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SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY UNDER  
GORBACHEV

by Arnold L. Horelick

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# Soviet Foreign Policy Under Gorbachev

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In the early 1980s the image of the Soviet Union that was at once the 'strongest military power in a world' yet at the same time an 'economic basket case' became the point of departure for a great deal of prognostication and punditry. Allowing for exaggeration in at least one if not both parts of the cliché, the disparity between the Soviet Union's success in amassing military power and its failure in virtually every other sphere of national performance described a paradox of enormous significance for the future of both the USSR and the world order.

Precisely what that significance may be was then and remains today a matter of great uncertainty and debate. In the early 1980s some argued that the leaders of a militarily powerful but internally weakened USSR were more likely than ever to resort to external aggression in order to seize crucial new geopolitical positions and resources before their own declining domestic capabilities and more competitive Western adversaries closed their 'window of opportunity'. Since the most striking new evidence of Soviet decline at that time - the CIA's forecast of an imminent downturn in Soviet oil production - coincided roughly with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, this belief led to predictions of a dramatic Soviet breakout into the Persian Gulf calculated to deal a mortal blow to the oil-hungry West.

Others foresaw precisely the opposite Soviet behavior. Anxiety about the progressive weakening of the USSR's domestic foundations would compel Soviet leaders to turn inward, pare down external ambitions, and make concessions to secure access to the Western capital and technology needed to modernize the faltering Soviet economy.

Soviet behavior thus far in the 1980s has clearly refuted the dire predictions of the pessimists. The optimists' predictions have not been so starkly falsified, but they have also not been fully borne out. There was no major Soviet geopolitical advance into the Persian Gulf or elsewhere, but neither were there any major Soviet retreats. Leaders of Brezhnev's generation stubbornly resisted the idea that the Soviet domestic predicament was so grave as to require either radical internal repairs or major adjustments in Soviet external behavior.

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In the year and a half since he took over the reins of leadership, Gorbachev, by contrast, has repeatedly made clear his conviction that deteriorating domestic conditions endanger not only the future prosperity of the Soviet Union, but also its status as a world power. 'What is at stake today,' Gorbachev has told the party, 'is the ability of the Soviet Union to enter the new millenium in a manner worthy of a great and prosperous power . . . Without the hard work and complete dedication of each and every one it is not even possible to preserve what has been achieved.' To paraphrase Solzhenitsyn, Gorbachev seems to be saying that to remain a great power the Soviet Union must now become a great country.

The revised Soviet party program adopted at the CPSU's XXVIIIth Congress in February calls the USSR's attainment of strategic parity with the United States 'the historic achievement' of socialism. Brezhnev will be remembered by his heirs as the leader who permitted the stagnation of the Soviet economy and the demoralization of Soviet society while presiding over that historic achievement, an achievement, moreover, that failed to yield the expected foreign policy payoffs.

The Third World prizes of Soviet expansion in the 1970s have become not promising outposts for further expansion, but besieged, unstable client regimes struggling to survive against anti-Communist national liberation movements their rule has spawned. It is true that the massive military buildup of the Brezhnev era substantially altered global and regional military balances in the Soviet Union's favor; but it clearly did not buy for the Soviet Union enhanced political influence commensurate with its increased power. Most importantly, it did not secure from Western Europe the deference that Soviet leaders believed was their due in the light of the changed correlation of forces. In the crucial test of Moscow's pretensions to play the role of Europe's security manager, the Soviet Union failed in the early 1980s to head off the deployment of US intermediate range missiles in Europe. This failure to translate raw military power into political influence has been the Soviet leadership's greatest foreign policy frustration and the main impetus for Gorbachev's 'new thinking' about international security issues.

What Brezhnev's military buildup and muscular displays in the Third World did produce, however, was a powerful American backlash, which began to build in Carter's last years and was greatly broadened and accelerated under Reagan. Ironically, this backlash began to gather momentum precisely at the time when Moscow had begun to slow the rate of its own military growth in response to the Soviet economy's slowdown. And it grew in strength precisely at a time when the USSR was less well disposed to match it. In the mid-1980s, Brezhnev's heirs confront what they see as serious challenges to the the Soviet Union's military gains of the seventies.

