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MOSCOW'S GORBACHEV: A NEW LEADER IN THE OLD MOLD

INTRODUCTION

Evidence that the Soviets have been using a potentially cancer-causing powder to track the movements of U.S. officials in the U.S.S.R. seems to confirm the venerable wisdom that nothing changes in the way the Kremlin operates. Yet the appearance of new faces in the Kremlin initially still generates tidal waves of optimism in the West. It was this, for example, which transformed the grim figure of the dying Soviet secret police boss Yuriy Andropov into a vigorous economic reformer and closet liberal. Similar optimism has greeted the ascendancy of Mikhail Gorbachev to the top Kremlin post of General Secretary. Some observers expect Gorbachev to embark on domestic reform, cut Soviet defense spending, and reduce Soviet expansionism. The inevitable corollary of this optimism is a depression laced with panic, which sets in among Moscow watchers when they begin to see that the new Soviet leader is simply pursuing traditional Soviet policies. Exaggerated hopes give way to fear.

Both schools of thought are already in evidence in the American public debate on how to deal with the Soviets. While differing in their assessments of the new Soviet leader, many proponents of the two respective views of Gorbachev surprisingly end up with the conclusion that the U.S. should embark on a path of unilateral concessions to the Soviet Union. The motive for some is to mollify a nasty Gorbachev; for others, conversely, it is to protect a reform-minded Gorbachev from the "hardliners" in the Politburo and the military. The new and relatively sophisticated public relations campaign conducted by the Kremlin capitalizes on such tendencies.

The fact is, Gorbachev's domestic policy is hardly reformist: it continues Andropov's repressive policy of tightening the screws on the

Soviet population and bureaucracy to squeeze as much as possible out of the Soviet economy and nip any open unrest. Gorbachev also continues to enforce Soviet-line uniformity in Eastern Europe and to revive Stalin's policy of totally subjugating East European economies to Soviet needs. In Soviet-American relations, Gorbachev is pursuing the traditional Soviet line of public diplomacy combined with stubbornness at the negotiating table, designed to preserve U.S. vulnerability to the Soviet nuclear threat.

To concede anything to Gorbachev at this stage would only encourage more of the same on his part. Instead, the U.S. should proceed with its defense programs, especially the Strategic Defense Initiative, deny the Soviets and their East European satellites the benefits of American credits and technology, increase aid to freedom fighters in Afghanistan and Nicaragua, and conduct active public diplomacy to expose the oppressive nature of the Soviet regime. The U.S. should defend its national interests in a measured and well-calculated way, rather than waste time wondering how Gorbachev can punish or reward the U.S. for its conduct. Gorbachev comes out of the Kremlin mold; he does not break it.

THE PARTY'S MAN

Gorbachev has always been a professional Communist Party functionary, flesh and blood of the small, privileged elite that runs the Soviet Union for its own benefit. Much has been made of his degrees in law and agriculture. In reality, this education was a sideshow to his political career.

Gorbachev joined the Law Department of Moscow University in 1950, when Soviet law reached its nadir amidst Stalin's post-World War II purges. Apparently realizing in 1952 that there were better things than being a Soviet lawyer, Gorbachev, then 22 years old, joined the Communist Party and became a Komsomol (Young Communist League) functionary at Moscow University. It was a time when the Komsomol organizations of Moscow University showed remarkable zeal in carrying out Stalin's anti-Semitic campaigns.

After graduation in 1955, Gorbachev did not even try his hand at law, but returned to his native Stavropol in the Russian Republic and became its Komsomol leader. Eleven years later, after holding a number of increasingly responsible Communist Party jobs, he became the First Secretary of the Stavropol City Communist Party Committee. In 1967 he received a correspondence degree in agriculture from the Stavropol Agricultural Institute, whose faculty and administration were in effect Gorbachev's subordinates.

By 1970 Gorbachev was the First Secretary of the Communist Party Committee of the Stavropol Krai (Territory); in 1971, at age 40, he

became a full member of the Central Committee; in 1978 he was appointed as a Secretary of the Central Committee; the following year he became a candidate member of the Politburo; and in 1980 he was promoted to Politburo full membership.¹

Gorbachev therefore is not exceptional, not a wunderkind miraculously appearing at the top of the communist hierarchy. Nominating Gorbachev as General Secretary on March 11, 1985, Andrei Gromyko began by emphasizing that being a Communist Party functionary par excellence was Gorbachev's primary qualification for the job.

