

Central Intelligence Agency

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Political Factors Affecting Gorbachev's Ability  
to Negotiate Arms Control [redacted]

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Summary

General Secretary Gorbachev still appears to be setting the agenda and maintaining a Politburo consensus on foreign policy and arms control issues. In view of his political setback in the Yel'tsin affair and some civilian and military scepticism over elements of his national security policy, however, he is likely during his visit to Washington to be careful to avoid making any commitments that could give his critics in the Politburo new ammunition. We think he will stick closely to negotiating positions that have been worked out in the Politburo and is less likely to change them than he was at the Reykjavik summit. [redacted]

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While the signing of the INF Treaty will be a vindication of his foreign policy, Gorbachev will also want to demonstrate that his discussions in Washington have improved the prospects for an agreement on reductions in strategic offensive weapons, linked to the continued US observance of the 1972 ABM Treaty. Both for foreign policy reasons and as a means of strengthening his political position at home, Gorbachev clearly wants to achieve a breakthrough on these issues, but not at the expense of concessions on delinking START from the extension of the ABM Treaty. [redacted]

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Gorbachev's decision to come to Washington appears to have solid leadership support. There are fewer signs of differences within the civilian leadership over arms control than there were before the two previous summits. At the same time, while the top military leadership appears to be fully supporting Gorbachev, there have been indications of concern about some of his arms control initiatives among elements of the military. In view of the current tensions within the leadership over domestic policy and the skepticism of some Politburo members about Gorbachev's past handling of US-Soviet relations, the General Secretary will want to prevent any convergence of military concerns about arms control and more generalized questioning of his overall policy course in the civilian leadership.

[redacted]

### Leadership Attitudes

The recent conclusion of the terms for the INF Treaty demonstrates that whatever differences exist in the Politburo are not currently serious enough to derail Gorbachev's foreign policy agenda. In fact, [redacted] public indications of recent Politburo differences over INF, START and SDI is particularly notable in view of increasingly clear indications of conflict within the leadership over domestic issues. [redacted]

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Nevertheless, the political setback he suffered as a result of the Yel'tsin affair is likely to make Gorbachev more sensitive to the concerns of other Politburo members. He emerged from this affair with somewhat diminished prestige and weakened authority. His recent public remarks suggest that for now at least, while continuing to push his policy agenda, he is hewing more closely to the middle ground in the Politburo. [redacted]

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The decision to shift party Secretary Lev Zaykov to replace Yel'tsin as head of the Moscow party organization will probably deprive Gorbachev of an ally on both the Secretariat and the Defense Council (the key policymaking group on defense issues, including arms control). Some sources of the US Embassy in Moscow claim that Zaykov may keep his position on the Secretariat, but such a combination of jobs is without recent precedent and he will likely be removed as party secretary for defense industry at the next party plenum and relinquish his position on the Defense Council. [redacted]

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Zaykov's departure from the Defense Council could make it more difficult for Gorbachev to push through controversial national security policies. Zaykov has publicly associated himself with Gorbachev's military policies by supporting the concept of "reasonable sufficiency" and pressuring the defense industries to do more for the civilian sector. In addition to Gorbachev, the other Politburo members on the Defense Council appear to be President Gromyko, Premier Ryzhkov, "Second Secretary" Ligachev, KGB Chief Chebrikov, Foreign Minister Shevardnadze, Defense Minister Yazov, and possibly party Secretary Yakovlev. Three of the civilians--Ligachev, Chebrikov, and Gromyko--appear to take exception to some of

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Gorbachev's foreign and domestic initiatives. Yazov's political allegiance to Gorbachev will make him more amenable than his predecessor to the General Secretary's national security agenda, but in his role as the military's representative on the Defense Council he can be expected to argue strongly for positions critical to the military establishment. [redacted]

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At the same time, Gorbachev's allies control critical foreign policy posts. Foreign Minister Shevardnadze and party Secretary Yakovlev, who respectively run the government and party foreign policy apparatuses, appear to be Gorbachev's two most loyal supporters on the Politburo. Although Yakovlev has reportedly differed with party Secretary Dobrynin, Gorbachev's top advisor on Soviet-American relations, their differences appear to be more over tactics than over general approach and all indications suggest that Dobrynin is also a loyal member of the Gorbachev team. All three men will be accompanying Gorbachev to Washington. [redacted]

