

*The End and the Beginning: The Revolutions
of 1989 and the Resurgence of History*
Edited by Vladimir Tismaneanu with
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Budapest: Central European University Press, 2012.

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The Demise of the Soviet Bloc

In the mid-1980s, just before Mikhail Gorbachev became General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), the East-West divide in Europe seemed as stark as ever. Both the Warsaw Pact and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) had deployed new nuclear missiles against each other, and tensions between the two sides were acute. Certainly no one expected that, before the decade was out, the Communist regimes in East-Central Europe would collapse peacefully (apart from violence in Romania) and that the Berlin Wall—the symbolic divide in Europe for nearly 30 years—would be opened.

The momentous events of 1989 led to drastic changes in the political complexion of Eastern Europe and the end of the Cold War. In the mid- to late 1940s, Communist governments had taken power throughout the region under Soviet auspices. For more than forty years, those governments dominated political and economic life in Eastern Europe. The sudden downfall of the Communist regimes in 1989 and the opening of the Berlin Wall are sometimes depicted as the inevitable result of a lengthy process of systemic decay. But in fact there was nothing inevitable about the outcome. Popular opposition to the Communist regimes had long been intense almost everywhere in Eastern Europe, as demonstrated by the uprisings in Czechoslovakia and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in June 1953, the rebellions in Poland and Hungary in June and October 1956, the public acclaim for the Prague Spring in 1968, and the rise of Solidarity (*Solidarność*, which was both a free trade union and a social movement) in Poland in 1980-1981. What changed in 1989, compared to earlier crises in Eastern Europe, was not the depth of popular opposition to

the Soviet-backed regimes. Instead, what changed was the whole thrust of Soviet policy in the region. The largely peaceful collapse of East European Communism in 1989 was due as much to the fundamental reorientation of Soviet foreign policy under Mikhail Gorbachev as to the courage and restraint of protesters in Eastern Europe. Admirable as the protesters were, none of what they achieved would have been possible without the drastic changes in Moscow that allowed the events to occur.

Even though Gorbachev's reorientation of Soviet policy was a prerequisite for the events of 1989, it was hardly sufficient. In retrospect we know that leeway for radical change was available in 1989, but at the time no one outside the CPSU Politburo could be fully sure of that. At Gorbachev's behest, the Politburo had secretly decided in the spring of 1989 to refrain from any military intervention in Eastern Europe, no matter what happened to the Communist regimes there. But the Politburo also decided that it would not publicly disclose this decision and would not even confidentially inform the East European Communist leaders about it, for fear of demoralizing them. Hence, as events unfolded in the late spring, summer, and early fall of 1989, a good deal of uncertainty persisted at all levels in Eastern Europe about how the Soviet Union would respond in an emergency. Memories of past Soviet military interventions in Eastern Europe, especially in 1953, 1956, and 1968, were still vivid for most people in the region. Amid this uncertainty, drastic change in the Soviet bloc could not just occur on its own. Instead, millions of ordinary people had to overcome lingering concerns and fears to make it happen. The vast number of Poles who voted for *Solidarność* in Poland's June 1989 legislative elections, the hundreds of thousands of Hungarians who gathered for the ceremonial reburial of Imre Nagy in Budapest less than two weeks later, the huge crowds of East Germans who took part in protest demonstrations in cities throughout the GDR in October and November 1989, and the millions of Czechs and Slovaks who participated in the Velvet Revolution against the hard-line Czechoslovak Communist regime in November 1989, all played crucial roles.