THE MAN FOR ALL SEASONS

Gorbachev has an apparent skill to seem what others want him to be. The late KGB chief Andropov, who promoted Gorbachev, saw him as a ruthless enforcer. Brezhnev, during the peak of corruption and decadence in the Kremlin in the late 1970s to early 1980s, accepted Gorbachev as a good member of the ruling inner-circle, often known as the Brezhnev "mafia." British Tory Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher saw Gorbachev as somebody with whom she could "do business" by which she apparently meant that he was more of a pragmatist than a communist ideologue. Zdenek Mlynar, an idealistic Czechoslovak communist reformer of the late 1960s, found similar idealism in Gorbachev at that time.²

In reality Gorbachev is none of the above: he is a consummate actor, as befits the Soviet party functionary, who spends his life accumulating and protecting his privileges by mouthing convincingly whatever suits the interests of the Communist Party at the moment.

GORBACHEV'S STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES

However varied the tactics of different Soviet leaders have been, they were invariably geared toward two strategic goals: maintaining the Communist Party's absolute power within the Soviet empire, and widening the basis of this power by international expansion.

Two major dangers have overshadowed the Soviet policy-making

1. Although his climb to power was rapid (15 years from the membership in the Central Committee to the job of General Secretary in 1985), it was slower than Brezhnev's (1952-1964).

2. Archie Brown, "Gorbachev: New Man in the Kremlin," Problems of Communism, vol. XXIV, May-June 1985, p. 23.

process for the last five years: 1) a possibility, remote but nevertheless frightening to the ruling elite, of the repetition of the Polish crisis in the Soviet Union as a result of economic stagnation; and 2) the possible loss of global political gains of the detente era as a result of the resurgence of U.S. national will.

Gorbachev pinpointed this dual danger when he insisted in his June 11 speech at a Central Committee conference that no cutbacks in defense and social spending were possible.³ Gorbachev also made it clear that the present growth rate of the Soviet economy (which he estimated at "about" 3 percent a year) is insufficient for social and military needs, for which "a minimum of 4 percent" is required.⁴

Economic problems could undermine the legitimacy of the Soviet regime not only by dashing the hopes of the Soviet population for a better life, but also by undercutting the predominantly military basis of the successes of Kremlin foreign policy. With its social and economic policies failing, the Soviet regime has come increasingly to rely on its imperial expansion for legitimizing itself. Explains Adam Ulam: "The regime believes that its internal security is inextricably bound up with the advance of its external power and authority."⁵

Gorbachev clearly recognizes this. In his first speech as General Secretary last March 11, he identified the priorities of his foreign policy:

1) To maintain a firm grip on the "socialist camp" (the communist countries within the Soviet orbit, particularly the Warsaw Pact members) and to seek to reinvolve China in the activities of the "socialist camp";

2) To aid national liberation movements in the Third World;

3) To pursue the "Leninist course of peace and peaceful coexistence" with the "capitalist" countries, which means constant encroachment upon the interests of democratic countries and the accumulation of Soviet political and military leverage over them without open war.⁶

These have been the priorities of Soviet foreign policy since the 1950s when Nikita Khrushchev began to pursue the strategy of "peaceful

3. FBIS--Soviet Union, June 12, 1985, p. R3.

4. FBIS--Soviet Union, May 22, 1985, p. R4.

5. Alan B. Ulam, Dangerous Relations (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 311.

6. Kommunist, 1985, No. 5, p. 9.

coexistence" with the West and simultaneous Soviet expansion in the Third World, while maintaining the Kremlin's control over its East European satellites even at the cost of military intervention. All of Khrushchev's successors subscribed to this international strategy, and Gorbachev is no exception.

NEO-STALINISM AT HOME

Gorbachev is firmly committed to preserve what is the root of Soviet economic ills: the concentration of all economic decision making in the Communist Party elite. There are no indications that he is tempted to emulate China's and Hungary's private enterprise experiments. Even such a minor move as the proposed increase in the number of garden plots that Soviet citizens are allowed to till in their spare time prompted a televised official warning against using the produce for profit making.

