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# The Soviet Union's Foreign Policy Environment to the Year 2000

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Alvin Z. Rubinstein

**T**he Soviet Union is, and will remain, a global power. It has used its central geostrategic position on the Eurasian landmass and impressive military capability to intrude a presence into all key regions of the world. Understandably, defense of the homeland and institutionalization of imperial hegemony over Eastern Europe take pride of place in Kremlin calculations. Soviet policy toward Western Europe—a mixture of blandishment, pressure, bargaining, and demonstrations of military power—seeks to exploit discord among the NATO countries and to retain a favorable balance of power by keeping Germany divided and the Red Army deployed far forward in the center of Europe. In the Far East, security considerations loom large. China has been a continuing problem ever since the alliance that Stalin forged started to crack. In the Third World, even during periods of nuclear inferiority, successive Soviet leaders followed Khrushchev's example, probing Western vulnerabilities, extending the reach of Soviet power, and continually raising the ante of commitments. No longer does one ask whether Moscow intends to become involved in regional conflicts; now the debate centers on the lengths to which its leadership is prepared to go to sustain a global policy and the ambitions that such a policy reflects.

Two profound changes characterize Soviet foreign policy in the more than three decades since Stalin's death: first, the emergence of the U.S.S.R. in the early 1970s as a credible nuclear power, the equal of the United States; and second, the shift from a continental-based strategy to a global strategy. Moscow's forward policy in the Third World is every bit as significant as the military buildup that made it possible, credible, and strategically coherent. For the first time in Russia's long imperial history, the Russian leadership is an integral factor in the politics of areas lying far beyond the continental confines of the Russian empire. But the Soviet record is mixed. For all of its achievements since Stalin's death—and they have been many—the Soviet Union is, ironically, the only Communist country surrounded by hostile Communist states.

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What probable trends will shape Soviet foreign policy in the year 2000 and beyond? The Chinese say it is very difficult to make predictions, especially about the future. Sociologist Daniel Bell once observed that any attempt to forecast trends is extremely hazardous because of “the variabilities of accident, folly, and simple human cantankerousness.” Still, there is benefit to be derived from speculating, from stimulating the imagination to visualize what might be and what needs to be done to bring about a possibly more secure tomorrow. But first, it might be useful to glance backward, to recall the recent, unanticipated developments that greatly affected Soviet foreign policy, to distinguish the continuities and the discontinuities, and from this perspective enhance our insight into the present and find a basis for projections into the future.

The advent of the Gorbachev era invites comparison with the Khrushchev era 30 years ago. Both leaders were confronted by major domestic and foreign policy dilemmas. Khrushchev’s decisions—what he did and what happened, though causality is not always certain—are a matter of record. Gorbachev, as yet untested in foreign affairs, has manifested some indications of what he would like to do and has shown himself skillful in consolidating power and initiating a diverse range of policies at home and abroad. Their effectiveness and consequences, however, remain to be determined.

Many of the essentials of Khrushchev’s foreign policy were embraced by his successors; in the main, they also guide Gorbachev’s policy, allowing for the tactical differences that reflect the new circumstances. These essentials are a disposition toward loosening controls on the individual members of the Soviet bloc, consonant with continued Soviet military-political hegemony; parity with the United States in the nuclear field; peaceful coexistence with the West, by which is meant cooperation in certain sectors but, in all else, competition and incessant struggle short of war as part of an unrelenting effort to derive advantage from Western weaknesses; and the projection of Soviet power into the Third World. There is no reason to expect the Kremlin to downgrade any of these policies.

Though no two situations or sets of circumstances are exactly alike, the task of locating Gorbachev somewhere along the spectrum of probable behavior may be facilitated by the identification of essential similarities in the past and in the present. The following generalizations are offered tentatively, in the spirit of encouraging thought.

The similarities are striking:

- The struggle for power at a time of mounting economic and political dilemmas;
- the quest for rationalization of Soviet-East European economic relationships, subject to Moscow’s strategic control;
- the need to improve relations with the United States; and
- the readiness to pursue Soviet objectives in the Third World, irrespective of their adverse consequences for Soviet-American relations.

First, in the struggle for political ascendancy, each had to revamp the structure of power that he inherited. The key to Khrushchev's success was de-Stalinization; for Gorbachev it is de-Brezhnevization. Whereas de-Stalinization entailed the end of one-man rule that rested on the tyrannization of the party by the secret police and the restoration of the party as the preeminent political institution of Soviet society, de-Brezhnevization requires renewal of the middle level bureaucracies that administer the country's economic, social, and political institutions. Gorbachev appears to have consolidated his position as the leading figure in the Communist Party. Having staffed the Politburo, the Secretariat, and the Central Committee with like-minded contemporaries, he must now ensure that they impose his priorities and values on the various levels (national, republic, obkom, raikom) of the political system and implement his "new political thinking." De-Brezhnevization is essential for the success of Gorbachev's campaign to modernize the economy, weed out corruption, and foster the acceleration of economic development. He may be forced to a more modest setting of his sights by the obdurate resistance of the bureaucracies that flourished during the Brezhnev-Andropov-Chernenko periods. As Khrushchev learned, wielding political power does not guarantee one the ability to transform the way in which the economy is operated.