The events of 1989 resulted in part from sweeping changes in Soviet policy, in part from the courageous actions of individuals and groups in Eastern Europe, and in part from the loss of will among hard-line East European Communist leaders as they realized, to their

horror, that the Soviet Union would no longer come to their aid with military force. The rapidly improving state of East-West relations was an important backdrop for the process, giving Soviet leaders greater confidence that Western governments would not seek to foment anti-Soviet uprisings or exploit changes in Eastern Europe against the USSR. In addition, an element of chance and contingency contributed to the auspicious outcome in the fall of 1989, especially to the opening of the Berlin Wall, which occurred as much through inadvertence as through design. Paradoxically, the Chinese authorities' brutal crackdown on peaceful demonstrators in Beijing in June 1989 helped to spur the reorientation of Soviet policy toward Eastern Europe, providing as it did a stark example of the violence that Gorbachev desperately wanted to avoid in the Warsaw Pact countries.

This article looks at each of these sources of change in Eastern Europe, highlighting the interaction between them. The article then briefly recounts how the Berlin Wall was finally opened in November 1989, and concludes by explaining why Gorbachev, who had sought both to strengthen the socialist camp and to end the Cold War, achieved the latter objective but not the former. The analysis here underscores the importance of individual agency as well as larger social forces in revolutionary upheavals, but it also reveals how uncertain, confusing, and unpredictable such events can seem as they are under way. Although the key participants in the 1989 crises did not foresee the full cumulative impact of their actions, the effects were ultimately global in scope. The demise of Communist regimes in the Warsaw Pact countries not only eliminated the Cold War divide in Europe but also had a transformative spillover in the Third World—particularly Mongolia, Latin America, and southern Africa—in 1989 and after.

Initial Continuity

Until the rise of Gorbachev, Soviet leaders after World War II regarded Eastern Europe as an extension of their own country's frontiers. Threats to the security of an East European Communist regime, whether external or internal, were seen as threats to Soviet security as well. This sentiment took its most explicit form in the so-called Brezhnev Doctrine, the term coined in the West after August 1968 to

refer to a series of authoritative statements by Leonid Brezhnev and other Soviet officials justifying the invasion of Czechoslovakia. The Doctrine linked the fate of every Communist country with the fate of all other Communist countries, required Soviet-bloc governments to abide by the norms of Marxism-Leninism as interpreted in Moscow, and subordinated the “abstract sovereignty” of socialist states to the “laws of class struggle.”¹

After Gorbachev came to power in March 1985, the Soviet-East European relationship initially underwent little change. In the mid-1990s, after the Soviet Union collapsed, Gorbachev claimed that he had informed the East European governments as early as 1985 that the Soviet Union would no longer come to their aid under any circumstances.² That claim has been repeated by a few of Gorbachev’s former advisers.³ Their retrospective assertions, however, have been undermined by a plethora of contemporaneous archival evidence that has emerged over the past decade-and-a-half in Russia and other former

¹ Mark Kramer, “The Kremlin, the Prague Spring, and the Brezhnev Doctrine,” in Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Promises of 1968: Crisis, Illusion, and Utopia* (Budapest–New York: Central European University Press, 2010), 276–362.

² See, for example, Gorbachev’s comments in Mikhail Gorbachev and Zdeněk Mlýnář, *Conversations with Gorbachev: On Perestroika, the Prague Spring and the Crossroads of Socialism*, trans. by George Shriver (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002, originally published in Prague in 1995 under the title *Reformátoři nebývají šťastni: Dialog o “perestrojce,” Pražském jaru a socialismu*), 84–85. Gorbachev refers here to a meeting he convened shortly after becoming General Secretary. The full transcripts of that meeting, which were declassified in December 2010 after my repeated requests, contradict Gorbachev’s recollection of what he said there, as shown below. Evidently, Gorbachev was projecting back to 1985 a view that in fact he did not come to embrace until a few years later.

³ See, for example, the comments by Anatolii Chernyaev and Vadim Medvedev cited in Raymond L. Garthoff, *The Great Transition: American-Soviet Relations and the End of the Cold War* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1994), 571–72; and in Archie Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 249. One of the problems in relying on Chernyaev’s and Medvedev’s post-hoc testimony about this matter is that neither of them became an adviser to Gorbachev until 1986. Hence, they were not in a position to know what Gorbachev said (or did not say) to the leaders of the other Warsaw Pact countries in March–April 1985.