While proclaiming the need for greater autonomy for industrial enterprise, Gorbachev, like his predecessors, apparently cannot resist the temptation to interfere in economic matters. He gives lengthy lectures, for example, on the virtues of various technologies and methods for organizing production. Speaking in Leningrad last May 17, he elaborated upon the need to manufacture "production complexes" rather than individual machine tools, suggested that Soviet industry copy the East German methods of the 1960s, which he claims make goods better and cheaper than in the West, mused about the potential economic gains from modernizing all of the Soviet Union's thermal power stations, and recommended deeper ploughing or using the blade cultivator to save soil and fuel. And when problems erupt, he follows the model of all Soviet leaders since Lenin: he blames the economic ills on the bureaucracy. To tackle the problems inherent in centralized planning is very risky, for it is the economic lever with which the Communist Party controls the Soviet multinational empire.

Rather than reform the Soviet system designed by Stalin, Gorbachev seems to be trying to make better use of it. He relies on traditional Soviet political devices.

The "Strong Boss" Image

What the Soviet system lacks in economic motivation, Gorbachev is trying to compensate with personal charisma. He imitates Lenin's "business-like" manner, borrows from Stalin's phraseology (especially the famous phrase that the Soviets need to cover in a decade what

other countries covered during a hundred years of economic development),⁸ mimics Khrushchev's folksy ways, and cultivates Andropov's stern disciplinarian image.

Political Repression

Gorbachev is enhancing the public image of the Soviet Union's most feared institution: the KGB secret police. He promoted KGB boss Viktor Chebrikov to full Politburo membership and approved a laudatory film about former KGB chief and General Secretary Andropov, now being shown in movie theaters and on TV. Chebrikov has published a lengthy article in the June 1985 issue of Kommunist, the main theoretical organ of the communist party, boasting at length of the KGB "achievements" in the struggle against dissidents and "foreign subversion." The article promises more of the same.⁹ Indeed, persecution of Soviet human rights defenders, Jewish activists, religious believers, and advocates of the rights of national minorities continues unabated.

Gorbachev's campaigns against corruption and alcoholism, lauded by some Western observers, are essentially repressive. They ignore the source of the disease, such as the centralized economy's failure to satisfy consumer needs and the spiritual devastation of the Soviet society. Instead, the campaigns merely try to suppress the symptoms. It is possible, in fact, that the KGB, more feared than the regular police, might assume a greater role in these campaigns.

Amassing Personal Power

Gorbachev has been replacing Leonid Brezhnev's "old guard" with his own people at an impressive rate--in the Politburo, the Central Committee, and throughout the party hierarchy. The anti-alcoholism, anti-corruption, and efficiency campaigns are important tools in this drive: few officials have not committed at least one of these three sins.

GORBACHEV'S FOREIGN POLICIES

Gorbachev has stated that he is seeking not merely a return to the detente of the 1970s, but that detente should be a "transitional

8. Ibid., p. R4.

9. Kommunist, No. 9, 1985, pp. 47-58.

stage...to a reliable and all-embracing international security system."¹⁰ In the Soviet political lexicon, "reliable" and "all-embracing" international security means hegemony. He will try to achieve this in several ways:

Derailing the SDI.

If the citizens of the U.S. and Western Europe were not held hostage to the Soviet nuclear threat, Moscow would wield less influence in U.S. and allied foreign policy decision making. It is the specter of Soviet nuclear attack that fuels peace movements in the U.S. and NATO. The influential Deputy Chief of the International Department of the Central Committee Vadim Zagladin, among others, implies strongly that the "peace movement," together with the Soviet arsenal, are the main factors inhibiting Washington from pursuing U.S. national interests.¹¹ It is to ensure that Soviet missiles can continue to menace the American population that Gorbachev has been waging his ferocious campaign against Ronald Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative or as it is popularly known, Star Wars.¹²

Gorbachev continues arms control positions that have not changed substantially for several years, as shown by an authoritative Pravda editorial, which expresses the views of the General Secretary and the Politburo, on August 1, 1985. But the Kremlin is trying to hide its true arms control objectives with a public relations smokescreen. This includes publishing Soviet statements in major American newspapers as advertisements (something North Korea long has done) and making Soviet officials more available to Western newsmen. During the

10. FBIS-Soviet Union, May 9, 1985, p. R16.

11. V. Zagladin, "World Balance of Forces and the Development of International Relations," International Affairs, No. 3, 1985, pp. 71-72.

