Gorbachev: A New Foreign Policy?

Author(s): Dimitri K. Simes

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Dimitri K. Simes

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Since Mikhail Gorbachev became general secretary of the Communist Party on March 11, 1985, the conduct of Soviet foreign policy has improved. A skillful public relations effort has become an important component of Moscow's diplomacy, but the substance of the U.S.S.R.'s international behavior has also changed considerably. Gorbachev himself increasingly talks about the need for "a new approach" in addressing the problems of the world. At the 27th Party Congress in February 1986 he said:

> It is not only in internal affairs that the turning point has been reached. It characterizes external affairs as well. The changes in contemporary world development are so profound and significant that they require a rethinking and comprehensive analysis of all factors involved. The situation of nuclear deterrence demands the development of new approaches, methods and forms of relations between different social systems, states and regions.[1]

In a speech in Vladivostok in July, Gorbachev was even bolder, claiming that "the current stage in the development of civilization . . . is dictating the need for an urgent, radical break with many of the conventional approaches to foreign policy, a break with the traditions of political thinking."[2]

Rhetoric, of course, comes cheap. But the foreign policy changes under Gorbachev have gone beyond words. He reshuffled the national security leadership, bringing younger and less doctrinaire officials to key positions and giving himself more personal control over decision-making. The new team quickly distinguished itself not only in launching Gorbachev's "charm offensive" but also by introducing a wide variety of foreign policy initiatives ranging from arms control proposals to overtures to China.

It is still far from certain how far, how fast and even in what

[1] *Pravda*, Feb. 26, 1986.
[2] *Pravda*, July 29, 1986.

Dimitri K. Simes is Senior Associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

direction Gorbachev intends to proceed. After less than two years on the job he needs more time to consolidate his authority. Until he became Yuri Andropov's de facto deputy after Brezhnev's death in November 1982, Gorbachev had little exposure to international affairs. His education as the chief architect of Soviet foreign policy is far from complete, and he himself probably cannot anticipate fully how his on-the-job learning will shape his attitudes toward the world.

If his record since assuming the leadership is any guide, Gorbachev is not inclined to depart from the fundamentals of Soviet strategy. Rather, the general secretary creatively uses a refreshing tactical flexibility in the pursuit of traditional Soviet objectives. These objectives include maintaining control over Eastern Europe; preventing whenever possible the emergence of unfriendly governments on the Soviet periphery; sponsoring Third World clients; aggressively seeking to undermine and/or replace U.S. geopolitical influence; and developing a military capability sufficient both to assure the U.S.S.R.'s ability to deal with any conceivable coalition of enemies and to project force on a global scale.

To respond properly to Gorbachev, the United States must distinguish between a newly pragmatic, vigorous and relatively sophisticated Soviet policy and a policy that would be truly more benign. America should welcome a more effective Soviet foreign policy only to the extent that it simultaneously becomes more moderate. Otherwise the United States and the West as a whole may find themselves mesmerized by an impressive Kremlin performance, forgetting that its final act is supposed to be their own demise.

II

The current Soviet domestic environment favors innovation in foreign policy as long as it does not abandon basic interests, ambitions and modes of behavior. Gorbachev frequently argues that the Soviet preoccupation with the modernization of its economy and society assures the peaceful nature of the U.S.S.R.'s global strategy. This is probably true to the extent that a period of international calm would help the Kremlin devote more resources to economic development. A new détente would also help Moscow obtain Western credits and technology.

But Soviet foreign policy is never dictated by economics. If anything, Gorbachev's difficulties in quickly improving the

Soviet economy make it all the more important for him to demonstrate momentum in foreign policy. This momentum must be achieved without giving an impression of weakness or overeagerness. No conceivable economic benefits would be accepted by either the elite or the majority of the Soviet people as adequate compensation for the abandonment of the much cherished dream of Soviet imperial greatness.

This is not to suggest that the Politburo would block Gorbachev if he scaled down Soviet global ambitions; but his image as a formidable leader would be compromised. This image is crucial if the general secretary is to push through much needed but highly controversial economic reforms. On the one hand, as the writings of former Chief of the General Staff Nikolai Ogarkov suggest, the military and defense industrialists do appreciate that economic reform may be the only means to maintaining Soviet geopolitical competitiveness. But any Soviet leader might find his credibility among the powerful national security elite badly damaged if change at home were to become coupled with a perceived softness abroad. Nothing about Gorbachev or his career indicates that he is likely to take such chances.

The modest improvement in the Soviet economy in 1986 relieves pressure on Gorbachev to reduce the economic costs of acting as a global empire. Regardless of the eventual outcome of the general secretary's reforms, he is starting from such a low economic base that several reasonably successful years probably could result from just introducing a more competent management, reducing corruption and improving work discipline. In the long run, however, nothing short of systemic change will suffice for the Soviet Union to remain a great modern power. Meanwhile there is little fear in the Kremlin that economic difficulties will force the Soviet Union to abandon its basic security interests and responsibilities.

Nor is there any apparent political pressure on Gorbachev to reduce Soviet international assertiveness. The general secretary's campaign for *glasnost* (openness) has certainly prompted criticism of all kinds of abuses and inefficiencies. But the campaign does not reflect an across-the-board liberalization. Rather, *glasnost* is used by Gorbachev as a political tool to expose those individuals and practices that stand in the way of his reforms. The general secretary wants to run a tight ship. Questioning his own actions does not seem to be part of *glasnost*. Accordingly, while the Soviet media discuss in depth

how to improve the economy and even society as a whole, foreign policy remains off limits to any meaningful debate.

