



Director of Central Intelligence

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Special National Intelligence Estimate

# Soviet Policy Toward the United States in 1984

Key Judgments

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SOVIET POLICY TOWARD  
THE UNITED STATES IN 1984

KEY JUDGMENTS

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THE NATIONAL FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE BOARD CONCURS, EXCEPT AS NOTED IN THE TEXT.

*The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of the Estimate:*

The Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, and the intelligence organization of the Department of State.

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## SCOPE NOTE

This Special National Intelligence Estimate examines current Soviet policy toward the United States and prospects for major changes during the remainder of 1984. In part, it is a contribution to the ongoing effort by the Intelligence Community to monitor the possibility that the Soviets may be preparing for some form of confrontation with the United States in the near term. This effort has assessed recent Soviet military activities as largely the product of longstanding or evolving plans, intended to increase Soviet strength for an intensified power struggle over the long term, rather than preparations for confrontation in the near term.

This SNIE's focus, however, is broader than that issue alone. It attempts a comprehensive assessment of current Soviet policy toward the United States and possibilities for sharp changes of course. Such possibilities include Soviet moves which instigate or exploit local crisis situations and also initiatives relating to arms control negotiations. Soviet views about the current US administration make the possibility of major Soviet initiatives to influence the November election, or to exploit the political environment of the campaign period, a central concern of this Estimate.

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## KEY JUDGMENTS

Current Soviet policy toward the United States expresses deep hostility to US aims and interests. It is shaped primarily by the Soviet perception that the United States is acting to alter the overall military power relationship, seeking to strengthen US alliances, and conducting regional security policies—all for the purpose of containing and reducing Soviet influence in world affairs. US policies threaten to undercut earlier Soviet expectations that the 1980s would be a period in which the USSR could, against the backdrop of its military power, expand its international influence at low risk, and enjoy the economic and diplomatic benefits of Western acceptance of its superpower status. US policies and pronouncements also contain a degree of challenge to the moral and political legitimacy claims of the Soviet regime which its leaders find unusually disturbing. Soviet policy is motivated by the desire to combat and, if possible, deflect US policies, and to create a more permissive environment in which Soviet relative military power and world influence can continue to grow.

*Current Soviet policy toward the United States makes hostile initiatives in crisis areas, such as Central America and Pakistan, a distinct near-term possibility. However, we do not see in current Soviet political and military behavior preparation for a deliberate major confrontation with the United States in the near future.*

The Soviets perceive that US policies directed against their objectives enjoy a considerable base of political support within the United States and in NATO. At the same time, they see weaknesses in that political base which can be exploited to alter or discredit US policies, making it possible to blunt the challenge posed by the United States and perhaps to return to a condition of detente on terms consistent with Soviet international ambitions.

The policy implications of these perceptions for Moscow are fairly straightforward, up to a point:

- First, Soviet leaders seem at present to believe that the likelihood that the United States will continue the policies of the past several years into the rest of the decade is high enough to require some political and military gearing up for a period of lasting and more intense struggle. How vigorous an effort this will require in the future is uncertain to them, and possibly in some dispute.

— Second, the Soviets believe they can influence the content, effectiveness, and durability of US policies they see directed against them. The rigidity and hostility of Soviet policy toward the United States, on one hand, and attempts to take initiative and show flexibility, on the other, are aimed at negating those policies. Up to now, they have evidently calculated that rigidity and hostility are the most promising posture. But their recent performance and the outlook for the future plausibly call this into question.

Moscow's policies toward the United States are focused on undercutting the domestic and alliance bases of public support for US policies and programs. Hostile propaganda, which blames the United States for an increased danger of war and for diplomatic rigidity with regard to regional security and the major arms control issues, is used to put the US administration on the defensive where possible and to excite opposition to Washington's policies.

