Chapter III

Analyzing Soviet Politics and Foreign Policy

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The task of describing in a single essay CIA's analysis of Soviet politics and foreign policy for the entire Cold War period leads inevitably to a broad survey. With respect to domestic politics in the USSR, this account deals only with the high points of top-level leadership politics and policies. In light of this broad-brush approach, there is much of interest to specialists regarding CIA's analysis that is necessarily left out and awaits future attention. With respect to Soviet foreign policy, only the main lines of the basic East-West competition are examined throughout the lengthy period covered. Unfortunately, but necessarily, even major issues such as Moscow's efforts through the years to deal with the German question or to gain influence in the Middle East are left for more detailed examination in the future. Finally, it should be noted that the availability of declassified CIA studies is uneven throughout the period under study, although there are National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs) from all years, which help to fill in what otherwise would be major gaps.

Earliest Efforts

From the outset, much of the analytic work of the CIA revolved around assessing the intentions and capabilities of the USSR. By the time CIA was created (its official birthday is 18 September 1947), the Soviet Union was generally viewed in Washington as hostile to US and Western interests. The wartime image of the USSR as an ally that the United States had willingly aided and as a potential postwar partner in assuring peace had been superseded by a growing concern in the United States over Soviet behavior in the emerging Cold War. It is worth noting, in fact, that the initial reporting to the President by CIA's predecessor, the Central Intelligence Group (CIG), began in the middle of February 1946. One week earlier, Joseph Stalin had delivered a notable speech explaining to the Soviet populace that hard times would continue because of the international situation. One week later, George Kennan sent his "long telegram" from the US Embassy in Moscow exploring the reasons for Soviet behavior. Three weeks later, Winston Churchill delivered his famous "iron curtain" speech in Missouri. These tocsins set the stage for what would become forty-five years of analytic labor by CIA. In a world increasingly seen as threatening and at times even dangerous because of Moscow's

ambitions and actions, Agency analysts sought to understand and explain Soviet behavior to a US policymaking community anxious to make the right moves to ensure US national security.

The Soviet Union was the topic of CIG's first major analytic paper, produced in the summer of 1946 by CIG's new Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE) in response to a White House request.[1] ORE 1, *Soviet Foreign and Military Policy,* placed its sober but non-alarmist main analytic judgment about the top question of the day—Soviet military intentions—in its first four sentences: The USSR is determined to increase its power relative to its adversaries and anticipates an inevitable conflict with them, but it is also intent on avoiding a conflict for some time to come and on avoiding provoking strong reactions from its adversaries. It struck a tone of circumspection by asserting that world domination "may be" an ultimate Soviet objective but should be viewed as a "remote and largely theoretical" aim.[2] (This caution about ultimate Soviet objectives was dropped from future analyses as a number of unwelcome Soviet actions were seen by analysts and policymakers alike as threatening to the West and as evidence that ambitious goals—animated by both ideology and *realpolitik*—guided Soviet foreign policy.)

Six months later, in January 1947, ORE produced ORE 1/1, titled *Revised Soviet Tactics in International Affairs,* advising its readers that the USSR had adopted "more subtle tactics" in pursuing its unchanged aims, citing actions such as Soviet concessions on the Trieste issue. The paper credited the change to Western firmness and also to domestic factors, which received more attention in this paper than in ORE 1. The internal economic situation and morale in both civilian and military sectors were cited as conditions inducing Soviet leaders to seek a "temporary breathing space for the purpose of economic and ideological rehabilitation at home and the consolidation of positions abroad." The paper even ventured that, while basic aims remained as described in ORE 1, they would now be sought "by methods more subtle than those of recent months," particularly by a range of political warfare methods, including economic and ideological penetration. It continued to stress that the USSR wanted to avoid attempting military conquests while building up its military strength.

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[1] An essay about how CIG and CIA depicted Soviet policies during the 1946-50 period and copies of representative CIA analyses from the period are available in Woodrow J. Kuhns, ed., *Assessing the Soviet Threat: The Early Cold War Years* (Center for the Study of Intelligence, CIA, Washington, DC, 1997). A particular value of that volume's collection is that it contains current intelligence items as well as longer research and estimative analyses and thus provides a basis for a more fine-grained discussion of, for example, Soviet policies in various regions of the world than is possible for the broader time period covered in this volume. In fall 1946, ORE's name was changed to Office of Reports and Estimates.

[2] The paper, dated 23 July 1946, was written in a few days time by a single analyst, Ludwell Montague, and was not coordinated with the heads of the US intelligence agencies. The DCI assured them that this had occurred because of time pressure and that he would normally seek coordination for such important products. As for its circumspection, it may have been lost on the paper's recipients in the White House. One study of this period states that "According to Clifford and Elsey, the Soviet Union sought world domination." See Melvyn P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, CA, 1992), p. 131.

The first major political analysis of the new CIA, produced on 26 September 1947, was CIA 1, *Review of the World Situation as It Relates to the Security of the United States.* It continued the basic line of thinking laid out in ORE 1 and 1/1 that the USSR wanted to avoid war while building its strength.[3] Yet it took a broader stance, asserting on the one hand that the USSR was capable of overrunning Western Europe and some other adjacent areas (while pointing out some reasons why this option would probably not be chosen by Moscow), and on the other hand that the chief threat to US security was the economic collapse of Western Europe and the opportunities that such a development would open up for expanded Soviet influence.

It should be pointed out that CIA's earliest analysis hardly led Washington thinking on Soviet affairs. The papers cited above were compatible with the analytic direction laid out in the "long telegram" and other contemporary expressions of concern about Soviet behavior and with already set lines of US policy such as the Marshall Plan. At the same time, it is probably also fair to say that CIA addressed issues of real concern to senior policymakers and buttressed their thinking by pointing out limits as well as potentialities affecting Soviet behavior. George Kennan, in reflecting back on the earliest efforts of CIA's analysts, commended the items he reviewed from the 1946 to 1948 period, "particularly the realism and restraints shown in the judgments of Soviet military intentions and capabilities."[4] He then observed a "deterioration" on this point, in his view, beginning in late 1948, when an overrating of aggressive Soviet military commitments, divorced from political restraints and economic weaknesses operating upon Stalin and other Soviet leaders, occurred. Indeed, other analysts have observed that CIA predictions of when the Soviets would acquire the atomic bomb and whether South Korea would be invaded were more "accurate" from 1946 to 1948 and got worse closer to the actual times of the events. (No wonder many CIA analysts are ready to join a few scholars who argue that predictions of specific events should not be considered a key measure of the quality of intelligence analysis.)

One paper produced by CIA in July 1948 shows an effort to help policymakers think about a situation by going beyond the general atmosphere of concern about Soviet military intentions caused by events such as the coup in Prague, General Lucius Clay's "war scare" telegram, and the onset of the blockade of Berlin. The paper, ORE 58-48, was titled *The Strategic Value to the USSR of the Conquest of Western Europe and the Near East (to Cairo) Prior to 1950.* Its avowed purpose was to determine whether such a conquest would in fact place the USSR in a stronger strategic position.

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[3] All three of these early major analyses can be found in Michael Warner, ed., *The CIA under Harry Truman: CIA Cold War Records* (History Staff, Center for the Study of Intelligence, CIA, Washington, DC, 1994).

[4] These words are taken from comments he sent to a conference held at CIA headquarters on 24 October 1997 on the subject covered in the Kuhns volume cited above.

The paper failed to achieve its aim. It could not get beyond the problem of what assumptions to make (e.g., if Soviet actions caused a war, would it escalate or end in a negotiated peace?), and it presented as its main conclusion that the Soviets would be unlikely to attempt such a conquest, thereby earning a justified US Air Force dissent claiming that, by estimating intent, the paper had gone beyond its announced purpose. It thus became just another estimate rather than a "think piece" that might have provoked additional research, analytic effort, or policy thinking. The paper could be regarded, however, as a bellwether of future CIA efforts to provide "what if" analyses to enrich and broaden the contributions intelligence can make to policy planning.

Internal Soviet Politics

CIA analysts believed that politics inside the USSR was an important subject for study, but they enjoyed no special information advantage in the 1940s. ORE 9, *The Succession of Power in the USSR,* 13 January 1948, speculated that a single person, probably senior Politburo member Vyacheslav Molotov, would be more likely to succeed Stalin than a collective. It concluded that uppermost in the successor's mind would be maintaining regime stability and that therefore the immediate effects of a transition would be insignificant. The paper mentioned Stalin's absence from some recent public events and ventured that perhaps a deliberate effort was being made to condition the Soviet populace for Stalin's retirement. Surprisingly, it then swung to the other end of the spectrum and speculated that if the USSR were confronted with enough domestic and foreign adversities at a time of transition, "the absence of Stalin's prestige and personality might give rise to manifestations of personal rivalry among Politburo members, which could result in the rapid disintegration of the Soviet regime." It was as though CIA's analysts accepted uncritically Stalin's own notion that his colleagues would not be up to the job of ruling once he was gone, and at the same time rejected any possibility of a leadership model for the Soviet Union other than a one-for-one replacement for Stalin. Analysts actually did consider a triumvirate of Molotov, Andrei Zhdanov, and Lavrenti Beria but seemed to lean to the idea that Stalin would be able to foreordain the passage of power to a single person rather than to a committee. CIA noted that it had no unique evidence on which to base its analysis but was attempting to "analyze the thought processes" of Soviet leaders.

Stalin's Foreign Policy

The question of Soviet military intentions continued to be addressed in CIA's analytic work into the 1950s. Three key events heightened the sense of urgency even after the Berlin blockade ended: the initial Soviet test of an atom bomb, the communist victory in China, and the North Korean invasion of South Korea. The first of these occasioned a paper that sought to explore the event's implications for US policy with special reference to Soviet willingness to use force.[5] The paper ran through previously presented reasons why the

Soviets were unlikely to initiate use of military force to achieve their goals and stated that the reasons remained valid. It foresaw a greater willingness for an atom-bomb-armed USSR to run risks and to use threats and intimidation, however, and concluded that Soviet achievement of a decisive advantage in atomic power—an ability to cripple the United States and limit damage to the USSR—could lead to possible attack.

The paper probably is most noteworthy for its inability to reach consensus. In the foreword, it was noted that the paper had been in the works for six months and still should be regarded as an "interim" product because of continuing disagreement on the issues. Indeed, there were four dissents published along with the main text—one of which said the paper was "dangerous"—and it seemed clear that only CIA wanted it published at all. The main point of disagreement seemed to be that the State Department and the military services believed there was more danger for the United States in the implications than CIA would abide.

This paper was published around the time of the adoption of NSC 68, the national security directive officially spelling out the US foreign policy of containing Soviet expansionism. Two months later, just weeks before the North Korean attack on South Korea, a second attempt to describe the impact of Soviet atomic capability was disseminated.[6] This time a "joint ad hoc committee" of intelligence representatives was given a narrower scope to examine, and agreed—with only a mild dissent from the Navy—that the maximum threat was a single surprise attack on US forces that could limit US offensive capacity "possibly to a critical degree." They added that it was also possible the USSR could do more to weaken the US position in the world "without resorting to direct military action."

Two observations can be made in retrospect about this pair of papers. First, it almost seems the subject—surprise attack and US vulnerability—was seen to be of such critical importance that intelligence was frozen into inaction, unable to agree on a set of useful observations to assist policymakers. Second, it can be taken as perhaps a low point of the troubles of CIA's estimate-making during the late 1940s. These had already been pointed out in the previous year's "Dulles Report," and they were regarded as solved only with the advent of Walter Bedell Smith as Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) in October 1950 and the creation the next month of the Board and Office of National Estimates, first under William Langer and soon thereafter under Sherman Kent. Smith abolished ORE and replaced it with an Office of Research and Reports, which built up capabilities for economic

[5] ORE 91-49, *Estimate of the Effects of the Soviet Possession of the Atomic Bomb upon the Security of the United States and upon the Probabilities of Direct Soviet Military Action* (6 April 1950). Excerpted in Kuhns, ed., *Assessing the Soviet Threat*, pp. 366-379.

[6] ORE 32-50, *The Effect of the Soviet Possession of Atomic Bombs on the Security of the United States* (9 June 1950). Reproduced in Warner, ed., *CIA under Truman*, pp. 327-333.

and other nonpolitical analysis, and an Office of Current Intelligence, which housed mainly political or country analysts and was the principal locus of political analysts in CIA until the 1970s. In 1950, it should be recalled, "political intelligence" was seen as the proper province of the Department of State, whereas producing "current intelligence" in the form of a daily summary had specifically been assigned to CIA by the President, and disseminating "national intelligence" was increasingly acknowledged as an appropriate role for CIA.

Soviet foreign policy toward various areas of the world was described in the papers from this period generally in terms of Soviet willingness to seek to expand the USSR's presence and influence and to undercut the US position.[7] Predictions of specific major Soviet moves, such as the coup in Prague early in 1948, are lacking in CIA's analysis, although of course such events fit with CIA's general characterization of Soviet aims and tactics. Europe was the main theater of concern, and by 1950 CIA was contemplating the possible eventual incorporation of the Eastern European satellite countries into the USSR. The Soviet decisions to forgo Marshall Plan aid and to "sovietize" regimes in Eastern Europe were taken as evidence of Stalin's preoccupation with political control of the region above all other considerations.[8] The exception, of course, was Tito's Yugoslavia. CIA noted that while the Soviets might harbor hopes of someday recapturing that country in their orbit, their minimal and more practical aim was to prevent Tito's stabilization of power. CIA's analysts also believed that as long as Tito stood as an exemplary alternative to Soviet domination, Moscow's claim to ideological supremacy could be challenged.[9]

The other main area of concern was the Far East. An early paper on Soviet views of the civil war in China showed considerable thought about the relationship between the communists in Moscow and those in China. Whereas ORE 1 in July 1946 had referred to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as an "unusually effective instrument of Soviet foreign policy," ORE 45, *Implementation of Soviet Objectives in China,* published in September 1947, offered more cautionary observations. It noted that the Soviets could count on Chinese communist cooperation "so long as the CCP itself is engaged in a struggle for power" and that a China dominated by communists would serve long-range Soviet interests "assuming that [the CCP] remained closely allied to the USSR." In fact, the analysis went on to state more directly that the USSR might prefer "a continuation of instability and regionalism in China...to the final achievement of central power by the CCP," and that Moscow might find that Chinese communists in power would display the same degree of nationalism and xenophobia as the Chinese Nationalists, "bearing little resemblance to the puppet governments found in the European communist satellites." Beyond China itself, the Far East was depicted in CIA analyses as an area of geostrategic

[7] These are described in more detail in Kuhns, *Assessing the Soviet Threat.*

[8] See ORE 17-50, *Soviet-Satellite Drive Against Western Influence in Eastern Europe* (2 June 1950).

