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In Place of Euphoria

By Harry Schwartz

SAN FRANCISCO — A useful by-product of the recent sharp deterioration in Soviet-American relations would be another hard look at the developing pattern of Moscow-Washington economic relations. The high costs of last year's massive grain sale to the Soviet Union are felt daily by every housewife who goes shopping. There could be even higher costs in the long run from today's lemming-like anxiety to some American businessmen to make massive transfers of United States technology and capital to the Soviet Union.

Many Americans, for example, must have felt uneasy when they learned of the recent agreement between Control Data Corporation and the Soviet Government. That accord calls for cooperation in the joint development of advanced computer technology. If its implementation is to mean anything at all, this agreement will transfer to the Soviet Union a knowledge of computer techniques that it does not now possess. But will that be in this country's interest?

One reason for disquiet is the technical virtuosity of some of the Soviet weapons which have been in the spotlight the past few weeks. The SAM-6 surface to air missile, for example, changed Western preconceptions about how the struggle in the Middle East would go by its extraordinary effectiveness—an effectiveness which for a time denied Israel air supremacy in the Suez Canal zone. This country has no comparable weapon, nor does the United States Air Force now have any reliable means to counter this missile should American planes have to fight in a war with a country having the SAM-6 mobile missile launchers. Impressive too is the new Soviet anti-tank missile, a weapon directed by infrared rays, and the three-ton Frog 7, the Soviet missile that sent 1,100-pound warheads crashing down on villages in the central Galilee.

The impression is inevitable that the Soviet Union has concentrated its substantial resources of scientific and technological talent overwhelmingly on military needs—including the military-related space program—while neglecting civilian technology. What Moscow seems to be asking now is that the United States play a major role in repairing the backwardness caused by this concentration, particularly, but not exclusively, in the computer field.

The Middle East war has shown what severe limitations there are on the Soviet concept of détente. It was not until Israel had changed the whole military perspective of the struggle by moving substantial forces across the Suez Canal that Moscow suddenly

became interested in a cease-fire. It seems a fair guess that if Egypt and Syria had continued to enjoy the military upperhand which their surprise initial attack gave them, Moscow would still be uninterested in any cease-fire proposals.

In these circumstances, is it not wise to take another hard look at how much and what kind of technological assistance this country is ready to give the Soviet Union? And in taking that second look, account ought to be taken too of the recent dismaying reports about the "spectacular" rise in Soviet tank strength in Central Europe as well as the 50 per cent increase reported in Soviet tactical air power in that area.

Similar consideration is due the gigantic Siberian natural gas deals that Moscow is seeking to conclude with some American companies. The energy crisis is real enough, but is dependence upon Soviet oil or gas the way out of the nation's problems?

A negative answer seems indicated. This is particularly true at this time when the Arab nations have put an oil and natural gas embargo on the United States. That move ought to teach the United States that political use of economic levers is likely to be a major and increasing feature of the world scene from now on. The Arabs want to punish this country for its support of Israel. The motives for a possible future Soviet cut-off of energy shipments to this country could arise from any of the numerous areas of potential confrontation between Washington and Moscow. More than ever, therefore, the question now arises why the United States should put this potential energy weapon in Moscow's hands, and pay billions of dollars in capital investments for the privilege of doing so. President Nixon's recent suggestion that this country become self-sufficient in energy seems to point toward a much wiser geographic focus of future American energy investment.

The Nixon Administration must shoulder much of the responsibility for encouraging excessive euphoria in the business community about the political and economic prospects for Soviet-American trade. The Middle East crisis and then the frightening Soviet-American confrontation last Thursday should help put sober calculation in place of euphoria. By all means let us trade with the Soviet Union, but American Government and business executives must study the question of what trade is really mutually advantageous as carefully as that issue is studied by their sophisticated negotiating partners in Moscow.

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