At the same time, a hostile stance toward the West is seen by Soviet leaders as convenient for exhorting greater discipline, sacrifice, and vigilance on the Soviet home front, where the Politburo is preoccupied with a range of complex problems. These problems include stagnating economic performance and the resistance of the system to reform, flagging social morale and the dwindling effectiveness of exhortation and disciplinary measures to boost worker performance, continuing isolated dissent, ethnic nationalism, "antisocial" attitudes among youth, and some doubts among the elite as to top-leadership effectiveness. Commanding a great deal of their attention, these problems create a setting in which a deliberately stimulated image of the USSR's being embattled abroad is used by the Politburo to reinforce its political and ideological control at home.

An alternative view is that, while the Soviet leaders recognize the existence of a number of longstanding domestic problems, they are not so preoccupied with addressing these issues that it prevents them from acting decisively and resolutely on foreign policies. Moreover, the holder of this view also believes that, while there may be some criticisms among party functionaries, there is no evidence that these criticisms affect Soviet policies.<sup>1</sup>

Although there may be debates among Soviet leaders about tactics toward the United States, we believe that current Soviet policy, combining a dominant hard line with steps and hints of progress, is

<sup>1</sup> The holder of this view is the Director, Defense Intelligence Agency.



based on consensus in the Politburo. The uncertain political power of General Secretary Chernenko, his and other Politburo members' limited foreign affairs expertise, and Gromyko's long experience as Foreign Minister have probably given the latter influence over Soviet foreign policy tactics he has not enjoyed under any previous General Secretary. We doubt, however, that he is unilaterally able to enforce his preferences over the objections of the rest of the Politburo, or that explicit contention on foreign policy—as recently rumored with respect to the USSR's space arms control initiative—led to his being temporarily overruled. The consensus-maintaining mores of the Politburo and the skills of its members in avoiding isolation make such showdown situations unlikely. Rumors of foreign policy conflict in the Politburo are probably exaggerations of more routine debate over tactics, and may be deliberately spread to influence Western perceptions.

In the last few months, the Soviets have been amenable to progress on several US-Soviet bilateral issues and have made a prominent initiative on antisatellite systems/space weapons negotiations. On bilateral issues, such as the hotline upgrade and the renewal of the technical and economic cooperation accord, the Soviets appear motivated by a desire to preserve the basis for substantive dialogue on issues of direct benefit to them, despite their underlying hostility toward the present US administration. The space weapons initiative, on the other hand, was intended primarily to stimulate concessions from the United States, or political controversy about them, in an election period when the Soviets judge that the administration wants to display progress in US-Soviet relations. Failing US concessions, the Soviets want, at a minimum, to deny the US administration any basis for claiming that it can manage constructive US-Soviet relations while pursuing anti-Soviet military and foreign policy goals.

The USSR's as-yet inconclusive initiative on space weapons is an example of the policy mix being pursued. Soviet behavior on this subject is motivated by a profound concern that the United States will develop strategic defense capabilities—whether space-based or an ABM version—that would seriously undercut the credibility of Soviet strategy and by a strong desire to achieve real constraints, by agreement or political influence, on what the Soviets regard as threatening long-term technology challenges by the United States in space weapons. This desire will persist and shape future Soviet actions whether there are space weapons talks in the near future or not. But short-term political considerations have clearly influenced the Soviets' tactics so far. They proposed specific talks in Vienna in September for a combination of reasons: to put Washington on the defensive if it refused, to coax it into

major concessions if it chose not to refuse, and to stimulate political interference from Congress and elsewhere with US ASAT and space weapons programs. The Soviets have expected all of these possibilities to be greater in an election season, and have evidently been willing, for a time, to risk the US administration's claiming progress on arms control for its own political advantage. Throughout the diplomatic exchanges that followed their proposal of 29 June, the Soviets combined a dominant line of hostility and accusation that the United States blocks the talks with repeated hints that compromise leading to Vienna is possible.

