

Changes in Soviet Policy Towards the West

Gerhard Wettig



Changes in Soviet Policy Towards the West



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Changes in Soviet Policy Towards the West

Gerhard Wettig
*Federal Institute for Soviet
and International Studies,
Cologne*



Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 1991 by Westview Press

Published 2018 by Routledge

52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

Copyright © Gerhard Wettig, 1991

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Notice:

Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the
British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

CIP data available upon request. CIP No. 90-072132

ISBN 13: 978-0-367-01253-3 (hbk)

Contents

Acknowledgements	vii
1. The domestic sources of Gorbachev's new approach to foreign policy	1
2. Changing patterns of foreign policy	22
3. The societal level of foreign policy	42
4. Old and new thinking about international security	65
5. A new policy towards Western Europe	89
6. The two alliances and the vision of a pan-European security system	103
7. The Soviet Union and the political transformation in Eastern Europe	123
8. The Soviet Union confronted with the German problem	150
9. Conclusions	175
Index	189



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Acknowledgements

To write a book on Soviet foreign policy when events are moving so fast and changes occurring all the time, is certainly not without risk. There is not only the possibility that new factors may come into play tomorrow which disprove, or at the least relativize, what has been correct until today. An even greater danger lies in the individual author's limited capacity to absorb and digest vast quantities of the most divergent source materials, too many of which are both interesting and relevant. I could not have dared to write my study under these conditions if I had not had the chance to talk about the events and the related problems with a great number of colleagues, particularly at the Federal Institute for Soviet and International Studies in Cologne where I have the privilege to have worked for a long time. I have also used their knowledge and elicited their advice in fields of study which are not precisely my Soviet foreign policy speciality but which are nonetheless crucial for the more general context in which Soviet foreign policy operates. Some of my colleagues in the Federal Institute, notably Olga Alexandrova, Heinz Brahm, Helmut Dahm, Hans-Hermann Hoehmann, Fred Oldenburg, Heinz Timmermann and Gerhard Simon, have read parts of the emerging book manuscript, and I have greatly benefited from their helpful remarks. Any errors which may be contained in this study are of course mine. I want to express my thanks also to the Director of the Federal Institute, Heinrich Vogel, who has largely contributed to creating the conditions which have allowed me to write the book.

Chapters 4, 5, 6, 8 and the final Conclusions have been written in English. Rosemarie Leusch, the most capable and devoted English-language secretary of the Federal Institute, has written out my taped dictation and patiently inserted my subsequent additions. For technical reasons, the rest of the book – Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 7 – were originally German. Robert Taubman provided good English translations of them. Last but not least, Adèle Linderholm of Pinter Publishers, has thoroughly edited the whole and thereby greatly contributed to what I hope will be good reading.

The study was completed in the early summer of 1990. Thus it has not been possible yet for the author to assess the international implications of increasing disorganization within the USSR.

Gerhard Wettig



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

1 The domestic sources of Gorbachev's new approach to foreign policy

GORBACHEV'S UNDERLYING CHALLENGE

Gorbachev has on several occasions described the transformation he has prescribed for the Soviet Union as a 'revolution within the [1917] Revolution'. According to Marxist theory, a revolution presupposes a revolutionary situation. Such a situation comprises not only widespread 'grass roots' dissatisfaction with the prevailing conditions, it also implies that those 'up top' are no longer able to preserve the existing order. The Soviet leader admitted that this was indeed the case when, at the Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in January 1987, he first spoke of a 'pre-crisis situation', thereby indicating that preventive measures would have to be taken to avoid full-scale crisis.

