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A reputation for telling the truth is an important resource in foreign policy. This paper investigates the performance of the central Soviet press in terms of the frequency and conditions under which it lies about Soviet foreign policy. The analysis is based on statements in Pravda and Izvestia since 1945 which related to Soviet foreign policy behavior, including military affairs. The results show that there were fewer than a dozen such lies. There were many deliberately misleading statements, but upon close examination, few of them turned out to be actual lies. The only clear cases of strategic lies were statements connected with the 1961 missile gap, the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia, the 1970 Soviet role in Egyptian air defense, and the 1979 invasion of Afghanistan. (There are also two ambiguous cases involving Soviet bases at Cienfuegos, Cuba in 1970 and in Somalia in 1975.) Thus, the central Soviet press has been used to tell lies on the rare occasions when the stakes of the situation were sufficiently high so that the potential gains from deception might well have been worth the loss in accumulated credibility. Neither internal divisions, organizational processes, nor political opportunism have been allowed to interfere with this impressive record of control.

It is important to bear in mind the distinction between a lie and a
misleading statement. Soviet pronouncements are carefully written, and can be carefully analyzed. These statements often encourage readers to draw misleading conclusions; but they are rarely lies. This distinction, moreover, is often overlooked by Western commentators, and consequently secondhand accounts of what Moscow has asserted are often unreliable.

For the interpretation of the credibility of an explicit Soviet statement about Soviet foreign policy behavior, a useful question to ask is whether this might be one of the most important foreign events to the Soviets since World War II. The Soviet leaders sometimes do lie (and sometimes do not) about their own foreign policy behavior when the stakes are very large: when they do, they are likely to pull out all the stops. If an event seems to have very large stakes for the Soviet leadership, one ought not be reassured by multiple Soviet assurances.

Chances are, then, when the Soviet leadership is caught in a lie about foreign policy behavior, that unless the lie is manifestly to maintain pretenses to domestic audiences, it regards the event as very important. If an event is not likely to be one of the most important since World War II, then the Soviet leadership is unlikely to be lying.
THE SOVIET PRESS ON SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY:
A USUALLY RELIABLE SOURCE

Introduction

Regimes are often preoccupied with maintaining their credibility. Great powers wish to convey to their allies the impression that they are not only strong but reliable. In limited adversary relationships, credibility is viewed as a resource to perpetuate and develop the more cooperative aspects of a fragile relationship. During wartime, during the Cold War, or in other sharply adversarial relationships, leaders have an interest in conveying to their rivals a sense of what they consider important. Regimes also cherish credibility as part of their own self-image. There is yet another, more paradoxical, reason why credibility is valued: it can be used as a resource to achieve deception. On the occasions when statements are meant to deceive, the effort will not be effective if it is based on a reputation for thoroughgoing mendacity.

This paper is about explicit deception in the Soviet press pertaining to Soviet foreign policy. It is part of a larger ongoing project on the relationship between word and deed in Soviet foreign policy. In the larger project we are concerned more with the media as a source for inputs into the Soviet policy process; in this article our concern is with media utterances as foreign policy outputs and the linkages of these outputs with other, non-verbal forms of behaviour. The previous paragraph prefigures a major reason for this study: the study of deception in the Soviet press allows us to ascertain the extent to which the leaders of a major power behave as though they believe it important to have a reputation for
credibility. It allows us to make inferences about probable future Soviet verbal and, in some circumstances, non-verbal behaviour.

**Scope of the Study**

To appreciate the exact range of validity of our findings it is necessary to be quite precise about the scope of the study. Our analysis of the central Soviet press was based on statements in Pravda and Izvestia since 1945 which related to Soviet foreign policy behaviour *per se*. We excluded statements about historical events before 1945, and we excluded statements about economic relationships. But otherwise we took a broad view of foreign policy behaviour, and included all aspects of military affairs. Reasons and implications of these choices are worth describing in some detail.

1. Authoritativeness. Our concern in this paper is with credibility *vis-à-vis* external audiences as a Soviet foreign policy resource. That concern pointed in the direction of identifying open channels whereby the Soviet leadership could unambiguously signal foreign audiences. Consequently, we operationally defined authoritative to mean appearing in Pravda or Izvestia -- the 'organs' respectively of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the government of the Soviet Union. We have included not only official statements and editorials, but everything else: signed commentary, dispatches from correspondents and anonymous news reports.
Excluded by this determination were television, radio, the specialized press and the regional press. Television, by its nature, is targeted to domestic audiences rather than foreign elites. Radio by its very transience reduces the extent to which Soviet credibility is laid on the line as compared to the degree of commitment represented by the publication of a statement in the central party or government organs, Pravda and Izvestia.

The subtleties of the specialised and regional press may be useful for studying internal debates, but they usually have limited direct foreign policy significance. When the Soviet leadership is engaged in communicating overt signals to outsiders, the central media represent a more natural and more often employed source.

Finally, our investigation excluded private deceptions, a notorious example being the promise of safe conduct used to lure Hungarian general Pal Maleter to his death during the 1956 uprising. Diplomatic and back-channel methods are standard forms of signalling to external elites, but are largely inaccessible to scholars. It should be stressed, however, that major private deceptions are, presumably, often supplemented with supporting public utterances. The textbook case of such an incident, of course, is the Cuban missile crisis. Ambassador Anatolii Dobrynin very explicitly assured President Kennedy on 6 September 1962, that Khrushchev wished him to know that "Nothing would be undertaken before the American congressional elections that would complicate the
international situation or aggravate the tension between our two countries." Georgi Bolshakov also told Robert Kennedy specifically that "No missile capable of reaching the United States would be placed in Cuba".3 These private diplomatic and back-channel statements were coupled with equally pointed statements in Pravda and Izvestia on 12 September that The government of the Soviet Union has authorized TASS to state also that there is no need for the Soviet Union to set up in any other country -- Cuba for instance -- the weapons it has for repelling aggression, for a retaliatory blow. The explosive power of our nuclear weapons is so great and the Soviet Union has such powerful missiles for delivering these nuclear warheads that there is no need to seek sites somewhere beyond the boundaries of the Soviet Union.4