[9] See ORE 8-50, *Evaluation of Soviet-Yugoslav Relations* (11 May 1950).

importance to the Soviets that needed to be denied to them in order to protect the island chain that included the Philippines and Japan and to prevent them from seizing control of resources that could be decisive in an ultimate world conflict.[10]

Analysts of foreign intelligence are supposed to avoid attempting to do "net assessments" involving US as well as foreign data. As CIA sought to understand Soviet behavior and the opportunities that might tempt Moscow to take offensive actions, however, it could not avoid on occasion noting Western capabilities or actions as important factors in Soviet thinking. For example, an April 1948 assessment of whether the Soviets would attack that year, done a month after General Clay's telegram, concluded that they probably would not. It did not exclude the possibility, however, that they might do so, "particularly if the Kremlin should interpret some US move, or series of moves, as indicating an intention to attack the USSR or its satellites."[11]

Korean War

With the outbreak of the Korean War, CIA offered within days of the invasion an opinion that the Soviets were not seeking a global conflict although they might exploit other areas of the world. Even if South Korea was "picked off," CIA estimated the USSR would be content to remain quiescent in such areas as Iran, Yugoslavia, Turkey, and Germany so long as US policy did nothing to require Soviet reactions. A second conflict, or "another Korea," could occur, but only if local conditions mirrored those in the real Korea. CIA also offered the view that the Soviets might use Chinese troops in Korea if hostilities were prolonged, but probably not Soviet forces.[12] Two months later, CIA saw signs of Soviet preparations for major hostilities (e.g. aircraft production, airfield construction, processing of petroleum) and warned of the risk of general war, but noted that it possessed no evidence of Soviet plans for initiating additional conflicts. It estimated the Soviets could deliver 25 atomic bombs on the United States, but not "large-scale" bombardment.[13]

The arrival of a new DCI and a new estimates process and the intervention of the Chinese in the Korean conflict late in 1950 brought a new sense of urgency to CIA's analysis of possible Soviet actions, and a flurry of estimates were prepared for Washington policymakers. In November (just after William Langer's arrival to chair the Board of National Estimates), a Joint Intelligence Committee paper from the Pentagon was adapted

[10] See ORE 17-49, *The Strategic Importance of the Far East to the US and the USSR* (4 May 1949) and NIE-43, *The Strategic Importance of the Far East to the USSR* (13 November 1951).

[11] ORE 22-48, *Possibility of Direct Soviet Military Action During 1948* (2 April 1948) excerpted in Kuhns, *Assessing the Soviet Threat*, p. 187.

[12] These views are in Intelligence Memorandum No. 301, *Estimate of Soviet Intentions and Capabilities for Military Aggression* (30 June 1950). In fall 1950, when the issue of possible use of Chinese forces was the focus of intense interest in Washington, CIA in its current intelligence did not judge such use to be likely. See Kuhns, ed., *Assessing the Soviet Threat*, pp. 18-19.

[13] Intelligence Memorandum 323-SRC, *Soviet Preparations for Major Hostilities in 1950* (25 August 1950).

to produce an estimate that said the Soviets would be relentlessly aggressive because of their immutable and dynamic objective of world domination and because they could not satisfy their offensive goals without war. "In the belief that their object cannot be fully attained without a general war with the Western powers, the Soviet rulers may deliberately provoke such a war at a time when, in their opinion, the relative strength of the USSR is at its maximum." This time was judged to be between 1950 and 1954, with the maximum danger in 1952. The war in Korea was seen as a significant step forward in fulfilling the Kremlin's overall strategy.[14]

In December 1950, several more papers continued the new vigor. NIE-11, *Soviet Intentions in the Current Situation,* speculated that the Kremlin might now want general war. Soviet leaders were judged to have opted for aggressive attacks on US positions, additional direct or indirect aggression was deemed likely, and Moscow surely saw a Sino-American war as good for their interests. No sense of tentative calculation or concern over miscalculation was attributed to Stalin and his colleagues. NIE-15, *Probable Soviet Moves to Exploit the Present Situation,* concluded that Soviet leaders thought the USSR's international position was one of great strength. It repeated the judgment that Moscow may now have decided on general war, warned of various violent options it might exercise in Berlin or even West Germany, and guessed that the Soviets would not be satisfied in Korea short of ousting UN forces completely.

By 1952, with the Korean war locked in stalemate and no dramatic Soviet reactions to Western plans to strengthen NATO militarily, CIA's judgment about Soviet aims had shifted to a less dire viewpoint. The analysts now saw the balance of power moving against the USSR, not enough to make Soviet leaders desperate but enough to lessen the likelihood of Soviet military action. NIE-48, *The Likelihood of the Deliberate Initiation of Full-Scale War by the USSR Against the US and Its Western Allies Prior to the End of 1952,* published in January 1952, estimated that the Soviets, concerned about risks to their own system and country and mindful of US power, would not undertake a frontal military attack. Rather, they would seek advantages in former colonial areas such as the Middle East and Southeast Asia. The next month saw another estimate published, NIE-53, *Probable Soviet Courses of Action Regarding Germany during 1952,* which indicated that the Kremlin would seek to weaken the Western position in Berlin but would not resort to another blockade or to military attack. It judged that Moscow was more interested in retaining control of East Germany than in accepting a united, independent, and disarmed Germany, and would be careful not to provoke rearmament of West Germany.

[14] The estimate was NIE-3, *Soviet Capabilities and Intentions* (15 November 1950), and the notion—that the Soviet path to international change lay via war—brought into the main text of CIA's estimates (without dissent) what had been expressed only in the US Air Force dissent to the April 1950 paper about Soviet possession of atomic bombs, namely that "no major revolution is feasible without war."

NIE-58, *Relations Between the CPR and the USSR: Present and Future,* published in September 1952, foresaw that while mutual interest would prevail over the next two years, Soviet efforts to extend control over China would weaken the Sino-Soviet alliance. It cited conflicts in border areas and separate Chinese efforts to assist communist parties in Asia, as well as Mao Tse-tung's special role as leader of a party that had seized power independently and had a seemingly stable leadership, as factors that would tug at the ties binding the two powers. In all three of these papers from 1952, CIA continued to wrestle with how best to understand and depict what it saw as the most important aims of Stalin's USSR. How did its ultimate objectives relate to its proximate intentions? What factors did Soviet leaders most take into account? Illuminating these issues, CIA analysts believed, would be the best contribution they could make to US policymaking.

In December 1952, no doubt to assist the new Eisenhower administration as it organized its transition to power, NIE-64, *Probable Soviet Bloc Courses of Action Through Mid-1953,* repeated many of the basic points covered in the estimates put out earlier in the year. It stressed Soviet political warfare and declared that Moscow would support rebellions in Indonesia and Malaya. A broader memorandum prepared in November titled *Estimate of Soviet Intentions over the Forthcoming Decade* emphasized the ideological component of Soviet thinking. It predicted that Cold War hostility would persist throughout the 1950s, that coexistence and relaxation of tensions were temporary and tactical, and that the Kremlin would continue to pursue its objective of a communist world dominated by Moscow. Eastern Europe would remain firmly in Soviet control, and the Chinese communists could continue to work "in close accord" with the USSR. The world political chess match was in stalemate. But as this condition continued, CIA argued, both sides would work to correct their deficiencies. Thus, the Soviet stockpile of nuclear weapons would grow, as would its capacity for delivering them and for defending against US capabilities. The possibilities of a Sino-Soviet split (which, if it occurred, would "profoundly alter the world power situation") and of war (which, if it occurred, would come through error, misinterpretation, or unexpected power shifts, not deliberate planning) were acknowledged, but both were seen as unlikely.

Post-Stalin Period

The lack of any significant inside knowledge of Kremlin politics did not absolve CIA's analysts of the task of explaining the implications of Stalin's death. Within days of the event they had produced SE-39, *Probable Consequences of the Death of Stalin and of the Elevation of Malenkov to Leadership in the USSR.* This "special estimate" foresaw no immediate challenge to Georgi Malenkov since he had been at senior levels for years and the transition had seemed smooth, but it warned that "A struggle for power could develop within the Soviet hierarchy at any time." It also declared that "The USSR is politically more vulnerable today than before Stalin's death." It followed that not self-evidently clear

statement by declaring that difficult policy decisions and rivalry for personal power could lead to reduced Soviet strength and reduced cohesion in the international communist movement. Perhaps its best prediction was about Sino-Soviet affairs. It declared that Mao's stature and influence in Asia would inevitably increase and that Soviet failure to deal "cautiously" with him would "almost certainly" lead to serious bilateral strains.

As for the impact of Stalin's death on foreign policy, the report predicted continuity — that is, unremitting hostility — but expressed concern about the ability of Stalin's successors to manage the Cold War peacefully. Stalin, it averred, "while ruthless and determined to spread Soviet power, did not allow his ambitions to lead him into reckless courses of action in his foreign policy." It warned that "it would be unsafe to assume that the new Soviet regime will have Stalin's skill in avoiding general war." The new leaders might have more difficulty abandoning positions and might react more strongly to Western moves, the estimate continued, as well as be less sure in handling new developments, including new Western proposals.

The unease CIA analysts must have felt in trying to fathom the loss of Stalin's sure hand on the helm of the Soviet state proved well founded. One month later, they were back at the drawing board. In an 8 April 1953 memorandum prepared for a National Security Council (NSC) meeting, they confessed up front that "recent Soviet moves belie many of [CIA's earlier] predictions" of cautious policy continuity. The unexpected moves abounded: a repudiation of the alleged doctors' plot to kill Soviet leaders, the scrapping of Stalin worship, an amnesty, and no fewer than nine steps marking a "peace offensive" on the international front (e.g., relaxing Berlin traffic controls and accepting a UN proposal for exchanging sick and wounded in Korea). Motives for the new stance were depicted as lessening the danger of war and gaining a breathing space for the new leaders, stopping US rearmament and the European Defense Community initiatives, and encouraging the eventual neutralization of Germany and Japan and removal of US troops from Europe and Asia. The analysts found the internal changes more difficult to understand. They speculated that the succession problem was not solved after all and that "an abrupt change in Soviet tactics, comparable only to that in 1939, may be impending." Thus emerged the first instance of a troublesome problem that would bedevil CIA's analysts throughout the Cold War years: "soft-line" Soviet flexibility was in some ways tougher for them (and their policy customers) to deal with than "hard-line" Soviet hostility.

In reaction to the surprising political events in Moscow, CIA's Office of Current Intelligence formed a small group of political analysts who were separated from current intelligence reporting duties and assigned to do in-depth studies of various episodes of the late Stalin and early post-Stalin period. The initial spur to this action was actually the doctors' plot unveiled in the fall of 1952, but Stalin's death caused the reports done by this group to be called the "CAESAR" series.[15] Eight lengthy reports were issued in summer

1953, and two others followed the next year. They covered political developments from the Zhdanov-Malenkov relationship in the postwar period to the purge of Beria, including the doctors' plot and its reversal, Stalin's death, and party-military relations through 1953. They drew on a variety of intelligence reporting, including reports of CIA's operations directorate (then called Directorate of Plans) and communications intelligence (which was made available to only a limited number of CIA analysts at the time because codewords limited dissemination). They are essentially "Kremlinological" assessments, however, relying heavily on Soviet official announcements and media output and thoughtful interpretation.

The studies were quite detailed, retrospective, not formally coordinated, and devoid of any attempt to spell out implications of their conclusions for US policy. They stand as testament to the importance CIA was willing—early in its existence—to place on devoting analytic resources to understanding the "main threat" that faced the United States and to the belief of at least some in CIA that intensive study of Soviet politics and policies needed to be protected from the time-consuming tasks of current intelligence and policy support activities. These studies were in effect building blocks that assisted general understanding of Soviet affairs, not attempts to deliver "bottom line" messages of immediate utility to CIA's customers in the policy community.

One of the first of these studies, published in July 1953, stated that "it is the author's contention that Stalin was unable to contemplate anyone succeeding him." This is not a surprising conclusion, but it is precisely opposite the reasoning that had guided the estimates done in 1952 and at the time of Stalin's death, which had imagined that Stalin had carefully positioned an individual to succeed him smoothly (and even that he had a will prepared and might retire). So these studies testify to another CIA practice of the day: a willingness to permit the publication and dissemination of uncoordinated views by individual analysts that did not accord with the company line as expressed in authoritative National Intelligence Estimates.

Twentieth Party Congress

This impulse to develop deep analytic expertise and devote it to study of the communist threat led, around 1956, to the formation of a Senior Research Staff (SRS) on International Communism subordinated directly to CIA's Deputy Director for Intelligence (head of all CIA analysis but not in charge of the production of NIEs). This staff did in-depth studies of Soviet and Chinese political affairs and a wide range of international communist matters. Probably the Staff's best contribution was its exhaustive ongoing treatment of the course of

[15] This information was supplied to the author in fall 2000 by James Hanrahan, a CIA veteran of this period and leader of this group. CAESAR 10A, a paper that summarizes the conclusions of the first nine CAESAR reports, was released by CIA to the National Archives and Records Administration in conjunction with the Princeton conference.

Sino-Soviet relations, which was pathbreaking in nature and a model of exemplary research and analysis (and, it should be remembered, on a topic about which there were passionately held differing views in Washington). According to a CIA Inspector General (IG) report on the SRS done two years after it was created, the Staff originated in part because of counterintelligence concerns about international communism and was to assist in operational work countering communism. It developed, however, as an entity devoted to academic-style inquiry with an emphasis on the role of ideology in animating communist thinking and policy.

Like the CAESAR work, SRS products were detailed, usually retrospective, scholarly, largely self-generated, and not of immediate utility to policymakers. They often lacked even an introductory abstract or summary, and they were frequently denoted as "speculative" in nature. One complaint stated in the IG report was that the Staff's work was sometimes at odds with other CIA products (an example cited referred to differences between SRS and James Angleton's Counterintelligence Staff, which of course was not a Directorate of Intelligence analytic unit producing finished intelligence for outside consumers). Another was that the Staff's product was not going to policy-level officials. The report's conclusion that the Staff should be removed from CIA and that kind of work be performed at a research foundation or university was, in a sense, apt. Research was exactly the kind of work it did, and some of its members went into university teaching and research positions after leaving the US government. This recommendation was not acted upon, however, and CIA kept the staff intact until 1973. It continued, until its demise, to do pathbreaking work and to live up to the reputation for analysis of "good intellectual quality" cited in the IG report.[16]

The first paper published by SRS was an examination of the momentous twentieth congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). CIA/SRS-1, *The 20th CPSU Congress in Retrospect: Its Principal Issues and Possible Effects on International Communism,* was published in June 1956 (just after the *New York Times* published Khrushchev's "secret speech" at the meeting denouncing Stalin and before the impact of that publicity was felt). It clung solidly to the idea that the basic Soviet goal of world domination had not been altered and went to some length to argue that "mellowing" tactics in foreign policy and less dictatorial regime practices did not bode well for US interests. Although the Soviet system now had the party rather than an individual in charge, it was still a dictatorship. "Revolution," the paper argued, "can become more gradual and respectable."

[16] One indicator of the dedication and intensity of the specialists in SRS is an urgent plea contained in an SRS think piece done just before the twenty-first party congress was to take place in 1961 to adopt the first new Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) program since 1919: "It is essential that all experts, whether in the intelligence, academic, or other public communities, gird themselves for a searching study of this program."