The crucial factor giving rise to this reference was the explicitly voiced recognition that 'real socialism' had been 'lagging behind capitalism in terms of the standard of technological development' attained. In particular, there was concern that the Soviet Union was in danger of missing out on the incipient 'new technological stage in the scientific and technological revolution' with its as yet inestimable impacts and, as a consequence, being relegated to the ranks of the underdeveloped countries. The revolution from above that Gorbachev prescribed for the Soviet Union was expressly intended to create propitious 'conditions for overcoming this dropback'.¹

The circumstances that initially attracted the greatest attention from the Soviet leadership was the country's weak economic and technological performance. In the past decades, as Soviet economists are now free to point out in public, the Soviet Union had plummeted in the world development ranking tables, and this downward trend was continuing. It was already affecting the material basis of Soviet power in the international system. A shortage of resources had for a long time been seriously restricting the Kremlin's foreign-policy options. A glance into the increasingly gloomy future made it apparent that the Soviet Union would shortly be unable to preserve its military might as the crucial basis for its international status unless there were a change for the better. These concerns were further

heightened by the realization that the socio-political structure of the Soviet Union was also exhibiting worsening symptoms of weakness. The leadership was beginning to lose control of the bureaucracies, of the production process and of the proceeds of the economy.²

One of the most serious aspects of the situation was that it was becoming more and more difficult to remedy the multifarious deficits with the aid of the accustomed administrative tools. For example, the Soviet leadership had, despite the weak economic and technological performance of the country as a whole, been able to keep up arms production by concentrating all available resources on the arms sector and by procuring Western blueprints, often by illicit means. As the rampant 'shadow economy' made the economic process less and less susceptible to reliable control from above, and as technological progress came to depend more and more on all-round development of the country rather than on selective successes, the traditional remedies became ineffective.

At the same time, the life nerve of the regime was being pinched by a loss of party control over public morality. The terror of the Stalin era, which had largely dissuaded the bureaucrats and producers from pursuing their own interests when these were frustrated by the existing command structures, was by now a thing of the distant past. Accordingly, plan compliance was decreasing, while the misappropriation of state authority and goods for private purposes was becoming more and more widespread. The *apparatchiki* had set up their own feudal system and were covering up their unauthorized activities with the aid of a mutually arranged reporting network which prevented higher-level authorities from reviewing or intervening in what was going on below. For instance, those involved in the production and distribution process were not only able to fake the plan fulfilment reports but also to divert from the goods to which they had access everything needed for themselves and their dependents for barter for other commodities and for 'gifts' to persons thought to be useful some day. The scale on which the products of the economic process were being sidetracked in this way had in the course of time become enormous.

According to authoritative Soviet reports, the pressure on resources as a result of the Brezhnev leadership's imperially expansionist policies had also become unbearable. The scale of the arms effort was ruining the country's economy. This already strained situation was aggravated still further when, in the late seventies, the United States began to step up its own arms effort in response to the Soviet challenge. The Kremlin was particularly worried by the qualitative innovations envisaged by the rival superpower in the context of its 'Strategic Defense Initiative' (SDI). Critical Soviet observers had come to see Brezhnev and his aides as the true

originators of the dreaded arms race against the economically and technologically superior Americans. In the latter half of the eighties, the old regime was accused in retrospect of having, with its overzealous arms build-up, added impetus to the Reagan administration's efforts to embroil the Soviet Union in an arms race in order to ruin the country completely.

In Gorbachev's overall diagnosis, the Soviet Union had already dropped almost to the level of an underdeveloped Third World country and was in danger of lagging further and further behind even in those sectors — such as arms production and space technology — on which the Soviet Union had always based its claim to superpower status. If this trend were not reversed, the country would one day be an 'Upper Volta with missiles'. But this — coupled with the signs of incipient decay in domestic order — could not fail to have repercussions for the authority of the party, and especially of the top-line rulers within the CPSU. The first general secretary to have become fully aware of the problems and their potential impact appears to have been Andropov. But during his short period of rule, and beset by his failing health, Andropov had had no opportunity to draw effective practical conclusions from this new awareness. It was only after Gorbachev came to office in March 1985 — following the Chernenko interlude — that the task of renovating the country was placed on the CPSU's political agenda.

