

NEW CHANCE FOR IMPROVED U.S. — SOVIET RELATIONS

The death of Soviet leader Yuri Andropov and the assumption of power by Konstantin Chernenko present both a challenge and an opportunity to the United States. The challenge is to maintain a steady course in U.S. policy toward the Soviets despite the temptation to make preemptive concessions to obtain what might appear as a friendly Soviet response. The opportunity is to be flexible and creative enough to present the Soviets, at a time when reassessment of U.S.-Soviet policy is possible, a chance to take actions that would end their prolonged policy paralysis and reflexive rejection of Western initiatives and begin the process of reducing the tensions which they have helped to create.

There are certain things the U.S. should not do: It should not be overly eager to seek sweeping new agreements or understandings with the Soviets. Nor should there be "halts" or "pauses" in U.S. defense measures which have been undertaken in response to Soviet actions. For example, deployment of Pershing and cruise missiles in Western Europe should proceed on schedule--until the Soviets agree to reduce or eliminate their intermediate range ballistic missiles. Finally, until there is concrete evidence to justify it, there should be no euphoric talk about a possible change of heart in the Kremlin or the "dawn of a new era" in U.S.-Soviet relations.

However, there is in fact an opportunity during times of transition and new leadership for changes in nation-state relationships. The current Soviet transition is no exception. While the Reagan Administration already has demonstrated considerable flexibility and innovation, it should seize the initiative and reiterate those solid proposals it has made for improved relations with Moscow that would ease world tension. These include:

- A return to the START and INF bargaining table to negotiate seriously over: 1) ways to eliminate or substantially reduce the number of theatre-range nuclear missiles in the Soviet Union and Europe; 2) methods of lessening or eliminating the growing instability in the U.S.-Soviet arms balance caused by the Soviet land-based ICBM capability to destroy the major portion of the U.S. nuclear retaliatory capability in a first strike.
- An agreement at the Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction talks in Vienna on an accurate data base regarding the

number of Soviet troops in Eastern Europe and adequate verification of balanced reductions through on-site inspection; and agreement on limited confidence-building measures at the Conference on Security and Disarmament in Europe talks in Stockholm.

- Consideration of a meeting between President Reagan and the new Soviet leadership. This, of course, would require substantial advance preparation and a site in the U.S., or at least outside the Soviet Union, and no preemptive U.S. concessions.

In turn, the Soviets could signal their intentions to lower tensions by:

- Muting anti-U.S. bombast and threatening rhetoric by Soviet spokesmen and in official publications.
- Making significant human rights gestures such as freeing imprisoned dissidents, relaxing emigration restrictions, and removing obstacles to the mutual East-West flow of information.
- Joining talks to allow full independence for Afghanistan.
- Restraining Cuban and other proxy forces destabilizing Third World nations.
- Complying in letter and spirit with existing treaties and agreements.
- Eliminating support for terrorist activities.

The Soviet record of recent years and Moscow's blanket rejection of Reagan arms reduction and tension-lowering initiatives in part might have been the result of policy paralysis caused by Brezhnev's and Andropov's long illnesses. As such, the Reagan Administration should give the new Kremlin leaders a chance to demonstrate whether they desire improved East-West relations. This requires the U.S. and its allies to remain strong militarily, to understand the ideological dynamics of the Soviet leadership, to respond firmly to Soviet probings and--at the same time--remain open to Soviet proposals to reduce tensions. Any system which requires that its leader's serious illness be described as a common cold for several months has certain peculiarities and dynamics which limit its flexibility to respond to initiatives. Washington should recognize this and be patient. For this, America's foreign policymakers require bipartisan public and congressional understanding and support. With such support, the Reagan Administration can probe the new opportunities for reduced U.S.-Soviet tensions.

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