The USSR is currently following a deliberate dual-track policy toward the United States. It involves, on one hand, hostile propaganda on all subjects, hostile acts such as harassment of US diplomats and tampering with access to Berlin, stubborn resistance to compromise on central arms control issues, and incremental increases in military capability dramatized by exercises and INF-related deployments. It has also allowed, on the other hand, forward movement on selected bilateral issues and contained hints of progress on arms control and wider US-Soviet issues if the United States makes concessions. Sustained Soviet efforts to undermine US interests and policies, from Central America, to Europe, to the Middle East, are an integral part of this policy course.

We expect this mixed Soviet policy to continue in the near future. It provides a basis for denying political benefits to the US administration—which the Soviets expect, but are not sure, will be reelected—while exploring for concessions and a new tactical base for dealing with the administration in a following term. This tactical posture leaves open the possibility of joining ASAT/space weapons talks in September if the United States appears ready to make inviting proposals, and also the possibility of refusing such talks, or walking out on them, if the administration looks politically vulnerable to such moves.

As of now, we believe the chances are well less than even that the Soviets will see it in their interest to start some form of ASAT/space weapons talks in September. They have probably not yet conclusively decided this, notwithstanding high-level assertions that talks are not expected. In any case, they will handle the matter for the short-term purpose of stimulating pressures for a US ASAT test moratorium and to coax concessions on the agenda and substantive issues. Should such talks begin, it is highly likely that the Soviets will hold over them the constant threat of a walkout or suspension to keep up this pressure. If they see the US administration as unbending on Soviet demands, divided within, and politically vulnerable as the election approaches, there is a significant chance they would stage some sort of walkout for political effect. It

is somewhat more likely, however, that they would remain at the talks, press for a scheduled adjournment or suspension before the elections, and maintain a drumfire of public and private accusations that the administration is blocking progress on a vital arms issue that could open the way to progress on the rest of the strategic arms control agenda. This tactic would maintain pressure on Washington for concessions, keep the issue alive during the campaign, but not damage irretrievably the prospects for resuming the game should the administration be reelected.

Soviet desires to exacerbate the political vulnerabilities of the administration or to exploit inhibitions on its behavior in the preelection period could play a role in Soviet behavior toward potentially confrontational situations that may arise in regions of tension, or could be instigated by Soviet action. On the whole, Soviet behavior toward regional crisis contingencies will be governed more by local opportunities and risks than by the Soviet reading of the US political environment. As regards the latter, while the Soviets may see opportunities to hurt the US administration politically or to exploit election-year inhibitions, they will also reflect on a spotty record of assessing these effects, realizing that a Soviet challenge might strengthen the administration's standing and generate support for a forceful response unwelcome to Moscow. The following examines possible contingencies we believe most worthy of attention, and we have reached judgments as to their probability:

- In *Central America*, an insurgent offensive of limited scope and moderate effectiveness is likely to occur in El Salvador in late summer or the fall, and the Soviets expect it to undermine Washington's claim that its policies there are working. There is evidence that the Soviets are arranging the shipment of L-39 trainer/combat aircraft to Nicaragua, possibly before November. Although the United States has made clear that it will not accept MIGs or other combat jets in Nicaragua, the Soviets would count on the less capable L-39 to introduce ambiguities into the situation and to complicate a US response. The Soviets would be betting that the United States is unwilling militarily to challenge the L-39 deployment before the election, and constrained by its prior acceptance to tolerate the planes thereafter. The Soviets may intend to introduce more advanced fighter aircraft (such as MIG-21s) into Nicaragua at some point in the future. Their decision on MIGs or other advanced aircraft would depend principally on US reaction to deployment of the L-39s. The Soviets could also exploit the availability of Nicara-

gua's large new military airbase for visits by Bear reconnaissance and ASW aircraft, to shape the political environment for other deployment actions, and for military activity, such as maritime monitoring at the approaches of the Panama Canal. An alternative view is that the estimate places too much emphasis on the L-39 issue. If these aircraft are shipped to Nicaragua, Moscow would perceive their introduction as only one of a number of increments in the Sandinista regime's military capability—others would include the construction of a large military airfield at Punta Huete and three Soviet-equipped communications intercept facilities. In evaluating the probable US response to the MIGs, Moscow would consider US reaction to all of such increments, not to the L-39s alone. The Soviet concern not to provoke the United States into military action that has kept Moscow from delivering MIGs to Nicaragua for over two years would continue in play.<sup>2</sup>