Andrei Sakharov's return to Moscow from exile in Gorki changes little in this respect. True, he was given an opportunity to appear on American television, where he called for an expeditious Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and for decoupling the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) from other areas of arms control. But to put this in perspective, the Sakharov release took place just days after another well-known dissident, Anatoly Marchenko, died in a prison hospital after a long hunger strike he had begun to protest his mistreatment. Taking into account Sakharov's poor health and his well-known mistrust of doctors in Gorki, it was only prudent for Gorbachev to take measures so that the Kremlin would not be blamed for Sakharov's de facto murder. Although the Nobel Peace Prize-winning nuclear physicist was released unconditionally, months earlier he had sent a letter to the general secretary hinting that once back in Moscow he would prefer to focus on research rather than politics. Sakharov's skepticism toward SDI promised political advantages to Moscow. Also, interestingly, the announcement of his return was made on the very same day the Soviet government issued a statement declaring an end to its unilateral moratorium on nuclear testing.

Other well-known dissidents like Anatoly Shcharansky and Yuri Orlov were, in effect, exchanged for spies. Several others were released at the request of prestigious American visitors such as Occidental Petroleum Chairman Armand Hammer and then Senator Gary Hart (D-Colo.). Gorbachev should get credit both for being broad-minded in handling these hardship cases and for the skill with which he has exploited them to improve the Soviet image abroad. Nevertheless, Soviet repression has continued essentially unabated. Jewish emigration figures for 1986—914—are the second lowest for any year since 1969. Dissidents of all stripes continue to be arrested and persecuted. Soviet citizens are warned against contacts with foreigners. More generally, the scope of *glasnost* does not include the KGB. Activities of the security services today, unlike under Khrushchev, are not subject to critical scrutiny from outside the agency.

For the first time since Khrushchev, the Soviet media have openly criticized the KGB. The possibility that *glasnost* may extend to the secret police is interesting and encouraging. Still, the incident exposed by *Pravda* was not about mistreatment of

a dissident. Rather, it involved a provincial KGB chief in the Ukrainian city of Voroshilovgrad who illegally ordered the arrest of a local journalist. Worse, according to *Pravda,* the KGB officer attempted to implicate the newspaper's own correspondent, whose investigative reporting had angered the provincial hierarchy. In short, KGB officers in Voroshilovgrad had challenged the Central Committee's principal media institution in Moscow, and by implication Gorbachev's *glasnost* campaign. Their punishment and public humiliation is an impressive demonstration of the general secretary's personal authority. Whether it is also a sign that the KGB will no longer be able to escape public scrutiny remains to be seen.

The new leadership is less insecure about exposing Soviet citizens to opposing viewpoints. For the first time in the U.S.S.R.'s history, Western officials, scholars and journalists are invited to appear on Soviet television, where some of them question Moscow's arms control initiatives and occasionally go so far as to condemn the invasion of Afghanistan. Yet their Soviet colleagues, as in the past, do not go beyond explaining the party line with varying degrees of sophistication.

It may very well be that Gorbachev is unleashing forces he will have difficulty controlling. Intellectuals who today are delighted to have an opportunity to expose the sins of the past may develop a taste for independence and eventually become a problem for the regime. Nationalists in ethnic republics—as the recent riots in Alma-Ata have demonstrated—have an even greater potential for challenging the central authority. Whether such challenges indeed take place and how Gorbachev would respond to them—by cracking down once again or by allowing a degree of genuine pluralism—are matters of conjecture.

III

Most Soviet people are intensely patriotic and cherish the Soviet great power image. Gorbachev's own devotion to Soviet greatness is not in doubt. On the contrary, he has often emphasized that one of the principal reasons behind his call for far-reaching economic reform is the need to maintain and enhance the Soviet role in international affairs.

In this connection, however, there is evidence that not everyone in the Soviet Union is comfortable with Gorbachev's arms control concessions. In a speech to a group of workers in Togliatti in April 1986 the general secretary himself referred

to "numerous letters" to the Communist Party Central Committee from those worried that "under the cover of peaceful talk and fruitless negotiations the West will make a leap forward in armaments," catching the U.S.S.R. unprepared. The Soviet leader sounded somewhat defensive when he provided assurances that "this will not happen."[3]

But even if some Politburo members are uneasy about Gorbachev's arms control proposals, they will not rush to mount an attack against him. The tremendous power associated with the general secretary's post should not be underestimated. He is much more than the first among equals. Once elected by the Politburo, the general secretary becomes both the chief executive of "U.S.S.R., Inc.," and the high priest of Soviet Communist orthodoxy. His speeches are treated as official party documents, almost as holy texts. And he is built up as a symbolic figure whose stature is linked to the very legitimacy of the system.

Unlike the pope, however, the general secretary may be ousted. But that has happened only twice in Soviet history. Georgi Malenkov, demoted in 1953, had never enjoyed full authority as Stalin's successor. Khrushchev's dismissal in 1964 occurred only after he had managed to push through his "harebrained" schemes and, more importantly, had conducted constant assaults on the privileges of elites throughout the Soviet establishment. After Khrushchev every Soviet leader, despite physical infirmities (and in Brezhnev's case even outright senility), was allowed to die on the job. Andropov was able to exercise considerable authority even from a hospital bed. Konstantin Chernenko, whose health also rapidly deteriorated, made his imprint by slowing down reforms at home and adopting a less confrontational posture vis-à-vis the United States.

As for Gorbachev, there is a certain similarity between his position and Ronald Reagan's political mandate of 1980. Both men came to power after several failed administrations. Both benefited from an intense desire by their respective bodies politic to have finally a successful government. And both were propelled to power largely by a widespread belief that the ways of the past were no longer acceptable.

Yet the differences are obvious. The Politburo has the right to ask for a general secretary's resignation, but under ordinary circumstances this right is more apparent than real. Like mem-

[3] *Pravda*, Apr. 9, 1986.

bers of a corporate board, individual Politburo members serve at the pleasure of the general secretary. Grossly unskilled chiefs can be brought down by a coalition, but as long as a general secretary plays his cards carefully, does not fail too dramatically and does not challenge the interests of the elite too drastically, his position is secure. The last thing other Politburo members would want to do is expose themselves as his premature critics or opponents. Gorbachev is not yet a dictator. But he has both the mandate and the temperamental predisposition to act as a decisive chief executive.