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[redacted] there are several Politburo members at least potentially sympathetic to concerns expressed by some military officers about Gorbachev's arms control initiatives:

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Recent remarks by Gorbachev and Shevardnadze suggest that they are sensitive to internal sniping at their arms control initiatives:

--On 2 November Gorbachev made a stronger rhetorical commitment to defense needs than he has in other speeches this year. He appeared to take unusual pains to justify the INF Treaty by pointing out that past treaties have been signed with the enemy due to domestic problems.

--In September Gorbachev also sounded defensive in setting forth his arms control policies, arguing that his nuclear testing moratorium had not been in "vain."

--At his press conference following the conclusion of the INF treaty on 26 November, Shevardnadze went out of his way to insist that even though the Soviet Union will destroy more missiles under the agreement, the interests of the Soviet Union "have not been damaged." [Redacted]

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Although other factors no doubt also played a role, Gorbachev's efforts to prevent Politburo politics from complicating arms control negotiations may have contributed to the failure to set a summit date during the October Ministerial meeting in Moscow--which took place the day after Yel'tsin's inflammatory speech to the party plenum. By moving rapidly to get the summit back on track and working out final details of the INF Treaty, however, Gorbachev demonstrated that his arms control strategy is not seriously encumbered by domestic opposition. [Redacted]

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Military Attitudes

Gorbachev also has the support of the top military leadership. Before the current drive toward the INF agreement began, he strengthened his personal control over the military by using the Cessna incident last May to install his own man--Dmitriy Yazov--as Minister of Defense. In addition, General Staff Chief Akhromeyev has consistently played a key role in negotiating the INF agreement, frequently coming up with compromise positions that advanced the negotiations. Some elements of the military probably welcome the elimination of intermediate range nuclear missiles from Europe because of the Soviet advantage in conventional weapons. [Redacted]

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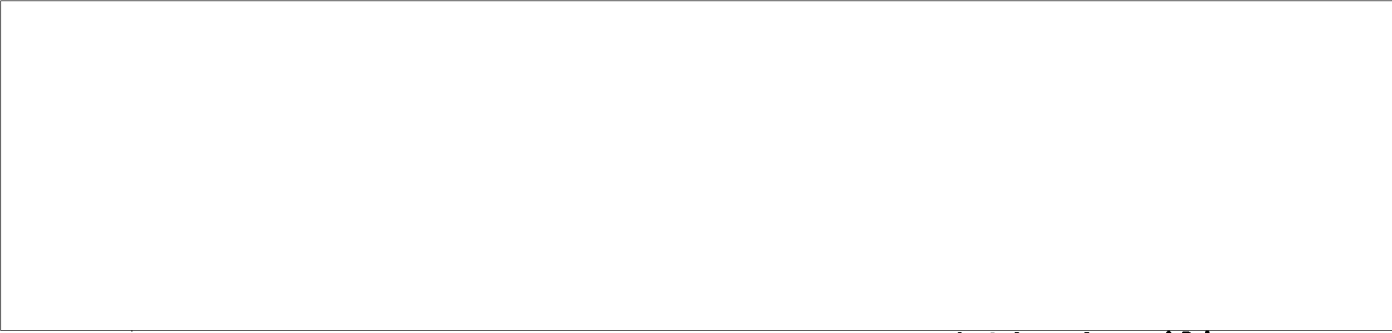
At the same time, there have been persistent indications that Gorbachev's arms control initiatives are causing unease among some members of the military:

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--In an apparent effort to allay concerns within the military, Krasnaya Zvezda has published letters questioning whether Gorbachev's arms control proposals will adversely affect Soviet security and offering assurances that they will not.

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These concerns have no doubt been aggravated by indications that Gorbachev wants to tighten the spigot on military spending to help modernize the civilian economy and is contemplating large reductions in the size of the officer corps. Many officers, especially those in operational positions, no doubt feel threatened by these prospects. Even some officers involved in strategic planning who are probably more inclined to accept the value of the INF agreement, may worry that it will create momentum toward other arms reductions they fear could weaken Soviet security.