2. Time Frame. Our decision to limit the study to the post war period seems natural. We examined the major international events involving the Soviet Union since World War II including the 1946 events in Iran; the Berlin crises of 1948 and 1961; the Korean War; Suez crisis 1956; the Hungarian and Polish events of 1956; the Quemoy-Matsu incident in 1958; the 1960 U-2 incident; the Cuban missile crisis in 1962; the Prague spring and subsequent invasion of Czechoslovakia by the USSR, the German Democratic Republic, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Poland (1968); Middle East conflicts in 1956, 1967, 1970, and 1973; the United States intervention in Vietnam; the Egyptian ejection of Soviet
troops in 1972; the Vietnamese intervention in Cambodia (Campuchea) in 1978; the subsequent Chinese intervention in Vietnam in 1979; and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. In addition we examined a large number of other episodes which seemed to offer the temptation for lying; relying initially on our prior research in Soviet studies and foreign policy generally, and standard secondary sources. These events included the 1970 flap about a Soviet base in Cuba, the attempted overthrow of Nimeiry in the Sudan in 1971, the Portuguese revolution in 1974, the war in Angola 1975, the 1975 American charges about Soviet naval base construction in Somalia, the United States' expulsion of Soviet spies in 1978, the death of American Ambassador Adolph Dubs in Afghanistan, 1979, and the presence of Soviet combat troops in Cuba in 1979. We considered not only crises, but a wide variety of issues on which the Soviets had an incentive to deceive, such as their recent claims about troop concentration in Central Europe and the size of their military budget. We further specified some significant policy-relevant subject areas where we examined everything that had appeared in Pravda or Izvestia over a period of years. We looked, for instance, at strategic arms production and capability claims during the years 1957-1962, at Soviet civil defense claims in 1961-78 and
Soviet military aid to the Arabs in 1967-73. Finally, we solicited further suggestions from the community of Soviet specialists by requesting in the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies Newsletter that scholars send us examples of Soviet lying. This request produced a handful of responses, each of which we investigated.

We do not contend that the events we studied constitute a complete sample, but we do claim to have examined a set of events which would constitute a very large fraction of the universe of anyone's list of important events and which does reflect a nearly complete effort to look carefully at every instance which we or others have thought might have involved deceptive Soviet behaviour.

3. Subject matter. The decision to limit our inquiry to Soviet statements about their own past, present, or future behaviour flows logically from our concern with the Soviet leadership's use of credibility as a resource in foreign policy. The decision to exclude Soviet commentary on events prior to 1945 was relatively inconsequential. There already exists a significant literature on the Soviet use and misuse of history. More to the point, Soviet commentary about Soviet behaviour in the relatively distant past serves more to legitimate and justify Soviet behaviour than as an instrument by which the Soviet Union signals external non-communist leaders about forthcoming non-verbal Soviet behaviour.

More important, our criteria exclude Soviet statements about the behaviour of others. This has some disadvantages. To the extent the Soviet Union has a reputation for mandacity in world affairs, that reputation...
depends to a considerable extent on its media's considerable proclivity for fabrications about other states' behaviour. Moreover, Soviet statements about the behaviour of others may sometimes foreshadow Soviet actions. Even so, statements about others (even ones of such obvious portent as an assertion that socialism is endangered somewhere, say, Czechoslovakia) do not constitute anything like the commitment to link word and deed that inheres in a counterpart statement about what the Soviet Union is doing or will do about it. Hence, statements about the behaviour of others involve far less risk of Soviet credibility as a resource.

4. Defining direct deception. It is important similarly to stress that our concern is with what we define as direct deception, i.e., statements that are false or which become false. Direct deception is to be contrasted with indirect deceptions that require that the reader make inferences which go beyond the explicit claim. As we shall see, indirect deceptions are to be found in abundance in the central Soviet media, and it is often a reasonable inference that such statements were carefully formulated to encourage some audiences to make misleading inferences about probable Soviet behaviour. Our focus on direct deception minimizes the necessity of determining either the inferences of the target or the motives of the source.

5. Verifiability. We grant immediately that even many cases of direct deception are inherently difficult to evaluate. Although
we do have to exclude certain unverifiable but potential instances of deceptions, \(^6\) the number of events analyzed in which there were opportunities for the evaluation of possible direct deceptions remains large. We know, too, there are many instances, in circumstances analogous to the Soviet foreign policy events examined (especially those involving covert operations), where other states have authored known lies. In the case of the United States, for instance, one thinks immediately of the U-2 denial and the denials relating to American actions in Cambodia in 1970.

**Alternative Perspectives**

One can readily imagine conceptions of the Soviet system, wherein lying—direct deception—about Soviet foreign policy would be a frequent occurrence. One central function the Soviet press has always served is that of agitation and mobilization of domestic audiences. Were such a function paramount, commentary about Soviet foreign policy would be highly homogeneous, but the regime's need to protect its credibility would be modest and likewise the reluctance to deceive rather slim. The Soviet press can also be used as a window on Soviet
politics. Were that conception paramount, then given the style of discourse in Soviet high politics, one would assume words would be carefully chosen, but the incentives to maintain credibility as a resource would be modest and the degree of coordination moderate.