PHASES IN THE EFFORTS TOWARDS REFORM

From the very beginning, criticism of the old Brezhnev regime centred around the charge that it had been inefficient and had blocked progress. This was reflected for instance in the retrospective description of the years under Brezhnev as a 'period of stagnation' (period *zastoia*). Gorbachev's ideas about the remedies required at first circled within traditional terms of reference. His initial approach was to attempt to get the country's development moving again solely by means of corrective actions in the economy and technology. 'Acceleration' (*uskorenie*) was what was needed. This unequivocally implied that the conventional systemic orientation was essentially correct and that everything could be solved merely by giving new impetus to development. As in earlier attempts to remedy systemic deficiencies, the present difficulties were to be eliminated by means of corrections to the existing framework — for example by improving labour discipline and performance incentives and by rationalizing the steering mechanisms. An anti-alcohol campaign — which gained Gorbachev the nickname 'Mineral Secretary' — was launched with the aim of improving the performance of the workforce.

It soon became apparent, however, that the deficiencies in the system of administrative socialism could not be eliminated without fundamental changes to the system itself. The new ideas that gained acceptance in the Kremlin in the winter of 1986/87 envisaged the centrally administered economy adopting some market economy elements, with a view to attaining a productivity level comparable with that in the West. Efforts were to be directed towards the 'restoration and evolution of the principles of democratic centralism in the steering of the economy', ie towards revitalizing the existing system. The 'borrowing of capitalist methods' was expressly intended not to culminate in an emulation of Western models. On the contrary, the intention was to carry out changes 'in keeping with the socialist choice' already made once and for all in the Soviet Union. Anybody who was counting on a departure from the socialist path was in for a 'bitter disappointment'. The objective was not less but 'more socialism'.³ The reasoning behind this was that the system of administrative socialism imposed by Stalin was merely a perversion of an intrinsically good and correct system. The elimination of a number of misguided practices was thus going to lead back to true socialism.

But even at this stage, Gorbachev and his advisers were beginning to realize that their goal of adding 'more dynamism' to socialism could not be achieved by changes to the economic system alone. As of 1987, this viewpoint gained more and more acceptance. The aim was now to change society as well as the economy, for instance by introducing wide-scale publicity (*glasnost*). The political system was also in need of new impetus, which was to be imparted by 'more democracy'. A new understanding of the socialist system was proclaimed. 'We want more socialism and therefore more democracy.' The difficulties under which the Soviet Union was suffering were 'by no means a crisis of socialism as a socio-political system, but just the opposite, the result of not adequately consistent application of socialist principles, of departure from them and even their distortion.' Precise adherence to the social system and a planned economy would put the Soviet Union in a particularly good position to carry out the necessary changes.⁴ This last claim was based on the conviction, still widely held at the time, that the command structure of the socialist system was inherently superior to the West in that it enabled the leadership to establish priorities and to give precedence to their implementation.

The change of approach was reflected in a change of terminology. Instead of the 'acceleration' of the economy that had been propagated in the first two years under Gorbachev, in 1987, talk focused on 'restructuring' (*perestroika*) of the Soviet Union as a whole. The original reform plan was extended in scope and in the quality of the

projected changes. If, at the first session of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) following his coming to office, Gorbachev was still insisting that he considered even a strictly economic reform along the lines of the modest examples of Yugoslavia or China too drastic, by 1987 he was calling more and more emphatically for a radical transformation — in all aspects of the economy, of society and even politics.

In a third phase, starting in the second half of 1989, the Soviet leadership began to move more and more apparently towards the idea of a new style of socialism, to be implemented with the aid of market-economy tools. This change of direction reached its climax first in Bonn on 10 April 1990 with the Soviet consent to the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) countries' adoption of market economy principles⁵ and then with the announcement on 26 May 1990 that the Soviet Union would make the transition to a market economy.⁶