At the same time, the paper noted that a purposeful domestic tension, the demands placed on both the populace and the economy for an unending struggle, and the concept of an inevitable death struggle between two camps had served useful purposes for the regime. Because the new party platform called for relaxing these tensions, the paper reasoned, "The question naturally arises whether the leaders of the CPSU and other parties can dispense with permanent tension without at the same time undermining their monolithic dictatorship." And since these leaders are surely not unaware of this risk and "would reject a 'mellowing' process," SRS concluded, "their reasons must have been weighty indeed, and their confidence great." This theme of questioning whether Soviet leaders could pull off the kind of "inducements-instead-of-force" policy shift they seemed to be attempting was raised frequently by DCI Allen Dulles in forums such as lectures at the National War College. Also stressed was the theme that greater subtlety in Soviet foreign policies probably posed more danger for the West than Stalin's confrontational but non-reckless approach.

The Soviet doctrinal shift on the non-inevitability of war was clearly attributable, this CIA analysis believed, to the recognition by the Soviet leaders of the significance of nuclear weapons. Stalin, the paper asserted, had not understood this in the immediate postwar period before the USSR had successfully tested atomic bombs, and the new leaders "surely must realize that the atom knows no ideological preferences." The shift to allowing peaceful and varying roads to power for communists in other countries was seen by SRS as indicating that Moscow would allow "considerably more leeway to the satellite parties," and would seek advances in other regions via its new strategy, which the paper judged to be "realistic and ingenious."

Khrushchev Era

The issue of change in the USSR was much on the minds of CIA analysts in the 1950s. A January 1957 Office of National Estimates memorandum titled *Forces of Ferment in the USSR* outlined two phenomena that the author felt were insufficiently appreciated in the formal estimates: the role of the intelligentsia and Great Russian chauvinism. Dostoyevsky, the memo asserted, "wrote a better 'estimate' of the future of Russian society" than any statesman of his day. There was evidence of discontent in the USSR at this time, and the writer ventured that "one of the first key prerequisites for a revolutionary situation" was coming into being and that "a disaffected intelligentsia living within an absolutist state has been, historically, almost impossible to conciliate with piecemeal reforms." SRS wrote a lengthy (130 pages) study on the eve of the 1957 Moscow youth festival about both internal and international aspects of the event.[17] The staff's analysts clearly saw the new inquisitiveness and openness as potentially of critical importance for the USSR and cited

[17] CIA/SRS-5, *International Communism and Youth: The Challenge of the 1957 Moscow Festival* (6 June 1957).

their own director, Allen Dulles, as having said in a December 1956 speech at Princeton University that "The leaven of education has begun its work; the men in the Kremlin have a hard task ahead to hold this process in check."

By the late 1950s, CIA had passed through the "shake-down" period of its first ten years, and its political analysts were both regularly contributing to the formal estimates that supported the well-oiled NSC process and grappling with the exciting changes of the post-Stalin "thaw." Some of their best work on Khrushchev-era politics and the emerging Sino-Soviet split lay just ahead. We might pause at this juncture and look at a 1958 retrospective assessment of how well the Office of National Estimates (ONE) had done in covering the Soviet Union in its first seven years.

The author of the assessment, Abbott Smith, a senior ONE officer who later headed the office, noted dryly how NIEs had grown in size during the period. He was struck by the development of the economic section, which he felt "reflected the maturing capabilities of ORR (the Office of Research and Reports)." "Political sections, both on domestic and foreign affairs," he noted, "have grown luxuriantly." Inclusion of these now lengthy "learned disquisitions," he perceptively observed, had the effect of reducing the proportion of the estimate language that referred to the threat posed by the USSR. As for political forecasting, however, he felt that NIEs "wholly failed to foresee" events connected with post-Stalin policy changes such as the June 1953 Berlin riots, the Austrian peace treaty, the Soviet arms deal with Egypt in 1955, and the convulsions in Eastern Europe in 1956.

The grand charge was that "our most important wrong estimates, all of which were in the political field, arose out of resistance to the idea that change and development would occur in the Soviet bloc." ONE had failed to recognize that Stalin's death was a critical event that ended an era, he contended, and the complications of running the Eastern Europe empire had been underappreciated. Perhaps it was a lack of imagination, he thought. (The basic US policy of containment was predicated on inducing change inside the Soviet system by denying it external successes, however, and one might therefore think that change would be the *most* logical target of estimative work.) He identified analytic mindset (without using the term) as a key problem: "We had constructed for ourselves a picture of the USSR, and whatever happened had to be made to fit into that picture. Intelligence estimators can hardly commit a more abominable sin."

At the same time, he balanced his critique by noting that many of the main points of political analysis of the USSR had turned out to be valid: emphasis on the continuing strength of party rule, the importance of heavy industry and the military, and the emergence of problems with communist China. If the main fault was not foreseeing change, perhaps the cautious emphasis on continuity for a regime retaining its basic shape and aims was not so bad. "It is better for us to err on the side of conservatism and immobility," he concluded,

than to bend in every breeze. (This viewpoint is a surprising conclusion for a professional intelligence officer, who should avoid slant of any kind. It was widely held throughout the Cold War, however, by analysts and policymakers alike.)[18]

Certainly this assessment was right in complimenting CIA's coverage of Sino-Soviet affairs. In 1954, one estimate described China as more an ally than a satellite, and another mentioned the potential for worse conflict between the states while stating that cohesion was at that time far more dominant.[19] The threat posed by both nations as they sought to advance their influence in the Third World was followed diligently in the 1950s. By 1958, estimates described the bilateral relationship as "more nearly one of equality."[20] Apart from estimates, SRS was producing a series of papers that focused on the details of Sino-Soviet differences (they were called the ESAU series of studies since they dealt with a troubled "fraternal" relationship). These and other studies tracked carefully the various meetings, communications, and actions between the two countries and their impact on other key areas such as Soviet policy toward Eastern Europe or the West.

Study of Sino-Soviet relations was a major subfield of CIA analytic inquiry. Differing points of view were expressed in a number of uncoordinated papers. Some stressed the areas of unity and cooperation, others put more emphasis on the growing signs pointing toward possible rupture. Ideology was of course a constant field of battle, and much of the SRS analysis involved interpretations of ideological disputes and their practical meaning. Estimates tended to stress geopolitical factors. Sherman Kent, in a 1961 memorandum to a new DCI (John McCone), described the Sino-Soviet dispute as one of national interest and offered the opinion that a full break was coming.[21] The subject took up more than a third of the memorandum, which was about the full range of Soviet intentions, and Kent forecast that a rupture might cause harsher Soviet policies in Eastern Europe, but perhaps a willingness to ease tensions with the West.

On Eastern Europe, an estimate in early 1956 predicted no active resistance to firm communist control in the area although nationalism and dissidence would be factors with which regimes would have to deal.[22] A special NIE done during the Hungarian revolt foresaw that the Hungarian leadership could not bridge the gap between nationalist aspirations awakened there and Soviet security requirements.[23] The NIE calculated that events in Hungary and in Poland had clearly weakened the Soviet position in the region,

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[18] For an excellent treatment of the dangers of various kinds of conscious and unconscious bias in intelligence analysis, see Raymond L. Garthoff, "On Estimating and Imputing Intentions," *International Security*, Vol. 2, no. 4, (1978), pp. 22-32.

[19] NIE 10-2-54, *Communist Courses of Action in Asia Through mid-1955* (9 March 1954); NIE 11-4-54, *Soviet Capabilities and Probable Courses of Action Through mid-1959* (14 September 1954).

[20] NIE 11-4-58, *Main Trends in Soviet Capabilities and Policies, 1958-63* (23 December 1958).

[21] ONE, Memorandum for the Director, *An Appraisal of Soviet Intentions* (21 December 1961).

[22] NIE 12-56, *Probable Developments in the European Satellites Through 1960* (10 January 1956).

[23] SNIE 12-2-56, *Probable Developments in East Europe and Implications for Soviet Policy* (30 October 1956).

rendering the communist military alliance less reliable. A month later, estimators tried to think through what kind of control the Soviets could devise and offered the view that the looser model provided by the Polish case might be applied elsewhere.[24] After another year had passed and Khrushchev had consolidated his power, CIA reversed course and saw Moscow going slow in bloc relations and trying to avoid the Polish example.[25] By 1958 Soviet policies in Eastern Europe were seen to have worked in terms of reestablishing control, and no political innovations, let alone revolts, were foreseen, although internal ferment (and potential for influence from the West) was expected to continue.

As Khrushchev shifted to more confrontational tactics after the initial Soviet ICBM tests and Sputnik's precedent-setting satellite launch, NIEs dutifully registered the change. NIE 11-4-58, *Main Trends in Soviet Capabilities and Policies 1958-1963* (23 December 1958) described the "new tendencies" in Soviet policy, including pressures on Berlin.[26] Militancy and external assertiveness seemed based, the NIE stated, on a new confidence felt in Moscow owing to a more favorable balance of international power. "We think that the substance, as distinguished from the style, of Soviet policy is likely to be little affected by Khrushchev's idiosyncrasies," the estimate intoned. Yet Khrushchev the person could not help but loom large in the analysts' thinking, and the energy evident in Soviet actions was at another point in the same paper explicitly linked to the now clearly number one Soviet leader.

Early 1960s

How to relate judgments about Khrushchev's position or about general, internal conditions to policy was difficult for CIA's analysts. They assessed Khrushchev's political success as being dependent on the success of policies he supported, a marked change from the kind of power Stalin had held. Political controversy within the Communist Party and the top leadership was clearly recognized. In substantiating the argument that Khrushchev was under some political restraints, the Sherman Kent memo of late 1961 cited earlier and an early 1962 estimate (NIE 11-5-62, *Political Developments in the USSR and the Communist World,* 21 February 1962) pointed out that old-line Communist Party leaders were hardly the kind of people likely to be capable of or enthused about carrying out some of the reforms pushed by Khrushchev. Remaking the party in his image, Kent asserted, will "be a long and difficult process," and will even then perhaps be inadequate to the task of maintaining party supremacy in a society that has been told of Stalin's excesses. Analysts also carefully examined such factors as the role of the military in Soviet politics.[27] But as

[24] SNIE 12-3-56, *Probable Developments in Soviet-Satellite Relations* (27 November 1956).

[25] NIE 11-4-57, *Main Trends in Soviet Capabilities and Policies 1957-1962* (12 November 1957).

[26] See Donald P. Steury, *On the Front Lines of the Cold War: Documents on the Intelligence War in Berlin, 1946 to 1961* (History Staff, Center for the Study of Intelligence, CIA, Washington, DC, 1999), for more detailed documentation and discussion of Berlin, including, but not limited to, the 1958-61 crisis period.

Allen Dulles noted in a lecture to the National War College in 1960, even a general judgment that dictatorships either degenerate or mellow over time or that Soviet society suffers certain liabilities does not mean analysts can assure policymakers about a leadership that seems to be striving mightily in international affairs and building or maintaining a lead in some measures of military power.

A Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE), done in summer 1960 just as US reconnaissance satellites began operations, was unsure whether Moscow would press publicly against such capabilities or remain silent while building countermeasures.[28] It predicted that the Soviets would try to block them from acquiring some data and be ready to destroy them with anti-satellite capabilities as soon as possible. There was no discussion of Soviet use of such satellites themselves. That they spelled the end of the period of Khrushchev's exaggerated boasting about Soviet missiles was not yet evident.

On Sino-Soviet relations, a 1960 estimate noted growing Chinese power and predicted China would increase its weight in Communist Bloc affairs over the next five years.[29] In general, it judged that the cohesive forces between the two powers outweighed the divisive ones but noted that a break between them could still come. It noted Soviet help to China on nuclear weapons and predicted a Chinese nuclear bomb by 1964 if Soviet assistance continued. CIA wrestled with the impact Sino-Soviet differences had in various respects: on internal affairs within the Soviet and Chinese communist parties, on Eastern Europe, and on Soviet foreign policy generally. On the latter point, the line generally adopted was that it did increase militant tendencies in Soviet policy, for example, regarding the national liberation struggle in the Third World, but would not necessarily lead Moscow to take risky actions. (The Berlin actions involved threats but arguably in a way that controlled risks; the Cuban missile deployment, famously not foreseen by CIA, clearly was much riskier).

When the wall went up suddenly in Berlin in 1961, an estimate done within two weeks of the event warned that stanching the refugee flow might not be enough and that further efforts to obtain a separate treaty for East Germany and to expel the West from Berlin might occur.[30] At the same time, it judged that further drastic action in Germany or elsewhere was not likely once this step had been taken. A unique follow-up paper issued less than two months later cited information recently supplied by a source, "judged at this time to be reliable," warning of Soviet military plans and a planned sudden signature of a peace treaty with East Germany (it credited the information regarding plans but cast doubt on the

[27] An ONE staff memorandum dated 6 June 1960, *The Marshals and the Party: The Role of the Military in Current Soviet Politics*, delved deeply into the past to illuminate career experience connections between various political and military leaders.
[28] SNIE 100-6-60, *Probable Reactions to US Reconnaissance Satellite Programs* (9 August 1960).
[29] NIE 100-3-60, *Sino-Soviet Relations* (9 August 1960).
[30] SNIE 11-10-61, *Soviet Tactics in the Berlin Crisis* (24 August 1961).

signature story as source speculation).[31] Other 1961 papers cast the Berlin action as part of a general policy of intimidation that would be felt in areas such as Iran (e.g., SNIE 11-12-61, *The Soviet Threat to Iran and CENTO,* 5 October 1961).

NIE 11-9-62, *Trends in Soviet Foreign Policy,* 2 May 1962, judged that Soviet leaders still believed the Soviet system would prevail but did not want to run risks in pursuing their international aims. It was published about the time Khrushchev was secretly hatching his Cuban missile gambit, and may have reflected the new confidence felt in Washington with the collapse of the "missile gap" fears in 1961. It took a long view, looking back to the initial post-Stalin opening up of Soviet foreign policy in the mid-1950s and to Khrushchev's post-Sputnik rhetorical aggressiveness and imagining how Soviet leaders assessed their gains as against their earlier hopes. It concluded that the "mood of exuberant confidence" in Moscow had "sobered somewhat," leaving an "expectation of slower advance" internationally despite apparent favorable gains in Cuba, Laos, and elsewhere. Notably, it pointed to the importance of the United States to Khrushchev as a measure of Soviet advance. It depicted Soviet leaders as wanting to have an equal voice with Washington's in world affairs and acknowledgment by the United States that this was warranted. It also declared that peace and economic gains were now more important to Soviet leaders and that therefore relations with the West might become less ideologically intense and possibly even more valued than ties to their communist colleagues in China. Domestic economic goals drove them to want to reduce the burden of military spending, the estimate judged, but military strength remained the foundation for their policy.

In the wake of the Cuban missile crisis, a CIA memorandum of March 1963 titled *Soviet Policies: The Next Phase* drew the logical conclusion from the outcome of the event that Soviet leaders would now want to build military strength (although this reasoning did not carry over to estimates of future Soviet strategic military power, which in the next few years understated the Soviet intercontinental ballistic missile buildup).[32] The memorandum quoted Khrushchev's frank public acknowledgment that this policy "diminishes, and cannot but diminish" the prospects for Soviet consumers and went on to speculate that there now existed "an internal stress for sacrifice [that] will militate against any resumption of détente." "A further decline in confidence and expectations" was foreseen for foreign affairs generally, and a possible nuclear test ban was seen as unlikely.