In the strategic nuclear area, a whole series of US modernization programs

have already begun to yield new, highly capable deployed systems. Expensively acquired Soviet advantages in prompt hard-target counterforce and long-awaited improvements in homeland air defense appear destined to disappear as the United States proceeds with its strategic modernization efforts. The fielding by the US of highly accurate ICBMs and SLBMs equipped with multiple warheads will increasingly place at risk the large silo-based ICBM force that is the cornerstone of Soviet strategic nuclear prowess.

In the theater nuclear arena, the failure of Soviet efforts to derail NATO's INF decision has led to the reappearance in Europe of US missiles capable of striking the Soviet Union. The deployment of American Pershing II ballistic missiles and ground-launched cruise missiles substantially reduces both the political and military advantages Moscow had hoped to enjoy by augmenting its long-range theater nuclear capabilities with massive SS-20 deployments. For the Soviet Union, the net outcome of the INF controversy will be a setback whether or not there is an INF arms control agreement that reduces or eliminates US missiles in Europe. While 'zero/zero' is now surely the preferred Soviet INF arms control outcome, it is a drastic comedown from the monopolistic Euromissile position enjoyed by the USSR until the end of 1983.

In Europe, moreover, where extensive modernization of Soviet forces enlarged the margin of Soviet conventional warfare advantages substantially in the 1970s, new NATO 'deep strike' concepts and technologies for implementing them could, if successfully developed, challenge the viability of Soviet military strategy for Europe (specifically, Soviet assumptions about NATO's inability to break up or slow down decisively a massive Soviet conventional campaign with conventional forces only). While this challenge to Soviet conventional war strategy seems improbable, or at least still quite remote, in Western eyes, the potential of Western technology to revolutionize theater war has captured the attention of Soviet military professionals, most notably Marshal Ogarkov, formerly chief of the general staff and now commander of the Western Military Theater.

Among looming military threats, there is now above all the Strategic Defense Initiative, which arouses Soviet concerns along a number of dimensions. First, concern about SDI as a range of potentially deployable multilayered space-based ballistic missile defense systems of varying degrees of potential effectiveness; second, about SDI as the leading edge of a broadly based US military technology effort featuring sensors, computers, computer programming, signal processing, and exotic kill mechanisms, not limited in military application to space-based ballistic missile defense; and, third, about SDI as the technological centerpiece of a broad global US political, military, and economic challenge to the hard-won geopolitical and strategic Soviet gains of the past two decades, a challenge that threatens the superpower status of the USSR at a time when it is hard put to make massive new exertions merely to hold its own in the world.

The combination of what is perceived as a gathering challenge to the most important Soviet military gains of the past and a conviction that the rebuilding of the USSR's weakened domestic base can no longer be delayed shapes Gorbachev's foreign policy and impels it to pursue proximate objectives that are largely defensive.

Gorbachev's first priority in foreign policy is to consolidate weak or threatened positions. Closest to home, this clearly applies to Eastern Europe. The prolonged and still not fully resolved Polish crisis has made a deeply unsettling impression on the Soviet leaders. It was probably the single most preoccupying external policy issue on the agenda during Gorbachev's break-in years in Moscow. (He was first brought from the provinces into the Central Committee Secretariat in 1978.) The challenge for Gorbachev is to find ways to keep the populations of Eastern Europe pacified without increasing Soviet subsidies, risking politically dangerous reforms, or permitting excessive levels of economic intercourse with the West.

Initially there was widespread concern in Eastern Europe – fueled by pointed Soviet press criticisms of local reforms – that a new, more vigorous Soviet leader would tighten Warsaw Pact discipline and insist on greater Bloc uniformity in domestic policies. These concerns have not materialized. In fact, Gorbachev appears generally to be giving East European leaders their head, indicating Soviet readiness to go along with established policy directions so long as local leaders stay out of trouble. With varying degrees of enthusiasm, he has conferred his blessing on all of the fraternal party leaders, reserving his most demonstrative support for General Jaruzelski, despite the highly unorthodox character both of the Polish regime and many of its policies. So long as Gorbachev continues to pursue vigorously his policy of political engagement and detente with Western Europe, and so long as local leaders avoid new major upsets, a harsh Soviet tightening of the screws in Eastern Europe is unlikely.