PROBLEMS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF *PERESTROIKA*

The ideas guiding the Soviet leaders in their re-orientation were not, however, so clearly defined and detailed as the public announcements suggested. The practical steps undertaken were still based on not very clear conceptions of the concrete consequences of their programmatic ideals. This was particularly apparent with regard to public-order issues. The 1987/88 attempt to adopt Western market economy elements to increase productivity while adhering to the principles of a centrally administered economy and a socialist system of ownership was by its very nature doomed to failure. But even later, the Kremlin continued to succumb to illusions: when it professed its commitment to a market economy but at the same time was unable to detach itself from old socialist notions such as the ownership of the means of production. Also, the anti-capitalist prejudice prevalent among the population and in the bureaucracy as a result of decades of indoctrination (expressed, for example, in the indignation over the profits made by the new private cooperatives, and the subsequent restrictions imposed on them) constituted another major psychological resistance potential. Insecurity by the Gorbachev leadership itself — revealed in its procrastination over the introduction of essential price reforms because of their potential social and political repercussions — is yet another factor casting doubt on whether the proclaimed transition to a market economy can actually be put into practice.

In principle, though, Gorbachev and his aides gradually concluded that radical changes were imperative and that the long overdue

reforms must be more than mere corrections to the existing system. The social and political conditions in the country were in need of a wide scale *perestroika*. The patterns of behavior instilled in the people in the past were a constant barrier to improving the country's performance. If society was to perform well, it required leaders able and willing to bear responsibility in its key positions. But the bureaucracy, in whose hands the decisions lay, had grown accustomed to a logic of mutual complicity which ruled out any form of individual responsibility. This collectivization of responsibility had previously been the only possible way to evade the unfair and intolerable personal risk that arose with the need to ignore established procedures.

Administrative socialism was continually producing instructions and bottlenecks which could not be handled without departing from the bounds of legality. The workforce and the *apparatchiki* alike were in constant danger of being reprimanded for having violated regulations that simply could not be obeyed. The only way to alleviate this risk was to involve as many colleagues and supervisors as possible as accomplices and allies; these would then have a vested interest in warding off any investigations. In this way, responsibility for impending decisions in the Soviet bureaucracies became so widely distributed that in the end no personal accountability could be discerned at all, and every action taken was defended tooth and nail by a multitude of implicated individuals. As long as this pattern of behaviour persisted, nobody could be made personally responsible for the success or failure of any particular action.

But willingness to bear personal responsibility is essential if any real performance is to be achieved. The performance-based society envisaged by Gorbachev requires self-confident citizens — and not timid underlings anxious to avoid anything that could expose them to criticism. The Soviet leadership thus made political emancipation its motto. *Glasnost* was one of the means to this end; the introduction of elections involving true decisionmaking another.

As of the summer of 1988, proliferating disruptions in the country's economy made it doubtful whether the measures introduced up to then were going to have the desired effect. This was not surprising. The workforces' efforts to fulfil the established planning targets slackened still further, with the result that the old steering mechanisms lost even more of whatever effectiveness they still commanded. But no new, consistent steering mechanisms were created in their place. The supply situation deteriorated still further. Two contrary interpretations of the ensuing predicament emerged. One claimed that the changes had not gone far enough or had not been consistent enough to fulfil their purpose; the other line of argument maintained that it was precisely the departure from long-

standing practices that had been the cause of all the difficulties.

But for Gorbachev and his aides there was no going back along the path on which they had embarked; otherwise they would have forfeited all credibility. The decisionmakers in the Kremlin were also well aware that a return to administrative socialism offered the country no perspective for the future. There was thus no alternative to a continuation of *perestroika*. However, Gorbachev also attempted to allay the growing dissatisfaction among the population, suffering more and more from supply shortages, by looking for stratagems with an immediate relieving effect. One such expedient was to divert funds urgently needed for investment to improve the supply of consumer goods. This, however, did no more than plug a few gaps.