Another perspective on the Soviet system, the Soviet press, and Soviet foreign policy would emphasize a third function of the Soviet media, namely, communicating with foreign elites. Again, this is a perspective with considerable basis in fact. The Soviet press is one of the most important vehicles available to the Soviet leadership through which it can signal foreign audiences. The Soviet leadership knows this and so do foreign elites. This perspective would be prone to view the Soviet Union as a rational foreign policy actor operating in a coordinated manner, as in the mobilizational perspective, but concerned, primarily, with external audiences. It might be supposed that an extrapolation of such a perspective would project an image of the Soviet Union which allowed short term optimizing considerations to take precedence over all others. The result of such actions would be that, as in the primacy-of-politics perspective, the incentive to maintain credibility would be modest. The proclivity for direct deception, by contrast, would be high.
A rational actor would not, however, always elect to maximize short term advantage. Rather, the decision to engage in direct deception can be thought of as one of a larger class of events in which the political leadership of a state enjoys a resource which can be used to surprise the leaders of other states. In such instances, the non-use of the resource is costly since the resource must be maintained. At the same time, the use of the resource risks its further use. Thus, lying about what one has done or is going to do reduces the prospects that one can lie successfully at some future time—when it may be more important. It also reduces the likelihood that at some future time, when decision makers want to be believed, they will in fact be believed. In such situations where the potential for surprise constitutes a valuable resource, there are strong incentives to forego the short term advantage (should the other side be fooled by the lie) and to incur the cost of maintaining the resource, in this instance, the credibility of the central Soviet media. Conversely, there are incentives to lie when the stakes are very high and/or when there is relatively little likelihood that the lie can in some fashion be put to the test. This rational actor model requires patience for a long term perspective, and strong planning to harness the
press when the stakes are right. Like the mobilizational perspective, it presumes a Soviet leadership which exercises central control and maintains a homogeneous posture on Soviet foreign policy. Unlike the mobilizational perspective, it implies a Soviet leadership which evidences considerable concern to maintain its credibility and whose incidence of direct deception is low, occurring when the stakes are quite high or when it is very difficult to demonstrate the validity of an utterance. 8

Lies

We now turn to a presentation of the cases in which we have discovered lies in the central Soviet press. After reviewing these cases, we will discuss some interesting cases which turned out not to be lies. Then we will assess the total record in light of alternative perspectives on Soviet use of credibility as a resource.

The instances of direct deceptions—lies—which we found can conveniently be grouped under three rubrics. The first is strategic lies—lies designed to deceive foreign audiences about the Soviet Union's behaviour the present or recent past. The second category is unfulfilled threats—statements about future behaviour which did not come to pass. The third category is diplomatic fictions—pretences about Soviet behaviour that can hardly be expected to deceive any foreign audience but the most naive.

We found only five clear strategic lies and two more ambiguous cases in the entire thirty-four years since 1945. We will present the clear cases first.

The first strategic lie was a statement in January 1962 about the
capabilities of Soviet missile forces made by the then Defense Minister, Marshall Rodion Malinovski. First a bit of context. In late 1961, the United States leadership had taken pains to make clear that it knew the United States was in a position where it could destroy Soviet targets and that the Soviet strategic position was such that the USSR very likely could not effectively retaliate against the United States (as opposed to Western Europe) in the event of an American attack. In 1957, the era of geographically based American strategic invulnerability had been brought to an end by the Soviet development of the ICBM; American missile procurements in 1960-61 threatened to recreate the pre-1957 strategic environment. Against this backdrop, Malinovski made the following claim: 'We are in a position to wipe from the face of the earth with one nuclear-missile strike any targets, all the industrial and administrative-political centers of the USA' (Pravda, 24 January 1962; Izvestia, 25 January 1962). Prompted, presumably, by the same kind of desperation which induced the Soviet leadership to install missiles in Cuba, this statement was false. Interestingly, however, it is the only example of direct deception we found among the many production or capability statements which emanated from Khrushchev and other Soviet leaders in the volatile years 1958-1962.

Later in 1962 came the strategic lie which was the precursor to the Cuban missile crisis. It was a whopper. Moreover, every effort was made to make it clear that the statement came with the imprimatur of the Soviet government. The TASS declaration in Pravda and Izvestia on 12 September 1962 was explicit. As mentioned earlier, it declared that it was the 'government of the Soviet Union' that had authorised the TASS statement. The
The third example of a statement which proved to be a strategic lie occurred in 1968 in connection with the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Union and the GDR, Bulgaria, Hungary and Poland. As in Hungary in 1956 (when the USSR did succeed in getting key Hungarian leaders to call for Soviet fraternal assistance) the initial rationale of the invasion claimed that the troops had acted in response to the ‘request by party and state leaders of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic for immediate assistance, including assistance with armed forces, to the fraternal Czechoslovak people’ (Pravda and Izvestia, 21 August 1968). Gordon Skilling’s definitive account of the Czech events suggests there may have been some reason for the Soviet leadership to expect the troops would be invited in. Whatever may have been anticipated at the time of the invasion, after the invasion no Czechoslovak leader was willing to come forth to declare that he had extended such an invitation. The result was a cover story starkly at variance with Czechoslovak reality. After a few days, the cover story was quietly dropped by the USSR.