Second, Eastern Europe is no less a problem for Gorbachev than it was for Khrushchev. In the past, when confronted with a choice between viability and cohesion, Moscow opted for the latter. Its absorption with security has overshadowed its willingness to permit more rational, less exploitative economic relationships with its East European satellites. Khrushchev sought to decentralize the empire that Stalin had created from 1945 to 1953, to enhance its economic utility to the Soviet Union, but he was not prepared for the disruptive tidal consequences of de-Stalinization. As matters turned out, the effort at imperial decompression threatened the very foundations of Soviet rule. His successors groped unsuccessfully for a formula that would foster sustained economic growth and permit a considerable measure of autonomy within politically tolerable parameters. Brezhnev tried to loosen things up in Comecon, encouraging a degree of specialization and greater integration among the members, but Moscow's insistence on ultimate administrative and political control reinforced propensities toward bureaucratic inertia and innate conservatism in dealing with economic issues. Czechoslovakia in the late 1960s, Poland in the 1980s, and Romania throughout the Ceausescu era attest to Moscow's continuing difficulties in extracting economic, political, cultural, and ideological benefit from its East European imperial system. Its experience bears out Winston Churchill's comment in 1944 that Russia "is a great beast . . . and it is not possible to keep her from eating, especially since she now lies in the middle of her victims," but Russia will not have an easy time digesting its prey.<sup>1</sup>

Gorbachev realizes the danger of economic and political reform in Eastern Europe. Soon after he came to power, Moscow expressed concern over the persistence with which the nationalism and national interests of individual East European countries complicated Soviet objectives in the socialist camp.<sup>2</sup> The call for bloc cohesion to counter "imperialism's anticommunist crusade" has not, however, been followed up by any specific or long-term initiatives. Gorbachev is undecided over what to do. Vladimir V. Kusin, Deputy Director of Research and Analysis for Radio Free Europe, describes Gorbachev's behavior to date well:

"He seems to have recognized that there are limits that he himself cannot overstep, as well as problems that his lesser allies have to cope with in their own way. He did not relax the Soviet grip on the area to the point where disintegration might, or almost certainly would, ensue. He has eschewed endorsing market-based reform for individual countries or as an underpinning of CMEA. He has prodded all of the client states into domestic action designed to increase efficiency, discipline, and thrift, and he asked them to cut corruption and abuse of power. He affirmed Soviet primacy in coordinating the way the East-West relationship was to be shaped and conducted.

"Nevertheless, Gorbachev has fine-tuned rather than bulldozed. . . . In other words, in not acting rashly either in tightening or in relaxing Soviet control over the area, Gorbachev has acted optimally. . . .

"In at least one respect Gorbachev has so far failed to provide an adequate answer to the East European challenge. He has not charted a credible path toward making the region economically healthy. . . . From any perspective, Marxist or not, this shakiness of the economic base should be cause for considerable concern."<sup>3</sup>

A third similarity pertains to the problem of dealing with the West, particularly the United States. U.S.-Soviet relations in the 1980s, as in the 1950s, are in a state of considerable tension. Normalization for any sustained period of time is elusive: for Khrushchev there were crises over Berlin and Cuba; for Gorbachev, SDI, Nicaragua, Afghanistan, and the impasse over the buildup of offensive strategic forces are among the contentious issues so far preventing improved relations. Nonetheless, Gorbachev, like Khrushchev, was able to set in motion initiatives that conveyed a sense of the centrality that Moscow placed on the U.S.-Soviet relationship. Khrushchev sought normalization of relations with the countries of Western Europe and the West's recognition of the territorial status quo in Europe, something that Brezhnev achieved at the Helsinki Conference in 1975; Gorbachev seems content to build on the status quo bequeathed to him. Still, developing better relations with the United States remains a pressing problem and for much the same reasons: the U.S.S.R.'s need for Western technology and credits; its quest for stability in Europe; concern over China; and interest in limiting or at least stabilizing the nuclear relationship.

Finally, the U.S.S.R. persists with policies in the Third World irrespective of their adverse consequences for U.S.-Soviet relations. The essential continuity in the policy pioneered by Khrushchev, driven forward by Brezhnev and sustained by Gorbachev, suggests that it enjoys solid support among the key oligarchs in the party, military, and government, notwithstanding periodic setbacks and possible differences over particular aspects of the overall policy. There is as yet no indication of any change in basic Soviet policy under Gorbachev. Khrushchev's early successes (in Afghanistan, India, Egypt, Iraq, Ghana, Iran, and Yemen) established a record that had its disappointments, but the enduring achievements of involvement in Third World affairs have obviously commended themselves to Soviet planners.

**L**et us lead into our examination of the equally important differences between the two eras by noting one change, minor in itself, that may, however, have long-term significance. Under Khrushchev, the slogan "peaceful competition" was emblazoned everywhere. He took it seriously and believed that the Soviet experience could serve as a model for the world, especially in the newly independent countries of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. By the 1970s, Brezhnev dropped the slogan, realizing that the Soviet Union was not going to catch up and surpass the U.S. economy and move into the communist stage of bountiful production and consumption by the next decade. Gorbachev is realist enough to know that there is no possibility of the Soviet Union's competing economically with the United States in the foreseeable future. This modified expectation could presage a fundamental change of outlook and policy. Gorbachev's determination to ensure that the Soviet Union remains a world power will, presumably then, be based on military, not economic strength.