On the whole, the Soviet leadership's record up to now is one of hesitancy. Though it insists it has abandoned administrative socialism, it has taken no clear steps towards creating a new system. It is important that this half-heartedness be recognized despite Gorbachev having, in the autumn of 1989, accepted the countries of Eastern Europe's transition to a market economy system and despite his having, in the spring of the following year, himself vociferously proclaimed his endorsement of the market economy system.⁷ Decisions on crucial questions have been put off again and again — with the inevitable result that the problems have grown even more serious; Gorbachev has been forced more and more into the role of a defender of domestic status quo interests in opposition to reformist forces that have been drifting ever further away from him. If the reforms have nevertheless made some progress, this is due to the pressure exerted on the president by groups such as the Democratic Platform.

THE POLITICAL WRESTLING OVER *PERESTROIKA*

From the very beginning, Gorbachev was more successful than any of his predecessors at filling the crucial posts in the central power apparatus with men of his own choosing. However, the results of his team selection were marred by the fact that he had had less opportunity than previous general secretaries to build up a reliable clientele of followers before coming to office. For this reason he had to fall back on some people inherited as followers of deceased politicians such as Kirilenko and Andropov and who did not always follow him on his new course. This meant that he soon had to make replacements, for instance when he dismissed Chebrikov, whom he had himself made chairman of the KGB.

Greater still were the difficulties encountered as a result of the

instinctive opposition to *perestroika* from broad sections of the middle- and lower-level *apparát*. Though the Soviet leader at no time needed to fear for his own position, the conservative trends especially predominant in the party hierarchy nevertheless constituted a political burden. As long as Gorbachev was an active reformer, he had to reckon with the possibility of being outvoted, particularly in the Central Committee of the CPSU; he had to find new ways of ensuring this did not happen, for instance by launching a surprise coup to send a number of the Central Committee members packing or by diverting the decision about the future political orientation of the country — normally a matter for the Central Committee — to a hastily convened *ad hoc* party conference, over the composition of which, however, he had only limited control.

Such abrasive antagonisms were certainly a major factor in a personal performance trend in which Gorbachev has gradually — and especially in the course of 1989 — lost his reformist verve, reverting more and more to conservative positions. Another factor may have been that the Soviet leader was worried about the long-term prospect of a coalition emerging among the *apparatchiki*, the military and the national conservatives. Such a political combination might conceivably count on support from the lower social strata who have been in need since time immemorial, afflicted by still further privations in recent years and faced with at least temporary further pauperization in the wake of a future economic reform. The right's weakness, of course, was that it had no plausible alternative to offer, neither in terms of policy nor personalities. In the winter of 1989–90, the displeasure that had been building up for a long time among broad circles of the high-level military over unwelcome domestic and foreign-policy developments displayed itself in a demonstrative warning addressed to the president.⁸ Gorbachev tried to take the wind out of the opposition's sails by making equally demonstrative concessions on a number of points. But when the democratic and market-oriented radicals elected Boris Yeltsin president of the crucial Russian republic, which then proceeded to proclaim Russia's independence from Union legislation, the associated loss of important power positions meant that Gorbachev now has to make allowance for even more particularist interests.

Gorbachev attempted to counter his domestic opponents not only by means of power-policy tactics (including close liaison with prominent members of the KGB) but also by mobilizing the general public (such tactics, however, have proved effective only against the conservatives). *Glasnost* was used with some success against the bureaucracy. Critics both from within and outside were encouraged to expose the activities of the functionaries to the public spotlight. One of the main objectives pursued by the top-level leaders in

promoting *glasnost* was to ensure that they would no longer have to rely on reports from their subordinate agencies as the sole basis for assessing those agencies' performance. An information source not manipulated by those concerned was essential if the top-level authorities were to gain a more accurate picture of the activities and omissions of their subordinates. In this respect, *glasnost* was an instrument that was intended to make it more difficult for local bureaucrats, in the tradition of the feudal lords of the middle ages, to evade control by the central powers.