This is particularly true in foreign policy, where the elite have fewer vested interests and there are fewer opportunities for sabotage. Western observers who speculate about hard-line challenges to Gorbachev too often uncritically project into the Kremlin's national security formulation the widely publicized bureaucratic procrastination, ineptness and corruption that frustrate economic reforms. But in foreign policy the institutions are much smaller, the degree of centralization much greater and the general secretary's control over both decision-making and policy implementation much stronger.

In contrast to Brezhnev, who allowed an essentially cabinet-type government, run by key party and state agencies, to retain considerable autonomy, Gorbachev has quickly moved to consolidate his hold. In the area of national security, the general secretary, instead of delegating authority to several senior officials, has built around himself an impressive team of associates. All of them had qualifications for their new positions. But none were sufficiently entrenched politically to risk deviating from Gorbachev's instructions.

The new minister of foreign affairs, Eduard Shevardnadze, was an unusual choice. He made his entire career in the republic of Georgia, as a Communist Youth League functionary, a party official, minister of internal affairs—in effect the chief of police—and finally the party leader. Despite a lack of foreign policy expertise, Shevardnadze apparently had several important qualifications. He reportedly had been friendly with Gorbachev since the late 1950s. He had established a reputation in Georgia as an efficient, no-nonsense, but also open-minded, administrator. After 30 years of Andrei Gromyko's iron rule, the Foreign Ministry needed a fresh approach. Moreover, although tough and decisive, Shevardnadze was known for his jovial, open personality, which was bound to contrast favorably with Gromyko's dour manner. As long as he was not

expected to act as a foreign policy mastermind, the new foreign minister was an imaginative choice for the job.

With Gromyko's departure, the Foreign Ministry ceased being the center of gravity of the Soviet national security formulation. That role shifted to the Central Committee Secretariat, which is personally directed by Gorbachev. Two new secretaries appointed at the 27th Party Congress became the general secretary's principal foreign policy lieutenants. One, former Ambassador to Washington Anatoly Dobrynin, took over the International Department. That office, which in the past dealt primarily with non-ruling communist parties and so-called national liberation movements, was given new responsibilities and personnel to focus on East-West affairs, specifically arms control.

The other, Aleksander Yakovlev, a former ambassador to Canada and before that a career party official, joined the Secretariat to coordinate all Soviet propaganda activities, internal as well as international. Anatoly Chernyaev, previously one of five International Department deputy chiefs, was made Gorbachev's key foreign policy aide, replacing the venerable Andrei Aleksandrov-Agentov, who had performed this function under Brezhnev and his successors since 1964. Chernyaev, like his predecessor, is less a high-powered conceptualizer than a competent assistant, who keeps the general secretary well briefed and exposed to a variety of opinions. Among others contributing viewpoints are the directors of two leading Moscow international think tanks—the Institute on the United States and Canada and the Institute of World Economy and International Relations—Georgi Arbatov and Yevgeny Primakov, respectively. While Arbatov occasionally was consulted by Soviet leaders before the Gorbachev era, only recently has his and Primakov's participation in the leadership councils been put on a regular footing.

The absence of a military man in the Politburo concentrates even more power in Gorbachev's hands. The minister of defense, Marshal Sergei Sokolov, 75, was appointed during the last months of Chernenko's tenure after the death of Dmitri Ustinov. From the beginning he has appeared to be little more than a caretaker. His status as merely a candidate (non-voting) Politburo member may say more about his personal situation than about any intent to downgrade the military's political role. Yet the absence of a forceful military voice on the Politburo obviously enhances Gorbachev's authority. The chief of the

general staff, Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev, who accompanied the general secretary to the Reykjavik summit, impressed members of the U.S. delegation as a competent officer. But particularly in anticipation of a succession at the Defense Ministry, neither he nor his colleagues are likely to resist Gorbachev's wishes.

The character of this new national security team is telling. Most of the new appointees are definite improvements over their predecessors. All of Gorbachev's hand-picked lieutenants have already had long and largely successful careers, and none were recruited from outside the narrow party-government institutional framework. None were ever known to dissent from Soviet policy. While younger (although not always so young—Dobrynin, Yakovlev and Chernyaev are all in their mid-sixties), more vigorous and creative, Gorbachev's top foreign policy appointees as a team are more suited to adjust the Soviet foreign policy course than to change it drastically.

IV

The concept of a bipolar world remains central to Soviet thinking. Gorbachev's address to the 27th Party Congress was notable for its unprecedented preoccupation with East-West relations and particularly the relationship with the United States. The general secretary's aides in Reykjavik revealed that he is personally involved in all major decisions on relations with America. No other country, including China, receives anything approaching the same level of attention from the Soviet leader.

Both Dobrynin and Yakovlev, as noted, are experienced America watchers. Dobrynin's deputy, Georgi Kornienko, used to work for him at the Soviet embassy in the United States. So too did Yuli Vorontsov, one of the two first deputy ministers of foreign affairs, who was Dobrynin's deputy chief of mission for many years. The other deputy is Anatoly Kovalev, who, like Chernyaev, is an expert on Western Europe. Never before has Soviet foreign policy formulation been so dominated by officials with backgrounds in Western, and especially American, affairs.