There have been a number of changes in the international situation and in the Soviet-American relationship which must make Gorbachev's foreign policy outlook different from Khrushchev's and which must influence Soviet policy in the future:

- Gorbachev's U.S.S.R. is far stronger and is a credible nuclear power;
- Gorbachev has many more options in the Third World;
- the Far East is a major foreign policy problem; and
- U.S. influence in the international system is less in the 1980s than it was in the 1950s.

Whereas in the 1950s the Soviet Union was a significantly weaker military power with no credible nuclear force and no long-range bomber or SLBM capability, in the 1980s it enjoys essential equivalence or parity with the United States in the nuclear field. Khrushchev operated from military inferiority, but Gorbachev commands an imposing array of powerful forces. Whereas Khrushchev's reach was continental, Gorbachev's is global; and

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whereas Khrushchev was driven by a need to catch up to the United States in strategic weapons or dramatically offset the gap with lesser systems, Gorbachev's problem is how to preserve the reliance on MAD, confine SDI, and use political means to keep the arms race from draining away resources needed for domestic modernization.

Gorbachev's interest in stabilizing the nuclear arms relationship seems serious. In January 1986 he issued a major statement on arms control, which among other things called for deep cuts in offensive forces, an end to nuclear testing, and development of appropriate verification procedures. At the Twenty-seventh Congress of the Communist Party in February 1986, he discussed the problem at greater length and with considerable candor: "The character of present-day weapons leaves a country no hope of safeguarding itself solely with military and technical means, for example, by building up a defense system, even the most powerful one. The task of ensuring security is increasingly seen as a political problem, and it can only be resolved by political means. . . . Security cannot be built endlessly on fear of retaliation, in other words, on the doctrines of 'containment' or 'deterrence.' Apart from the absurdity and amorality of a situation in which the whole world becomes a nuclear hostage, these doctrines encourage an arms race that may sooner or later go out of control.

"In the context of the relations between the USSR and the USA, security can only be mutual. . . . The highest wisdom is not in caring exclusively for oneself, especially to the detriment of the other side. It is vital that all should feel equally secure, for the fears and anxieties of the nuclear age generate unpredictability in politics and concrete actions."

Though dismissing the policies that are pillars of Western security, containment and deterrence, Gorbachev's implicit call for strategic stability and renewed commitment to the SALT/START process elicited receptive reactions in many quarters in the West and holds out the possibility of compromise and accommodation in the arms control field. Unlike Khrushchev, whose main problem in the nuclear field was to catch up to the United States, Gorbachev has to keep abreast of qualitative advances. Concretely, he would like to contain the SDI genie in the laboratory in order to forestall a new escalation in defense expenditures and avoid straining the heavily burdened Soviet economy. He needs the respite to replace aging capital stock and physical plant and to train people to operate new capital equipment.

Gorbachev is better positioned militarily, but he faces tougher obstacles in arms control: the issues are more complex, more interrelated, more momentous in their potential consequences than in Khrushchev's day, thus his active efforts to exploit public diplomacy for wresting concessions from the United States at the negotiating table. In public, Gorbachev sounds flexible; in

private, the Soviet position is tough and inflexible, insisting that any deep cuts in offensive weapons must be preceded by agreed limits on the development of a space-based defense system.<sup>4</sup>

Gorbachev is more adept than Khrushchev in projecting an image of reasonableness and pragmatism abroad, but he is also far more respectful of the military and far less likely to be high-handed with them in his efforts to trim defense expenditures. Today, the military may be even more influential in commanding scarce resources, partly because of the U.S. arms buildup under the Reagan administration and partly because of the mushrooming costs of defense modernization. The world is a more dangerous place for the Soviet Union than it was in the 1950s. Then, the only military threat was the American nuclear capability, which, while real enough, was sheathed for deterrent purposes. In present circumstances, however, besides the ever-present nuclear problem, NATO forces are stronger, relative to Soviet bloc forces, than they were 30 years ago; China is an antagonist not an ally; the war in Afghanistan, in its eighth year, is an unanticipated drain; and commitments in different parts of the Third World complicate the military's preparedness posture.

Next, Gorbachev's foreign policy attitude toward the Third World is significantly different from Khrushchev's in taking the offensive and probing forcefully for advantage. It is not merely strategic denial that Moscow seeks, but strategic debasement—the weakening of U.S. policy regionally and globally, and the dissipation of its resources in areas of marginal utility to the Soviet Union. Judging by preliminary evidence, Gorbachev's inclination is to exploit further the cost-effective indirect strategy of frustrating U.S. policy and aggravating discord in the Western alliance that his predecessors stumbled upon and gave their consensual support to over a period of three decades.

Khrushchev's ventures in the Third World were an understandable defensive counter to the U.S. policy of containment. They also mirrored the man's optimism and ideological conviction of the inevitability of socialism as a socio-political system that would attract newly independent countries in the era of decolonization and aversion to capitalism. The heavy economic component of early Soviet assistance to Third World countries (India, Afghanistan, Indonesia, Burma, Egypt) was desired by the recipients and was consonant with Khrushchev's belief in the relevance of the Soviet model of development for Third World countries. Military assistance was not unimportant, but it was only one component of an overall courtship that aimed at diplomatic normalization and a political presence.