Even before Gorbachev's investiture an increasingly skeptical view of Soviet prospects in the Third World was evident in Moscow. Earlier it had been hoped that the creation of Marxist-Leninist 'vanguard parties' in Soviet client states would solve the problem of securing long-term Soviet influence and reliable outposts for further expansion. Bitter experience in the 1980s has brought a deeper Soviet appreciation that influence in the Third World is limited without control and that control can either not be attained at all in remote areas or is too costly compared to what it can buy.

At a minimum, Gorbachev will be more selective than his predecessors in the Brezhnev era about making new commitments and he will be more sensitive to the economic and political costs of making bad choices. If challenged frontally by the United States in any region where Soviet interests can readily be defended – e.g., in Afghanistan and perhaps Angola, but not in

Nicaragua – Moscow may well respond defiantly. But if their credibility is not placed under severe challenge and if ripe fruits do not simply fall into their lap, Soviet leaders will for the time being prefer to avoid new and costly involvements in the Third World.

Toward the West, the circumstances argue above all for a Soviet policy aimed at breaking the momentum of what Moscow sees as Washington's global counteroffensive, and particularly at containing the security challenge of US and NATO military programs. Gorbachev is not likely to 'yield to provocations' by Washington and will seek to avoid both political and military confrontation. He will prefer to moderate the US military challenge by political means because meeting it head on with a 'crash' defense effort requiring a major reallocation of scarce technology resources would be highly disruptive to his program of economic modernization and growth acceleration. It would probably foredoom his already over-ambitious five year plan. And it would impair his efforts to deal with the US challenge politically.

While loath to use a term that conjures up historic images of truly desperate circumstances in Soviet history, Gorbachev in fact would like what Lenin called a *peredyshka*, that is, a respite from the heavy American competitive pressures that threaten to divert Soviet resources and energies from what are for the time being the more urgent tasks of rebuilding the bases of Soviet power.

Gorbachev's dilemma is that he must seek a *peredyshka* without seeming too eager for it. Lenin unabashedly sought a breathing spell after the revolution and civil war when Russia was palpably weak, lacking external assets or commitments, and with nothing at stake beyond sheer survival. Gorbachev must worry about the Soviet Union's empire, its credibility as a superpower, and his own reputation as the new leader of a proud and mighty state.

To this difficult foreign policy challenge, Gorbachev has brought a verve and energy long absent in Moscow and a flair for public diplomacy well attuned to the television age. He has already profoundly altered the style of Soviet foreign policy, modernizing and superficially 'Westernizing' it to make it more competitive in the arena of Western opinion where the central East-West political struggle is waged. That parliaments and publics in the democratic West are the most salient objects of both Eastern and Western foreign policies, while the internal Eastern arena remains essentially inaccessible to the West and readily controllable by the East is, of course, the cardinal structural asymmetry of the East-West competition. Gorbachev and his lieutenants are especially sensitive to this inherent Soviet advantage. They seem strongly determined to exploit this asymmetry so as to constrain the foreign policies of Western governments in ways that serve – or at least limit the damage to – Soviet interests.

Within four months of his election as party General Secretary, Gorbachev

made it clear that he intended to take personal charge of the conduct of Soviet foreign policy. The key change, paving the way for many other personnel and organizational changes that followed in the Soviet foreign policy machinery, was his 'promotion' of Andrei Gromyko to the largely ceremonial post of chairman of the USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium (titular president of the Soviet Union) and his replacement as foreign minister by Eduard Shevardnadze, long-time party chief in Georgia.

Gromyko had been foreign minister for more than a quarter of a century, but it was only after his elevation to the Politburo in 1973 that his influence as a maker rather than mere executor of Soviet foreign policy began to grow. During the ensuing years of growing Politburo decrepitude under a succession of ailing general secretaries, Gromyko's control of Soviet foreign policy grew progressively, along with his Politburo seniority. His replacement was essential for Gorbachev if the new leader was to place his own mark on the conduct of Soviet external affairs and begin to change the stodgy and stereotyped image of the USSR abroad.