Why does the United States occupy such a central place in Gorbachev's world outlook? The new Soviet leader is a patriot and a pragmatist. He has little of Khrushchev's romantic enthusiasm for Third World revolutionaries. And unlike Brezhnev, he does not run foreign policy by inertia. Gorbachev defines his own priorities and pursues them with dogged deter-

mination. From his perspective, it is the United States that represents the greatest threat to the security and prosperity of the Soviet Union. It is also the United States that remains the toughest obstacle to the expansion of Soviet global power. But the existence of the American giant offers Moscow attractive opportunities to play the role of the only other superpower benefactor for any nation disenchanted with Washington. Because the United States has a unique place in Soviet political thinking, agreements with it—particularly agreements that codify Soviet equality—contribute to Gorbachev's standing inside the U.S.S.R.

Soviet preoccupation with the United States does not mean neglect of other international interests: the general secretary has made new moves to improve ties with a variety of nations. Yet he has always made clear that while relations with other countries would be built on their own merits, it is with America that the issue of mutual survival would have to be worked out.

Soviet analysts themselves reject the notion that the U.S.S.R. could benefit from lesser concentration on the United States. For example, American Sovietologist Jerry Hough recently wrote an article published in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* in which he suggested that "the most realistic way to improve the Soviet-American relationship is to pursue a policy of a relative neglect of the United States," because otherwise Moscow's concessions would lead only to "the arrogance of power" on the part of the Reagan Administration. A leading Soviet commentator, Fedor Burlatsky, voiced a strong objection. In a rejoinder, Burlatsky argued that the relationship with the United States was too important to be put on the back burner for even a relatively short time.[4]

Continuity in Soviet foreign policy has also been evident with respect to Eastern Europe, where Gorbachev has combined flexibility and firmness. At the Soviet party congress, Gorbachev stated that disagreements among communist parties should not be overly "dramatized." In a departure from the Kremlin's previous insistence that deviations from the Soviet model of development and differences with Soviet foreign policy positions were unacceptable, the general secretary acknowledged that "identical views on all issues without an exception are probably impossible." Gorbachev's statement was interpreted by East European leaders as an official blessing to

[4] *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, Aug. 27, 1986.

do things their own way. Simultaneously, Gorbachev instituted regular consultations with Warsaw Pact leaders on such international developments as the Geneva and Reykjavik summits. And East European officials were pleased that instead of always being summoned to Moscow, as was customary under Brezhnev, they now were frequently briefed in their own capitals.

Gorbachev's sensitivity to East European concerns has its limits. He has actively discouraged Eastern bloc countries from becoming dependent upon economic cooperation with the West. Instead they have been strongly urged to integrate further with the Soviet and other East European economies. All broad-minded talk aside, the practical side of Gorbachev's policy has been to force unenthusiastic client states to accept a plan for the merger of Soviet and East European enterprises on terms beneficial to the U.S.S.R.

The Brezhnev Doctrine is very much a part of Gorbachev's policy. Speaking at the Polish party congress in June 1986, the Soviet leader issued a stern warning to those seeking genuine independence from Moscow:

> . . . socialism now manifests itself as an international reality, as an alliance of states closely linked by political, economic, cultural and defense interests. To threaten the socialist system, to try to undermine it from the outside and wrench a country away from the socialist community means to encroach not only on the will of the people, but also on the entire postwar arrangement, and, in the final analysis, on peace.[5]

Gorbachev's approaches toward China reveal a certain flexibility, but he is not promising to give away anything important. In his Moscow party congress address he unequivocally described China as being a socialist state. He also noted an improvement in Sino-Soviet relations and declared that "the reserves of cooperation between the U.S.S.R. and China are enormous." Even more significant was what Gorbachev did not say; his speech carefully avoided explicit or even implicit criticism of Chinese policies.

The effort to rebuild bridges to China was initiated during the last months of Brezhnev's rule. Speaking in the Central Asian city of Tashkent on March 22, 1982, he expressed strong interest in normalizing relations with Beijing. He offered a symbolic ideological concession by calling China a socialist

[5] *Pravda*, July 1, 1986.

country for the first time in years. Andropov and Chernenko made similar gestures during their brief tenures.

But it was Gorbachev who made rapprochement with China a diplomatic priority. Much has been accomplished already: the Sino-Soviet border has been generally quiet; trade is increasing; cultural exchanges have resumed; and some Soviet specialists have returned to China. But relaxation still has not led to true accommodation. Both powers share a desire to stabilize the relationship but neither appears to want to re-create the close alliance of the early 1950s. The Soviets speak rather positively about changes introduced by Deng Xiaoping. But behind a facade of curiosity and even grudging admiration there is a noticeable concern that successful modernization in China might change the balance of power to the detriment of the Soviet Union.

Gorbachev offered several inducements to Beijing in his Vladivostok speech. He disclosed that "the question of withdrawing a considerable number of Soviet troops from Mongolia is being examined." He made an apparent concession on the Amur River boundary dispute by accepting a demarcation along the middle of the main channel. Earlier, however, at the Moscow party congress, Gorbachev had emphasized that rapprochement with China would be "on the basis of principle and equality and not at the expense of third countries." The meaning was clear: the Kremlin would not meet China's demands for a Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and an end to its support of the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia. Deng Xiaoping's offer, after the Vladivostok speech, to meet with Gorbachev if the Soviets disassociated themselves from the Vietnamese occupation did not receive a positive response.

Nor has the new Soviet leadership been willing to forgo its assertiveness in the Third World. At the 27th Party Congress Gorbachev acknowledged that the process of change in the Third World "has encountered considerable difficulties." In his view:

> Through political maneuvering, promises and bribes, military threats and blackmail, and not infrequently through direct intervention in the internal affairs of liberated nations, capitalism to a large degree has managed to save previously established relations of economic dependence. On this basis, imperialism has succeeded in creating and fine-tuning the most sophisticated system of neocolonial exploitation, in tying up closer to itself a significant number of liberated states.

There has not been such pessimism in Soviet official speeches since Khrushchev announced an alliance with the Third World at the 20th Party Congress in 1956.