By 1964, on the eve of Khrushchev's ouster, the Soviet acceptance of the limited nuclear test ban and hot line agreement led CIA's analysts to conclude that Moscow's post-Cuba period of indecision was over. NIE 11-9-64, *Soviet Foreign Policy,* 19 February 1964, envisioned continued Soviet emphasis on the Third World but avoidance of confrontation

[31] SNIE 11-10/1-61, *Soviet Tactics in the Berlin Crisis,* Supplement to SNIE 11-10-61 (5 October 1961).

[32] For some CIA analyses of the Cuban missile crisis, see Mary S. McAuliffe, ed., *CIA Documents on the Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962* (History Staff, CIA, Washington, DC, 1992).

there as well as in Germany. NIE 11-4-64, *Soviet Military Policy* 22 April 1964, stated that Moscow recognized US strategic superiority and judged that both sides were deterred from nuclear weapon use. It held out hope that Soviet leaders would try to hold down military spending.[33]

Brezhnev Comes to Power

Some months after Khrushchev's ouster in the fall of 1964, CIA portrayed more continuity than change in Soviet policies, asserting that the differences had been more about style than substance.[34] There were still pressures to ease military spending, it asserted, as agricultural and other policies seemed to anger the defense lobby. The leaders were still seen as looking for popular support in a more modern Soviet society, and their political struggle continued "to revolve around specific issues of policy." In foreign policy, the new collective leadership was seen as wanting to repair the fissures within the socialist camp and willing to accept a deterioration in Soviet relations with the United States.

By 1966, however, after the twenty-third party congress, Leonid Brezhnev was seen as leading a return to a more orthodox party role, and the military was getting a better hearing for its claims on resources. A major issue facing the renamed Politburo was increased demands for greater intellectual and other freedoms, which were being met with resistance, and so greater chances for internal political conflict in this arena were foreseen.[35] NIE 11-4-66, *Main Trends in Soviet Military Policy,* 16 June 1966, noted a sharp increase in military spending although it did not conclude that this meant more aggressive policies. (The US Air Force dissented on this point.)

A series of studies from ORR in 1965-67 (just before it split in mid-1967 into an Office of Economic Research [OER] and an Office of Strategic Research [OSR]) followed the important changes taking place in Soviet military policy at that time. They noted the rise in defense spending signaled at the end of 1965 and cited Brezhnev's complaint that this was "a great burden for the budget, for our national economy." They explored the rethinking of Soviet strategists of modern military requirements that had been neglected under Khrushchev and that justified more military investment. By mid-1967, these papers asserted that there had been a "marked change in the Soviet Union's strategic situation over the past year" and that the USSR was "approaching maturity in the nuclear missile age."

[33] In the 1950s, the "11-4" NIEs were comprehensive and annual, addressing military capabilities and both domestic and foreign affairs, and were fitted into the NSC policy machinery of the Eisenhower administration. In the early 1960s, new series of separate estimates on strategic and conventional military capabilities were created (to handle the volume of data presented), and from the 1960s into the 1980s the "11-4" estimates, no longer annual, covered overall Soviet military or political-military policy with somewhat varying titles and areas of emphasis.

[34] NIE 11-65, *Soviet Politics After Khrushchev* (1 July 1965).

[35] NIE 11-7-66, *Main Trends in Soviet General Policies* (28 April 1966).

If the internal building of military strength was going well for the Soviets, other areas of policy were not. In the Middle East, an Arab defeat in 1967 left Moscow having to take actions (e.g., rearm clients) to maintain its hard-won position in the region, but—in CIA's view—choosing not to seek new commitments (e.g., bases) there. In the Far East, CIA charted a worsening of the Soviet relationship with China that caused Moscow to build up forces on the border and to compete with China in the Third World. In Eastern Europe, the situation in Czechoslovakia in 1968 brought Soviet leaders new evidence of unreliability on the part of the communist regimes there, new fears of the effects of the Prague Spring within the USSR itself, and a temporary setback in the budding dialogue with the United States on strategic arms (though, CIA argued, Moscow's invasion of Czechoslovakia in August did not mean a general hardening of policy toward the West).

Brezhnev and his colleagues were portrayed in CIA analysis in the late 1960s as a colorless, cautious group devoted to committee rule among themselves over the central apparatuses of control, and to party rule over the country.[36] Whereas Khrushchev had spoken to the party, one memorandum observed, Brezhnev spoke *for* it. Their domestic prospects were seen as "not especially bright," and the rebirth of neo-Stalinism and vigilance were seen as reactive policies that might or might not cope well with the internal pressures faced by the regime.

In the first months of the new administration of President Richard M. Nixon, NIE 11-69, *Basic Factors and Main Tendencies in Current Soviet Policy,* 27 February 1969, offered a treatment of politics and policymaking in Brezhnev's USSR that was especially sensitive to limitations and predicaments faced by the Kremlin. It dwelt on internal affairs, portraying the leadership as on the defensive, operating with a "fearful mood of conservatism," and not certain of their ability to co-opt new members to their ranks without upsetting their collective leadership arrangement. "Severe problems" at home related to dissidence and economic growth were depicted as not easy for Soviet leaders to solve, especially while at the same time they were competing with the United States globally on an economic base only half the size of their rival's. In Eastern Europe, there was no good solution, and CIA warned that force might have to be used again. In Asia, China had moved from a fraternal ally to a full-fledged great power enemy, and the specter of Sino-US collusion loomed.

[36] The dead weight of bureaucracy in the USSR cropped up occasionally in CIA analysis. The best description may actually have been rendered a decade earlier by an SRS analyst who believed that Khrushchev's 1957 industrial reorganization scheme was aimed at eradicating overcentralized bureaucratic structures: "During forty years of Bolshevism, Moscow had become what William Cobbett called London a century and a half ago, the great 'Wen'...a web of administrative nerve lines converged on a vast ganglion of desks in the capital."

All in all, the estimate offered less a catalogue of policy options or predictions than a sense of the perspectives and atmosphere in Moscow pressing on all Kremlin policy decisions. Notably, it did not stress the Soviet military threat—although that topic was much on Washington policymakers' minds at the time. It served as a good summary of what preoccupied the minds of the Brezhnev-led collective leadership on the eve of Soviet military clashes with the Chinese and a new stage of détente with the West.

Rise and Fall of Détente in the 1970s

After the initial round of US-Soviet strategic arms limitation talks (SALT), an estimate was prepared to support US policy choices on the important strategic dialogue opening up between Moscow and Washington.[37] It stated that the Soviet leaders wanted US recognition of the USSR's equality with the United States, and might see as attainable margins of advantage even as they recognized the basic condition of mutual deterrence and demanded at least parity in strategic arms. Whether beyond this they sought strategic superiority occasioned divided opinion, with the main text stating that it was not seen as a feasible goal, and the US Air Force claiming that it was. They "must be reluctant" to face additional arms expenditures, the estimate declared, and technology was seen as another big part of their motivation to seek agreement on some limitations to the strategic competition. Internally, the Soviet military was probably split in its opinions about the talks, the SNIE continued, and cautious decisionmaking would mark the Soviet approach to further negotiations.

Two years later, an estimate prepared on the eve of President Nixon's trip to Moscow to sign the SALT I accords depicted a Soviet leadership more confident about its security posture and more vigorous in its foreign policy.[38] Regarding Soviet strategic aims, although superiority was seen as not feasible, some kinds of advantage were now seen as achievable, not just possible. Brezhnev, now the indisputable leader, had a political stake in détente, the paper argued. Détente itself was described as a useful element of Soviet foreign policy's current "forward phase," which involved Moscow's making common cause with the United States in containing tensions in a world where the USSR now had a bigger role. The paper judged that the Soviet leaders felt the USSR had "made the grade" as a superpower.

The competition for influence in the world continued, the estimate contended, and international difficulties for the USSR abounded. US relations with China posed problems for Soviet diplomacy, and China itself had become a worse adversary than the United States. The Middle East remained unsettled, complex, and dangerous, but stalemate in this region would serve Soviet interests, and working toward a settlement of the Arab-Israeli dispute might even do so as well. Eastern Europe remained unsolved as détente with

[37] SNIE 11-16-70, *Soviet Attitudes Toward SALT* (19 February 1970).
[38] NIE 11-72, *Soviet Foreign Policies and the Outlook for Soviet-American Relations* (20 April 1972).

Western Europe still had to be squared with continued control by communist regimes in the east. In this environment, sharp competition with the United States continued, but détente was seen as helping Moscow to contain the risks of that competition.

What détente meant to Moscow was a much-debated issue in Washington as skepticism about Soviet intentions grew in the wake of the SALT and other agreements and in the midst of considerable international turmoil. New developments in Soviet strategic military programs fueled the fire. CIA produced a series of papers exploring Soviet aims throughout the 1970s. SNIE 11-4-73 asked a key question in its title: *Soviet Strategic Arms Programs and Détente: What Are They Up To?* (10 September 1973). It saw an edge to Soviet actions, testing the West on occasion, but did not portray Moscow as inviting new risks. The Soviets were after both equality and advantage, the paper declared. They were both prudent and opportunistic. They saw no contradiction between détente and vigorous arms programs. The latter underwrote their entire foreign policy, of which the former was an integral part.

The next year, a national intelligence analytic memorandum (NIAM 11-9-74, *Soviet Détente Policy,* 22 May 1974) repeated much of the same point of view regarding the utility to Moscow of détente with the West in setting limits on the big power rivalry while allowing Moscow to continue to build its military strength and maximize its security, power, and influence. It concluded that the policy was not a transitory one for Soviet leaders, and that a lower probability of aggressive Soviet actions in the Third World was implied. The Air Force dissented from the 1973 estimate, contending that Moscow was after strategic superiority and that détente was a tactic. And both the Air Force and the Navy dissented from the 1974 paper, arguing that more aggressive Soviet foreign policies were to be expected in the Third World.

The thrust of CIA's analysis of Soviet foreign policy shifted to a more dour outlook in the mid-1970s. Moscow's words and actions, including vigorous Soviet strategic military programs, played a role, as did the "Team B" exercise in Washington in 1976. This experiment in competitive analysis, in which an outside group challenged CIA's previous views as being too complacent about the threat posed by the USSR, was conducted with respect to estimates about Soviet strategic military power, but it really focused on overall Soviet policy objectives, not just military policy or capabilities.

Just after the conclusion of the "Team B" exercise and before the administration of President Jimmy Carter took office, NIE 11-4-77, *Soviet Strategic Objectives,* 12 January 1977, took a markedly more dire line in describing Moscow's policies. A foreword noted that the paper continued a trend toward "a more ominous interpretation" of Soviet aims, and the key judgments termed those aims "far-reaching." Moscow was not seeking equilibrium, the paper asserted, only continual enhancement of it own power, and military power was seen as a "key instrument" of its advancement. Although their military programs were

described as steady at a high level and not accelerating, the Soviet leaders were now thought to no longer accept the concept of mutual assured destruction even though they did recognize mutual deterrence as a "present reality" that would be hard to change. Most interesting perhaps was the paper's contention that Soviet leaders now saw their political system as strong and stable, with dissidence more an embarrassment than a challenge, although a concern about its being brittle was perceived. Soviet leaders, the paper concluded, would not be compelled to lower their rate of military spending. Most of the "limits" that CIA in the past had often cited in describing Soviet policy seemed to have been removed.

Taking Stock

It is worth pausing at this point to note two assessments made of CIA's political analysis in 1977 and 1978. The first was an in-house study conducted before the advent of the Carter administration by senior intelligence officers with analytic experience, largely on the basis of interviews with recipients of estimates.[39] The study covered all estimates, but its points seem clearly to apply to the ones on the USSR. It said that estimates on military, scientific, technical, and economic subjects were better received than those on political subjects, mainly because "most users were less able to handle the complex data, perform their own analysis, and reach their own conclusions" with the former. Also, the former often dealt with "hard" data: "By comparison, judgments on political matters, or on intentions, seem fuzzier, less precise, and less supportable, and often are." They found among recipients little concern about "slant" in estimates and little interest in specific predictions about possible future events such as coups.

The second study responded to a set of concerns voiced by the Carter administration about a year into its tenure about the quality of the intelligence support given to policymakers. Again, the object of the study was intelligence in general, but analysis of the USSR was prominently included. Promises to step up multidisciplinary work and to improve the quality of the analysts themselves were made in response to the criticism (an internal memorandum containing these promises cited the association with CIA of several prominent Sovietologists who were—in one way or another—assisting CIA's analytic effort on the USSR). In the Office of Regional and Political Analysis, a "multidisciplinary" branch was established in the Soviet affairs division to strengthen work on topics that bridged politics and policy on the one hand and military, economic, and technical issues on the other hand (e.g., Soviet science policy, Soviet policy toward legal regimes for space, Soviet arms control policy).

[39] Intelligence Monograph, *National Estimates: An Assessment of the Product and the Process* (Center for the Study of Intelligence, CIA, April 1977), TR/IM 77-03.

Organizational Changes

Organizational changes in the 1970s and early 1980s rearranged CIA's political analysts, including those working on Soviet affairs. In 1973, the ONE and the SRS were abolished.[40] Their analysts formed the core of a new Office of Political Research (OPR), which was established to provide a research-oriented complement to the Office of Current Intelligence (OCI) and a companion to the then six-year-old offices of economic and strategic research. OPR's Soviet analysts numbered only a handful (a much smaller group than their counterparts in OER and OSR) and included some newly recruited officers as well as transfers from ONE, SRS, and OCI.

One paper done by this office, *The Soviet Foreign Policy Apparatus*, published in June 1976, examined in detail the political and organizational context that had developed to support foreign policy decisionmaking in Moscow. It explained how foreign policy was now more important in leadership politics, how Communist Party experts exerted influence alongside professional diplomats, and how Brezhnev had formed a new kind of unique political stature involving authorities tied to the Defense Council, Politburo, and Central Committee. This kind of research-based work, as in the case of the detailed studies of Sino-Soviet affairs and other topics, brought a special dimension to CIA's political analysis of Soviet affairs and supported points made in shorter memorandums and estimates.

Another OPR paper, *Changing Soviet Perceptions of World Politics and the USSR's International Role*, published in October 1975, looked at how a newly self-confident and powerful USSR found itself conflicted between desires: to exploit apparent opportunities that had some Soviet scholars writing again about the general crisis of capitalism (e.g., political change in southern Europe, Western economic difficulties because of the oil issue); and to solidify its newfound influence via cooperation and agreements with its erstwhile ideological adversaries. Ideology remained important as a conceptual prism and rationale for action, the paper argued, but not as a practical guide to short- or intermediate-term goals and actions. Interstate relations had supplanted revolutionary struggle for the bureaucrats led by Brezhnev, and maintaining the new détente with the United States took precedence over embracing militancy for the sake of uncertain gains. The paper did not dwell on Soviet military policy or capability and struck a relatively balanced tone. It had no discernible impact on the estimates prepared in the mid-1970s and was deemed "provocative" by the chief of US Army intelligence. DCI William Colby praised the paper, however, and in his last month in office he sent it to President Gerald Ford and other senior US policymakers.