The replacement of Gromyko cleared the way for the most thorough and far-reaching restaffing and reorganization of the Soviet foreign policy decision-making structure in post-war Soviet history. This foreign policy *perestroika* culminated in the designation after the XXVIIth CPSU Congress earlier this year of Anatoly Dobrynin to head the Central Committee's International Department (ID). Two things are especially notable about these changes. The first is the strengthening of the party's ID and the substantial broadening of its responsibilities, particularly with respect to Soviet state-to-state relations with the United States and Western Europe, a province that is technically beyond the jurisdiction of the ID. Dobrynin obviously was not appointed to head the ID because of any deep knowledge of the American or other Communist Parties in the West, much less of revolutionary movements in the Third World.

The second notable feature of the foreign policy *perestroika* is the deliberate blurring of the division of labor between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the party's ID. The MFA is headed by a foreign policy novice who has spent most of his professional life in the police and party apparatus of a small Soviet republic remote from Moscow. The ID, on the other hand, is headed by the man who was the Soviet Union's senior career diplomat and never worked a day in the party apparatus before his recall to Moscow by Gorbachev. Dobrynin's principal deputy in the ID is Georgii Korniyenko, formerly the first deputy foreign minister under Gromyko and also a former Washington embassy subordinate of Dobrynin. Another former Dobrynin subordinate, Yuli Vorontsov, has been elevated to the position of first deputy in the MFA under Shevardnadze. Other MFA officials with experience in American affairs have also been promoted to more senior positions in the

ministry. At the same time, the International Information Department of the Central Committee, to which principal responsibility for publicizing and propagandizing Soviet foreign policy had been assigned in 1978, has been disbanded and its former head, Leonid Zamyatin, packed off to London as the new Soviet ambassador. Its responsibilities have evidently been divided between the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee, supervised by Aleksandr Yakovlev, a Gorbachev favorite, and a newly created Information Department of the MFA, headed by Gennadiy Gerasimov, who has emerged as the principal government spokesmen on foreign affairs.

A case could be made that under Gorbachev the ID of the Central Committee has become the USSR's chief organ for formulating broad foreign policy strategy, while the MFA attends more narrowly to policy implementation. This would be in keeping both with the end of the anomalous late-Gromyko period of exaggerated MFA influence and with the exceptional, exclusively party-based character of Gorbachev's formal institutional power. Gorbachev is the first party general secretary since Brezhnev displaced Podgorny as head of state in 1977 who has not simultaneously occupied the post of chairman of the USSR Presidium of the Supreme Soviet (president of the Soviet Union). In this connection, it may be noteworthy that three of the five senior members of the Soviet delegation that accompanied Gorbachev to Reykjavik, where he met the US President in his capacity as Party General Secretary, were Central Committee officials (Dobrynin, Yakovlev, and Chernyaev), the other two being Shevardnadze and Marshal Sergei Akhromeev, chief of the General Staff.

In reality, however, the picture is not quite so clearly defined. Dobrynin, a Party Central Committee secretary and department head, but not a member of the Politburo, is de facto and de jure subordinate to Gorbachev, the general secretary. Foreign Minister Shevardnadze, on the other hand, is the only foreign policy official who is a full member of the Politburo, where he is formally coequal with Gorbachev. The division of labor between the ID and the MFA probably reflects the personal and political dynamics among the foreign policy barons and Gorbachev more than it does their formal charters and organizational wiring charts.

The clearest implication of this restructuring of the Soviet foreign policy machine is a further downgrading in the priority of the Third World in Soviet foreign policy and of proletarian internationalist theology in the preoccupations of the senior Soviet foreign policy apparatchiks. This seems generally accepted by Western analysts, but the priorities of Soviet foreign policy with respect to different states in the First and Second Worlds have been a matter of some controversy in the West.

Periodically, Gorbachev has implied that he will seek to de-emphasize the centrality of Soviet relations with the United States. 'The world', he said at the

XXVIIth Party Congress, 'is much larger than the United States'. One of his key advisers, Yakovlev, has on occasion all but called openly for a policy of 'Europe first'. The past year has also seen a widely publicized Soviet effort to activate Moscow's diplomacy in the Far East, with renewed overtures to China and Japan.