But Westerners who saw Gorbachev's realistic assessment as a sign that Soviet involvement in the Third World would be scaled down to save resources and improve relations with the United States have been disabused of such hopes. Setbacks in the Third World only motivated Gorbachev to try harder to uphold already existent Soviet commitments and more generally to keep the U.S.S.R. as a credible global power. A sense of overextension may have limited Moscow's willingness to accept costly new responsibilities, but it has not led Moscow to reduce its support for friends and clients, particularly those directly or indirectly challenged by the United States. New realism has not been translated into greater moderation.

In Nicaragua, Angola and Afghanistan, the Soviet Union made considerable new investments to support its embattled allies. Sophisticated weapons worth hundreds of millions of dollars were delivered to the Sandinistas and to the government of Angola. In Afghanistan, where the Soviets are reported to spend about $3 billion a year, there was an increase in the number of ground and air incursions into and artillery bombardments of Pakistan. A token withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan completed in November, by all indications, was no more than a public relations gesture.

The replacement of Babrak Karmal with secret police chief Najibullah in May 1986 as the Afghan Communist Party leader brought new sophistication to Kabul's policy. The new leadership did make some new approaches to tribal and religious leaders, and on January 1 Kabul proposed a cease-fire. Nevertheless, both the Soviet and Afghan governments made abundantly clear that their version of a "just settlement" of the war would keep the communist regime firmly in control. The "national reconciliation" in Afghanistan advocated by Gorbachev presupposes that Kabul will moderate some of its practices and even include some opposition elements in the government. But these elements are offered no more than token participation. In return, the United States, China, Pakistan and Iran are requested to stop all support of the rebels. And despite his professed desire to remove Soviet troops from Afghanistan, Gorbachev assured the visiting Najibullah that the Soviet

Union "will not abandon our southern neighbor in trouble."[6] This does not sound like a formula for genuine power-sharing.

In the Middle East the Soviet Union sent new weapons, including long-range SA-5 missiles and advanced MiG-25 fighters, to Libya and Syria. Moscow denounced the U.S. raid on Libya in April as "state terrorism." Realistically, the Soviets could do nothing to prevent the American attack. They had neither the naval and air power nor, presumably, the desire to risk a direct military confrontation with the United States in the Mediterranean just to protect Muammar al-Qaddafi. In any case, they apparently provided no early warning to the Libyans.

Still, in evaluating the Soviet response to the raid, it is fair to say that for Libya the glass was half full rather than half empty. The Politburo canceled a scheduled May visit to the United States by Foreign Minister Shevardnadze, who was supposed to confer with Secretary of State George Shultz about arrangements for a U.S.-Soviet summit. To put this step into perspective, one should remember that Brezhnev did not cancel President Nixon's trip to the Soviet Union in May 1972 following the American bombing of Hanoi and mining of Haiphong harbor. Shevardnadze's cancellation could be partly explained by the Kremlin's uncertainty whether another summit with Ronald Reagan could accomplish much. But North Vietnam in 1972 was a much closer and important ally than Libya in 1986, and Qaddafi's endorsement of international terrorism was implicitly criticized even by Gorbachev himself.[7] Beyond diplomatic retaliation and verbal denunciations of "the barbarian attack," the U.S.S.R. agreed to make an additional contribution to Libyan defenses. Qaddafi's deputy, Major Abd al-Salam Jalloud, went to Moscow in late May and, in addition to meeting with Gorbachev, had extensive negotiations with a high-powered Soviet delegation headed by Soviet Premier Nikolai Ryzhkov, with Marshal Sokolov as a member. Upon his return to Tripoli Jalloud reported that the Kremlin promised to deliver new military aid.

Moscow also made additional commitments to Syria. After the U.S. raid Gorbachev personally assured visiting Syrian Vice President Abd al-Hakim Khaddam that Moscow would assist

[6] *Pravda,* Dec. 18, 1986.
[7] *Pravda,* May 29, 1986.

in "the strengthening of [Syrian] defense capability."[8] When Britain broke diplomatic relations with Damascus over Syrian involvement in an attempt to blow up an El Al airliner in London, the Soviet Union accused Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's government of following the instructions of "American reactionary circles and Zionists."

The Soviets also made new approaches to Japan and even to Israel. In both cases they went far enough to create an impression of movement but not far enough for any specific accomplishment. It had been ten years since a Soviet foreign minister had visited Tokyo, and the Japanese welcomed the fact that Shevardnadze's arrival in January 1986 restored a higher level of diplomatic dialogue. Still, like Gromyko before him, Shevardnadze refused to incorporate a specific reference to the contested northern islands in the joint communiqué. Similarly, discussions in Helsinki in August 1986 with the Israelis regarding the establishment of consular links collapsed over the Soviet refusal to discuss Jewish emigration.

All in all, Soviet geopolitical maneuvering under Gorbachev has demonstrated a new sense of purpose, a new realism and a new creativity. What it has not demonstrated is any kind of turn inward, any evidence that Gorbachev and his colleagues are scaling down Soviet global ambitions in order to concentrate on domestic economic modernization. Nor has the Soviet Union shown any hesitation to use force to accomplish its objectives or, for that matter, any reluctance to support governments charged with terrorism. Gorbachev's advisers publicly argue about "the need not to view conflict situations only through the prism of Soviet-American relations." However, the Soviet approach to world politics continues to be based on a familiar mind-set that views relations with the United States as a zero-sum game, in which any gain for Washington is automatically a loss for Moscow and, conversely, any American setback is a plus for the U.S.S.R.

The essence of Gorbachev's attitude to international affairs was summed up in his report to the party congress: "Continuity in foreign policy has nothing in common with the simple repetition of the past, especially as far as approaches to accumulated problems are concerned. . . . What is required is firmness in defending principles and positions coupled with tactical flexibility. . . . " And it is precisely in tactical flexibility, rather

[8] *Pravda*, May 30, 1986.

than in a strategic reappraisal of Soviet international interests, that Gorbachev has already made a major impact on the conduct of Soviet foreign policy.