[40] NIEs continued to be done, but they were now directed by a group of "National Intelligence Officers" (NIOs)—one of whom was NIO for the USSR—appointed by the DCI. The group acquired a somewhat more regular shape as an office in 1979 when it became known as the National Intelligence Council (NIC), but it still did not have a drafting staff like ONE's or a regular collegial review process. The NIC and NIOs exist today and report directly to the DCI.

In 1976, OPR and OCI were both abolished and replaced by an Office of Regional and Political Analysis, which was renamed the Office of Political Analysis in 1979. In 1981, a major reorganization of CIA's Directorate of Intelligence abolished this office and the offices devoted to economic and strategic research. Created out of their units and staff were multidisciplinary offices for five geographic areas: four regions of the world and the USSR.[41] Thus came into existence the Office of Soviet Analysis (SOVA), which lasted ten years, until the end of the USSR.[42]

Within SOVA, as the office was called, the main subordinate units remained defined basically by discipline, but there were new synergies across disciplines resulting from the organizational change that assisted analysis of Soviet affairs at CIA. One new element introduced in the early 1980s was the creation of an office-sponsored panel of recognized non-CIA experts on Soviet political affairs that met periodically to review SOVA's political analysis products and research program. This group was an analogue to panels of outside experts on Soviet military and economic affairs that had previously existed and were continued under SOVA. The meetings of these panels, and the preparation and briefings associated with the meetings, may well have improved SOVA's perspectives across as well as within academic disciplines. Some analysts felt, for example, that SOVA's conclusion in 1982 that Soviet spending for military procurement had leveled off in the late 1970s and early 1980s grew out of ideas exchanged at such meetings. Also, CIA's recognition of the importance of the burden of defense spending to Gorbachev and his "new thinking" with respect to both economic reform and foreign policy may have been spurred by cross-disciplinary discussions made easier by virtue of SOVA's creation.[43]

Confrontation Replaces Détente

NIE 11-4-78, *Soviet Goals and Expectations in the Global Power Arena* (9 May 1978), set forth what the DCI described in an introduction as the basic thrust of Soviet foreign and military policies in an estimate written specifically to have a more "unified, integrated view" than the typical coordinated product. It asserted that military strength was the

[41] Just such a reorganization, replacing an inherited academic division of labor with sections reflecting regional theaters of operation, was carried out in 1943 within the Research and Analysis Branch of the Office of Strategic Services. One account records that the economists at first refused to serve with historians or political scientists and that the man in charge, William Langer, deserved a decoration for courage in "assaulting the academic fortifications." See Barry M. Katz, *Foreign Intelligence: Research and Analysis in the Office of Strategic Services, 1942-1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 22, 102.

[42] The reorganization also created a new Office of Global Issues (dealing with narcotics, terrorism, etc.), which produced some papers on the USSR in the 1980s devoted to topics such as covert action, global presence, and foreign aid. For a discussion of how that office rather than SOVA was used in the 1980s to produce analysis regarding the "underside" of Soviet behavior, see Robert M. Gates, *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), pp. 200-208.

[43] Although CIA's Directorate of Intelligence had placed most of its Soviet affairs analysts (but not technical weapons specialists or those working in OGI) together under one office director, the several NIOs charged with examining different dimensions of the Soviet Union did their work in the more loosely knit NIC.

foundation of the USSR's status, the key to its prospects in the world, and of "sharply increased importance" in Soviet policy calculations at a time when other forms of international competition were not going so well for Moscow. Soviet military spending could therefore be expected to continue unabated over the next decade and to improve Moscow's relative power position in the 1980-85 timeframe.

Just how this military power was going to be translated into foreign policy gains was seen as a complex issue. Ideology was still a "vital force" animating Soviet policy, however, and Soviet foreign policy was seen as "essentially revolutionary." Thus, a "purposeful, cautious exploration" by the Soviets of the political implications of their military power could be expected. Increased assertiveness was described as simply a projection of continuity in their policy actions. Gone with the winds of change of the 1970s were CIA's past emphases in some papers on the growing irrelevancy of ideology and the importance of interstate cooperation among great powers. The one general dissent to the estimate's main line of analysis was taken by the Department of State, which argued that the estimate overemphasized Soviet leaders' perceptions of the USSR's power and undervalued political and economic factors. (One might well guess that the principal author of NIE 11-69 *Basic Factors and Main Tendencies in Current Soviet Policy*, which highlighted precisely those elements a decade earlier, would have agreed.)

The late 1970s and early 1980s brought a succession of important changes in the USSR's international environment and in Soviet policies to deal with them. The election of a new pope in 1978 promised nothing but trouble for the Kremlin. A CIA memorandum, *The Impact of a Polish Pope on the USSR*, published on 19 October 1978, concluded that the event would arouse Polish nationalism, hinder Polish Communist Party efforts to impose social and political discipline, weaken Poland's ties to the USSR's Eastern European alliance structures, and draw Poland ineluctably westward. Unwelcome effects on other communist regimes in Eastern Europe and on communist parties in Western Europe were also discussed.

In Poland, Moscow's need was to find ways to defend a position against adverse pressures. Elsewhere, in places such as Ethiopia and Nicaragua, the issue was whether opportunities justified Soviet assertiveness to gain new power positions. In Afghanistan, regime changes implied potential for increased Soviet influence and the addition of another communist-led country. An interagency memorandum done in September 1979 titled *Soviet Options in Afghanistan* described Moscow's sense of Soviet interests in that country as "now more ambitious" in the wake of political developments there and foresaw the possible introduction of airborne troops for the short-term purposes of safeguarding Soviet citizens and helping to maintain a pro-Soviet regime if control broke down in Kabul. Tough

policy choices faced Moscow, the paper argued, and Soviet leaders were probably considering more serious direct combat intervention to salvage the USSR's increased stakes.

By the time Moscow actually sent troops into Afghanistan at the end of the year, other developments had changed the international scene. The dialogue with the United States had soured over a number of issues including the US "discovery" of a Soviet ground force unit in Cuba (which helped shelve the brand new SALT II accord) and, more importantly, a US-led NATO decision to deploy new missiles in Western Europe unless Moscow bargained away its own regional missile force, which was being upgraded. The situation in Poland continued to worsen, raising the prospect of another Soviet military intervention, and a new administration in Washington signaled its strong dislike of both the Soviet system and Soviet policies worldwide.

CIA's analysis in the initial years of President Ronald Reagan's administration portrayed Soviet behavior as a strong challenge to the United States. In the spring of 1981 a special estimate was commissioned that asserted Moscow was "deeply engaged" in supporting revolutionary violence globally as a basic tenet of Soviet policy and had no scruples in doing so (SNIE 11/2-81, *Soviet Support for International Terrorism and Revolutionary Violence* [May 1981]).[44] Some support was described as fairly direct, including that going to certain insurgencies and separatist groups as in El Salvador. Other support was indirect, rendered by states with which the USSR was in effect allied. This aspect of Soviet policy was low risk and low cost, the estimate contended, and it meant that Moscow would not cooperate with other countries in antiterrorism actions.

On the heels of the May 1981 special estimate came another estimate, this time a "memorandum to holders of NIE 11-4-78" on Soviet international behavior. Like the 1978 paper it connected the new, "more assertive Soviet international behavior" to a foundation of Soviet military power. But it went beyond the three-year-old paper in concluding that Moscow was now more willing to risk a military crisis with Washington (whose power, it asserted, Soviet leaders saw declining) in pursuit of its goals. A wide range of specific regional situations from the Iran-Iraq war and the Persian Gulf to Africa and Latin America were cited as potential areas where the USSR would work to expand opportunities for advancing its influence. The internal situation in the USSR was addressed in terms of deteriorating economic performance and potential social instability, and the impact of those

[44] This estimate stirred up quite a controversy inside and then outside CIA, including during the confirmation hearings for Robert M. Gates as DCI in 1991. See Raymond L. Garthoff, *The Great Transition: American-Soviet Relations and the End of the Cold War* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1994), pp. 20-26, esp. footnote 47. For another useful account that notes how the episode entailed a breach between SOVA and the new DCI, William Casey, and led to more work on Soviet topics by OGI, see Gates, *From the Shadows*, pp. 200-208.

factors on foreign policy was termed unpredictable. High military spending could be expected despite a likely worsening of the economy, the paper contended, and foreign policy and military requirements would dominate the leadership's policy calculations.

In August 1982, NIE 11/4-82, *The Soviet Challenge to US Security Interests*, took a fresh look at the same set of issues. Overall, it mentioned more potential limits on Soviet behavior but balanced those out in each case with judgments that leadership decisions would continue to support assertiveness abroad. It catalogued virtually all aspects of a continuing global challenge to the United States, drawing attention to the Third World as a less risky and therefore more likely area of possible confrontation. It claimed Soviet leaders did not see a "window of opportunity" because of Soviet strategic military strength, but it did not doubt that defense spending would continue to grow at its historic rate of four percent a year at least through 1985. Interestingly, it down played Moscow's concern about the new administration's efforts to counteract Soviet expansionism and exploit Soviet vulnerabilities. As for a possible successor leadership in Moscow, it foresaw a greater willingness to exploit opportunities abroad in low-cost, low-risk areas.

By and large, the major analyses during this period emphasized Soviet plans and actions rather than Soviet perceptions of the plans and actions of others. An exception to this generalization occurred as consecutive leadership successions got under way in Moscow, President Reagan's rhetoric sharpened, the Soviets downed the Korean airliner KAL-007, NATO's first Euro-missiles became operational, and NATO conducted its "Able Archer" exercise. In May 1984, SNIE 11-10-84, *Implications of Recent Soviet Military-Political Activities*, explored Soviet activities that—it was feared—reflected belligerent intent or perhaps an "abnormal Soviet fear of conflict with the United States." It noted that Soviet propaganda attributed a heightened danger of war to US behavior and offered the opinion that it did not reflect "authentic" leadership fears of "imminent" conflict. The activities, which included such steps as large-scale military exercises, could be explained by individual circumstances and ordinary planning, the paper argued. It did acknowledge "Soviet perceptions of a mounting challenge from US foreign and defense policy," and an inability to know at that time "how the Soviets might have assessed recent US/NATO military exercises and reconnaissance operations." Beyond these references, it is unclear from the paper how much the author knew of US actions that were perhaps important in shaping Soviet perceptions. The Soviet "apprehensive outlook" over the longer term US arms buildup, however, was believed to increase the chances that Moscow would take riskier actions to neutralize the US challenge.

Gorbachev and Internal Reform

CIA's analysts, long used to leadership stability, indeed stasis, at the top in the USSR, were once again confronted by political change in the 1980s. A paper done in April 1982 looked to old-time stalwarts Andrei Kirilenko and Konstantin Chernenko as the likeliest successors to Brezhnev, but Yuri Andropov's move from heading the KGB security apparatus to the party secretariat immediately after the paper was published presaged the rise of a late-blooming oldster to the fore. His style and tone differed from Brezhnev's, and, as was noted in a June 1983 paper, his main policy initiative seemed to be an internal "discipline campaign." But Andropov needed to gain better control of the Politburo before moving to more substantive changes, and he was judged to "not yet have a comprehensive reform program in mind" for the economy.[45] His death came before the old guard was ready to let go, and so Chernenko was allowed a year at the top before his death finally induced the aging party leadership to give the chairmanship of their troubled corporation to the younger Mikhail Gorbachev.

We might note at this juncture that CIA's analysts of Soviet affairs began giving more attention in the 1980s to conditions of Soviet society that affected all the other objects of their study, i.e. the economy, the military, and politics at all levels. At the end of 1982 a research paper titled *Soviet Society in the 1980s: Problems and Prospects* assessed the depth and nature of quality of life problems, ethnic tensions, and dissent in the USSR. "Popular dissatisfaction and cynicism seem to be growing," the paper noted, and "the sharp slowdown in economic growth since the mid-1970s is the underlying problem that ties all these issues together and makes them potentially more troublesome for the regime." In April 1983, a National Intelligence Council Memorandum, *Dimensions of Civil Unrest in the Soviet Union*, examined the available information from 1970 to 1982 on strikes, work stoppages, sabotage, demonstrations and riots, and even attempted political assassinations. It concluded that the incidents implied "a popular willingness to hold the regime more accountable for perceived shortcomings" and could lead to repression and reduced labor productivity. This in turn could mean, the paper went on, "a vicious cycle of greater potential domestic significance for the 1980s than the regime has had to cope with anytime in the past three decades." In 1985, SOVA created a new branch to work on societal issues, demonstrating that CIA had gotten the message that increasing regime concerns about alcoholism, social discipline, corruption, and unrest meant CIA also had better pay more attention to Soviet social malaise and its implications.[46]

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[45] The two Intelligence Assessments, both from SOVA, were *The Soviet Political Succession: Institutions, People, and Policies* (April 1982), and *Andropov's Political Position: The Importance of the June Plenum* (June 1983).

[46] Robert M. Gates describes the impact of a briefing on Soviet domestic stress points given by the head of the new branch to President Reagan in November 1985. See Gates, *From the Shadows*, pp. 343-344. Two papers laying out CIA's views of this topic were NIE 11-18-85, *Domestic Stresses on the Soviet System* (November 1985) and a SOVA research paper, *Domestic Stresses in the USSR* (April 1986).

Gorbachev made no secret of the fact that these problems were central targets of his policies, and CIA picked up readily on his early moves. In the summer of 1985 an Intelligence Assessment titled *Gorbachev's Approach to Social Malaise: A Managed Revitalization* captured what analysts saw as a sort of discipline—plus strategy aimed at making the economy more productive. They cautioned that Gorbachev did not yet have an integrated, comprehensive program formed but was already brooking risks both with the bureaucracy he wanted to reform and with the populace whose expectations he was raising. In September another paper, *Gorbachev's Economic Agenda*, described his economic reforms as exactly what a leader would do if he had longer term serious change in mind but was realistically shooting for more modest, realizable goals in the near term. He "has put his finger on the very tasks the economy has never done well," the analysis said in an approving tone, while still retaining significant central controls. Separate papers on Gorbachev's anti-alcohol and openness campaigns intercepted his actions as reflecting a serious intent, but cautioned about the risks of possible unrest and the trickiness involved in trying to cure cynicism.[47]

Critical to Gorbachev's reform actions, of course, was his political strength. An assessment in February 1986 titled *Rejuvenating the Soviet Party Apparatus* declared that he was counting on leadership style "in the classical Soviet manner"—rather than systemic reform—to accelerate economic growth and revitalize a damaged social fabric. Two intelligence assessments in April 1986 on the twenty-seventh party congress and new party program noted that Gorbachev's progress to date seemingly was not as great as he had hoped.[48] He had improved his power position via turnover of key officials, but enough Brezhnev-era holdovers remained to constrain his actions. The party program reflected a more sober view of the overall Soviet outlook than the Khrushchev-era 1961 program (discarded were the ideas of catching up with the West's standard of living and of achieving much of a global advance) and an emphasis on the need for new policies to strengthen the economy (more stress on domestic issues, but without a defined specific plan of action). At the end of 1986, Boris Yeltsin's reforming zeal as the new head of the Moscow party apparatus was taken as a sign of Gorbachev's seriousness in going after "localism" in regions and in using the leverage that the Moscow party structure exercised on the central bureaucratic institutions located in the capital.[49]

By February 1987, in an Intelligence Assessment titled *Gorbachev's Domestic Challenge: The Looming Problems*, CIA characterized Gorbachev as having gotten off to a "strong start" in his first two years, but it made the basic point that the measures instituted thus far were "insufficient to achieve [his] goals," which were said to be radical

[47] The two research papers were *Gorbachev's Campaign Against Alcohol* (April 1986) and *Debate over Openness in Soviet Propaganda and Culture* (August 1986).