The fourth example of a strategic lie concerns the Soviet role in aiding the Egyptians in 1970. The Egyptians were practically defenceless in late 1969 against Israeli deep penetration raids and turned to the Soviet Union for assistance in early 1970. The USSR complied with the request (and made it discreetly but explicitly clear that it intended to provide Egypt with substantial military assistance). The assistance was unprecedented in that it included the dispatch of Soviet crews to man SAM-3s in
Egypt. To commit Soviet personnel in a combat role against Israel must have provoked considerable anxiety in Moscow since no similar step had ever been taken outside the Communist camp. In the summer 1970, after Soviet aid had succeeded in deterring Israeli deep penetration raids on Cairo, a 90-day cease fire was negotiated between Egypt and Israel. During the cease fire, Egyptian-owned SAM-2s and Soviet-manned SAM-3s were installed along the Suez Canal, an action which the Soviet Union denied. (These missiles were crucial to the Egyptian attack on Israel in 1973.) Once again, the denial was made on very high authority, in this case by the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs. After denying interference with Gunnar Jarring's UN mission, the statement went on to say:

A slander campaign, patently aimed at casting aspersions on the Soviet Union's position and at accusing it of violating a certain agreement, has been perpetrated in the USA. In particular, insinuations have been circulated that ground-to-air missile installations manned by Soviet crews have appeared in the Suez Canal Zone. This, too, is a deliberate falsification. (Pravda, 9 October 1970; Izvestia, 10 October 1970)

Actually, the deliberate falsification was the Soviet denial. The most recent instance of a lie is the Soviet claim to have been invited into Afghanistan in December 1979. Judging from the reaction of US President, Jimmy Carter, we infer that the Soviet Union lied about its activities in diplomatic as well as public channels. The Soviet Union began airlifting troops on an around-the-clock basis on 25 December 1979, three days before any appear for military aid was
supposedly issued. The appeal itself was issued three days before the person in whose name it was issued, Babrak Karmal, had evidently even returned to Afghanistan. 19 Pravda's explanation of 31 December 1979 of the Soviet action indicated that the Afghan government had made 'an insistent request that the Soviet Union give immediate aid and support in the struggle against external aggression'. Yet at the time the Soviet Union had begun airlifting troops to Kabul the government which purportedly made that request was still headed by Hafizollah Amin who the same Pravda article described as a 'usurper' of power who got 'hold of the main levers of the state'. In short, the invasion by air occurred prior to the coup which restored the 'progressive forces' who might have issued an invitation. As in the case of the invasion of Czechoslovakia, the Soviet press lied about an invitation. The main difference was that in the Czechoslovakian case the lie coincided with the invasion whereas in the Afghanistan case the lie was not issued until several days after the invasion.

A potential sixth case of a strategic lie involves the story of the Soviet activities in Cienfuegos, Cuba, in 1970. In September 1970, American intelligence detected a number of activities that caused Henry Kissinger (but not Secretary of State William Rogers) considerable concern. Kissinger and subsequently President Nixon were especially exercised because over-flight photographs had detected the presence in Cienfuegos of a submarine tender and two barges whose function is to store the waste of nuclear
powered submarines. The conclusion Kissinger and Nixon derived from the evidence was that the Soviet Union was building a submarine base in Cuba, in violation of the 1962 Soviet-American agreement. Whether the Soviet Union was building a base for nuclear powered submarines is unknown to us. They were building something. The first Soviet denials came in an article by V. Matveev which appeared in Izvestia, 10 October 1970, the very issue which contained the SAM-3 denial cited above. Following Matveev's article came the formal declaration by TASS published in Izvestia on 14 October which stated that the Soviet Union 'has not constructed and is not constructing its own military base in Cuba'. This may have been a lie in describing Soviet behaviour in the recent past. We cannot be sure. 'Do it until called' may have been the Soviet watchword in Cienfuegos. If the denial was, in fact, a lie, it was also part of a de-escalatory commitment. Matveev's article and the TASS declaration (and private assurances to the American leadership) were clearly not false statements about future Soviet behaviour; the construction stopped. 14

Equally ambiguous, though in a different respect, was the Soviet coverage of American charges in 1975 that the USSR was building a base in Somalia. Here part of the controversy as to whether there were lies in the authoritative media involves terminological hair-splitting on the part of the US, the Soviet Union, and Somalia. The US accused the USSR of building a facility; Soviet commentary denied that the USSR was building a base. While most of the Soviet reportage in published Soviet sources quoted only Somali spokesmen, and significantly, there were no denials by the Soviet government, there was one article in Izvestia (12 April 1975) which we concluded was false. It was by TASS commentator S. Kulik and declared
Western intelligence has been using periscopes with crooked mirrors. Otherwise how could building materials and equipment for hydraulic engineering complexes being built by the USSR in Somalia be taken for strategic shipments designated for Soviet military bases, trawlers flying the red flag for 'warships' and our agronomists and road-builders, teachers and geologists for military experts?

Kulik may well have assumed Western eye-witnesses would not be able to falsify those claims; he surely could not have imagined the Somali government would invite foreign reporters and Members of the United States Congress to visit Berbera and that an American delegation headed by Senator Dewey F. Bartlett would actually visit the Soviet facility. It is quite possible that Somalia was deliberately revealing the Soviet military presence there. Soon thereafter Moscow's ties with Somalia deteriorated as Soviet relations with the new regime in Ethiopia improved.

Besides the five to seven cases of strategic lies, we identified two cases of unfulfilled threats. Both involved Berlin. In 1948, as the Soviet and Western zones of Germany were becoming increasingly differentiated, Soviet statements began to assert that 'Berlin is a part of the [Soviet] zone'. This claim was so obviously contrary to the four-power agreement on Berlin that the intent was presumably to threaten to make it come true in the future. It was vigorously contested by the US side, both at the verbal level and, more significantly, by the American airlift to West Berlin. As a consequence, ultimately, the Soviet claim, which was false to begin with, remained false.
Similarly, in 1961, Khrushchev committed the Soviet Union to signing a 'peace treaty with the German Democratic Republic by the end of the year' (Pravda, 21 June 1961). When that threat did not produce the desired Western response—a multilateral peace treaty—the Soviet Union first waffled on its commitment and then dropped it. Final offers are sometimes followed by final, final offers; terminated negotiations are sometimes followed by discussions or unilateral declarations.