The high point of that effort was a major Gorbachev speech in Vladivostok last July in which he offered the first concrete unilateral Soviet concession to China on a key security issue. His announcement that the USSR was 'discussing with Mongolia' the withdrawal of a 'considerable part' of Soviet troops from that country, spoke to a longstanding Chinese security complaint. The Chinese response to this and other gestures toward the PRC by Gorbachev has thus far been cautious and somewhat skeptical about the readiness of the USSR to go beyond relatively painless small concessions in meeting China's demand for the removal of the 'three obstacles' to fully normalized Sino-Soviet relations (Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, Soviet support for Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia, and the threatening Soviet military posture along the Sino-Soviet border, including Mongolia). The modest but perceptible improvement in Sino-Soviet relations that has occurred in the past few years seems not so much a consequence of Chinese responsiveness to particular Soviet initiatives as a reflection of the Chinese leadership's own preference for a relaxation of tensions with the USSR while it attends to the priority Chinese program of economic modernization.

Toward other major states in the Asia-Pacific region, Gorbachev offered little but a more conciliatory tone. While he dangled before the Japanese the prospect of a summit meeting in Tokyo, he made it clear that return of the Northern Territories - Japan's key demand for an improvement in relations - was not on the agenda; he urged the Japanese instead not to permit present prospects for improvement to be 'burdened with the past'. So while Gorbachev has taken a small but potentially important new step toward China, and has displayed a much greater sensitivity than his predecessors to symbolic issues important to many Asian states (e.g., granting permission to Japanese to visit ancestral graves in the Northern Territories), it is not yet clear whether he is any more willing or able than his predecessors to make the hard compromises that a substantial improvement of the Soviet position in Asia would require.

Toward Europe, Gorbachev's diplomacy has surely been bolder and more flexible than his predecessors, but it remains to be seen whether it will be more successful. Recent important Soviet moves toward Europe in arms control reflect a failure on the part of Gorbachev and his advisors to comprehend how Europeans view their security dilemma, and, flowing from that failure, a series of miscalculations in fashioning arms control proposals meant to appeal to Europeans. In October 1985 he greatly diminished the attractiveness of his

first radical proposal for a 'deep cut' in strategic nuclear arms by leaving the huge Soviet intermediate range missile force out of the package. He compounded the error in Paris by practically inviting President Mitterand publicly to rebuff his proposal for separate negotiations on French and British nuclear forces. In January 1986 he may have thought he was correcting the October mistake by proposing a radical 'zero/zero' INF solution in Europe, along with a freeze of French and British forces. If so, he again badly misjudged the European reaction to a Soviet offer that came more than three years too late, that is, after the trauma of US INF deployment had already been absorbed and fear of 'decoupling' had become the most salient concern. He has similarly antagonized West Europeans by first offering to delink a prospective agreement on INF missiles from the negotiations on strategic weapons and space arms and then, at the Reykjavik meeting, when agreement on INF seemed within reach, once more relinking INF to START and space weapons.

At bottom, despite all the talk about shifting to a more Euro- or Asian-centered orientation, Soviet foreign policy under Gorbachev is, if anything, more preoccupied with the United States than before. Gromyko's departure from the foreign ministry last year was not the harbinger of a Soviet downgrading of relations with Washington, as some Western observers supposed it might be. A day after Shevardnadze replaced Gromyko, Moscow announced that Gorbachev and Reagan would hold the first summit meeting of Soviet and American leaders in more than six years. Gorbachev went to the Geneva summit without having secured in advance any of the concessions he sought, and he joined the US president in assessing positively a meeting that was conducted on an American agenda without any major substantive agreements that addressed Soviet concerns. In February 1986, he made Dobrynin, the Soviet official most deeply identified with US relations, the senior party apparatchik with foreign policy responsibilities. Then, having failed after the Geneva summit to secure advance assurances about American readiness to reach minimum agreements he insisted were needed to justify a second meeting in Washington, and in the face of what he interpreted as a series of US provocations, he proposed a 'preliminary' meeting with Reagan in Iceland without prior conditions. And when this meeting broke up after Reagan refused, despite major new Soviet concessions on offensive arms, to accept Gorbachev's demands for severe limitations on SDI, the Soviet leader announced his readiness to continue the dialogue and to leave on the table in Geneva the concessions he had offered at Hofdi House.

This is not the behavior of a Soviet leader who has decided to deemphasize the centrality of the United States in Soviet foreign policy. It also seems clear that, at least as late as the mid-point of Reagan's second term, Gorbachev has rejected the alternative of 'waiting out' the incumbent American president to deal with an almost certainly less popular and possibly more receptive successor.