[48] *The New CPSU Program: Charting the Soviet Future* and *The 27th CPSU Congress: Gorbachev's Unfinished Business.*

[49] Gorbachev's *War for Control of the Regional Party Apparatus: The Situation in Moscow* (December 1986).

improvement of the domestic Soviet system and keeping up with the United States internationally. The logic of the situation, the paper argued, was that he must either accept results short of what he wants (in which case his political position might erode since it was tied to the success of his policies) or go for more controversial and difficult policies (in which case he would engender greater opposition to himself politically). The analysis did not offer predictions or solutions but did lay out in some detail the policy dilemmas Gorbachev faced at that juncture.

Another paper, an April 1987 assessment titled *The January Plenum: Gorbachev Draws the Battlelines*, depicted the political struggle within the party. Gorbachev was pushing "democratization" and polarizing the party in a way that suggested a showdown could come soon, the paper contended. He had "no intention of limiting the party's monopoly of political power or the top leadership's authority within the party," it stated, but his effort to energize the party in support of his policy goals was squeezing many officials between pressures coming from Gorbachev and his allies at the top, and grassroots pressures from below being encouraged by Gorbachev's reform policies. The result of the January 1987 party meeting was Gorbachev's acknowledgment that he had been giving the policy steering wheel perhaps "too sharp a turn" (a few of his proposals at this time were rejected, i.e., multiple candidates for party elections). The leadership as a whole, however, agreed to continue pursuing economic reform and some of the legal and other changes attendant to that goal.

One technique used occasionally by CIA to expand its awareness of factors affecting politics in the USSR was to invite outside experts to conferences to solicit their views. This was done in the Gorbachev period to see what impact the new information technologies might have on the USSR. A group of consultants offered views that were gathered in a conference report published in May 1987 titled *The USSR Confronts the Information Revolution*. The Soviets were seen as appreciative of the value of modern information technology to the West, but viewed it with a mixture of admiration and concern. Productivity gains and weapons effectiveness might be enhanced, but state control might be undermined also as Western propaganda penetrated deeper into Soviet society and Soviet citizens gained more access to independent information sources. In trying to reach suppositions useful to the US government, the conferees concluded that: "Soviet leaders will put a premium on maintaining political control" in dealing with the new information methods; and that in the 1990s the USSR might find itself even further behind the West and therefore might become even more reliant on military power to maintain influence in the world. This report and its conclusions are noted not as representative of CIA views or indeed any set of views other than those expressed at the conference, but simply to show one example of how implications of important developments were explored by CIA's analysts in forums other than formal estimates or finished analytic products.

The June 1987 meeting of the Central Committee was seen by CIA's analysts as a major political victory for Gorbachev.[50] What had been piecemeal reform was now packaged in a new, comprehensive approach designed to reduce rigid central controls over the economy. Yegor Ligachev's power had been diluted with the appointment of new Politburo members and Gorbachev had more control over the policy agenda, but a continuing political struggle loomed, and the speeches at the plenum were said by one participant to have been "emotionally charged."

Near the end of 1987, an estimate (NIE 11-18-87, *Whither Gorbachev: Soviet Policy and Politics in the 1990s* [November 1987]) pulled together the strands of Gorbachev's first two and a half years of power and tried to project where he might go next. It declared forthrightly that it judged Gorbachev's intent to be bold and visionary. He really wanted nothing less than to revitalize the USSR, the paper stated, and was "now convinced that he must make significant changes in the system, not just tinker at the margins." This meant the continuation of replacing officials resisting change and revamping institutions, albeit somehow in a Leninist way. Foreign policy, the paper argued, was in for "profound" changes, with a de-emphasis on military intimidation as a policy instrument and a reduction in tension with the West so that growth in defense spending could be constrained. Four scenarios ranging from democratic socialism to neo-Stalinism were discussed at length to spell out for policymakers what to watch for as unpredictable events played out. A final basic point, the paper stated, was that whatever course change took in the USSR, it would transpire largely as a result of internal forces with only indirect impact from outside influences.

In a striking dissent from this depiction of Gorbachev's aims and actions that was printed in the estimate's key judgments, the Director of the National Security Agency (NSA) presented a fundamentally different "alternative view."[51] It is the revitalization of the party, not the society or system, that Gorbachev is after, he argued. The purge is the object of reform, not the other way around, he continued, and besides, what Gorbachev was doing was not only best understood in orthodox power-politics terms, he actually was not even as bold a reformer as Khrushchev had been. (The paper went further, arguing that the "potential" for change under Gorbachev was the most significant since the 1920s.) As for scenarios, he continued, Gorbachev will either unleash forces that will cause a KGB and party backlash or, more likely, fall back toward Brezhnevite immobility. His conclusion was that in either case, Soviet foreign policy would present a greater global challenge to the

[50] Intelligence Assessment, *The June Plenum and Supreme Soviet Session: Building Support for Economic Change* (September 1987).

[51] The NSA director was Lt. Gen. William Odom, USA, a close student of Soviet affairs. In remarks delivered at Princeton University on 10 March 2001 to the joint CIA-Princeton conference on *CIA's Analysis of the Soviet Union, 1947-1991*, former national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski recalled that Odom had written a prescient analysis in the late 1970s when he worked on NSC matters in the White House and foresaw that internal problems could bring about the collapse of the USSR by the end of the twentieth century.

United States. This stands as one of the most straightforward expressions of a fundamentally differing viewpoint on Soviet politics and policy on the long record of estimates and demonstrates how, even for the much more open Soviet society of the 1980s, intelligence analysts could hold varying views of the basic motivations and direction of Soviet political affairs.

A similar viewpoint was expressed at about the same time by Robert M. Gates, then Deputy Director of Central Intelligence, in a memorandum dated 24 November 1987 and titled *Gorbachev's Gameplan: The Long View* (both the NIE and the memorandum were scene-setters for the December 1987 Gorbachev-Reagan summit meeting in Washington). Gates presented several major areas of continuity with the past in Soviet policy under Gorbachev (seeking détente, extraordinary military modernization, continued protection of Soviet client states, and weakening US alliances) so as to put changes being pursued under Gorbachev in proper perspective and support the conclusion that "it is hard to detect fundamental changes, currently or in prospect, in the way the Soviets govern at home or in their principal objectives abroad." After noting that previous hopes—that internal reform in the USSR would lead to changed Soviet behavior—had always been dashed, Gates implicitly cast his lot with the NIE's dissent (i.e., that Gorbachev was after power, not reform) by predicting that Gorbachev would "likely be in power long after his adversaries at home and abroad have moved off the world stage." In a speech given two months later to the Dallas World Affairs Council (the speech, titled "What Is Going On in The Soviet Union," delivered 19 January 1988), Gates explicitly said that the fundamental transformation of the Soviet Union at home and abroad was not the intention or expectation of Gorbachev or the ruling Communist Party, making it clear he viewed the changes being attempted as instruments of power politics, not genuine reform.

In 1988, papers examined various internal factors affecting Gorbachev's progress in reforming the USSR's politics and economy. In February 1988, a paper titled *USSR: Domestic Fallout From the Afghan War* asserted that dissatisfaction over the war had been growing within the Soviet elite, and cited corruption in the military induction process, health and drug use concerns, and more than a dozen major demonstrations against the war since mid-1984, involving especially non-Russians. All this was seen as harming Gorbachev's efforts to build a new social contract. Another factor of importance was Christianity, with Gorbachev depicted as attempting a less repressive strategy in dealing with believers. In light of the connection between Christianity and nationalism in the Baltics and Ukraine, a May 1988 paper warned, "the regime is playing with fire" in seeking to accommodate this ideological rival.[52] Gorbachev's new struggle with the KGB, an organization that had backed him earlier, was documented in another paper that pointed out

[52] Executive Summary of DI Research Study, *Gorbachev Confronts the Challenge of Christianity* (May 1988).

his desire to curb some of its power, as well as Viktor Chebrikov's evident skepticism about aspects of reform, and also noted that Gorbachev remained dependent on the KGB to monitor the internal situation.[53]

Throughout both 1987 and 1988, papers charted the new threat of nationalism and ethnic violence as riots in Kazakhstan and unrest in the Caucasus widened the impact of Gorbachev's policies and opened up for him new areas of potential political vulnerability.[54] But a December 1988 Intelligence Assessment, *Gorbachev's September Housecleaning: An Early Evaluation*, concluded that Gorbachev's dramatic leadership shakeup that same year now enabled him and his allies to move more vigorously on all policy fronts. His position as both president and party head and his restructuring of political institutions had taken the traditional power role from the party secretariat and left him free to push his consumer-oriented plans at the expense of military spending. "New thinking" on national security and foreign policy was now more likely, the paper judged, involving a "more pragmatic, nonideological approach to foreign affairs" and "greater Soviet foreign policy activism, including bold—possibly unilateral—moves designed to generate international support for Soviet positions."

In early 1989, a CIA paper took a look at changes Gorbachev was making in both legislative and executive branches of government and noted that they "could radically transform the Soviet political system."[55] He did not, however, want opposition parties, CIA concluded. He still wanted the Communist Party to exercise policy leadership, providing the top-down pressures needed to guide the bottom-up participation he desired, and the Politburo remained a decisionmaking center he hoped to use to drive both party and government bureaucracies. Another paper examined the ways he was weakening the party apparatus's grip on power in direct ways, cutting Central Committee staff in order to undercut the role it could play in managing the economy or opposing his reforms.[56] Yet another paper, however, pointed to the dangers of this approach, noting that the reduction in party control had not gone very far and that further disruptions would occur if it proceeded quickly. On balance, CIA's cautious analysts estimated he would ease up his pressure temporarily rather than force a showdown in the near term with the party apparatus.[57]

[53] Intelligence Assessment, *Gorbachev's Growing Confrontation With the KGB: A Coming Showdown?* (June 1988).

[54] See an Intelligence Assessment, *Kazakh Riots: Lessons for the Soviet Leadership* (June 1987), and a research paper, *Unrest in the Caucasus and the Challenge of Nationalism* (October 1988).

[55] Research paper, *Gorbachev's Reform of the State Institutions: Toward a Parliamentary System?* (March 1989).

[56] Research paper, *Gorbachev's Reorganization of the Party: Breaking the Stranglehold of the Apparatus* (June 1989).

[57] Research paper, *USSR: Redefining the Party's Role in the Economy* (August 1989).

One SOVA research paper of July 1989 asked in its title a basic question that was bedeviling CIA's analysts as they tried to help US policymakers in the new Bush administration: *Gorbachev's Assault on the Social Contract: Can he Build a New Basis for Regime Legitimacy?* This paper continued the CIA's effort to wrestle with the "volatile" social aspects of the Soviet scene, an issue that had been raised in the 1950s as Khrushchev had unleashed forces that he too did not fully control. It contended that Gorbachev had not realized when he started in 1985 that his political reforms would unleash popular demands that grew more quickly than his economic reforms could satisfy them. The paper chose not to predict ultimate success or failure for him, but did a good job, again, of describing the dilemma in which he found himself. Another paper, done in September 1989, also caught the flavor of CIA's view of Gorbachev's political position in its title, *Gorbachev's Domestic Gambles and Instability in the USSR*. It may be said of CIA that it did not predict with exactitude that Gorbachev would fall, or when he would fall, but it must also be acknowledged that CIA documented many indications of the troubles he encountered (and engendered) and the seriousness of their danger to his political health.[58]

By early 1990, CIA's analysts had again concluded Gorbachev was in a box. A March 1990 Intelligence Assessment titled *Perestroyka at the Crossroads* described reform in the USSR as "at a critical juncture." Domestic concerns generally increasingly preoccupied the Soviet leadership, the paper stated, with basic problems such as a loss of control over society in general, a precipitous decline of the party, secessionist movements and interethnic strife, and continued economic deterioration. These problems threatened to overwhelm *Perestroyka*, CIA warned, and Gorbachev had to choose between moving more decisively toward democracy and economic reform, or backtrack on both. In the past he had chosen to press ahead, the paper noted, and so it guessed that he might do so again. While this might result in success farther down the road, the paper estimated that in the near term, instability and conflict seemed likely to persist and possibly intensify. In the less likely case of serious retrenchment, use of force in a crackdown could, it was predicted, aggravate political and social tensions.

Through 1990, CIA's analysts struggled to keep up with the pace of events, noting the emergence of a rival center of power to Gorbachev in the development of a party within the Russian federation as well as cracks within the CPSU itself and the growing challenge of

[58] One of the senior policymakers for whom CIA analysts were writing was Robert M. Gates, their former boss in the 1980s as DDI and DDCI (and also for a time as NIO/USSR and NIC chairman) who had become deputy national security adviser to President George Bush. Gates had begun his CIA career in the late 1960s as an analyst of Soviet affairs and was known for generally conservative views on Soviet matters. At the White House, he was thought of as "generally more conservative than others in the administration regarding the Soviet Union," according to Philip Zelikow and Condoleeza Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 23. In his memoirs, Gates states that "Thanks to analysis and warnings from CIA, we at the White House began in the summer of 1989 to think about and prepare for a Soviet collapse." Instability was the chief danger, Gates thought, and in September 1989 he asked Condoleeza Rice to begin contingency planning "in very great secrecy." See Gates, *From the Shadows*, pp. 525-526.

nationalism, all centrifugal forces unleashed by Gorbachev's own reforms.[59] A paper on the new legislature noted that, one year after its creation, it was far more independent than Gorbachev had expected. It was willing to revise leadership-backed bills, criticize nominees for top posts, and accelerate the decline of the CPSU. By 1994, the paper estimated, Gorbachev could lose his pliable majority.[60] Papers pointed to growing pressures for unrest in the USSR, including Central Asia, and growing difficulties in keeping the union together.[61] By December 1990, an assessment pointed to steps Gorbachev was taking to be ready to act in more authoritarian ways to cope with the serious problems multiplying in the USSR.[62] He was expanding the authority of the presidency and exhibiting greater resolve to try and preserve the union, the paper argued, including making it easier to exercise coercive emergency rule if necessary. Again, the dilemma he faced was easier to describe than the solution: "The logic of the path on which he had embarked increasingly imposes a choice between use of force, which he fears, or display of fecklessness, which further undermines his already low public esteem." It now looked to CIA as if a nonviolent resolution of the secessionist problem was less likely, and Washington policymakers were warned that human rights violations by both the center and the republics might be in the offing.