12. The political importance attached by the Soviets to the fear of nuclear war among Americans has been made unusually clear in a recent lead article in their USA journal:

The "factor of fear" of the threat of nuclear war and of the American vulnerability in such a war can apparently stimulate the anti-militarist mood of the Americans, their striving for peaceful agreements and normalization of relations with the USSR only under certain conditions. One of such conditions is destruction of the illusion that the USA can reach such a level of development of nuclear strength and ballistic missile defense which would truly reduce the risk of nuclear war or save Americans in case of war.

Yu Zamoshkin, "Yadernaya opasnost' i faktor strakha," SShA. Ekonomika. Politika. Ideologiya, No. 3, 1985, p. 70. An article of the Chief of Soviet General Staff Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev in Pravda on June 4, 1980, is one example of Soviet propaganda of "Futility" of SDI.

July 29-August 1, 1985, meeting to commemorate the Helsinki Accords, for instance, the Soviets went out of their way to arrange press briefings and chat with Western reporters, while the speech of the new Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze was almost devoid of anti-Western polemics. This new image of amicability, combined with the attempts to address the U.S. public directly via U.S. media, as well as relying on the more traditional Soviet method of using the "peace movement" for the propaganda of Soviet views, are Gorbachev's tools to undermine the Reagan arms control negotiating position.

Dividing the U.S. From Its Allies

Like his predecessors, Gorbachev is fully aware of the potential of exploiting the differences between the U.S. and its European allies. He has, for example, been courting Western Europe by scheduling a meeting with French President Francois Mitterrand before meeting President Reagan and by announcing a temporary freeze on deployments of Soviet SS-20 medium-range missiles aimed at Western Europe (the Soviets have already deployed at least 279 of these three-warhead missiles against Western Europe). These moves are designed to undermine the continuing American counter-deployments of Pershings and GLCMs in that region and to lay the ground for splitting NATO over the SDI. At a minimum, Gorbachev hopes to achieve more purchases of advanced technology from Western Europe, which, in its own turn, might weaken U.S. resolve to keep its high tech from falling into Soviet hands.

Tight Reins On Eastern Europe

Gorbachev seems determined to keep Eastern Europe, especially Poland, under tight control. Less than a month after Gorbachev came to power, the Soviet newspaper Izvestiya printed an unprecedentedly direct attack against all opposition forces in Poland, singling out the Polish Catholic Church for the most vehement criticism.¹³

Gorbachev's visit to Poland at the end of April was followed by a wave of repressive measures by the Polish regime: the penal code was made more severe, the trial of three Solidarity leaders was conducted in an atmosphere of open contempt for even legal formalities and amendments to the Higher Education Act curtailed academic freedoms so drastically that the Warsaw University senate implicitly compared the new situation to the Nazi policy of destruction of the Polish culture.¹⁴

Four days before the June 25 to 26 summit in Warsaw of the

13. Izvestiya, April 6, 7 and 8, 1985.

14. The New York Times, June 14, 1985.

Moscow-controlled communist nation economic group known as COMECON, Pravda attacked unspecified East European countries for nationalism, Russophobia, and anti-Sovietism, for attempts to decentralize economic planning and increase the role of the private sector (obviously a criticism of Hungary), for the "propaganda of philosophical and political pluralism" (allegedly aimed at weakening the communist monopoly of power), for permitting religious revival, and for entertaining ideas of a special "intermediary" role of small countries in Soviet-American relations. Pravda's prescribed remedy was a heavy dose of the old-fashioned medicine: complete subordination of the East European countries to the Moscow foreign policy line, "ideological purity," and an uncompromising attitude toward anti-socialist forces.

The COMECON¹⁵ summit confirmed that Gorbachev is attempting to reshape Soviet economic relations with Eastern Europe along Stalin's line of the "Soviet Union first." This will require new investment from Eastern Europe in Soviet energy production, as well as forced sales to Moscow of the high quality goods that the East Europeans are now selling to the West for hard currency.¹⁶

Expansion in the Third World

The Kremlin is now facing armed national resistance movements in several Third World countries where the Soviets or their communist allies have been in power. Gorbachev seems determined to crush these movements and prevent the West from helping them. In Afghanistan, in particular, Soviet tactics against the freedom fighters and the civilian population have increased in brutality in recent months. Soviet pressure on Pakistan is mounting. On a number of occasions, Afghan aircraft, apparently piloted by Soviets, bombed Pakistani territory, while Soviet propaganda has been trying to stir up Indian suspicions of Pakistan.¹⁷ Moscow wants to convince the West that its channelling support for the Afghan freedom fighters via Pakistan will prompt so much Soviet retaliatory pressure that the regime of Pakistani leader Mohammad Zia ul-Haq will collapse. Yet, increased pressure against Pakistan would interfere with Gorbachev's attempts at rapprochement with China.