The other class of direct deceptions are diplomatic fictions. In our canvass of events we found three instances of this genre. There may well be others. One was Khrushchev's 1962 reply to the Chairman of the Japanese Communist Party in which he declared flatly (and outrageously) that 'espionage is needed by those who prepare for attack, for aggression. The Soviet Union...does not intend to attack anybody and therefore has no intention of engaging in espionage against other states...' (Pravda, 29 June 1962, and Izvestia, 30 June 1962). 16

An analogous diplomatic fiction was generated by the Brezhnev-Kosygin leadership to explain the sudden departure of Soviet troops and advisers from Egypt in 1972, after President Anwar Sadat had demanded their departure. The Soviet military personnel had 'fulfilled their function', and Egypt and the USSR had agreed that the 'military personnel sent to Egypt for a limited time' would return to the Soviet Union (Pravda, 20 July 1972; Izvestia, 21 July 1972). This papering over of a Soviet disaster would fool only the most naive.

Our third example of a diplomatic fiction is from 1978. Soviet commentary explicitly denied that V.A. Enger and R.P. Chernishev, Soviet members of the United Nations Secretariat staff had been engaged in spying. A long
article in Izvestia (5 November 1978), actually skirts the issue of whether they had been engaged in spying. Indeed it actually quotes, ostensibly to rebut, Judge Lacey as having said, 'never in all my experience have I seen guilt so fully proven'—merely denying that Enger and Cherniaev had any 'relation whatsoever to any "conspiracy".' The Soviet government itself however, explicitly spoke of the 'obvious groundlessness' of the charges against Enger and Cherniaev in a situation where the evidence appeared overwhelming (Pravda and Izvestia, 5 November 1978).

Denials that the Soviet Union ever spies or that its advisers can be ignominiously kicked out of a country are hardly likely to deceive any foreign audience but the most naive. Our assumption is that they are undertaken to maintain pretences vis-à-vis domestic audiences.

Illustrative Non-Lies

Why the enumeration of Soviet direct deceptions in the previous pages is rather short is better understood by examining, briefly, some interesting non-lies. This examination in turn allows us to portray some more typical styles of Soviet authoritative statements about Soviet foreign policy.

The Soviet announcement on 4 May 1960 of the downing of the U-2 spy plane is a perfect case of an indirect deception: a statement which does not lie, but makes it easy for the target to draw a false conclusion. Khrushchev made the announcement in the middle of a speech to the Supreme Soviet.

The first investigation showed that this plane belongs to the United States of America, although it bore no
identification marks — the marks had been obliterated.

[Shouts of indignation. Voice: 'How can this be
squared with Eisenhower's unctuous speeches? This is
outright banditry!']

An expert commission is now studying all the data that
fell into our hands....After all the materials now in our
hands have been studied the Soviet government will lodge a
strong protest with the United States of America...(Pravda
and Izvestia, 5 May 1960).

On 7 May, however, Khrushchev revealed that he had in fact deliberately
deceived the United States and that the United States had fallen into the
trap by issuing an elaborate and false cover story.

Comrades, I must tell you a secret. When I was delivering
my report to you, I deliberately did not say that the pilot
was alive and in good health and that we have parts of the
airplane. [Laughter. Prolonged applause.] We did this
intentionally, since if we had reported everything at once,
the Americans would have made up another version. [Laughter
in the hall. Applause.] And now look how many silly things
they have said....I must state, comrade Deputies, that [the
American versions of the U-2 flight story] are a complete
fabrication intended for gullible people. The authors of
these versions assumed that if the plane was shot down, the
pilot most probably perished too. So there would be no one
to ask how everything actually happened. There would be no
way to check what kind of plane it was and what instruments
it carried. (Pravda and Izvestia, 8 May 1960.)
Statements about future rather than past Soviet behaviour are even more subject to ambiguities which allow the reader readily to derive inferences that go beyond the explicit claims. It is often a reasonable inference that such statements were formulated to encourage some audiences to make misleading inferences about probable Soviet behaviour. One example will suffice. In August 1964, Nikita Khrushchev's response to American strikes against North Vietnam (DRV) in the aftermath of the Tonkin Gulf incidents was to declare that

Should the imperialists thrust war upon the socialist countries, the peoples of the Soviet Union will carry out their sacred duty.

The Soviet Union today has enormous military strength at its disposal and by relying on it we are able to labor and create in peace. Directing all its forces into communist construction, the Soviet Union is following the behests of the great Lenin and is pursuing the correct path. (Pravda, 9 August 1964.)

The New York Times headlined its coverage of Khrushchev's speech as 'Khrushchev would go to war for Hanoi'. Peking Review (14 August 1964, p. 27), demonstrated a closer reading of Khrushchev's statement when it remarked acidly that Khrushchev had not 'referred to giving support to the just struggle of the DRV against US aggression'.

Some non-lies are statements which seem declaratory but are in reality conditional. An instance of this sort which most Western observers would regard as a direct deception was the 3 August 1968 Bratislava statement issued after a meeting of Communist leaders called to discuss the liberal tendencies of the Czechoslovak government. It was signed by the Soviet leadership as well as by the Czechoslovak, Bulgarian, Hungarian, East German, and Polish leaderships. There is a sense in which that statement was a lie in that it pledged 'respect for sovereignty and national independence, territorial integrity...' (Pravda and Izvestia, 4 August 1968). It is noteworthy, though, that these boiler plate words
were not accompanied by other standard phrases. In particular, as Skilling notes,

the principle of 'noninterference in domestic affairs' usually present in similar documents, was replaced by that of 'fraternal mutual aid and solidarity'. Moreover, the assertion of the common duty of all to defend the gains of socialism contained the implication that common action might be justified to meet any threat to these gains. By implication the declaration set forth the criteria the neglect of which would justify such intervention. 17
The Soviet leadership expected that the Czechoslovak leadership would manifest 'unshakable fidelity to Marxism-Leninism, [continue the] indoctrination of the popular masses in the spirit of the ideas of socialism and proletarian internationalism, and [wage] an implacable struggle against bourgeois ideology and all anti-socialist forces' (Pravda and Izvestia, 4 August 1968). Failing that, respect for sovereignty and national independence would be followed by 'fraternal mutual aid' and 'the defence of socialist gains'.