- The Soviets may take hostile action against *Pakistan* to end its support of the Afghan resistance, the tenacity of which appears to have increased the Soviets' frustration and perhaps led to doubts as to whether they ought to be satisfied with their protracted strategy for imposing control on Afghanistan. [

] The Soviets cannot direct Indian actions against Pakistan. But we believe that the likelihood of India's taking action over the next 12 months for its own reasons has risen distinctly, and we believe that the Soviets are in consultation with New Delhi about the situation and strongly motivated to exploit it.<sup>3</sup> It is somewhat less likely that the Soviets will make direct but limited attacks on Pakistan's border because this would present the best political circumstances for increased US support while not altering Zia's policies. Nevertheless, given Moscow's strong incentives to try to change Pakistan's policies toward the Afghan war, recent signs of increased Soviet pressure on Islamabad, and Moscow's inability to command Indian action against Pakistan, the prospect of unilateral Soviet political and military pressures on Pakistan, such as limited air attacks and hot-pursuit raids on border sites, cannot be ruled out. The Soviets may decide to increase the frequency and scale of limited cross-border raids in

<sup>2</sup> The holder of this view is the Director, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State.

an attempt to force President Zia to rein in the insurgents, but we believe large-scale Soviet military actions against Pakistan remain unlikely.

- In the Persian Gulf region, escalation of the *Iran-Iraq* war and the prospect of US intervention might induce the USSR preemptively to apply military pressure on Iran to end the conflict and to assert a Soviet role as a superpower in the Gulf region. Various developments in the Gulf are possible, but in the short term the most likely Soviet responses will be efforts to gain increased political influence in Iran and other regional states, rather than confrontational military actions. An Iranian victory over Iraq and Soviet reaction to it could lead to a Soviet invasion of Iran, and thereby to a direct military confrontation with the United States. But we believe this course of events is highly unlikely in the time frame of this Estimate. There is no evidence to suggest that the Soviets are readying their military forces in the region to exert visible pressure or to take local action, but they could be brought within weeks to sufficient readiness to attack Iran or play a part in a Soviet pressure campaign against Iran.
- In *Berlin*, where the Soviets have been acting to remind the West of its vulnerable access, the Soviets could escalate pressures to stimulate fear and tension among the United States and its allies. Some increase in Soviet actions to test US and allied reactions cannot be ruled out in the short term. We believe any major escalation of pressure is very unlikely because the risk of counterproductive political effects in the West or a genuine confrontation is higher than the Soviets wish to run now.

Taken together, these regional conflict situations, in which US and Soviet interests are opposed and the potential for local conflict escalation is significant, generate possibilities for limited US-Soviet confrontation over coming months which we cannot rule out, although we judge them unlikely. Circumstances could arise in which local events combine with Soviet desire to gain local objectives and, secondarily, to embarrass the United States, resulting in a degree of confrontation the USSR did not originally seek. Domestic political conditions in the United States will play some role in Soviet calculations. The Soviets would expect the election period to impose inhibitions on US responses to their initiatives or other developments which would enhance their prospects of local success. To a lesser extent, they may expect regional crises to put the US administration on the defensive regarding its overall foreign policy. At

the same time, uncertainties about US reactions to challenge and about the political effects of Soviet challenges on US politics will continue to be a restraining influence on Moscow's actions.