Warsaw Pact countries. Far from intending to let go of the Soviet bloc, Gorbachev arrived in office wanting to strengthen the military, political, economic, and ideological institutions that linked the Soviet Union with the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe. On 6 March 1985, five days before Gorbachev became CPSU General Secretary and when he was still serving as CPSU Secretary for ideology, he met in Moscow with all the East European Communist party secretaries for ideology. He called on them to "intensify [their] ideological vigilance" and to strive for "much tighter cohesion in all spheres of the socialist commonwealth." He concluded his presentation by declaring that every party and state official in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe "must be imbued with the spirit of constant readiness to defend socialist gains—the utmost task of all propaganda activity."⁴ The phrase "defend socialist gains" was a core element of the Brezhnev Doctrine, as everyone at the meeting would have been aware.

In subsequent months, after taking over as the CPSU General Secretary, Gorbachev promoted greater economic integration within the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) and an expansion of political-military cooperation among the members of the Warsaw Pact. In both respects, his early policies displayed strong continuity with the policies of his predecessors. Gorbachev's manner of presentation may have been more dynamic, but at no time during

⁴ "Stenogramma pervogo (utrennego) zasedaniya vstupitel'noe slova chlena Politbyuro, sekretarya TsK KPSS M. S. Gorbacheva pri otkrytii Vstrechi, utverzhdenie poryadka predsedatel'stvovaniya na zasedaniyakh, poryadka i reglamenta raboty, obmen maneniyami po obsuzhdaemym voprosam," Verbatim Stenogram with corrections marked by hand (Top Secret), 6 March 1985, in Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Noveishei Istorii (RGANI), Fond (F.) 10, Opis' (Op.) 1, Delo (D.) 548, List (L.) 1-148. See also the subsequent discussion, "Stenogramma vtorogo (vechernego) zasedaniya prodolzhenie obmena mneniyami po obsuzhdaemym voprosam, prinyatie teksta kratkogo soobshcheniya dlya pechati, zaklyuchitel'noe slovo sekretarya TsK KPSS M. V. Zimyanina pri zakrytii Vstrechi," Verbatim Stenogram with corrections marked by hand (Top Secret), 6 March 1985, in RGANI, F. 10, Op. 1, D. 549, Ll. 1-81. Vadim Zagladin, the CPSU official overseeing international information and propaganda activities, drafted Gorbachev's speech for this gathering. See "Vystuplenie—proekt," Draft Text, 18 February 1985, in Arkhiv Gorbachev-Fonda (AGF), F. 3, Dokument (Dok.) 4487, Ll. 1-10.

his initial years in office did he disavow the Brezhnev Doctrine or display the slightest inclination to accept the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe. In a secret memorandum to the CPSU Politburo, Gorbachev emphasized that “although the countries of socialism have endured serious internal and external challenges, not a single one of [these countries] has suffered a return to the old order”—a record he clearly took great pride in and aspired to uphold.⁵

The declassified transcripts from Gorbachev’s meetings and communications with East European officials belie the notion that the new Soviet leader at any point in 1985-1988 told the Warsaw Pact governments—or even hinted—that the Soviet Union would no longer take action to counter dire threats to Communist rule in Eastern Europe. He never said anything remotely like that to his East European counterparts during his first few years as CPSU General Secretary, and indeed the records show that he frequently said the opposite, especially in his first year as he consolidated power. Immediately after Gorbachev took office, he pledged that his “first priority” in foreign policy would be “to protect and strengthen as much as possible the fraternal friendship with our closest comrades-in-arms and allies, the countries of the great socialist commonwealth.”⁶ In early bilateral meetings with the East European party leaders, Gorbachev urged them to step up their “fight against the encroachments of imperialism” and to “do everything possible to undermine the aggressive attempts . . . made by class enemies [who] are nowadays seeking to achieve the ideological dissolution of socialism from within.”⁷ At an important plenum of the CPSU Central Committee in April 1985, Gorbachev called for “the improvement and enrichment of cooperation among the fraternal socialist countries in every possible way, the development of compre-

⁵ “V Politbyuro TsK KPSS: O nekotorykh aktual’nykh voprosakh sotrudnichestva s sotsstranami,” Memorandum from M. S. Gorbachev to the CPSU Politburo, 25 June 1986 (Secret), supplement to Point 1 of Politburo Protocol No. 18, in Arkhiv Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii (APRF), F. 3, Op. 102, D. 218, Ll. 4, 5.