V

Where Gorbachev truly differs from his predecessors is in his handling of arms control. He has made a number of dramatic new proposals for which he received public credit, even from Ronald Reagan. It is first and foremost the general secretary's approach to arms control that leads two seasoned American analysts to argue that "his foreign-policy perspectives differ significantly from those of his predecessors and could reshape the ways in which the Kremlin deals with the outside world."[9]

A dynamic and imaginative arms control diplomacy has helped Gorbachev to determine, to a large degree, the focus of the East-West dialogue. For the Soviet Union to project a benign image, establishing arms control as the number-one international issue makes inherent sense. It turns attention away from events that otherwise could cause the Soviet Union considerable embarrassment. Gorbachev boldly used the Chernobyl nuclear plant disaster to make a case for his arms control program. The scandal over the arrest of *U.S. News & World Report* correspondent Nicholas Daniloff damaged the general secretary's reputation in the United States. The Reykjavik summit, proposed by the Soviet leader, helped to erase the memory of the Daniloff entrapment and to revive the image of Gorbachev the arms controller.

On this issue—arms control—Gorbachev could safely occupy the high moral ground. Whenever the Soviet Union finds itself on the defensive because of internal repression, the Kremlin makes a case that it is the true champion of the most important among all human rights—the right to survival. The tendency in the West to equate arms control with peace allows Gorbachev to make a favorable impression without sacrificing Soviet global aspirations or changing domestic practices.

If arms control talks end in a stalemate, the Kremlin is positioned to blame America and appeal to Western public opinion to put pressure on the American Administration. Since there is no audience on the other side that the United States

[9] F. Stephen Larrabee and Allen Lynch, "Gorbachev: The Road to Reykjavik," *Foreign Policy*, Winter 1986–87, p. 3.

could hope to engage on its behalf, the arms control public relations contest must be played exclusively on Western turf. Consequently, even a draw is advantageous to the Kremlin. Gorbachev has perfected this use of disarmament diplomacy as a political weapon. But he also has offered enough substance to suggest that the professed Soviet interest in reaching an agreement is not just propaganda.

There has been an interesting evolution in the Soviet attitude toward nuclear weapons. Until the mid-1970s Soviet military doctrine argued that nuclear war, while inherently undesirable, would result in a Soviet victory. Accustomed to a position of nuclear inferiority, the Soviets charged the United States with all kinds of sinister designs to exploit the American edge. As the Soviet strategic forces grew, Moscow portrayed them as a symbol of the Soviet Union's parity with the United States, in effect a symbol of Soviet superpower status.

Gradually, however, first civilian and then military analysts in the Soviet Union began saying openly that nuclear war was unwinnable, would not bring victory to the U.S.S.R., but would destroy human civilization. The general recognition that in terms of nuclear capabilities the Soviet Union was, at a minimum, second to none has reduced Moscow's need to remind the world of its strategic might. In fact, such bragging had proved counterproductive, providing ammunition to Soviet critics in the West.

In the early 1980s some leading Soviet strategists, including Marshal Ogarkov, issued thinly camouflaged warnings regarding the limited military and political utility of acquiring more and more nuclear weapons. They emphasized that new types of conventional arms had the potential of accomplishing the same goals without creating unacceptable collateral damage. Yet the priority given to nuclear matters was retarding the Soviet effort to compete with the United States in these other increasingly crucial areas of military technology. Other Soviet experts pointed out that nuclear weapons had not helped the Americans in Vietnam or intimidated U.S. opponents elsewhere; privately they were willing to concede that the Soviet Union faced an identical problem.

The Soviet Union is less dependent on nuclear weapons than the United States. The U.S.S.R. enjoys a margin of conventional superiority on the entire periphery of its empire. No Soviet clients, in contrast to America's NATO allies, feel that the Soviet nuclear umbrella is the key to their security. Further-

more, the growing Soviet non-nuclear force projection capabilities make nuclear weapons less indispensable for Moscow's global military role.

Because the Kremlin is deadly serious about the political utility of military power, and precisely because the Soviet force posture is determined largely by the professional military, there is an emerging consensus in Moscow about de-emphasizing the nuclear component of the Soviet arsenal as long as it can be done without giving an advantage to other nuclear nations. Arms control gives the Soviet Union a chance to accomplish exactly that.

There are also economic and technological considerations. The Soviet Union can afford its current level of spending on strategic forces, which constitutes eight to ten percent of the military budget. Any conceivable arms reductions would allow little savings; paradoxically, they may initially require some additional expenditure if the Soviets are forced to accept as the price of a deal the restructuring of their forces, which would require a move from heavy land-based missiles to a greater emphasis on missile-carrying submarines and bombers armed with cruise missiles—two categories in which the U.S.S.R. lags behind the United States.

But in a longer-term perspective, the Soviet Union is not interested in unrestricted competition with America in creating new types of weapons. An intensified technological arms race would occupy thousands of Soviet scientists and engineers whose work is vital for economic modernization. Moscow's concern is magnified by a fear that after all the resources invested in nuclear forces, it may find itself confronted with some completely new and unexpected technological threat. That is the main reason, as Gorbachev explained in his post-summit press conference in Reykjavik, for the Soviet concern over the U.S. Strategic Defense Initiative.