Gorbachev's situation is quite different. Over the past 20 years, the Soviet Union has developed a power projection capability to safeguard clients and influence events in ways that were previously beyond its ken; and the Third



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World environment within which it operates has undergone a polarization and militarization that enhance the value of what Moscow is best equipped to provide, namely, protection and method of institutionalizing power. The change in outlook in much of the Third World dovetails nicely with the strong military hand that Gorbachev has to play. Though prime clients such as Cuba and Vietnam receive economic assistance, Moscow's main contributions are military.

Since coming to power, Gorbachev's policy can be described as activist. Far more than was generally expected—given the enormity of the tasks facing him in consolidating his power, mobilizing the country for internal revitalization, preparing for the Twenty-seventh Party Congress, and dealing with the United States—he moved on a broad front, in ways that were fully in keeping with those of his predecessors. Besides expanding the scale of combat operations in Afghanistan during the past year, the U.S.S.R. has calculatedly fueled regional tensions: for example, in the Arab world, where Moscow considers Libya's Qaddafi and Syria's Hafez Assad "point-men" for disrupting U.S. policy and interests; in Angola, where arms transfers and involvement by Soviet personnel have increased; in the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, in Ethiopia and in Central America. There is no evidence to suggest basic shifts in policy toward any conflict, issue, or region. Indeed, Gorbachev is trying to widen the network of those with whom the Soviet Union has a comprehensive military, economic, and political relationship.

His activism in the Third World is generated by commitment to the underlying strategic rationale that was so persuasive for his predecessors, but that, more than ever before, relies on military power. Gone is the belief in the suitability of the Soviet model of development; gone is the perceived need to develop close economic ties as a condition for long-term, politically meaningful relationships; and gone, too, is the ideological optimism for socialism in our time.

Gorbachev's approach is dominated by strategic-military considerations. Equally important, he believes that these are what motivate Third World clients to look to the Soviet Union. The result is a reciprocal courtship that is mutually cynical in its outlook and expectations. Thus, unlike Khrushchev, with his hopes of a *de facto* alignment between the Soviet camp and the new nations based on shared ideological affinities, Gorbachev looks at the Third World without illusions and with a cold eye for strategic advantage.

Third, the Far East is a more serious foreign policy problem for Gorbachev than it was for Khrushchev. Sino-Soviet relations turned sour under Khrushchev, though not until the late 1950s. The twin shocks of de-Stalinization and *détente* with the West rocked Mao Tse-tung's belief in a bipolar world that would keep the Soviet Union and the United States ideological-political antagonists. When Khrushchev's espousal of "peaceful

coexistence" and doctrinal revision asserting that war was no longer "fatalistically inevitable"—the ideological rationale for Moscow's unwillingness to use its nuclear power on China's behalf to regain Taiwan—came into conflict with Mao's revolutionary line, then personal antipathies further worsened the deteriorating political relationship.

Khrushchev had no reason to fear China militarily; Gorbachev does. Indeed, for the first time since the 1920s and 1930s, a Soviet leadership has cause for concern over the threat to its security from an Asian power. Khrushchev squandered Stalin's bequest of a military-political alliance with a dependent, ideologically-congenial China. Gorbachev must find a way of restoring normalcy to a relationship that has profound implications for Moscow's future in the Far East and for U.S.-Soviet relations as well.

In a major speech delivered in Vladivostok on 28 July 1986, Gorbachev spoke of "the need for an urgent, radical break with many of the conventional approaches to foreign policy."<sup>5</sup> Comparing the situation in the Far East with that in Europe—obviously, with the U.S.S.R.'s two-front problem in mind—he noted that "the Pacific region as a whole is not yet militarized to the same extent as the European region," but the potential for this happening "is truly enormous and the consequences extremely dangerous." Insisting that the Soviet Union sought to improve bilateral relations with all the countries in the area, he addressed directly for the first time "the three obstacles" raised by the Chinese as preconditions for an improvement in Sino-Soviet relations: Mongolia, Afghanistan, and Kampuchea. He extended three conciliatory olive twigs, saying that "the question of withdrawing a considerable number of Soviet troops from Mongolia is being examined" by Moscow and Ulan Bator; that the Soviet Government would withdraw six regiments from Afghanistan by the end of 1986; and that the Kampuchean issue "depends on the normalization of Chinese-Vietnamese relations." He also called for expanded economic cooperation, noting that "the mutually complementary nature of the Soviet and Chinese economies which has been historically established, offers big opportunities for the expansion of these ties, including in the border region." Gorbachev held out the prospect of concessions on long-festered border issues and joint cooperation on an Amur River Basin waters project, a railroad linking the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region and Soviet Kazakhstan. He is saying all the right things, but one swallow does not a spring make.

There has been a flurry of economic activity and a modest expansion of trade and cultural contacts between the Soviet Union and China, but to become significant they must be impelled by a political will to normalize all aspects of the relationship. This has so far been absent because of China's insistence on progress in overcoming "the three obstacles." In the more than a decade since Mao died, Moscow has waited, largely in vain, for the

post-Mao leadership to reciprocate its interest in such a reconciliation. In the meantime, it has seen extraordinary leaps forward in Sino-American and Sino-Japanese relations, and in China's pace of economic modernization.