⁶ “Rech’ General’nogo sekretarya TsK KPSS tovarishcha M.S. Gorbacheva na Plenume TsK KPSS 11 marta 1985 god.,” *Pravda* (Moscow, 12 March 1985), 3.

⁷ See, for example, the notes of Gorbachev’s meeting with the Polish leader Wojciech Jaruzelski, 7 April 1985, in AGF, F. 3, Dok. 4380, Ll. 5-8.

hensive ties, the assurance of close collaboration in the political, economic, ideological, military, and other spheres, and the organic merger of the national and international interests of all members of the great [socialist] commonwealth.”⁸ The official Soviet TASS and Novosti press agencies prominently highlighted all of these comments in their wire dispatches about Gorbachev’s speech at the plenum.

A few days later, on 26 April, when Gorbachev and the other East-bloc leaders gathered in Moscow to extend the Warsaw Pact for an additional thirty years, the participants issued a joint communiqué vowing to “increase their close cooperation in international affairs” and “reinforce their efforts to strengthen the combat cohesion of the alliance.”⁹ Nothing more about the proceedings was released at the time, but the declassified records show that Gorbachev, in his keynote speech at the meeting, praised the “unity of action” that had “thwarted the attempts by imperialism to subvert or ‘destroy’ the socialist order in any of the fraternal countries,” a clear reference to the events of 1968 and 1980-1981 when challenges to Communist regimes in Eastern Europe were forcibly suppressed.¹⁰ Gorbachev also lauded “our joint efforts in accomplishing a task of historic importance—we have reached military-strategic parity with NATO. This was not at

⁸ “Plenum Central’nogo Komiteta TsK KPSS, 22-23 aprelya 1985 god.,” 22-23 April 1985 (Top Secret), in RGANI, F. 2, Op. 3, D. 347, L. 12. Gorbachev’s speech was published the next day as “O sozyve ocherednogo XXVII S”ezda KPSS i zadachakh svyazannykh s ego podgotovkoi i provedeniem: Doklad General’nogo sekretarya TsK KPSS M. S. Gorbacheva,” *Pravda* (Moscow, 23 1985), 2.

⁹ “Kommyunike o vstreche vysshikh partiinykh i gosudarstvennykh deyatelei stran-uchastnits Varshavskogo Dogovora,” *Krasnaya zvezda* (Moscow, 27 April 1985), 1-2.

¹⁰ The passages quoted here are from the verbatim text of Gorbachev’s speech, with corrections marked in by hand, “Vystuplenie General’nogo sekretarya TsK KPSS M. S. Gorbacheva na vstreche 26 aprelya 1985 god.: Teksty okonchateln’yi i s redaktsionnymi pravkami,” Stenogram (Top Secret), in RGANI, F. 10, Op. 3, D. 149, Ll. 1-44. For a Czech version of Gorbachev’s speech, translated from the original Russian, see “Vystoupení generálního tajemníka ÚV Komunistické strany Sovětského svazu souduhu M. S. Gorbačova: Příloha IV/d,” 26 April 1985, 8696/24, in Český Národní Archiv (ČNA), Archiv Ústředního výboru Komunistické strany Československa (Arch. ÚV KSČ), PÚV 47/85, Listí (Ll.) 1-11.

all easy to do." He made clear that the Warsaw Pact must never fall behind in its ability to "wage an active fight against the military threat" from NATO:

Military-strategic parity is a vital prerequisite for the security of the socialist states. Understandably, safeguarding the military balance has required—and, if the situation does not improve, will continue to require—a great deal of resources and effort. But without this it will be impossible to defend socialist gains. This is our common affair, the success of which will depend on contributions from every socialist state.¹¹

Far from displaying any inclination to relax Soviet military-political ties with the East European states, Gorbachev demanded "a unified line" and "stricter coordination of efforts" to "consolidate the position of socialism."¹² His insistence that the Warsaw Treaty be extended by thirty years rather than a much shorter period (of perhaps five to ten years) as some East European officials had wanted, and his determination to prevent any changes in the basic text of the treaty (or in the top-secret supplementary Provisions on the Unified Command of the Armed Forces of the Member-States of the Warsaw Pact), underscored his desire to push for greater cohesion and integration between the Soviet Union and its East European allies.

This same approach, with its echoes of the policies adopted by previous Soviet leaders toward Eastern Europe, was evident during other high-level deliberations in Moscow in 1985 and 1986. At meetings of the CPSU Politburo and CPSU Secretariat, Gorbachev called for an expansion of political and military ties within the Warsaw Pact and promised to safeguard the "underlying path of development of our cooperation with the other socialist countries."¹³ The recently

¹¹ "Vystuplenie General'nogo sekretarya TsK KPSS M. S. Gorbacheva na vstreche 26 aprelya 1985 god." L. 2.

¹² *Ibid.*, L. 8.

¹³ "Zasedanie Politbyuro TsK KPSS 26 iyunya 1986 god.: Zapiska tov. Gorbacheva M. S. o nekotorykh aktual'nykh voprosakh sotrudnichestva s sotsialisticheskimi stranami," Politburo Protocol No. 18 (Top Secret), 26 June 1986, in RGANI, F. 89, Op. 36, D. 19, L. 1.

declassified transcripts and notes from these meetings and from other secret high-level discussions in 1985 and 1986 further contravene the notion that Gorbachev decided at an early stage to leave the East European states to their own devices.¹⁴ The archival evidence shows that although Gorbachev was critical of some of the policies of his predecessors (including their failure to develop much greater economic and political integration within the bloc), he was certainly not proposing that the Soviet Union should or could stand by if Communist rule in Eastern Europe were in danger of collapsing.¹⁵ On the contrary, he believed that fortifying Soviet ties with the Warsaw Pact countries would help to avert potential crises akin to those in the past. He vowed that the USSR would establish “greater [Communist] party control” over Soviet-East European relations and “strengthen the unity of

¹⁴ Notes from CPSU Politburo meetings and many other high-level discussions from 1985 to 1991 were gathered in 2003–2004 by the Gorbachev Foundation for transcription in a planned six-volume document collection titled *Kak “delalas” politika perestroiki* (KDPP) that originally was slated to appear in 2004. Unfortunately, Gorbachev decided not to publish the volumes, which would have come to more than 3,500 pages in total. Later on, he did permit a much abridged single volume to appear—A. Chernyaev et al., eds., *V Politbyuro TsK KPSS: Po zapisyam Anatoliya Chernyaeva, Vadima Medvedeva, Georgiya Shakhnazarova* (Moscow: Al’pina Biznes-Buks, 2006)—as well as a collection of documents pertaining to Soviet policy in Germany: Aleksandr Galkin and Anatolii Chernyaev, eds., *Mikhail Gorbachev i germanskii vopros: Sbornik dokumentov, 1986–1991* (Moscow: Ves’ mir, 2006). In 2010, another thick volume was published with notes and materials (including some already publicly available) from Gorbachev’s meetings and conversations with foreign leaders—A. S. Chernyaev and A. B. Veber, eds., *Orvechaya na vyzov vremeni: Vneshnya politika perestroiki—Dokumental’nye svidetel’sтва* (Moscow: Ves’ mir, 2010)—but the other documents planned for KDPP have not yet been made generally available. Fortunately, Anatolii Chernyaev, who oversaw the project and would have preferred to release all of the materials, agreed to give me (as well as other researchers) access to the unpublished volumes when I was in Moscow numerous times from 2005 to 2009. I am grateful to Chernyaev for the opportunity to go through all of the documents.