On the one hand, Gorbachev defiantly declared that the Soviet Union "is not frightened by SDI" and will be able to find an effective "asymmetrical" response to it "without having to sacrifice much," but the Soviet leader complained that "through SDI one can come into new types of weapons."[10]

From the Soviet standpoint it does not help that the United States may be better prepared for a race in new military technologies. In his party congress address Gorbachev admitted

[10] *Pravda*, Oct. 13, 1986.

that "the current stage of the general crisis of capitalism" does not preclude "the mastering of new scientific-technological directions," even to the extent of achieving "social revenge, the recapture of previously lost positions." Anything arms control can do to address this danger by killing, or at least retarding, SDI would be a major accomplishment for the Politburo.

Finally, the Soviet system puts a premium on planning and predictability. Soviet leaders do appreciate the value of arms control in exchanging information, providing mutual reassurances and avoiding the need to think about each other's strategic programs in terms of worst-case scenarios.

The 1986 Soviet arms control offensive started on January 15 with the unveiling of a major new negotiating package. The proposal was typical of Gorbachev's approach: it included new ideas and was presented with dramatic flair. Only three hours after Gorbachev's letter to Reagan outlining his proposals was delivered to Secretary of State Shultz, the general secretary's detailed statement about the initiative was read on Soviet television and distributed by Tass.

Much of the package was pure public relations. Gorbachev proposed a complete elimination of nuclear weapons by the end of the century. Almost equally unrealistic was an appeal to begin by 1990 the elimination of nuclear missiles and battlefield weapons by all nuclear powers. Taking Soviet conventional preponderance into account, the negative reactions of the French, British and Chinese were easy to predict. The first stage of the nuclear disarmament plan, to reduce all U.S. and Soviet strategic arms by 50 percent, had already been proposed by the Soviets and rejected by the Reagan Administration. The proposal failed to satisfy the U.S. concern with heavy Soviet intercontinental ballistic missiles, yet precluded deployment of the U.S. MX missiles as well as the Trident II submarine. Finally, in the Soviet package, SDI research had to be confined to a restrictively defined "laboratory."

Real Soviet concessions consisted of an extension of a unilateral nuclear test ban moratorium, a willingness to allow on-site inspection, acceptance of the old U.S. zero-option for intermediate-range missiles in Europe (but no willingness to scrap missiles in Asia) and an agreement that British and French nuclear forces would not have to be included in the reductions as long as London and Paris guaranteed that they would not be expanded or modernized. But probably most encouraging

was Gorbachev's apparent willingness not to demand U.S. abandonment of SDI as a precondition for progress on all other arms control issues.

Gorbachev also committed himself to a summit with President Reagan in Washington, but only if there could be movement on an intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF) agreement and a nuclear test ban. This commitment was delivered both publicly and through private diplomatic channels, including via intermediaries such as Senator Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) and former President Richard Nixon. It was on this basis that the Reagan Administration finally accepted the Gorbachev request to hold a preparatory summit in Reykjavik. Washington assumed—now it is clear, far too casually—that Gorbachev wanted the encounter because he needed assurances that he would not leave the United States empty-handed after his visit. Apparently the Administration believed there had been enough progress on INF that some agreement could be completed in Reykjavik.

Instead of pursuing a limited agreement, Gorbachev confronted President Reagan with another comprehensive nuclear arms control package. In this case, all American and Soviet medium-range missiles would be banned in Europe. French and British nuclear arsenals would not have to be frozen. Moreover, Soviet missiles in Asia would be limited to 100 warheads, and Washington would be entitled to deploy the same number in the continental United States. Soviet short-range missiles in Europe would be frozen and negotiations regarding their "further fate" would begin. The 50-percent reduction in strategic weapons was revived, to be achieved in five years. But all of these concessions were at a price: the United States had to agree to limit SDI research beyond even the narrow interpretation of the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty for a period of ten years. Not only components but also elements of SDI systems could not be tested in space. After ten years the ABM treaty would still be in effect. Acceptance of the Soviet demand would amount to barring most SDI-related research efforts. The whole program could be considerably retarded if not stopped altogether.

What was the rationale for returning to the previous Soviet all-or-nothing position? Did Gorbachev expect President Reagan to surrender his SDI dream? Was it a calculated step to make major concessions to Western Europe while presenting SDI, and accordingly the Reagan Administration, as the only

stumbling block to an arms deal of "historic proportion"? Or is it possible that Gorbachev has a gambler's streak which overcame his prudent judgment, that the Soviet leader misinterpreted Reagan's interest in his ideas and gave away too much to be able to settle at the end with a modest agreement on INF and a test ban?

There are no definite answers. But there was a real difference in both tone and substance between the Soviet leader's initial assessment at his Reykjavik press conference and his two subsequent television addresses in Moscow on October 14 and October 22. With each appearance Gorbachev sounded increasingly disappointed and bitter. At the press conference he stated that it would be a mistake "to say that the encounter produced no results" and claimed that the summit in Washington was "closer." His first television appearance in Moscow combined a sharper attack on the U.S. performance in Reykjavik with an assertion that "the meeting was useful." The fact that the third address on the same topic had to be delivered so soon after the first two suggests that something went wrong. Gorbachev indeed has acknowledged that what has happened since Reykjavik was "totally different" from original Soviet hopes.

Gorbachev's initial cautious optimism was based on two misconceptions. First, the Soviet leader failed to understand that there was more to the differences between the two sides' positions in Reykjavik than just SDI. Reagan's peculiar negotiating style and his emphasis on the big picture at the expense of crucial details obscured major areas of disagreement on strategic offensive weapons cuts. U.S. efforts to interpret the President's words, contrary to Gorbachev's own perception, evidently touched a sensitive nerve. The Soviet leader sounded particularly angry over the American insistence that all Mr. Reagan had promised was to eliminate ballistic missiles rather than all strategic arms.

