSS en crise", *Politique étrangère* (1982), no. 4, p. 880.

¹²⁴ A. Baydakova, "Dlia Evropy Ukraina ne tak vazhna. Krym – eto uzhe istoriia", *Krugozor* (June 2014), <https://www.krugozormagazine.com/show/Pipes.2233.html>.

¹²⁵ Pipes, *Expansionism*, p. 61.

¹²⁶ R. Pipes, "Misinterpreting the Cold War: The Hardliners Were Right", *Foreign Affairs* 74 (1995), no. 1, p. 158.

¹²⁷ Pipes, "Russia's Politics", p. 9.

¹²⁸ Pipes, "Militarism", p. 3.

international tension and justified their extreme political control by depicting Western countries as inveterate enemies. Because those countries outmatch Russia in wealth, its leaders have contended against them using asymmetrical methods. Pipes urged Western leaders to oppose a firm, well-informed, and multifaceted approach, which Pipes called a grand strategy, to Russian contentiousness. Western leaders should avoid offending the Russians' sensitivity over their unequal position internationally, while urging them to continue on their path toward westernisation, interrupted by the Bolshevik seizure of power. In its hostile phases, Russia should not be bolstered with economic support. When Russian news media are tightly controlled, Western countries should provide an ersatz free press. Great patience will be necessary: the process of reform could take decades or even generations.

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