Recent Soviet military and political actions have created concern that the Soviets may be preparing for a major military confrontation with the United States. During the past six months or so the Soviets have pursued a vigorous program of large-scale military exercises, have engaged in anomalous behavior with respect to troop rotation and withdrawn military support for harvest activities, have demonstratively deployed weapon systems in response to NATO's INF deployments, and have heightened internal vigilance and security activities. Amidst continuing propaganda and intermittent reporting [

] about Soviet fears of impending war, there is concern that recent Soviet military and defense-related activities might be read as revealing (or attempting to cloud) definite Soviet preparations for a near-term confrontation with the United States that could sharply heighten the risk of a general war.

There is also concern about the possibility that the Soviet leadership might be of a mind to attempt a "now-or-never" effort to dramatically shift the terms of the US-Soviet power struggle through central confrontation, fearful that future Soviet domestic problems may make it excessively difficult for the USSR to achieve its military and international goals in the future. It is feared that Soviet military activities could be in preparation for such a confrontation.

We strongly believe that Soviet actions are not inspired by, and Soviet leaders do not perceive, a genuine danger of imminent conflict or confrontation with the United States. Also, we do not believe that Soviet war talk and other actions "mask" Soviet preparations for an imminent move toward confrontation on the part of the USSR.

Supporting the conclusion, the analysis underlying the present Estimate has led us to judge, further:

- The Soviet leadership displays an expectation of intensified power competition with the United States in the years ahead, along with some hope that US policies can be deflected by a combination of stubbornness and cajolery. It does not now display a view that dangerous confrontation may be required to defend its interests and advance its power.
- While pleased with the USSR's improved military situation achieved in the past decade, the Soviet leadership is not so confident in it that it would deliberately seek out a central test of US-Soviet strategic strength to "keep history on track."

- Patterns of power and decisionmaking in the Soviet Politburo at present are very unlikely to generate initiatives that are politically dangerous for its members, which a risky confrontational strategy would be.
- Examined comprehensively, Soviet military and defense-related activities are in line with long-evolving plans and patterns, rather than with sharp acceleration of preparations for a major war. Noteworthy by their absence are widespread logistics, supply, and defense-economic preparations obligated by Soviet war doctrines and operational requirements. We have high confidence in our ability to detect them if they were occurring on a wide scale.

To be sure, Soviet propaganda and other information activities have deliberately tried to create the image of a dangerous international environment, of Soviet fear of war, and of possible Soviet willingness to contemplate dangerous actions. Some, although by no means all, recent Soviet military activity appears to have been directed in part at supporting this campaign, especially large and visible Soviet military exercises. We believe that the apprehensive outlook the Soviets have toward the long-term struggle with the United States has prompted them to respond with a controlled display of military muscle.

In reaching these judgments, we must point out that the indicators and methodologies of our strategic warning establishment are oriented toward the provision of warning of war within a short period, at most one to two months. Because we give less emphasis to defense-economic and other home front measures that might provide strategic warning beyond so short a period, and because a pattern of such activities is inherently difficult to detect in their early stages unless deliberately signaled by the regime, we have less confidence in longer range warning based on military and defense-related activities alone. However, in the total context of Soviet foreign and domestic developments, we judge it very unlikely that the Soviets are now preparing for a major war or for confrontation that could lead to a major war in the short run.

It is possible that, following the US elections and their reading of the overall political results, the Soviets could adjust their present foreign policy tactics to give more emphasis to steps of limited accommodation. Their aim would be to encourage US political trends that would deflect or alter the defense and foreign policies of the United States which the Soviets see directed against them. They would seek a return in some form to the detente environment of the early 1970s in which they enjoyed many political and economic benefits of East-West amity but

suffered few constraints on the expansion of their military power and international activities directed against the West, especially in the Third World. Although political circumstances in the West, both in the United States and in Europe, may encourage them to make more serious attempts in this direction than in the past several years, the present Soviet leaders appreciate that detente consistent with longstanding Soviet aims requires fundamental changes in US policies, namely a substantial US retreat from efforts to contain Soviet power. They also appreciate that this is unlikely to be accomplished solely by diplomatic maneuver on their part.