There was another reason Gorbachev considered it important to break the bureaucracy's monopoly on information enabling it to influence the leadership in its own interest. As publicly discussed in Moscow as of 1987/88, many of the political errors of the past had been committed because the competent experts had not been consulted. A fatal decision such as the go-ahead for military intervention in Afghanistan were alleged to have been taken because Brezhnev had relied almost exclusively on a biased recommendation from one agency. Many of the obvious repercussions had been overlooked out of pure ignorance and had later cost the Soviet Union dearly. If the arguments for and against had been discussed in public, it was mooted, events would have taken a more propitious course. The practical conclusion was that official secretiveness had been harmful in the past and must not be allowed to recur in the future. *Glasnost* was required in the political issues hitherto reserved for the bureaucracy. Public discussion of public policy must be invented, if it did not exist already. Despite such professions of openness, however, there was still no question of the Kremlin allowing its policies to be shaped by public participation. The leadership continued to take its decisions without preparatory opinion-forming in society as a whole. There were, however, other cases in which *glasnost* gave the politicians an idea of the sentiment within important sectors of public opinion on which to base their decisions.

Gorbachev also used 'democratization' to curb the influence of the apparatuses. He instituted a quasi-parliament to be a third political force alongside the party and state bureaucracy structures. Although the Supreme Soviet had always existed, it had hitherto exercised no real power. It had neither been legitimated by real elections, nor put in an appearance as a working body with standing committees. At the general secretary's instigation, both these deficits were discussed and eventually remedied in 1988/89. Following general elections in the spring of 1989, the People's Deputies met in the middle of the year to appoint from their ranks the members of the new Supreme Soviet, which was also given significant powers of consultation and ratification on domestic and foreign policy affairs. Gorbachev was voted chairman and filled the most important parliamentary

positions with his own confidants. Thus a new power centre was created, curtailing the competences of the party apparatus. Furthermore, the new option of nominating competing candidates, first introduced for the election of the People's Deputies meant — even if not exercised everywhere — that conservative party functionaries ran the risk of being voted out of office. This freedom of choice was also intended to pave the way for the removal of unsuccessful candidates from their functions within the party.

The calculation that the conversion of the Supreme Soviet and of the regional and local soviets into something resembling real parliaments would solve Gorbachev's domestic power problems did not entirely work out. Although the Soviet leader succeeded with the help of the Supreme Soviet in adding the office of president of the Soviet Union to his former function as general secretary of the CPSU, thus extending his power on a scale unparalleled since Stalin's day, and although there was a significant shift of political weight from the party to the renovated hierarchy of the soviets, the power of the state and of the KGB remained undiminished and in many cases it proved impossible to remove the party establishment from the Supreme Soviet and the lower-level soviets. Many conservative functionaries either did not stand for election or, like Gorbachev himself, gained their seats via the blocks reserved for the various organizations. Nor did failure to gain election to a soviet necessarily result in loss of party functions, if the unsuccessful candidate still enjoyed enough support within the party. Nevertheless, the progressive forces managed to gain a strong backing in the Supreme Soviet and in the soviets of many Republics (to which elections have been held since the beginning of 1990). However, this loss of influence by the old cadres benefited Gorbachev less and less: the more the president himself withdrew to more conservative positions, the more the progressive forces in the soviets formed up without — and in some cases even against — him.

In the wake of the landslide towards democracy and market economy in Eastern Europe in the autumn of 1989, the criticism that had originally been directed only against Gorbachev's domestic policy was extended to encompass his foreign and security policy. One of the most prominent right-wingers in the Politburo, Ligachev, speaking at the February 1990 plenum of the Central Committee, cast a negative spotlight on the 'occurrences in Europe', identifying an 'approaching danger'. He raised a warning finger about the 'precipitation of the reunification of Germany' in which West Germany threatened to swallow up the German Democratic Republic. The 'massive economic and military potential' which a unified Germany would have at its disposal gave grounds to expect it to exert pressure for a 'revision of the post-war boundaries' and to fear a

repeat of 'pre-war Munich' along the lines of 1938. The time had come 'to recognize this new peril of our age and to inform the party and the people' before it was 'too late'.⁹

The second secretary of the Kazakhstan Central Committee, V. G. Anufriev, blamed Gorbachev for 'the disintegration of the unity of the party', for the 'ideological breakdowns', and for the 'occurrences in Eastern Europe'.