In February 1991, a research paper titled *Organized Crime in the USSR: Its Growth and Impact*, summarized the main problems associated with what was by now a flourishing problem. Crimes involving extortion, embezzlement, gambling, prostitution, and drugs were corroding the system, the regime, and popular attitudes, the paper argued. The corrosion was more clearly seen at low and middle levels, but the public anger it generated affected support for Gorbachev, the new institutions he had set up, and reform itself. Another new feature of the political landscape by now was Russia as a major new separate political actor. A paper done in March 1991 titled *The Struggle Over Russia's Future* described a debate between reformers and traditionalists that featured a critical struggle between a Yeltsin-led push for greater pluralism and powers for republics like Russia, and a Gorbachev-led center that had just used force in a crackdown in the Baltics. This center versus republics issue "has become all-important," CIA's analysts warned, citing one Soviet as saying that the center "is fighting for its life." If a referendum approves a Russian Republic presidency, Yeltsin will win it and become an even more formidable challenge to Gorbachev, they contended, even if the reformers' dependence on Yeltsin is itself "a potential weakness."

[59] See *Spotlight on Perestroyka* (April 1990).
[60] Intelligence Assessment, *The Supreme Soviet: Will It Be Supreme?* (July 1990).
[61] See research paper, *The Potential for Mass Unrest in Soviet Central Asia* (September 1990).
[62] Intelligence Assessment, *Gorbachev's November Maneuver* (December 1990).

An April 1991 Intelligence Assessment on the *Prospects for the Russian Democratic Reformers* saw Yeltsin's likely win in the election of a Russian leader as a "watershed event," leading to intensified political conflict between the two men. Yeltsin's likely push for more radical economic reform and Russian sovereignty, however, would have to contend with both a frustrated public and a more hostile and aggressive center, the paper estimated. Also in April 1991, a SOVA paper titled *The Soviet Cauldron* examined the political dynamics and foresaw that a coup might occur and would probably fail. It also drew special attention to the nationality problems, seeing the desire for independence as a growing threat to the union. Another paper issued in June saw Yeltsin as a champion of a Russian democratic alternative to the authority of an imperial USSR; not an unprincipled opportunist, but a leader who had averted repression and now had to handle the Russian nationalism he had helped arouse.[63]

After the August 1991 failed coup, CIA's analysts saw a window of opportunity for Yeltsin. In an October 1991 Intelligence Assessment titled *The Politics of Russian Nationalism*, the nation-building democrats aligned with Yeltsin—who were willing to jettison the USSR—were seen as unalterably opposed by a coalition of conservative nationalists, who were hostile to democracy and a market economy and had backed the neo-Stalinists who had attempted the coup. Yeltsin would try to push his program since he was at his peak of popularity following the coup, but public fears about secessionism within the Russian federation and about the course of economic and social change could be used by those willing to push a more chauvinistic nationalism against Yeltsin's program. A special estimate done in the wake of the coup attempt judged flatly that "the USSR and its communist system are dead," and estimated that a loose confederation of republics might form, but if so, under Yeltsin not Gorbachev. Disintegrative tendencies bore great danger for the West, it was argued, especially with respect to the security of nuclear weapons.[64]

In November 1991, a paper on social problems surrounding greater inequalities growing within the economy predicted more social and economic instabilities. Homelessness and unemployment would grow, undercutting any governmental stabilization efforts and posing serious obstacles to reformers whose still viable hopes for a rosier future had to survive "a long and difficult transitional period."[65] Another special estimate was done that month as well on disorder in the collapsing USSR. Even acts of terrorism were foreseen as possible, and the estimate judged that "no one knows whether the Yeltsin government can survive the winter."[66] Indeed, in 2001, ten years after CIA's

[63] Intelligence Assessment, *Yeltsin's Political Objectives* (June 1991).
[64] SNIE 11-18.2-91, *Republics of the Former USSR: Outlook for Next Year* (September 1991).
[65] Intelligence Assessment, *Winners and Losers: Increasing Social Stratification in the Former Soviet Union* (November 1991).
[66] SNIE 11-18.3-91, *Civil Disorder in the Former USSR: Can It Be Managed?* (November 1991).

analysts closed the book on their study of a communist USSR, these and additional kinds of internal tensions have remained an important target for ongoing analysis of Russia and other parts of the former Soviet Union.

Gorbachev's Impact on Foreign Policy

CIA's analysis of Soviet foreign policy early in the period of Gorbachev's leadership usually was stated in general and cautious terms, especially with respect to departures from the past attributed to Gorbachev. There was no lessening of foreign commitments, one paper stated, although the USSR's relationship with the United States, including reviving arms control talks, was seen as important to Gorbachev. A new estimate on Soviet support for international terrorism was issued in August 1986. It clung to the general line adopted five years earlier (one section was titled "Little Change Expected in Soviet Role") and took the Soviet bloc to task for opposing and obstructing Western-led counterterrorism efforts. It took note of recent remarks by Gorbachev criticizing terrorism and hinting at cooperation in opposing it, while at the same time, dousing that conclusion with the complaint that the Soviet reaction to the US raid on Libya showed that "the Gorbachev regime is quite like its predecessors when it comes to actions, as opposed to words."[67] A paper on what Gorbachev's programs meant for defense concluded that there was a "more heated competition" between civilian investment and military spending, but it judged that strategic military programs planned for the 1980s could move forward and that achieving a near-term arms control agreement was not critical to Gorbachev.[68]

A special estimate done in September 1986 concluded that Gorbachev was trying to recreate a 1970s style détente with the United States to ease the arms burden on the Soviet economy and the US challenge internationally. Possible new Soviet willingness to reduce military programs and even to take unilateral steps such as "modest cuts" in military manpower were foreseen, and Gorbachev was judged to have the political strength to take such steps. But economic pressures were portrayed as insufficient to force fundamental concessions to the West, even though killing or constraining the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) was seen as a critical Soviet goal.[69] It was noted that "new thinking" in Soviet foreign policy had led to fewer ideological references in Soviet positions and new emphasis on "interdependence," but security issues were depicted as unlikely to be the subject of major concessions from the Soviet side. Among other things, this led CIA to hold to the notion—in this paper and in another at the end of 1986—that the Soviets would stay the course in Afghanistan and not withdraw unless they could preserve the nature of the regime there.[70]

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[67] NIE 11/2-86W, *The Soviet Bloc Role in International Terrorism and Revolutionary Violence* (August 1986).

[68] Intelligence Assessment, *Gorbachev's Modernization Program: Implications for Defense* (March 1986).

[69] SNIE 11-9-86, *Gorbachev's Policy Toward the United States, 1986-88* (September 1986). The Deputy Director for Intelligence of CIA, impressed with the evolution of Soviet military doctrine, took a more forward position than others in estimating that Moscow might be willing to consider reductions in nuclear arsenals on both sides.

"In the next two years or so," the September 1986 special estimate declared, "neither the domestic situation nor the foreign policy outlook of the regime obliges Gorbachev to compromise substantially on central arms control or security issues in dispute with the United States." And if the United States does not give up its SDI, the paper estimated, Gorbachev would become more uncompromising over the next 30 months, preferring to wait out Reagan and deal with his successor than to come to the table and risk legitimizing Reagan's Soviet policies.

In retrospect, these judgments could not have been more wrong. Both domestic and foreign considerations led Gorbachev to adopt paradigm-breaking policies, and they involved not just compromises, but unilateral moves intended to change the basic equations involved in both arms control and regional security matters.[71] As for SDI, although Gorbachev was uncompromising in 1986, he came around to accepting important arms control deals before Reagan left office and despite continued US support for SDI. As for the evidence available in September 1986, however (well before Gorbachev's book on *Perestroyka* and a number of other indicators made clear how radical he was prepared to be), CIA had not yet seen enough to convince itself that new thinking in Moscow required new estimates in Washington.

CIA's SOVA looked over the new faces among Gorbachev's foreign affairs advisers and took note of their help to the Soviet leader in consolidating personal control over the USSR's foreign policy decisionmaking. A paper issued in August 1987 contended that Gorbachev had fostered increased competition among Soviet institutions involved in foreign policy, set up new arms control staffs in both the foreign ministry and the party secretariat, thus stirring up new ideas for his consideration.[72] Gorbachev's foreign policy initiatives ("a dizzying array") were said to be "derived more directly from his domestic goals" than was the case under Brezhnev. The time-worn approach of declaring that long-term objectives remained unchanged but that tactics were newly flexible was stated, but it seemed to hint that something more might be afoot. "As a result of these changes, many of the assumptions that were used in dealing with the Soviet Union in the past are no longer valid, and the West must be prepared for the unprecedented or unexpected." Unfortunately, the paper contained no further exploration of the implications of this important judgment.

[70] See research paper, *Soviet Policy Toward the Middle East* (date of information 5 December 1986).

[71] Gorbachev's foreign policy adviser Anatoly Chernyayev contends that Gorbachev "always considered every significant action or initiative from two perspectives—domestic and foreign." "It was always characteristic of Gorbachev's outlook from the outset to organically link domestic and foreign policies." See Anatoly S. Chernyayev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, trans. and ed. by Robert D. English and Elizabeth Tucker (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), p. 192.

[72] Intelligence Assessment, *Gorbachev's New Foreign Policy Apparatus* (August 1987). Eduard Shevardnadze and Anatoly Chernyayev come in for little attention in this paper.

In May 1988, NIE 11/12-9-88, *Soviet Policy Toward Eastern Europe under Gorbachev,* pointed out the increased potential for instability inherent in Gorbachev's policies. The Eastern European regimes were problematic instruments for the kind of reform Gorbachev was pressing, the estimate warned, and popular upheaval in at least some countries was the most likely scenario among several examined. In the end, the paper assessed, force would be needed to control the situation, and the USSR would use force if necessary to retain the upper hand there.

A June 1988 Intelligence Assessment titled *Soviet National Security Policy: Responses to the Changing Military and Economic Environment* asserted that there was a real debate going on in Moscow over the size and composition of Soviet military forces. It summarized the main positions of political and military leaders and experts as they argued what Gorbachev's new military policy of "reasonable sufficiency" should mean in practical policy terms. It brought to bear the writings of Soviet military theoreticians and leaders, in particular former General Staff chief Marshal Ogarkov, to the effect that nuclear forces are needed only to maintain the nuclear standoff, not to achieve superiority, and thus explained why the professional military could abide Gorbachev's nuclear arms control positions. Although the paper judged that the evidence suggested a continuation of high but flat or only slowly growing defense spending, it put forward the idea that Gorbachev's political power and interest in producing more civilian machinery as part of industrial modernization created "a good chance that Gorbachev will, by the end of the decade, turn to unilateral defense cuts." In October 1988, a Foreign Broadcast Information Service analysis report titled *The USSR's East Asian Policy: The Gorbachev Agenda* laid out Gorbachev's emphasis on China and on de-emphasizing military instruments in foreign policy in an effort to reduce the US military presence in Asia. At that time, the paper pointed out, Japan remained an exception to generally improved Soviet ties to countries in the region.

In a sense, the dramatic opening of the end game of the Cold War was Gorbachev's speech at the United Nations in December 1988, where he announced stunning unilateral reductions in Soviet military forces in Eastern Europe and invited the United States to join the USSR in cooperatively ending the Cold War.[73] The following month CIA published another paper on advisers helping Gorbachev on foreign policy matters.[74] It cited Gorbachev's UN speech as evidence of his willingness "to challenge basic assumptions of the past," and judged that, once carried out, the cuts he had announced "would virtually

[73] A more complete story than is related here of how CIA covered the ensuing, final three years of the Gorbachev era—and of the USSR—is told in a CIA volume that contains a number of analyses from the period. See Benjamin B. Fischer, ed., *At Cold War's End: US Intelligence on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, 1989-1991* (Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Intelligence, CIA, 1999), pp. ix-xliv. That account draws relatively more heavily on national intelligence estimates than this one, though two key CIA Directorate of Intelligence analyses are included. Unfortunately, neither account makes use of CIA's current intelligence analysis.

[74] Intelligence Assessment, *The Changing Role of Civilian Advisers in Shaping Soviet National Security Policy* (January 1989).

eliminate any Soviet capability to launch a short-warning attack against NATO." It traced the evolution of Soviet statements about reasonable sufficiency and concluded that Gorbachev had aligned himself with some of the most radical thinkers in a wide-ranging internal debate.

CIA continued in early 1989 to try to make sense of Gorbachev's now quite evident radicalism in foreign policy. In February 1989 a paper on US-Soviet relations asserted that Gorbachev's foreign policies flowed directly from his domestic policies, but then noted that many domestic concerns—by now focused on ethnic turmoil, consumer unrest, and protection of his political flanks—might in fact distract him from attention to his US policy just as the new Bush administration took office. It contended that Soviet concerns about SDI were now lessened.[75] Another paper issued that month on Gorbachev's overall foreign policy asserted that the Soviet leader had adopted an "unprecedented policy of global 'tension reduction,'" and that while his conception could still be said to support traditional aims such as weakening US military presence abroad and decoupling Western Europe from America, he was weakening the ideological foundations of Soviet policy and fostering a longer term "normalization" approach.[76]

In wrestling with how best to describe the key elements of the new Soviet thinking, the paper went to great pains to predict what it meant for Eastern Europe. On the one hand, it countenanced the notion that Moscow still hoped to preserve "in some form" the Soviet position there. On the other hand, the paper recognized that Soviet policy now circumscribed, "perhaps even rejected," the Brezhnev doctrine and could "accelerate the decomposition of communist rule in Eastern Europe and weaken Soviet hegemony." As had become the case for CIA analysis of Gorbachev's domestic policies, the basic question of how much Gorbachev realized where his policies might lead was raised for foreign policy as well. At one point, the paper noted that, "He is undermining Marxism-Leninism as a mechanism of political control in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, whether he cares or not." In what superficially looked like reverse mirror-imaging, the key message in the paper for US policymakers was a warning that "maintaining cohesion in US alliances and sustaining Western security...is the central challenge Soviet policy now poses for the United States."