A massive military deployment, of proportions unknown in most of the Khrushchev era, defines Gorbachev's Far East policy. Accordingly, his efforts to improve relations with China and Japan founder on an inherent contradiction—Moscow professes goodwill but brandishes military power, including deployment of the SS-20 mobile intermediate-range ballistic missile, increase in the size of the Soviet Pacific Fleet, and acquisition of air and port facilities at Da Nang and Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam and Wattay Airport in Laos. To these must be added the continuously modernized conventional capabilities of the approximately 25 to 30 percent of its army and tactical aircraft positioned against China. Any meaningful improvement in Sino-Soviet economic and political relations would seem to be hostage to Moscow's penchant for relying on military power to foster diplomatic objectives. It will be interesting to see whether Gorbachev, in the interest of signalling peaceful intent to Beijing, significantly thins out the approximately 75,000 to 100,000 Soviet troops stationed in Mongolia—an area that is stable, securely in the Soviet camp, and not susceptible to Chinese inroads, much less Chinese threats.

Japan also poses problems for Gorbachev. His intense interest in enlisting Japan's assistance for the economic development of Siberia and exploiting Japanese-American trade tensions has witnessed no progress because of Japan's deep-rooted distrust of the Soviet Union. In particular, Japan fears the U.S.S.R.'s military threat to its sea-lanes of communication and Soviet political intransigence on the issue of the "northern territories" (the Soviet-occupied and militarized islands of Etorofu, Kunashiri, Shikotan and Habomai in the southern Kurils, off Hokkaidō). The Japanese remember Khrushchev's quip that the Soviet Union will return the northern territories "when shrimps learn to whistle." Their reservations about closer ties with the U.S.S.R. are not easily overcome by goodwill visits such as the one by Eduard Shevardnadze in January 1986, the first by a Soviet foreign minister in 10 years. Just as their suspicion of the Soviet Union is stronger than their desire for trade, the U.S.S.R.'s belief in the efficacy of power and pressure is stronger than its need for Japanese investment and technology. Moscow is patient. Soviet analysts have long insisted that Japan will have serious economic troubles with the United States and that these will inevitably bring Japan to look to the Soviet Union for trade and raw materials—and on Soviet terms.

This outlook highlights the final difference between the Khrushchev and Gorbachev eras. The overall strategic environment within which the Soviet-American rivalry operates has become far less congenial to the United States than formerly and perhaps better-suited to the advancement of Soviet rather

than American purposes. Relatively speaking, the Soviet Union's geostrategic, military, political, and even economic situation may be better off than that of the United States. Gorbachev's Soviet Union has major problems, but so does the United States. The U.S.S.R. is not a backward country. Indeed, in terms of resource potential, it may be far better positioned to expand its economic strength in the 21st century than any other country in the world. It alone is capable of pursuing a policy of autarchy. True, the Soviet economy lags perennially behind countries of the West and Japan, but to lag behind is not to falter. The Soviet Union can absorb increased military spending by squeezing a nationalistic and politically compliant population. Lagging behind the United States by 5 or even 10 years in high-tech military fields does not mean that the U.S.S.R. is becoming increasingly weaker militarily or unable to pursue the kinds of diverse policies that it has over the past 30 years. Gorbachev is realist enough to appreciate that Soviet militarism drains men and resources and keeps the U.S.S.R. from modernizing as extensively as he would like. Also, he is probably ideological enough to sense that the U.S. economy has profound problems (for example, the chronic U.S. balance of payments deficit, the Third World indebtedness, and the rising pressures for protectionism), any one of which could catapult the Western world into a depression having severe domestic social, economic, political, and military consequences. Though it is beyond the scope of this essay to explore which of the two superpowers will emerge in a stronger position at the end of the century or what the implications are of the various possibilities, such considerations must be part of broader speculations on the international environment in the year 2000.

My "guesstimates" of the Soviet Union's foreign policy in the year 2000 are predicated on a number of assumptions about the Soviet Union and its aims in world affairs. I shall note these at the outset to facilitate thought and analyses of their accuracy and implications for the constraints and choices affecting the Soviet leadership, and to contribute to our common quest for a clear perspective on the challenge that the Soviet Union poses for U.S. policymakers.

Initially, I assume that the Soviet Union is a territorially satisfied power and will not resort to a major war with the United States in order to acquire additional real estate, and that as long as its own core security community is not threatened, it will not seek to alter the superpower relationship or the international constellation of power by a nuclear strike or conventional war in Europe or the Far East.<sup>6</sup> This does not mean that it has become a status quo power, but rather that its approach to improving the strategic context within which it operates is minimalist, incremental, and opportunistic. The first and primary responsibility of Soviet power is preservation of the Soviet imperial order, and to that end the Kremlin seeks stability within its domain. However, as William E. Odom has written, a sullen, nationalistic, and

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generally anti-Russian Eastern Europe, "an exploited peasantry and industrial labor force, hostile national minorities, and a dissident intelligentsia confront the Politburo with ever-present potential for massive disorders and upheavals that threaten the regime."<sup>7</sup> The Soviet approach is the incredibly old-fashioned one of holding on to what it has through the use of overwhelming power.

