SCIENCE AND MAN--

Remarkable Appeal

From Soviet Scientist

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Scientists are often blanketed with the indictment of indifference to the human consequences of their experimental discoveries. Some have, to be sure, such a frightening glimpse of the future that they escape with relief to the refuges of their laboratories. Most simply do not know how to communicate with non-specialists about matters of ultimate importance.

The Soviet physicist, Andrei Dmitrievich Sakharov, is a scientist who has dared to speak out. His manifesto, translated from the Russian and published in all its 10,000 words by the New York Times on July 22, would have been a courageous dissent even within the intellectual tradition of western countries.

Far more remarkable as an open shout of defiance of the Communist Party bureaucracy at a critical time in the evolution of European Socialism, or perhaps to Sakharov himself, is that we read his message and express our appreciation of the basic theses. The USSR should learn that we are capable of understanding the needs of a people who are emerging from the sufferings of a half-century of revolution, Stalinism and Hitlerism.

The capacity of a society to tolerate liberal dissent helps to predict its compliance to its contracted obligations and its dedication to humanitarian aims against geopolitical objectives. Needless to say, we must apply the same measures to our own shortcomings and those of our allies.

We must still unravel a host of complicated issues. Our immediate affirmation of a plea for intellectual freedom is not an insinuation that such power may be used. The continued balkanization of Europe into independent military and political forces remains the worst peril to its political stability. Exactly the same principles justify our support of NATO while we work for new concepts of European and then world government.

The U.S. military presence in Europe is now less important as a hostage against communist expansion than to fill a vacuum that would otherwise attract an independent German force inevitably, susceptible to the most dangerous nationalistic pressures.

In this year of paradox, the Kremlin's main anxieties about its western frontiers may come from the threat of unilateral American disengagement.