If the United States remains at the center of Gorbachev's foreign policy, arms control is at the center of his American policy. This is the area of foreign policy where Gorbachev has made the most substantial innovations and changes in policy directions. Under his leadership, not only the style but also the substance of Soviet arms control diplomacy have been dramatically altered. Historically, the Soviets have preferred in arms control negotiations to respond to American initiatives and not to break new conceptual ground themselves. They have clung doggedly to positions once taken and have altered their proposals only slowly and incrementally. And when forced in the past to choose between constraining the United States or protecting existing Soviet forces and ongoing Soviet programs, Moscow almost invariably opted for the latter.

The series of Gorbachev proposals during the past year go precisely in the opposite direction: to break the back of the challenge posed by the SDI, and to slow down US strategic modernization generally. Gorbachev in October 1985 offered radical reductions in Soviet offensive forces that went very far beyond any cuts previously proposed or even rumored by Moscow. His proposed reductions included a 'concentration rule' that would in effect have required a reduction of between 40 and 50 percent in Soviet ICBM warheads and a comparable associated reduction in Soviet ICBM throwweight - the principal objectives of US strategic arms control policy since 1977. In January 1986, Gorbachev offered to eliminate entirely the force of some 270 triple-MIRVed SS-20 Soviet missiles targeted on Europe in return for the elimination of the smaller US INF force being deployed and for a freeze on British and French independent nuclear forces. Whatever the net political-military gain that Moscow presumably saw in such a trade - presumably from the 'decoupling' effect on NATO that withdrawal of US INF systems would entail - the offer to eliminate the entire Soviet SS-20 force in Europe represented a radical break with past Soviet military and arms control policies and suggested that Gorbachev, under conditions of the 1980s, sees arms control tradeoffs differently from his predecessors.

Then again in June 1986, the Soviet Union added to its previous proposal trading 'deep reductions' in offensive weapons for the total and permanent banning of SDI-like research, testing, and deployment, more modest cuts in offensive forces in return for constraints on space weapons that would not preclude the ultimate deployment of SDI-like systems. At Reykjavik in October, Gorbachev evidently decided to 'go for broke,' or at least to convey the impression that he was doing so. He presented a package deal intended either to induce US concessions on SDI in exchange for attractive new Soviet offers on offensive weapons, or to place the entire onus for failing to reach agreement on President Reagan and his attachment to the vision of an impenetrable space shield. In the end Gorbachev failed on both scores.

In the arms control poker game he played in Reykjavik, the Soviet leader anted up a series of new concessions on offensive arms which surprised even the most case-hardened American negotiators. On INF he accepted British and French nuclear forces without compensation or restriction; and he agreed to an 80 percent reduction in Soviet INF warheads deployed in Asia and accorded Washington the right to deploy an equal number of INF warheads in the United States.

On START, Gorbachev and his representatives agreed to a US-proposed goal of 6000 strategic warheads and 1600 strategic delivery systems and to a number of critically important new metrics and counting rules that were major concessions to the United States. Thus, the Soviets dropped their long-standing demand that US weapons deployed on forward-based systems capable of striking the USSR be counted against the strategic weapons aggregate. They also dropped their demand that sea-launched cruise missiles (SLCM) be counted against that aggregate, proposing instead that SLCMs be dealt with in a separate agreement. Marshal Akhromeev himself negotiated with Paul Nitze a provision for counting bomber weapons that would radically affect the numbers in the US favor. Previously and throughout the START negotiations, the Soviet side had insisted that bomber weapons (gravity bombs and short-range attack missiles) be counted one-for-one along with ballistic missile warheads and air-launched cruise missiles. This would have exacted a huge penalty on the United States, which has many more bombers in its strategic force than does the Soviet Union and relies more heavily on the bomber leg of its strategic triad. At Reykjavik, the Soviet Union agreed to a counting rule that would charge each heavy bomber carrying non-ALCM weapons with only one weapon (as opposed to what would have been 10 to 20 under the old Soviet proposal). Finally, the Soviet side also agreed for the first time to accept a sub-limit on heavy ICBMs, a sub-limit they have rejected for more than a decade as discriminating against their SS-18 force, which is, of course, the point of the sub-limit.