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Gorbachev's ability to conclude the INF Treaty and dramatically move the Soviet position on other arms control issues is the best evidence that he can allay or overcome such military concerns. Those in the military who continue to question the direction of Gorbachev's policies are not in a position to challenge him directly. Nevertheless, Gorbachev needs to pay attention to military reservations because they may be exploited by some civilian leaders.



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Prospects

From a domestic political perspective the signing of the INF agreement can be presented both as a vindication of Gorbachev's vigorous efforts over the past two years to push for the agreement and sufficient to call the summit a success, provided it is accompanied by signs of progress toward deep reductions in offensive arms that are linked at least in some way to limits on SDI. If Gorbachev were to fail to make progress on START and the ABM Treaty, he would naturally try to place the onus for the lack of progress on the US position on SDI, but he might be subject, nonetheless, to criticism that his concession on INF had yielded no progress toward Moscow's larger arms control objectives.

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25X1 Gorbachev clearly hopes that the visit will also pay other dividends. It should boost his image as a world leader. [redacted]

[redacted] If he can show that he is making progress in controlling strategic relations with the United States through negotiations, it will make it easier to hold down the defense budget to gain resources for his economic program. [redacted]

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Given Gorbachev's record of playing to the world media, his determination to break out of rigid foreign policy patterns, and his penchant for the bold stroke, he may try to make the most of his visit to Washington from a public relations point of view by unveiling a new Soviet initiative on some aspect of bilateral relations. His chief foreign policy advisors--Yakovlev, Shevardnadze, and Dobrynin--have promoted "new thinking" in foreign policy, which they claim means escaping from "dogmatism" and being more flexible in seeking solutions to problems. A key element of this approach is "interdependence," looking for policies from which both sides can benefit, rather than seeing negotiations as a zero sum game. While there is undoubtedly a large propaganda component in "new thinking," these three top foreign policy advisors probably are more pragmatic than their predecessors and more inclined to make compromises consistent with Soviet interest. [redacted]

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If Gorbachev makes new proposals during his trip to the United States, the odds are strong that they would have been fully approved by the Politburo. Such proposals might amount to no more than a repackaging of previous Soviet positions, but they could contain some new elements:

--Gorbachev might announce a limited unilateral withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, as has been rumored in Kabul, or a shortened timetable for the withdrawal of all Soviet troops after a full settlement has been reached.

--Another possibility which, Gorbachev might hope would help in the ratification debate, would be an initiative on a major arms control compliance issue, such as an announcement of a decision to dismantle the Krasnoyarsk radar. [redacted]

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While political and military leaders seem to agree on the critical importance of limiting SDI, recent remarks by Shevardnadze and other Soviets show some flexibility on how the linkage between START and SDI is formulated. Gorbachev is unlikely to delink a START agreement from SDI, but he may be willing to proceed with strategic arms negotiations in the expectation that as the prospects of a START agreement grow, there will be more readiness to agree to specific limits on SDI--if not from this administration, then from its successor. The Soviets may see less risk in such a strategy if they believe that SDI will prove unworkable for technological and political reasons. Asked at a 31 October press conference if Moscow's insistence on a strict observance of the ABM Treaty meant that SDI would have to be curbed, Shevardnadze responded by minimizing the significance of the program, stating he did not think

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it is "realistic," and pointing out that "many major scientists and specialists" have voiced "serious doubts" about its feasibility. [redacted]

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The Politburo will likely give Gorbachev room to maneuver on SDI, but in view of his current political situation he will be unlikely to depart very far from whatever mandate he was given in Moscow.\* How far he will go in compromising will depend both on the assessments of Soviet experts of how specific proposals affect Soviet security and Gorbachev's assessment of the political climate in Moscow. If Gorbachev cannot persuade Washington to accept terms he is sure he can sell at home, we think he will want to consult with his Politburo colleagues before making any commitment. How much maneuvering room Gorbachev actually has in closing the outstanding issues on a strategic agreement will provide some indication of his political strength. [redacted]

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