Further, though not averse to seizing additional real estate along its periphery if circumstances permit, the Soviet Union has become basically an intrusive power, not an expansionist power. By this I mean that as we look ahead to the year 2000, there is no reason to believe its security needs and political ambitions will impel it toward additional territorial acquisitions. Afghanistan has given new impetus to the description of the Soviet Union as an expansionist power, and it is probably true that Moscow would not pass up an opportunity to gain control of parts of Iran or Pakistan should they disintegrate and ethnic separatism pave the way for the establishment of "people's republics" under Soviet control. Still, my argument is that present Soviet policy in Afghanistan is not indicative of Kremlin aims elsewhere in the Third World; if anything, the U.S.S.R.'s experience in Afghanistan may bring home to the Kremlin the exorbitant costs of new conquests and lead it, in the future, to move far more cautiously in comparable circumstances of great geostrategic temptation.

The aim of Moscow's intrusiveness in the Third World is influence, Afghanistan being an exception. What Moscow seeks above all, through establishment of a presence or an entrenched position, is to undermine, weaken, and drain U.S. power and prestige. It is this overriding strategic objective that lends coherence to all that the Soviet Union has done in the Third World since the mid-1950s. Through its multifaceted Third World policy, Moscow chanced on a cost-effective way of diverting American power to expendable areas of marginal interest, exacerbating anti-Americanism, and instigating the militarization that makes it a sought-after patron in regional conflicts.

The next assumption is the persistence of military considerations in Soviet foreign policy. This suggests a continued impasse in arms control and disarmament negotiations because there are no signs of any melioration of the fundamental asymmetries in Soviet and American approaches to such issues as deterrence, force deployments, weapons development, military expenditures, and perceptions of threat. Significant arms limitation seems remote, much less deep cuts in offensive nuclear forces.

Fourth, the new Soviet leaders are imbued with a strong pragmatic bent; they are realistic, tough, and will act on the world scene out of sober calculation. In Gorbachev we are witnessing the arrival at the top of the political hierarchy of the new generation—the class of the Twentieth Party

Congress era. This is the cohort that witnessed de-Stalinization and the lurch toward system-renewal, the reversion to neo-Stalinism and reimposition of Muscovite authority in Eastern Europe, the "loss" of China, and the stultifying spread of corruption and inefficiency in the economy and society. Gorbachev's men are the Soviet Union's "brightest and the best:" they are more educated, more confident, and committed to change, but they also have little interest in the "restructuring" of the political system that would diminish their power and status. Their predilection may well be toward extensive internal reform, but the aim is to improve the functioning of the system, not alter its essential institutional structure. They may be expected to keep a weather eye out for other signs of sudden danger so as to avoid a repetition of Khrushchev's misadventures with attempted decompression and decentralization.

Gorbachev may push "restructuring" at home, but we do not yet know whether he will be prepared to make major changes in foreign policy. As the case of Khrushchev showed, there is no necessary correlation between internal relaxation and moderation abroad; at a time when he was encouraging cultural liberalization at home, he was implanting missiles in Cuba.

Nor are ruminations about ideology of much practical help in evaluating the mainsprings of Soviet foreign policy. Attaching great importance to ideological considerations demonizes Soviet behavior unduly. The relevant postulates of Marxism-Leninism have by now been thoroughly Russified. In the main, Soviet moves have been based on shrewd assessments of regional and local politics, and power relationships, and on careful weighing of the opportunities and costs.

Finally, what Gorbachev does will depend not only on his ambitions and the Soviet Union's capabilities for exploiting opportunities abroad, but also on the West's responses to its own internal challenges and the problems of managing the international system that it dominates. What the West does, inevitably affects what the Soviet Union can or cannot do: cohesion in NATO and cooperation among the Western nations, whether on defense expenditures, interoperability, or trade, strengthen stability in Europe and enhance deterrence; closer ties between the West and the countries of the Pacific Basin hold the key to economic growth and political stability for both regions and could keep the Soviet bloc relegated to the margins of the world economy; and so on.

**W**hat, then, of the Soviet Union's foreign policy on the way to the year 2000? Extrapolation from the recent past is inevitable. The thrust of the analysis presented here is toward essential continuity in the decade or so ahead. After all, successive leaders from Khrushchev to Gorbachev have pursued objectives that, in their fundamentals, seem to have enjoyed

widespread support among the oligarchs in the party and the military; preservation of the imperial system in Eastern Europe; improved relations with the United States, including arms control agreements if possible; normalization of ties with China and Japan; and competitive rivalry with the United States in the Third World. Within each of these broad issue areas there is latitude for toughness or accommodation, forceful power projection or studied equivocation, expanded commitments or political diffidence. We can generally agree on what Soviet policy actually is, if not always on what motivates the leadership.

Gorbachev's style is new. It features skillful public relations, cultivation of an image of reasonableness, bold initiatives designed to exploit NATO divisions, and activism on a scale that suggests a man in charge. What is at issue is his intent. In this connection, it might be well to remember Andrei Gromyko's observation that Gorbachev is a man who smiles, yet whose smile has "iron teeth."

Gorbachev may want Western trade and technology and a respite from the escalating arms race, but the U.S.S.R.'s experience must make it wary of reliance on détente to obtain the assistance needed for modernization. Stabilizing the strategic arms race is high on Gorbachev's agenda, but the arms control and disarmament process has yet to produce much of substance. SALT II seems finished, at least in its unratified 1979 version, given the Reagan administration's action on 28 November 1986, breaching the treaty's numerical limits on offensive launchers by deploying a new B-52 bomber equipped with ACLMs. In September 1986, a compromise document was crafted at the Stockholm Conference on European Security, calling for on-site inspections to guard against surprise attack by conventional forces in Central Europe; and at various times in late 1986, hints of progress were aired at the ongoing Intermediate Range Nuclear Force negotiations in Geneva, the Mutual Force Reduction talks in Vienna, and the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks in Geneva. However, post-Reykjavik follow-on agreements are conspicuous by their absence, and prospects are further dimmed by President Reagan's uncertain leadership in the wake of the festering Irangate affair. With these issues unresolved and looming as items for the agenda of the next U.S. President, the Soviet leadership may decide to focus on developing its own enormous but underdeveloped natural resources.