Why these changes in Soviet arms control diplomacy and, in particular, why these far-reaching concessions on offensive weapons? Some cynics maintained after the first Gorbachev proposals in the fall of 1985 and early 1986 that the changes and the concessions were merely propaganda designed to discomfit the Reagan administration and that they were so carefully surrounded by qualifications and 'hookers' that they could easily be withdrawn in the unlikely event the US side offered reciprocation on space weapons. This argument seems more difficult to sustain after Reykjavik. It is now even clearer how strongly motivated Gorbachev is to place the strategic competition between the United States and the Soviet Union on a more stable, manageable, and predictable basis as he embarks on what he doubtless knows will be a hard, costly, and preoccupying effort to revive the badly faltering Soviet system. SDI

is the principal target of Gorbachev's effort for a variety of technological, political and symbolic reasons. In the Soviet view, an unconstrained American SDI program would open a new and extremely costly phase in the US-Soviet strategic competition in an area of large American comparative advantage; the technologies generated as by-products and spin-offs of such a program would have to be countered, offset, or emulated by the Soviet Union with no good prospect that the USSR would be strategically better off for the effort; and the breakdown of the Soviet-American arms control regime that an unregulated space weapons competition would entail might leave the Soviets with greatly reduced political leverage in the West.

There are other considerations in addition to the parade of SDI-horribles that may account for the new readiness of Gorbachev to trade away what American administrations since Nixon's and Ford's have regarded as unilateral Soviet strategic advantages in ICBM forces. Gorbachev and his advisers may calculate that the marginal strategic advantages acquired by the USSR in the 1970s that have so gravely concerned the United States – the prompt hard-target kill capabilities of the Soviet ICBM force, the large breakout potential inherent in their huge throwweight edge, the massive preponderance of their SS-20 force – are in any case wasting assets that are being eroded by US and NATO programs; and that by trading them away now, the USSR could secure some relief from the heavy competitive pressures exerted by new US high technology programs, slowing them down if not halting them during the lifetime of an offensive reductions agreement.

A plausible case could probably be made in Moscow that such concessions are an unacceptably high price to pay for what Washington is likely to offer in return; that these concessions are at a minimum premature; and may in the end be unnecessary. It would not be wildly imprudent for some in Moscow to bet that the most ambitious new US military programs will in the end fail to achieve their objectives, be stretched out interminably, or be killed off by a future administration, and that only arms control posturing by the Soviet Union is required to help the process along.

So far there is no evidence of objections along these lines in Moscow to the offensive arms control concessions that Gorbachev has offered to the United States. Publicly expressed qualms about the unilateral Soviet nuclear testing moratorium do not seem to reflect high-level discord, but seem rather to have been orchestrated to underline Soviet seriousness for Western audiences and to reassure the Soviet public at home. At Reykjavik, Gorbachev appointed Marshal Akhromeev to head the Soviet arms control working group that negotiated with the US team, thus placing the imprimatur of the USSR's most authoritative military professional on the Soviet offensive arms control proposals and the concessions they contained.

So long as the two sides cannot find a common framework either at the

summit or in Geneva for negotiating an agreement on space weapons and on the relationship between offensive and defense weapons, any latent differences that there may be on the Soviet side can in any case be accommodated within the parameters of Soviet proposals that condition far-reaching offensive arms concessions on US acceptance of what are still clearly non-negotiable Soviet demands on defense. Should the space weapons negotiations reach the point of real bargaining, however, Gorbachev could face the first serious internal challenge to his leadership since his installation in March 1985.

How should we in the West respond to Gorbachev's evident desire for a *peredyshka*? We can dismiss it as a mere ploy to secure for the Soviet Union a breather to set its house in order before resuming a broad offensive against us. Or we can explore the opportunity to use our greatly improved bargaining position to nail down agreements that address some long-standing Western strategic concerns. Should the West forego such an opportunity in order to hold Gorbachev's feet to the fire? Or should we seek agreements that might foster a more stable and safer strategic environment now, but that might also facilitate Gorbachev's efforts to make the Soviet Union a stronger competitor in the future?

While these questions are seldom if ever posed so explicitly, the issues surrounding them have become key to a debate between two alternative approaches for dealing generally with the Soviet Union during Reagan's final term, and particularly with respect to arms control. Both approaches proceed from the common premise that a shift in favor of the West is occurring in what the Soviets call the global correlation of forces. Different policy conclusions are drawn from this assessment, however.