Other non-lies often take the form of statements which are correct but which do not join the issue. Thus, at a time when Western observers are quite mindful of increased Soviet military capabilities, especially in Central Europe, one might easily expect the following statement in Pravda, 12 May 1976, to be at variance with reality: 'Our state has been reducing military expenditure for a number of years, reducing its proportion of the total budget'. It is not, however, a lie. By Western calculations, Soviet expenditures as a percentage of the total budget did decrease slightly in the years before 1976.18

In like fashion, Brezhnev could truthfully claim in 1978 that the USSR has 'not been spending a long time building up our armed forces in Central Europe'. The big increase in Soviet manpower occurred in 1968. Although International Institute of Strategic Studies' annual assessments of the military balance show an increase in Soviet combat and support troops (in what are always described as 'approximate' or 'very approximate' figures) during the years 1973-78, those figures are all below the 1972 figure. IISS estimates of Soviet reinforcements available in European parts of the Soviet Union
and in Central Europe have also decreased markedly since 1974. 19

In like fashion, with the notable exception of Malinovski's January 1962 statement to which reference has already been made, military production claims in the years 1957-62, while doubtless bluster, were not lies. When Khrushchev declared the USSR could hit a fly in the sky, Kennedy appropriately dismissed that claim with the retort that it was no trick to hit one fly in the sky, the problem was coping with a sky saturated by flies. Khrushchev's famous statement that rockets were being produced 'like sausages' did not say that the rockets were ICBMs. Similarly, the claim in 1959 that the Soviet Union had begun serial production of ICBMs has been described by Horelick and Rush 20 as a deliberate deception in that it encouraged people to magnify Soviet capabilities. However, since the USSR by 1960 had conducted thirty ICBM tests and launched six space shots, the claim, taken literally, was probably not false. 21

Misdirection often takes the form of a statement which, while seeming to dispute an external depiction of Soviet behaviour, in reality meshes with that depiction. A recent vivid illustration of the proposition took place in February 1979 when the American Ambassador Adolph Dubs was killed in Kabul, Afghanistan. Accounts of Ambassador Dubs' death vary. 22 There is no dispute on two points: he died when Afghan police attacked the building in which he was being held hostage, and Soviet advisers to the Afghan police did not impede the police from acting despite American representations to the Soviet advisers to proceed cautiously. On the basis of these facts, the State Department lodged a formal protest which declared that
The refusal to consult by the Soviet advisers on the spot is impossible to justify given the fact that the life of an American ambassador was in jeopardy" (New York Times, 15 February 1979). The official Soviet response to charges that the Soviet advisers had done nothing was to affirm heatedly that the Soviet officials had done nothing: 'Soviet representatives arrived at the scene of the incident in order to protect the lives of Soviet citizens, who were also threatened by the terrorists. The Soviet representatives performed no other missions and had nothing to do with the Afghan authorities' decision concerning the nature of actions aimed at saving the American Ambassador's life' (Pravda and Izvestia, 18 February 1979).

A less vivid but perhaps more significant illustration of the same proposition relates to Soviet behaviour both prior to and after the United States' forces went on alert toward the end of the 1973 Middle East War. The United States' action was taken in response to fears that the Soviet Union might intervene unilaterally to secure Israeli compliance with the cease fire and were based in part on detection of increased Soviet troop readiness and other still ambiguous evidence. The Soviet response was to declare that

in trying to justify this step, [American] officials referred to some actions of the Soviet Union that allegedly gave reason for concern.

TASS is authorized to state that such explanations are absurd, inasmuch as the Soviet Union's actions are aimed strictly at facilitating the fulfillment of the Security Council's
decisions on a cease fire and the restoration of peace in the Near East. (Pravda and Izvestia, 24 October 1973, italics added.)

The presence of Soviet combat troops in Cuba is another interesting case of a non-true. The definitive Pravda editorial of 11 September 1979 did not deny that there was a combat unit in Cuba. It only denied that there were any recent arrivals. In fact it acknowledged that Soviet troops had been in Cuba since 1962 and it characterized their purpose as 'to help strengthen that country's defence capability'.
A corollary form of putative denial which also does not in practice dispute an external depiction of Soviet behaviour is the use of proxies. It is very much in the Soviet style of discourse to make what reads as a denial which on scrutiny turns out to constitute a report that someone else has denied the Soviet action. Most of the statements, for instance, regarding American charges that the Soviet Union was building a facility in Somalia were in this vein: thus, 'leaders of the Somali Republic have repeatedly refuted these conjectures...' (Pravda, 29 June 1975) and ''Reports about a Soviet military base in Somalia,' says a letter from the Somali Embassy in France...[have] 'been repeatedly refuted'.' (Pravda, 15 June 1975.)

It is important that mention be made of one further form which non-lies take. We refer to silence. Silence is intrinsically a non-lie. It is also a kind of 'statement' that has been much favoured as a 'comment' on the Soviet role in particular events—whether the event be Iran in 1946 (where Soviet troops had stayed beyond the agreed deadline for foreign troop withdrawal) or Poland during the tumultuous days before Gomulka's return to power in 1956, or the re-supply of the Arabs in 1973.²³

Finally, some non-lies are simply the truth, despite the implausibility of the context. In November 1975 TASS (in a statement never published in Pravda or Izvestia) characterized charges by the UNITA faction in Angola that twenty Russians were captured there as 'A Provocative Fraud'. According to the former Chief of the CIA's Angola Task Force, John Stockwell,²⁴ the UNITA story came from the CIA and was false, and it was TASS's denial that was the truth.