They have destroyed our buffer zone. God be with them, may they live as they see fit. But if even today they are advancing territorial and material claims, threatening consulates, and defiling the graves of our soldiers and our shrines, then they are humiliating a great country.

The Soviet Union, Anufriev continued, was prepared to extend its hospitality to the new masters of Poland and their like, but must take care not to feed other countries so that these could have it better than the Soviets themselves.¹⁰ The Soviet ambassador to Warsaw, Brovikov, also criticized his country's official policy towards Eastern Europe, albeit in more moderate tones. And from the general public more and more voices were heard to complain vehemently and bitterly that the Soviet empire and the ideology that had been its cornerstone were being abandoned. In the late spring, a number of high-ranking military personnel cast off the reserve they had been exercising up to that time and publicly vented their critical opinions.¹¹

CHANGING PRIORITIES IN FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY

The developments within the Soviet Union had significant consequences for the country's conduct towards the outside world. Under Brezhnev, foreign-policy interests had always taken priority; the exigencies of foreign policy had had to be fulfilled unconditionally. The satisfaction of necessities within the country itself had been relegated to second place. Accordingly, expenditure on arms and on the 'countries of socialist orientation' in the Third World had taken on enormous proportions. Defence spending at that time, the precise amount of which was probably unknown even to the Kremlin because of arbitrary pricing for the development and production of its weapons, is nowadays estimated by Soviet economists to have accounted for 20 to 25 per cent, if not more, of the gross national product.¹²

Among the Third World countries which had been entitled to Soviet support and maintenance by virtue of their leaderships'

profession of Marxism-Leninism, Cuba was the most costly. But other countries also devoured high and constantly escalating subsidies. The most expensive country in Africa — though still ranking far behind Cuba on the money-drain scale — was Angola, which according to Foreign Minister Shevardnadze, accounted for nearly three billion roubles per year.¹³ In the light of a budget deficit now publicly admitted to have amounted to more than 100 billion roubles in 1989, the Gorbachev leadership came to the conclusion that it could no longer afford its interminably high expenditure on client states. However, this was a decision in principle from which exceptions could be made in special cases. For instance, military *matériel* aid to the pro-Soviet regime in Afghanistan continued on a massive scale even after the withdrawal of the Soviet armed forces in 1988/89, and Castro continued to enjoy enormous subsidies from the Soviet Union despite his rejection of urgent recommendations from Moscow that it was time for *perestroika* in Cuba, too.

In general, however, the Kremlin considered its costly material commitment to the 'countries of socialist orientation' to be no longer justified. The recipients had failed to fulfil the political expectations made of them. The Brezhnev leadership had hoped that its subsidized clients would serve as points of attraction for other developing countries. Instead, just the contrary had been the case. Its nurselings had become poorer and poorer despite all the Soviet aid, becoming caveats for their neighbours. Besides, more and more of the Soviet-supported regimes were being challenged by guerrilla movements from within — a clear indication of how unpopular they were or had become among their own populations. Thus from Moscow's perspective the aid hitherto granted appeared in the majority of cases to be unwarranted in terms of political advantage. For this reason, Soviet foreign-policymakers looked around for possible ways of extricating their country from its commitments without losing face and without leaving their former friends completely in the lurch. This was the background to the need for an 'economization of foreign policy' voiced as of 1987/88.

In the field of security and arms policy, too, domestic exigencies brought about a change of strategy. The Gorbachev leadership adhered to the view that defence was the 'principal priority of the State',¹⁴ but it changed the practical conclusions it drew from this statement of principle. Until the early eighties it had been taken for granted that the security of the Soviet Union was directly proportional to the numbers of soldiers and weapons at the Kremlin's disposal. Gorbachev and his aides had challenged this blind assumption as early as in the summer of 1984, even before Gorbachev had come to office. In the course of an altercation with Marshal Ogarkov, who was calling for the arms build-up to be increased, the Gorbachev