In Nicaragua, Gorbachev continues his predecessors' policy of supplying the Marxist-Leninist regime with weapons, including Hind

15. Its membership includes the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, Romania, Mongolia, Cuba, and Vietnam.

16. The Wall Street Journal, July 1, 1985; Vladimir Sobell, "The Key Issues in CMEA Relations," Radio Free Europe Research, Vol. 10, No. 28, 1985, pp. 1-8.

17. The Washington Post, June 4, 1985; FBIS-Soviet Union, June 25, 1985, p. D1.

helicopter gunships, which proved themselves well in Afghanistan. Gorbachev is also helping the Sandinistas hone the mechanisms of their budding totalitarian state: it is reported that a group of Sandinista secret police interrogators are undergoing training at secret police facilities in Czechoslovakia, which are fully controlled by the Soviet KGB. ¹⁸ Gorbachev is ready to increase his involvement in Central America at the first sign of faltering of the U.S. support for democratic forces in the region. As soon as the U.S. Congress cut off aid to the anti-Marxist resistance forces in Nicaragua, Gorbachev invited the Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega to the Kremlin. Only the public opinion backlash at Ortega's trip made Gorbachev subsequently give a lower profile to his Managua connection.

CONCLUSION

Mikhail Gorbachev at home is pursuing a neo-Stalinist policy, which substitutes repression and mass mobilization for genuine economic and political reform. In Eastern Europe he is following the neo-Stalinist course of demanding Soviet-style repressive uniformity and economic concessions to benefit the U.S.S.R. His priority in relations with the U.S. is to derail Reagan's strategic defense project so that Moscow can continue to conduct nuclear blackmail against the American people. On the fringes of the Soviet empire in the Third World, Gorbachev is trying to frighten away the West from helping anti-communist freedom fighters.

Far from being a new model Soviet leader, Gorbachev comes out of an old mold. Far from being a reformer, he relies on traditional Soviet policies. There is no visible change in the Soviet regime's repressiveness, inefficiency, militarism, or aggressiveness. Consequently, there is no need to overhaul the American policy of the past four and a half years, which has stemmed the tide of Soviet expansion, has reduced the Soviet capacity for military blackmail against the democracies, and has the potential of making the Soviets negotiate arms reductions in earnest.

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18. Czechoslovak Federal Council, Press Release (Ottawa, Ontario Canada), 8 July, 1985

APPENDIX

Gorbachev's New Men at the Top

Yegor Ligachev, 64, Gorbachev's second-in-command, Politburo member (1985), and Secretary of the Central Committee (1983). He is in charge of purging the old Communist Party officials and appointing the new ones, and also responsible for enforcing "ideological purity." A professional Communist Party functionary since 24, he owes his career advancement to the patronage of Mikhail Suslov, the most prominent Stalinist in the Politburo until his death in 1982, and to the late KGB chief and General Secretary Yuriy Andropov.

Viktor Chebrikov, 62, Politburo member (1985) and Chairman of the KGB (1982). He became a party functionary at 27 and joined the KGB in 1967. He has the rare distinction of being both a member of the so-called Brezhnev mafia (beginning his career at the city of Dnepropetrovsk, where Brezhnev recruited many of his appointees) and being liked by Andropov, who promoted him to KGB Chairman. His tenure as KGB boss has been characterized by increasingly brutal repressions against dissidents.

Eduard Shevardnadze, 57, Politburo member and Foreign Minister (1985). A party member since 18, he later spent seven years as the Minister of Internal Affairs (responsible for the uniformed police) in Soviet Georgia, until becoming Communist Party leader of Soviet Georgia in 1972. There he conducted a ruthless campaign against the thriving underground market economy. He also became Brezhnev's court flatterer, lavishing praise on the latter's policy of "trust in cadres," which he now denounces together with Gorbachev. He is said to have encouraged torture in Georgia's prisons.