One view supports a policy of 'squeezing' the Soviets, seeking deliberately to maximize competitive pressures on the Soviet Union during a period of its relative weakness. This approach would attempt to press favorable trends still further in the hope of securing an even more substantial shift in the correlation of forces, eventually compelling Soviet retreats on a global scale, or, if the Soviets exhausted themselves economically in an effort to avoid concessions or retreat, inducing an internal Soviet crisis that would gravely weaken the USSR or even compel system-altering transformations with revolutionary long-term benefits for the West.

With regard to arms control, the 'squeeze' approach would call for the United States to take an essentially uncompromising position on the whole range of issues at Geneva, making at most only marginal, essentially cosmetic adjustments designed not to enhance the negotiability of US positions but rather to help manage domestic and alliance political concerns. Protecting the SDI from arms control constraints in the central preoccupation of the 'squeeze' position. Some 'squeezers' believe that SDI's strategic potential for the United States is so great that it must not be hampered by arms control

constraints; others believe that withholding SDI from the negotiations is likely to preclude a compromise arms control agreement that would at best produce marginal benefits while squandering hard-won US gains and momentum. Some 'squeezers' would prefer to renounce the existing constraints of the ABM Treaty, in both its 'restrictive' and 'broad' interpretations; others would 'novate' the ABM Treaty in lieu of abandoning it. SDI in the 'squeezer's' view should be used as leverage on Soviet force structure, not indirectly through enhanced arms control bargaining strength but directly, by compelling the Soviets to restructure their forces to compete in areas of comparative US advantage.

A second view supports an alternative policy of 'dealing'. It holds that the United States should take some initiatives in exploring ways to break the arms control deadlock. Partisans of this view generally believe that a sustained state of high tension between the United States and the Soviet Union is potentially dangerous and surely corrosive to the Western alliance if the United States is believed to be at fault. A credible attempt at arms control negotiations is held necessary to sustain public and congressional support for the administration's long-term armaments program.

Advocates of this view tend also to believe (like those who favor squeezing) that the correlation of forces is shifting against the Soviet Union. They prefer, however, to negotiate from that improved position now rather than gamble on the outcome of a totally unregulated arms competition of enormous and possibly unsustainable cost, incalculable risk and indefinite duration. Soviet anxiety about an intensified new round of strategic arms competition is held to provide an opportunity for inducing the USSR to accept basic tradeoffs in strategic weapons negotiations – tradeoffs that would involve deep cuts in Soviet offensive forces of greatest US concern in return for an easing of US competitive pressures in areas of greatest concern to the Soviets.

Some 'dealers' believe that an active SDI technology program could be sustained within the kinds of arms control constraints that might be negotiable with the Soviets and that arms control sanction for SDI would strengthen funding and political support for an SDI research program more than the associated constraints would hamper it. Other 'dealers' value SDI primarily for the bargaining leverage it provides and are less concerned about the extent to which arms control constraints might enhance or diminish the program's long-term prospects.

The gap between the 'dealers' and 'squeezers' is large. It may be that the West will prove incapable of concerting a strategy that can balance competitive pressure and political resourcefulness so as to extract gains that now seem attainable, while constraining future Soviet aggressive options. Perhaps we will have to take our chances with the opportunism and ad hocery to which democracies tend especially to be attracted when the tides of fortune are

running in their favor. It is ironic that in a period of adversity the West succeeded in concerting a strategy for managing relations with a Soviet Union that was an ascending power, but that a coherent agreed strategy for managing relations with a Soviet Union that is declining seems to elude us.

Failure by the United States and by the Western alliance to agree on a common strategy for dealing with the Soviet Union in the Gorbachev era will not only mean losing the opportunity either to 'squeeze' the Soviet Union effectively or to 'deal' with it profitably, but could leave us with the worst of both worlds. If Moscow finally does get its own act together and the West does not, policy initiative will pass to the Soviet leaders by default. In these circumstances, the Kremlin will surely try to have its cake and eat it too; Gorbachev will still strive to secure the *peredyshka* he needs, but will have little incentive to make concessions requiring him to give up anything of real value.