It will be years before the fate of Gorbachev's economic restructuring is known. That policy has three main components: institutional change relating to the issue of centralization versus decentralization; managerial authority with its tie-in to the entire incentive system; and correlation of the pricing mechanism and the flow of information. How this three-fold process of incipient and extensive change might affect foreign policy issues is simply impossible to hazard at this early date. For the foreseeable future, therefore, the dictates of geography and established approaches to security and transactions with the outside world should be the principal criteria used to speculate about Soviet policy.

The Gorbachev generation is not one to skimp on the military. It seems to possess the determination to do whatever is required to maintain strategic nuclear equivalence with the United States and to bear any cost that will ensure the "equal security" it considers vital for its national security. The old Russian maxim, "Better one army too many, than one division too few," is as operative today as in the past.

The area of the world that seems least likely to experience a withdrawal or diminution of Soviet power is Eastern Europe. Soviet domination of Eastern and Central Europe will remain nonnegotiable. Moscow will not relinquish strategic-military control over its forward positions in Europe; nor will it, under any circumstances that can be imagined in the years ahead, permit the reunification of Germany. Whatever the costs of empire, they will be borne in the center of Europe because the Soviets have come to perceive this area as vital for the stability and preservation of their imperial system.

Toward Western Europe, Soviet aims will remain the same. They are the derangement of NATO; perpetuation of a favorable military balance through an adroit and adapting mixture of force modernization, a strong forward deployment in Central Europe (long a cardinal tenet of Russian military doctrine), and diplomatic blandishments; improved relations with the main European actors, with special attention to economic ties; and maintenance of a friendly and nonnuclear Federal Republic of Germany. Overall, Soviet strategy is to induce docility rather than press for dominion. For the foreseeable future, it seems wedded to the same general approach in the 1990s that brought it such handsome benefits in the 1970s.

Nationalism in the empire is an old Russian bogey. It is an ever-present challenge to the stability of Russian rule. In Eastern Europe it bedevils Moscow's quest for economic integration and haunts the contingency planning of the Soviet General Staff which must continually worry about the reliability of the East European forces in the Warsaw Pact under varying conditions of danger. Barring an upheaval inside the Soviet Union—an unlikely development—the region will remain Soviet-controlled and communist, but divided, dispirited and, for the most part, profoundly antipathetical to the Soviet Union. In the absence of an extensive rejuvenation of the Soviet economy, including a significant dismantling of the Soviet command economy model and the confining political system that goes with it, the prospects in Soviet-East European relations "are for continued heavy Soviet subsidies and persistent instability in Eastern Europe as a result of unsolved economic problems."<sup>8</sup>

Soviet policy in the Third World is not apt to change significantly under Gorbachev. It has proven itself time and again to be a cost-effective way of weakening U.S. power at the center by engaging in a low-cost, low-risk, highly intensive pattern of substrategic interaction. Unlike Europe or the Far East, where relatively stable political-military constellations or entities



coincide generally with territorially-delineated centers of established authority, the Middle East, Southern Asia, Africa, and Central America are characterized by unanticipated dealignment and systemic instability, and are therefore natural arenas for superpower rivalry, with minimal risk of direct confrontation.

Notwithstanding his visit to India in November 1986 and a pending visit to Latin America in 1987, Gorbachev has devoted relatively little attention to the Third World; but this merely means that his priorities are elsewhere—domestic problems, U.S.-Soviet relations, and nuclear issues. It does not signify retrenchment or curtailment of commitments. Nowhere in the Third World has the Soviet outreach been reined in, not even slightly. Economic difficulties at home are no apparent bar to continuation of present policy, which is predominately military in character. If no new ventures have been undertaken, it is only because no promising opportunities have presented themselves to Soviet leaders for possible underwriting. I see no predisposition to disengage from entrenched or forward positions in the Third World because of “Gorbachev’s goal of concentrating on economic reforms and performance at home” or pessimism over the prospects of the countries with a “socialist orientation” or a desire for better relations with the United States.<sup>9</sup>

Afghanistan is a case in point. The war is in its eighth year, and still there is no end in sight. Gorbachev periodically hints that he seeks a political solution that would allow Soviet troops to be withdrawn. An end to the Soviet occupation would be an unmistakable demonstration of the “new political thinking” that Gorbachev says is necessary and an invitation for a new beginning in Soviet-American relations. But his actions since coming to power, and especially in 1986, bespeak a steely determination to keep the Afghan Communists in power and Moscow in possession of this strategically valuable real estate at the gateway to South Asia and the Persian Gulf. Mongolianization is his model, not Finlandization.

Gorbachev is more open than his predecessors in acknowledging the political and military difficulties that Moscow faces. At the Twenty-seventh Party Congress in February 1986, he called Afghanistan “a bleeding wound” and in late October permitted television coverage of the pullback of 8,000 of the estimated 125,000 Soviet troops. But his “*glasnost*” or “openness,” of which so much is made in the West, turns out, on closer examination, to be mostly shrewd, self-serving public relations; unfortunately, the Soviet word *glasnost* means not only openness but publicity.