Scholarly Implications

Kremlinologists have often remarked that Soviet elites talk among themselves with great care. The preceding illustrations of lies and non-
lies suggest that the Soviet leadership is similarly careful about what appears in Pravda and Izvestia on Soviet foreign policy. The attention to words often results in a highly ambiguous style of discourse. It is an ambiguity that derives not from careless disregard for the facts, but an ambiguity that is carefully formulated. It permits and indeed often encourages multiple interpretations without committing the Soviet government to action. The care shown to words often produces statements that are not lies, even if extrapolations from the statement would be misleading.

All this granted, the formulations employed to describe Soviet policy rarely represent direct deceptions. One reason is that the Soviet leadership shows great restraint in making any statements about future Soviet behaviour. When it does, moreover, the statements are rarely sufficiently precise as to be subject to falsification. When China attacked Vietnam in February 1979, the Soviet government warned Peking to stop 'before it was too late' (e.g., Pravda, 20 February 1979). Strength is not having to say 'or else'. The conscious use of silence is, in many respects, the extreme form of ambiguity, the ultimate Rorschach test. It can reflect, and be perceived to reflect, divided councils, indecision, the ominous quiet before the storm, and either opposition, indifference,
or support. 25 It minimizes commitments and maximizes options. It even lends credence to words when they are uttered.

The pattern of non-lies observed corresponds reasonably well with expectations of a rational foreign policy actor perspective. The concern with a reputation for credibility and the skill at conducting a dialogue with foreign elites are consonant with this approach. The strategic lies and the failed commitments observed also mesh with projections drawn from a rational actor perspective. That perspective anticipates that lying is relatively rare. Over a thirty-four year period there have been relatively few instances in which Pravda and Izvestia have lied about Soviet foreign policy per se. Patience and lack of opportunism have been the rule. In each of the five cases where strategic lies clearly occurred, the stakes have been very high. The desperate straits in which the Soviet Union found itself in 1962 was the backdrop to both Malinovski's false claims about Soviet missile capacity and the Cuban missile lie. The 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia also carried very high stakes. The stakes for the Soviet Union in the Middle East in 1970 may not have been quite as high when the Ministry of Foreign Affairs lied about Soviet manning of SAM-3 missiles in the Canal Zone. But considering that the USSR had not provided this level of direct assistance to any other non-communist state, the stakes must have seemed substantial to Moscow. 26 Certainly, the Soviet Union's first major use of its own troops outside Eastern Europe in its intervention in Afghanistan was a high-stake affair. Likewise, the unfulfilled threats over Berlin in 1948 and 1961 were also cases where the stakes were very high for the Soviets.

The two ambiguous cases of direct deceptions probably were not perceived as reducing the leadership's overall reputation for credibility.
In one case, there were good reasons to believe that the deception would not be proven (Somalia in 1974). In the other case, probably untrue denials about past Soviet behaviour were coupled with implemented commitments about future Soviet behaviour (Cienfuegos, Cuba in 1970). In the Somalian instance, Western observers were quick to note that no printed denials were forthcoming from the Soviet government. 27

Other comparisons of Soviet use of words provide additional indications of skill and an attention to maintaining credibility as a resource. Soviet leaders cut their losses. When the Soviet cover story about being invited into Czechoslovakia was blown, it was quietly dropped. It is remarkable, too, that the Soviet Union has rarely committed lies that flowed from unfulfilled threats. In Berlin in 1948 and 1961 the Soviet leadership was engaged in efforts at staking out a claim about what they would do. In 1948 the real point of the lie was to claim a new truth about Berlin—to make it part of the Soviet zone—so that it would become the truth. Berlin in 1961 was an instance of commitment (to sign a peace treaty) which became a lie when the bluff was called. Most Soviet commitments about future behaviour are such as they are unlikely to be called, or so vague they can’t be proven false. Two, or even a handful, of explicit unfulfilled threats or broken commitments in thirty-four years is not many. Successive Soviet leaderships have largely preferred not to be pinned down.

There is, moreover, a sense in which Soviet behavior suggests that it may be rational to lie at a lower threshold than would otherwise be appropriate. Credibility as a resource is diminished even when it is not abused. There are and will be many occasions when states, non-communist
and communist, disparage Soviet credibility, either deliberately or as a result of misunderstanding. Some people are going to believe you regardless, and others are not, regardless. And you are going to be accused, regardless. It might consequently be rational to lower the threshold (below very high value situations) at which it would be appropriate to lie. This calculation may explain why Moscow might rationally try to lie not only when the stakes are extremely high as in the movement of missiles to Cuba, but a bit more often, albeit still infrequently, when the stakes are fairly high.

This is scarcely to suggest that all Moscow's attempts at deception represent optimal behaviour. Khrushchev's bluster, for instance, likely constituted an overuse of indirect deceptions, non-lies designed to mislead. It was an overuse which had consequences for the Soviet reputation for credibility, and as a rational policy model would suggest, ultimately for Khrushchev himself: one of the complaints made about Khrushchev on his ouster in October 1964 dealt precisely with his blustering style. Even Khrushchev's utterances, however, were largely those which invited an excessively broad reading and he, too, rarely lied about Soviet foreign policy. It was Malinovsky whose statement about Soviet capabilities in January 1962 was false. The Cuban missile lies were issued by the Soviet government publicly and Dobrynin privately.