It is highly unlikely that the Soviets will fundamentally moderate their military and international aims and shift to a policy of genuine and far-reaching accommodation toward the United States in the period of this Estimate. This could occur in the years ahead as a result of the USSR's facing greater internal problems and external obstacles. For the present and the foreseeable future, Soviet leaders are likely to remain attached to expanding their military and international power. They will try to manage the Soviet internal system to sustain these objectives. They would like to achieve a form of East-West detente that facilitates these objectives while limiting the costs and risks of pursuing them. They are not yet ready for a form of detente that forswears the expansion of their power.

In brief summary, the near-term projections we have made are as follows (percentages are merely for display of qualitative judgment; note that judgments of probable Soviet behavior in some cases are contingent on prior developments having a lower probability):

- The USSR is likely to continue through the remainder of 1984 the mixed policy toward the United States observed during the summer months so far, with heavy emphasis on hostility and rigidity, but with an undercurrent of hints about progress in bilateral relations and arms control (70 percent).
- It is now unlikely, but not ruled out, that the USSR will agree at the last minute to commence space weapons talks in September (20 percent). The odds rise sharply if the United States agrees to an ASAT test moratorium (70 percent).
- Should space weapons talks begin in September, there is a chance that the Soviets will contrive some sort of breakoff to damage the US administration politically (30 percent), but more likely that they will simply accuse the United States of blocking substantive progress (70 percent).



- A moderately effective insurgent offensive is very likely to occur in El Salvador in late summer or the fall, and the Soviets will welcome it for putting significant although not decisive political pressure on Washington (90 percent).
- It is likely that the Soviets will introduce L-39 jet aircraft into Nicaragua (70 percent). It is unlikely that more advanced fighters (such as MIG-21s) will be introduced before November (10 percent). Should they successfully introduce L-39s, then the probability of their sending more advanced fighters rises. See the alternative view, held by the Director, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, as referenced in footnote 2. The Soviets could also use the new large airfield soon to be completed for visits by Bear reconnaissance and ASW aircraft.
- Should India evince interest in attacking Pakistan, the Soviets probably would be privately supportive, and probably would agree to provide intelligence and some logistic support (70 percent). The Soviets' main aim would be an end to Pakistan's support of the Afghan resistance.
- There is also a serious possibility that the Soviets will take escalated unilateral military steps such as airstrikes and hot-pursuit actions to pressure Islamabad toward this end in the months ahead (40 percent). A major Soviet attack on Pakistan, requiring new deployments and some weeks of preparation, is very unlikely during the period of this Estimate (5 percent).
- Near-term Soviet behavior toward the more probable developments in the Iran-Iraq war is likely to be continued efforts toward political openings in Tehran and among the Persian Gulf states (80 percent). Only in the event of dramatic military success by Iran against Iraq (10 percent) or major US intervention on Iranian soil are the Soviets likely to take direct military measures toward intervention (70 percent).
- The Soviets are unlikely to escalate substantially their present very low-key pressures on Berlin access (10 percent). They may, however, test Western reactions by small increases in the degree and visibility of pressures they are now applying (30 percent).
- There is some likelihood that the Soviets will try, following the US elections, a mix of tactics toward the United States that give greater emphasis to flexibility on arms control and movement on bilateral issues, without giving up fundamental positions (30 percent). Continuation of present policy mix well into 1985 is more likely (70 percent).

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- It is highly improbable that the Soviets will shift to more far-reaching accommodations toward the United States during the period of this Estimate (5 percent).
- It is highly unlikely that the USSR is now preparing for and will move deliberately into a visible posture of direct, high-level military confrontation with the United States during the next six months (5 percent). It cannot be ruled out, however, that the USSR could move quickly into such a posture as a result of a local crisis escalation not now planned or sought by Moscow (10 percent).

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