Gorbachev’s aim has been to consolidate Soviet domination, not relinquish it. Politically, he has shaken up the Afghan Communist leadership. The old guard, which was useful in undermining the monarchy and seizing power in 1978, is being replaced by younger, tougher cadres. In May 1986, Babrak Karmal resigned as head of the ruling People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan in favor of Najibullah, the mononymous chief of the Soviet-

created secret police. The 40-year-old Najibullah, a Moscow-trained protégé, is less directly linked to the Soviet Union's military invasion in December 1979. No doubt, Gorbachev hopes Najibullah will prove more effective in suppressing both the mujaheddin and factionalism in the party.

He rests his expectation of eventual victory on two assumptions. The first is that, militarily, there is no possibility of the freedom-fighters ever defeating the Soviet Union and, second, that in time, co-optation and Sovietization will take root. It seems Gorbachev intends the outcome of Afghanistan to be no different from the results Russia achieved elsewhere in Central Asia more than a century ago when the Czarist General M.S. Skobelev gave his formula for conquest and pacification, "I hold it as a principle that in Asia the duration of peace is in direct proportion to the slaughter you inflict upon the enemy. The harder you hit them, the longer they will be quiet afterward."

**S**oviet leaders are perennially probing for advantage, for improvement in the strategic environment that can facilitate attainment of a range of foreign policy goals. Though strategic advantage is often easier to identify than define, the past 30 years of involvement in the Third World have been years of accomplishment, and the expectation, plausible in view of the parlous state of affairs in regions such as the Middle East and Central America, is for further gains in the years ahead. Of course, there have been setbacks and there may be some pruning, but major stakes seem likely to be backed. Moscow's general strategic outlook on the Third World is bullish.

Assuming continuity to be the pattern of Gorbachev's policy in the Third World, as I do, then there is little likelihood of any significant improvement in Soviet-American relations. Détente collapsed in the 1970s because of Soviet imperial greed. Starting with the 1973 October War, the Soviet leadership saw the defense of existing relationships in the Arab world as more important than the prospective advantages of cooperating with the United States to stop a dangerous regional conflict and nurture the relaxation ushered in by the SALT I accords. Since then, the Kremlin has availed itself of every opportunity to interfere in a regional conflict, despite the adverse effects this would have on its relationship with the United States. The list is long and need not be elaborated—the U.S.S.R.'s intervention in Angola with a large Cuban force; its massive projection of military power in Ethiopia in 1977 and decision to remain there even though the regime is no longer threatened; its invasion of Afghanistan; its upgrading of Syria's military power far beyond the requirements of deterrence; its sale of advanced weaponry to Libya in circumstances of tension between the United States and Libya; and its carefully engineered military strengthening of Nicaragua in disdain of the priority that Reagan attached to the issue. Moscow has consistently permitted its Third World policy to disrupt relations with the United States.

If, however, Gorbachev is serious about wanting better relations, the Third World will be the likely place to begin. It is there that the stakes are expendable, the effects on Soviet security negligible, and the moderation of policy likely to bring benefits in the form of Western credits and trade. Nowhere could a signal of intent be so clearly sent. Afghanistan would be an obvious point of departure, as would Nicaragua, and at far less strategic cost.

Gorbachev has set himself the formidable task of modernizing Soviet society, of bringing it into the 21st century. Given this concentration on renewal at home, it would make a great deal of sense to maintain course abroad, and especially to focus efforts on improving the Soviet position in Northern and Central Europe, the Far East, and along the southern tier of the U.S.S.R. Rivalry with the United States will go on, but barring unplanned and uncontrollable cataclysmic developments threatening Soviet stability or the security of the Soviet empire, the prognosis for the foreign policy of Gorbachev, or his successor, to the year 2000, is for the continuity of core interests.

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### Notes

1. Quoted in John Lukacs, *A History of the Cold War*, (New York: Doubleday, 1966), p. 250.
2. For example, see *Pravda*, 21 June 1985.
3. Vladimir V. Kusin, "Gorbachev and East Europe," *Problems of Communism*, January-February 1986, p. 53.
4. British Ambassador Bryan Carthedge reported, after a meeting with Gorbachev on 15 December 1986, that the Soviet party leader specifically tied agreement to eliminate medium-range nuclear weapons in Europe to restraints on the U.S. SDI program. *Washington Times*, 17 December 1986, p. 7C.
5. The quotes from Gorbachev's Vladivostok speech are taken from the text translated by FBIS/U.S.S.R. National Affairs, 29 July 1986, R11-R18.
6. Alvin Z. Rubinstein, *Soviet Foreign Policy Since World War II: Imperial and Global* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1985), p. 300.
7. William E. Odom, "Whither the Soviet Union?" *The Washington Quarterly*, Spring 1981, p. 38.
8. Herbert J. Ellison, "On Eastern Europe: The Economics of Politics," *Parameters*, Summer 1984, p. 22.
9. For a well-argued contrary argument, see Elizabeth K. Valkenier, "Revolutionary Change in the Third World: Recent Soviet Reassessments," *World Politics*, April 1986, pp. 415-434.