Another type of excess is a policy implementation error that has produced a manifest lie. The only instance we found of this was the Soviet failure to attain even a fig-leaf invitation into Czechoslovakia in 1968. This resulted in a claim which they may have expected to come true but which never did.
The only Soviet utterances about Soviet foreign policy that do not approximate the projections stemming from a rational policy perspective were manifest diplomatic pretences. The claims that the Soviet Union does not spy and that the charges against Messrs. Enger and Cherniaev were obviously groundless, and the assertion that the Soviet Union had completed its mission in Egypt, all had such low probability of being accepted that it is difficult to imagine any compensating gains when viewed through the prism of a rational foreign policy perspective. Lies of this sort may diminish Soviet credibility vis-à-vis external elites and reduce the likelihood that other claims about Soviet foreign policy will be believed. But their very transparency may be a deliberate signal to Western elites that they are not to be taken seriously. It would seem more appropriate, therefore, to treat assertions of this kind as primarily targeted to, and intended for, domestic audiences, and as (rather weak) efforts to maintain the pretence that the Soviet Union is distinctive from other states in its use of foreign policy instruments.

These occasional pretences also reveal a pattern. Statements about manifestly illegal acts such as spying, which, their legality aside, are common forms of state behaviour, and statements that paper over a major humiliation (such as the ejection of Soviet troops from Egypt) are explained by the domestic considerations of the mobilization perspective. Strong coordination and orchestration of utterances were observed, but there was quite modest concern with the retention of credibility as a resource. There are also whole categories of statements that impinge on Soviet foreign policy about which this paper is not concerned and which other studies have shown are relevant to a high politics, Kremlinological perspective. These include statements about the
behaviour of other states, statements describing events, and statements which attribute the responsibility for policy to persons or institutions. 30

In these types of statements there is modest coordination coupled with careful attention to words.

We would thus be the last to deny the potential utility of Kremlinological or bureaucratic politics perspectives on Soviet foreign policy. But with regard to statements in the Soviet central press about Soviet foreign policy, neither internal divisions, organizational processes, nor political opportunism have been allowed to interfere with an impressive record of restraint and control. The central Soviet press has been used to tell lies on the rare occasions when the stakes of the situation were sufficiently high so that the potential gains from deception might well have been worth the loss in accumulated credibility. With the exception of statements that maintain diplomatic pretences, statements in Pravda and Izvestia about Soviet foreign policy behavior per se correspond to a rational policy perspective.

Policy Implications

It is important to bear in mind the distinction between a lie and a misleading statement. Soviet pronouncements are carefully written, and can be carefully analyzed. These statements often encourage readers to draw misleading conclusions; but they are rarely lies. This distinction, moreover, is often overlooked by Western commentators, and consequently second-hand accounts of what Moscow has asserted are often unreliable.

For the interpretation of the credibility of an explicit Soviet statement about Soviet foreign policy behaviour, a useful question to ask is whether this might be one of the most important foreign events to the Soviets since World War II. The Soviet leaders sometimes do lie (and
sometimes do not) about their own foreign policy behaviour when the stakes are very large: when they do, they are likely to pull out all the stops. If an event seems to have very large stakes for the Soviet leadership, one ought not be reassured by multiple Soviet assurances.

Chances are, then, when the Soviet leadership is caught in a lie about foreign policy behaviour, that unless the lie is manifestly to maintain pretences to domestic audiences, it regards the event as very important. If an event is not likely to be one of the most important since World War II, then the Soviet leadership is unlikely to be lying.
Footnotes

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4In this and later translations of extended quotes we have employed the Current Digest of the Soviet Press, checking the translation ourselves when necessary.
5 Leaders of communist states are far more accustomed to other, more esoteric communications.

6 Incentives for deception about nuclear war strategy are discussed in Jeffrey T. Richelson, 'Soviet Strategic Doctrine and Limited Nuclear Operations', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, XXIII (1979), 326-36.

7 For the theoretical development of the propositions which follow, see Robert Axelrod, 'The Rational Timing of Surprise', *World Politics*, XXXI (1979) 228-46.

8 An illustration of this type concerns emigration. On 14 December 1969, L. Berenshtein and M. Fridel' published an article in *Izvestia* ('Pod ch'iu dudku pliashut Sionisty') which acknowledged that 'some Soviet Jews, mainly the elderly', were being allowed to leave the Soviet Union for Israel. When the migration began in the early 1960s the elderly were definitely over-represented. By the end of the decade the elderly represented a much lower proportion of the migrants, giving rise to Arab charges that the Soviet Union was aiding the Israelis by sending men and women who could fight in the Israeli army. By 1969, the Berenshtein-Fridel' statement was probably false. We are informed by Zvi Gitelman (a close student of the Soviet migration to Israel) that no age breakdown of the migrants prior to 1967 exists. For the years 1967-74 cumulative data are available, but a breakdown on a year-by-year basis is unavailable.


13 The date of Karmal's return, 31 December, is given by American government sources, *New York Times*, 1 January 1980. Even if Karmal were underground in Afghanistan prior to that date, he was not in a position to issue an authoritative appeal for help.


15 See, for instance, *Pravda*, 14 July 1948. Interestingly, a month earlier (*Pravda*, 20 June) the Soviet position had only claimed that 'Berlin was located' in the Soviet zone.

16 It should be noted though that in recent years there has been a tendency to glorify Soviet spies especially those active in World War II.

17 Skilling, *Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution*, p. 310, italics added.


22 See *Washington Post*, 15 February 1978, and *New York Times*, 15 and 16 February 1979. In one version it is alleged that the Soviet advisers directed the Afghan police to attack the hotel, but in other versions the Soviet advisers ignored the pleas of Americans to intercede.


25 Poles, we are told, view the fact that no mention of the considerable reduction of censorship in Poland in 1978-79 has appeared in the Soviet press reflects Soviet tolerance of this development.


28 Pravda (17 October 1964), and Izvestia (18 October 1964) pontificated against 'bragging and bluster' three days after Khrushchev had been removed.


30 Peter Hauslohner, 'The Obkom First Secretaries and Foreign Policy', *World Politics* (forthcoming).