CIA reviewed Gorbachev's policies around the world in another paper, this one issued in March 1989 and focused on Third World areas.[77] The primacy of domestic reform was asserted, policy had become more pragmatic and less ideological, and getting "a higher

[75] Intelligence Assessment, *Moscow's 1989 Agenda for US-Soviet Relations* (February 1989).
[76] Intelligence Assessment, *Gorbachev's Foreign Policy* (February 1989).
[77] Intelligence Assessment, *Trends in Soviet Policy in the Third World Under Gorbachev* (March 1989).

degree of security at a lower cost" seemed a key motive to CIA's analysts. Gorbachev's interest in resolving conflicts in areas such as Afghanistan, Angola, Nicaragua, and elsewhere was presented as a cost reduction measure, at least in part. Another motivation ascribed to Gorbachev, which would have fit a pre-1980s analysis just as well, was a desire to expand Moscow's role as an actor on the international scene. This time, however, the warnings posted by the analysts mentioned that possible surprise, unilateral moves akin to those in the UN speech might be in the offing, for example, withdrawal from Cam Ranh Bay or of the ground forces brigade from Cuba. Also, some of the expansion of Moscow's relations abroad involved decidedly nonclient states such as Saudi Arabia, Israel, and South Korea. As far as China was concerned, the USSR was seen as having achieved a more balanced position within the US-China-USSR triangle by the time Gorbachev visited Beijing in May 1989 to talk with Chinese leaders.[78]

By 1990, after the Berlin wall had come down, the German question moved front and center. An analysis done in March 1990 asserted that "contradictions in Soviet thinking are apparent" on all the security-related issues connected with possible unification of Germany.[79] The basic Soviet desiderata seemed clear enough: assurances that Germany accepted postwar borders, restraints on German ability to threaten stability in Europe, and German security ties that did not favor the West. But what Moscow would really accept was not so clear. Neutrality would be a Soviet demand, the paper predicted, but more as a negotiating tool than a minimum condition. How to wrap up a final postwar treaty and fit Germany into a new European order were other key issues discussed. By June, CIA felt that Moscow "ultimately will concede some form of NATO affiliation for Germany," and that Gorbachev realized reliance on existing collective security arrangements was a thin reed upon which to place much reliance in assuaging Soviet security concerns.[80] The Germans as well as events in general were moving too fast, and this unexpected pace complicated Gorbachev's domestic agenda. In Asia, Moscow's push to strengthen ties to South Korea and Japan was seen as stronger than its concern about its relations with North Korea or Vietnam. Improvement in the USSR's relations with China was seen in Moscow as a success for Gorbachev. Through all these developments, economic considerations were seen as being of overriding importance.[81]

By 1991, with the Soviet position in Germany and Eastern Europe changed beyond anything imagined by CIA's (and most other) analysts just a couple years earlier, CIA focused on possible scenarios for the unraveling situation inside the USSR. Each scenario had logical implications for Moscow's foreign policies, although choosing which to fix on seemed less important than laying out possibilities for US policymakers to consider. An

[78] Memorandum, *Sino-Soviet Relations: The Summit and Beyond* (9 May 1989).
[79] Intelligence Assessment, *USSR: Developing a Game Plan for Six-Power Meetings on German Unification* (March 1990).
[80] Intelligence Assessment, *Moscow's Push for a New European Order* (June 1990).
[81] Intelligence Assessment, *USSR-East Asia: Moscow Realigning Its Policy* (May 1990).

attempt was made in a mid-year estimate to be "more speculative, and less predictive" than previous estimates because of the large number of uncertainties at the time. It presented foreign policy implications for four possible USSR futures: chronic crisis, system change, regression, and fragmentation.[82] By and large, the estimate foresaw more accommodating, nonthreatening policies, even for the "regression" scenario that envisioned efforts by Moscow to maintain Soviet military strength. The trickiest for the West to cope with was the "fragmentation" option because of its potential for refugees, wayward new states seeking help, and so on. In the analysts' opinion, whatever Russia or Russian-dominated state emerged "for a good many years...would be a far less influential actor on the world scene that today's Soviet Union...." And so the Gorbachev period moved to its dramatic conclusion at the end of 1991, bringing down Gorbachev, the USSR itself, and the final curtain on the Cold War.

Final Thoughts

The issue of whether CIA should have done a better job of foreseeing and foretelling the downfall of the USSR is the latest chapter in the longer story of how CIA's analysts coped with political change in the USSR throughout the Cold War.[83] The ONE assessment of 1950s estimates on Soviet affairs done in 1958 judged rather harshly that the estimators had not handled the post-Stalin changes very well (while complimenting them for stressing important continuities in Soviet policy). In general, declassified CIA analyses suggest that analysts in the 1980s did somewhat better in not allowing a mindset rooted in the past to dominate their thinking about domestic changes. The papers currently available show that CIA's analysts interpreted Gorbachev's words and actions as serious efforts to bring about real change in the USSR, that the analysts kept pace with changes as they occurred and thought through their possible implications, and that they understood after a while that the impact of Gorbachev's changes might turn out to be beyond his expectations, understanding, and control.[84]

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[82] NIE 11-18-91, *Implications of Alternative Soviet Futures* (June 1991).

[83] This controversy is a useful one if it helps analysts cope better in the future with questions such as how change will come about in communist China, or more basically, if it illuminates the key questions analysts should focus on in trying to foresee how empires or regimes end or are transformed. The analytic tasks involved are formidable. By the late 1980s in the USSR, the changes under way were revolutionary, the course of events was contingent upon many factors, and even better "insider" knowledge of Gorbachev's conceptual vision or tactical political planning at any juncture would not have afforded an analyst a sure map for preparing prescient national intelligence estimates for US policymakers.

[84] For two useful essays on how CIA covered the downfall of the USSR and for a helpful sampling of excerpts from CIA analytic papers, particularly for the Gorbachev period, see Kirsten Lundberg, *CIA and the Fall of the Soviet Empire: The Politics of "Getting It Right,"* Case Study C16-94-1251.0 for the Intelligence and Policy Project, John F. Kennedy School of Government, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994); and Douglas J. MacEachin, *CIA Assessments of the Soviet Union: The Record Versus the Charges* (Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Intelligence, CIA, May 1996).

That said, the analyses describing Gorbachev's impact on Soviet foreign policy were less alive to the possibility of changes and the resultant implications. CIA consistently depicted Gorbachev's foreign policy changes as derivative of his domestic reform policy needs in the sense that he needed a "breathing space" internationally. Although this reasoning was valid up to a point, it seems in retrospect that Gorbachev's impulse to change Soviet foreign policy had its own basis in "new thinking" about international affairs that went beyond simply assisting the success of his economic reforms and that calculated Soviet interests in a novel way. CIA seemed content to wait for explicit announcements or even actions to confirm what might have been inferred earlier from writings and statements. SOVA's predictions of possible unilateral arms cuts stand as an example where foreign policy implications of theoretical thinking were foreseen, but CIA's description of the larger Gorbachev-led policies that altered the basic political and military equations in Europe and elsewhere awaited future confirming evidence.

Arguably, the indications of Gorbachev's radicalism in foreign policy unfolded more slowly than did those marking his internal reform efforts, and CIA's recognition of the respective changes followed suit. Thus, if the November 1987 estimate on *Whither Gorbachev?* could be said to mark the point at which CIA clearly stated Gorbachev meant big, visionary change domestically, then it was not until the February 1989 SOVA paper on *Gorbachev's Foreign Policy* (after the pathbreaking Gorbachev UN speech of December 1988) that CIA said clearly that Gorbachev's foreign policy "has changed radically from that of his predecessors." To be sure, even this recognition of the scope of change was protected by an introductory paragraph claiming that Gorbachev's new ideas followed a broad strategy "in the Leninist tradition" of splitting enemies, weakening American global political influence, and so on.

CIA's caution, or conservative approach to statements regarding Soviet foreign policy, results partly from the perceived importance of these judgments for US policy (especially in estimates, which reflected the DCI's and the entire US Intelligence Community's views). They were believed to be so critical that they deserved special scrutiny and care. Here, as was noted in the 1958 ONE assessment, there seems to have been a bias in favor of not making analytic mistakes in the direction of being too "optimistic" about Soviet policy choices, probably in the conviction that this was the most prudent and therefore most responsible way to shape analysis for senior US policymakers. There seem also to have been two other related biases virtually built into CIA's work on Soviet foreign policy throughout the Cold War. The first bias was that it was more important to identify threats for US policymakers than opportunities. The other was that the military dimension of the Soviet threat—because it involved the vulnerability of the United States itself and the apocalyptic image of nuclear strikes—loomed over all other aspects of analysis on the USSR. The Agency's most basic mission was, and is, to warn of possible strategic threats

to the United States. In concert with that mission CIA sometimes attempted to relate appreciations of Soviet military strength to Moscow's general foreign policy in ways that emphasized the military or assertive aspects of Soviet policy.

How special was CIA's political analysis of the USSR? Of the ten analyses on Soviet politics and foreign policy selected to be included in the volume of documents published in connection with the 9-10 March 2001 conference at Princeton University on *CIA's Analysis of the Soviet Union, 1947-1991*, only two were originally classified top secret, and it is clear that the classifications of all of them were driven mainly by the fact that they were CIA products, not by specific sources of information that needed protection. Thus, it was not that the CIA often had especially confidential or "insider" information to give value or cachet to its analytic products on Soviet politics, although there were instances where that was indeed the case. Rather, the value to the policymakers who read those products was that they were getting views from experts who had deeply immersed themselves in the subject and who were usually regarded as having no policy-driven axes to grind in forming their conclusions. (This did not prevent, of course, instances where policymakers distrusted CIA's analytic views because they thought they were not tough-minded enough, or conversely, too tough-minded.) In general, CIA's analysis of Soviet political affairs was less special than CIA's analysis of Soviet military and economic matters, which was based in part on information uniquely acquired and pulled together within the US Government. Thus, the views of academic or other nongovernmental Sovietologists on the USSR's politics and foreign policy could and did compete nicely with the CIA product, and such experts were often consulted to good advantage by US policymakers who had access to CIA's analysis.

CIA's analysis of Soviet politics and foreign policy throughout the Cold War profited from being performed in an environment where in-depth analysis was being done on Soviet economic, technical, and military matters. This allowed a fuller appreciation of the totality of factors that operated in the Soviet system and brought more realism into analysts' understanding of what was on the minds of Soviet political leaders. In the 1980s in particular, with all the main areas of Soviet analysis gathered in one office, the discussions of military spending, economic choices, social and economic problems and programs to deal with them probably led to better integration of those subjects with the evolving story of Gorbachev's reforms and where they might lead than would otherwise have been the case.

The task faced by CIA's analysts of Soviet political affairs ended as it began, in an era of unusually intense change, both internationally and inside the USSR. Their challenge was no less than to understand and explain developments that were only imperfectly understood

by the Soviet leaders themselves. Their record is well worth close study for its value both as history and as an opportunity to improve a central mission of CIA, and will hopefully be more fully disclosed for future scholarship.[85]

Discussant Comments

A panel moderated by Robert Jervis, Adlai E. Stevenson Professor of International Relations at Columbia University, discussed Douglas Garthoff's paper and provided its views on CIA's analysis of Soviet politics and foreign policy. The panelists were Fritz Ermarth, former Chairman of the National Intelligence Council, and Peter Reddaway, Professor of Political Science and International Affairs at George Washington University.

Fritz Ermarth began his remarks by singling out two National Intelligence Estimates—one dealing with Soviet external affairs and the other with Soviet internal matters—for discussion. The first one, published in 1978, was titled *Soviet Power in the Global Arena*. Ermarth, who was the drafter of the Estimate, indicated that the basic assumption behind the NIE was that the USSR was at the peak of its power. With that as a given, it addressed the question: What are the Soviets going to do with this power? The Estimate was significant, in his view, for two reasons. First, it influenced the thinking of the Carter Administration about the challenges posed by the Kremlin—Defense Secretary Harold Brown personally told Ermarth of its importance. Second, it conveyed the message that the Soviets were going to use their power in a "determined, energetic, but basically risk-averse way." "They're not going to go out looking for trouble, although there's perhaps a higher risk than in the past that they'll get into it inadvertently because of the strength that they feel." Looking back, Ermarth opined that the Intelligence Community underestimated the limitations on Moscow's ability to turn its military status into geopolitical status as well as the Kremlin's penchant "to be dumb, therefore counterproductive, and therefore ineffective." He cited Afghanistan and the SS-20 deployment as two examples of Moscow's ability to shoot itself in the foot.[86]

[85] CIA clearly recognizes the value of enhancing the public record on this subject. It has declassified material dealing with so recent a period as the last years of the USSR (far short of awaiting 25-year automatic declassification) and cosponsored conferences to allow scholars and others to discuss the material (at Texas A&M University in November 1999 and at Princeton University in March 2001). An excellent next step would be for CIA to review and release all remaining NIEs relating to the USSR (about 70 per cent already have been released) and publish a complete list of the titles of all such NIEs, including those which cannot for good reasons be released. Another helpful step would be for CIA to invite outside scholars to review the Agency's entire analytic publication record on the USSR and to assist in the selection of additional analyses for declassification review and public release. (This approach was used in a limited way for the Princeton University conference of 2001.) For individual Cold War episodes of particular interest, regular daily and tailored policy support intelligence analyses as well as the research and estimative record should be reviewed and released. The overall goal should be to release, under a broad policy that retains as classified only material that would jeopardize current or future intelligence operations, the entire Cold War analysis record of CIA to enable scholars and the public to know more surely what CIA did or did not say on the full range of issues.

[86] An SS-20 is a Soviet intermediate range, road mobile, solid propellant MIRV capable ballistic missile.

The second NIE Ermarth singled out, *Domestic Stresses on the Soviet System*, was published in 1985. This estimate, according to Ermarth, was significant because it presented an exhaustive catalog of the dimensions of the crisis of the Soviet system. Briefed to President Ronald Reagan, in Ermarth's view, it "kind of crystallized the emerging understanding" in Washington of the crisis that was confronting the Soviet leadership. It had a significant role in the transition of Reagan I ("Okay, we're standing tall. You're not going to push us around anymore. In fact, we're going to challenge you ideologically, militarily, and economically.") to Reagan II; that is, a willingness to do business with the USSR ("Now we're going to get down to business.").

In concluding his remarks, Ermarth described some "lessons to be learned" from the analysis of Soviet affairs. First, he argued that to do the job right the Agency must be given the money to do "deep" collection and "deep" analysis on a sustained basis. Second, there must be a system of checks and balances. CIA's Directorate of Intelligence, the Department of State's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, the Defense Intelligence Agency, and other agencies within the Intelligence Community must possess significant, independent analytic capabilities in order to provide balance, diversity, and a system of checks on the intelligence assessments and recommendations given to policymakers.

Peter Reddaway confined his remarks on the Agency's political analysis to the period from 1968 to 1981. His hypothesis was that CIA's analysts "did not get quite right" the balance between the oft-stated belief of Soviet leaders that the correlation of forces in the world had shifted against capitalism versus the fears and anxieties of Soviet leaders about the weaknesses of the Soviet system that became more severe as the 1970s progressed. In Reddaway's view, Soviet leaders would always act in accordance with the anxious mindset, whereas CIA's analysis usually predicted that they would act in the "self-confident, potentially expansionist mindset."

Reddaway cited a number of examples to support his hypothesis that the leadership's response was based mostly on an anxiety mindset:

- In the area of ideology, Reddaway noted that throughout Brezhnev's 18-year reign no effort was made to produce a Communist Party Program to replace the program put forth by Nikita Khrushchev that had become a "horrible embarrassment." Instead of ideology, the regime, which became increasingly corrupt, turned to material goods as a way of satisfying popular desires of a population that was becoming increasing skeptical of and cynical about ideology.

- In the economic sphere, the Soviet leadership concluded—based on the Czechoslovakia disaster of 1968—that economic reform in the USSR had to be avoided. As a substitute, the Soviet leadership became more dependent on the West for advanced machinery, grain and the like, something that in Reddaway's words "no superpower would allow itself to do."

- In the foreign policy arena, détente was essential to the Soviet leadership to gain access to Western machinery, grain, and credits, to make the West forget about Czechoslovakia, and to try to moderate Western military spending.

In Reddaway's view, these "negative anxieties" multiplied rapidly in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Détente unraveled—particularly with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan that produced Western boycotts and alienated large parts of the Muslim world—the Solidarity movement took shape in Poland creating the horrendous specter of a communist regime being overthrown by a mass movement based on the working class, and dissent increased at home and had to be suppressed.

Reddaway concluded that CIA underestimated the cumulative impact of these domestic political weaknesses on Soviet leaders. Its analysts, in his view, did not pay enough attention to Soviet dependence on the West, and they overestimated the likelihood that Soviet leaders would act aggressively vis-à-vis the West in military matters.