Second, Gorbachev's press conference suggested a strong expectation that the public in the United States and particularly Western Europe would pressure the Reagan Administration to accommodate Moscow on SDI. Instead, the Kremlin discovered that the President was able to rally American opinion around his refusal to yield on SDI research. Even more shocking to the Soviets was the advice of key West European governments to de-emphasize those elements of the agreement in Reykjavik that Gorbachev has highlighted: a complete elimination of

strategic ballistic missiles and the elimination of all intermediate-range missiles from Europe. The Soviet leadership finally had to see that the risky improvisation at Reykjavik, while in many respects embarrassing and potentially damaging to Washington, also had set back Gorbachev's arms control agenda.

VI

As frustrated as the Kremlin was with the Reagan Administration, it recognized that an overreaction might backfire. In a furious personal attack on the President published in *Pravda,* Georgi Arbatov nonetheless stated that the Politburo was not going to be "provoked."[11] Arbatov and other Soviet commentators were still saying that there was no alternative to negotiating with the Reagan Administration. Privately some Soviets were sending messages suggesting that a way might be found to decouple SDI again from INF and the test ban. They hinted that if that happened, preparations for a full-scale Washington summit could be put back on track.

The Iran/contra scandal, following the Democratic takeover of the Senate, was bound to raise the question in Moscow whether the President had become a lame duck. It is unlikely that the Soviets will try to exploit the President's moment of weakness by engaging in risky adventures. Gorbachev's advisers caution that the politically injured U.S. President may even welcome a Soviet challenge to divert attention from his domestic problems. But, conversely, the Soviets hesitate to do anything that may help the President; that obviously precludes an arms deal, at least temporarily. The Soviet leadership knows that the time to reach an agreement with Reagan is running out and, other factors being equal, it would prefer to accomplish whatever is possible with one president who can realistically deliver. Still, before genuine bargaining resumes, Gorbachev will have to conclude that the worst is over for President Reagan.

It is clear that any agreement that might be reached in the near term, while possibly beneficial politically, is not going to lead to significant changes in the military balance. Arms control can make some useful, if modest, contribution to managing nuclear competition, and failure to practice arms control seriously is probably detrimental to the West's ability to sustain a

[11] *Pravda,* Nov. 21, 1986.

coherent policy toward the Soviet Union. It helps both superpowers to avoid deploying systems that neither really wants but may be compelled to proceed with in the absence of an agreement. The ABM treaty is a perfect example. It theoretically allows both sides to block the emergence of particularly destabilizing new weapons, although on this score the record is rather discouraging. Most importantly, arms control serves as useful political and psychological shock absorbers on the bumpy road of the nuclear race. Without it a worst-case mentality would inevitably flourish on both sides. Both the political stability of the U.S.-Soviet relationship and rational military planning would be jeopardized.

Nevertheless, arms control successes will be useful only as long as their limited impact on the East-West competition is evaluated realistically. The roots of the superpower rivalry are not in the nuclear arms buildup. Rather, the buildup itself is a reflection of basic conflicts of interests and values between the two systems of alliances. Accordingly, Gorbachev will have to show much more than his "new" arms control thinking to be accepted as genuine good news to the West.

What would really make the difference for America and its allies is if Moscow were to come to terms with its reduced ideological and cultural appeal, its technological backwardness as well as limited economic resources, and if it abandoned as a practical foreign policy objective the aspiration of being a global equal of—to say nothing of being superior to—the United States. Unless and until the Kremlin at least begins moving in this direction or, alternatively, succeeds in making the Soviet model attractive to the rest of the world, it will have to continue its unique reliance on force and coercion as foreign policy tools. It would be even more meaningful if the Soviet Union concluded that its security does not require an iron grip over Eastern Europe.

Speculating whether Gorbachev is interested in, or capable of, such a historic change in Soviet policy is an exercise in futility. What he has done up to this point may be either a case of tactical modification or a prelude to strategic reassessment. Gorbachev may not be quite sure himself. The United States does not know enough about his circumstances and does not have the adequate leverage and talent for foreign policy fine-tuning to influence the Soviet leadership's deliberations.

Following America's own interests is a more appropriate course during this time of Soviet transition. Identifying these

interests clearly and coolly should be the first order of the day. And that requires a recognition that the Soviet domestic renaissance is not necessarily a blessing to the West.

Throughout Russian history the modernizers rather than the conservatives have pursued the most ambitious international strategies. Peter the Great, Catherine the Great, Alexanders I and II proved to be overall more assertive and menacing to Russia's neighbors than such conservative tsars as Nicholas I and Alexander III. The realization that things had to be changed at home was to a large extent caused by failures abroad. And to make Russia more powerful and competitive was traditionally one of the main rationales for reforms. Domestic renovation was usually accompanied by a new spirit of popular self-confidence and patriotism that could be mobilized by the rulers to support foreign exploits.

Khrushchev's de-Stalinization campaign is a case in point. During Khrushchev's time the Soviet Union underwent a far-reaching internal liberalization. Soviet foreign policy—as rapprochement with Yugoslavia and arrangements with Finland and particularly Austria would testify—became more flexible and imaginative. But it also became more vigorous and ambitious. It was Khrushchev who ordered the crushing of the Hungarian rebellion, built the Berlin Wall and deployed Soviet missiles on Cuba. It was he who presided over the missile buildup and the aggressive effort to organize an "anti-imperialist coalition" with Third World nations that transformed the U.S.S.R. into a truly global power.

There are both moral and geopolitical arguments for why the United States may benefit from a reformed Soviet Union. A pluralistic democracy would not only make Soviet society more humane but would also probably force it to devote resources and energy to internal problems at the expense of global assertiveness. But what if the impact of Gorbachev's "revolution" from above were limited to having the enlightened and determined autocrat adjust the Soviet regime to modernity? A new dynamism and efficiency on the part of an adversary is also a legitimate cause for concern. There are more unknowns than ever in the U.S.-Soviet relationship. Both new opportunities and new dangers abound. Americans must approach them with an open mind but without wishful thinking and excessive sentimentality.