¹⁵ See, for example, “V Politbyuro TsK KPSS: O nekotorykh aktual’nykh voprosakh sotrudnichestva s sotsstranami,” Ll. 1–6; “Zasedanie Politbyuro TsK KPSS 26 iyunya 1986 god.,” Ll. 1–2; and “Politbyuro, 3 iyulya 1986: Rabochaya zapis’,” Notes from CPSU Politburo meeting (Secret), 3 July 1986, in KDPP, vol. 1, 152–56.

the socialist countries and counter any centrifugal tendencies” in the Warsaw Pact.¹⁶ Although he said it would be pointless to treat the East European states like “little children who need to be brought to kindergarten,” he was convinced that the Soviet Union’s “objective interests demand unity and cohesion among the countries of socialism” as well as “comprehensive coordination of all foreign policy actions.” The East European governments, he argued in mid-1986, “know that any initiative they put forth must enjoy our support and must be coordinated with us, or else it will never get anywhere and will be doomed from the start.”¹⁷ Gorbachev assured his colleagues on the CPSU Politburo that the Soviet Union would continue to be, as it had been under his predecessors, “the leader of the socialist world and the [military] guarantor of the security and socialist gains of the fraternal countries.”¹⁸

Gorbachev expressed similar views whenever he spoke with East European leaders during his first few years in office. In a series of bilateral and multilateral meetings with high-ranking East European officials in 1985 and early 1986, Gorbachev urged them to pursue closer military, political, and economic integration with the Soviet Union. In 1985 alone, five separate gatherings of Warsaw Pact leaders were convened, including two in March and one in November, shortly after Gorbachev returned from his first summit meeting with Ronald Reagan in Geneva. Gorbachev assured the East European leaders that the Soviet Union would show “respect for [their countries’] experience and understanding of [their] national specifics” and would support their “quest to follow national paths” to socialism. But he made these pledges in the expectation that the Warsaw Pact leaders would facilitate, rather than impede, the “strengthening of our cooperation, cohesion, and unity.” Gorbachev left no doubt that his main aim in Eastern Europe was to “develop comprehensive cooperation on all matters with coun-

¹⁶ “V Politbyuro TsK KPSS: O nekotorykh aktual’nykh voprosakh sotrudnichestva s sotsstranami,” Ll. 4, 5.

¹⁷ The quoted passages here and in the previous sentence are from Gorbachev’s keynote speech to a closed meeting of the Soviet Foreign Ministry Collegium, 28 May 1986, declassified and published in M. S. Gorbachev, *Gody trudnykh reshenii* (Moscow: Al’fa-print, 1993), 46–55.

¹⁸ “V Politbyuro TsK KPSS: O nekotorykh aktual’nykh voprosakh sotrudnichestva s sotsstranami,” L. 5.

tries of the socialist commonwealth.”¹⁹ The new CPSU Program that was adopted at the 27th Soviet Party Congress in March 1986 spoke explicitly about the need for “mutual assistance” in “defending socialist gains” and about the paramount importance of “socialist internationalism” for the Soviet bloc—the essence of the Brezhnev Doctrine.²⁰

In the months following the 27th Soviet Party Congress, Gorbachev continued to stress the need for increased discipline and cohesion in the Soviet bloc, a theme he voiced both at a meeting of the Warsaw Pact’s Political Consultative Committee (PCC) in June 1986 and at the 10th Congress of the Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR) a few weeks later. At the PCC meeting, he called for “increasingly close cooperation among the socialist countries” and highlighted the “great need for an increase in common action.”²¹ At the PZPR congress, Gorbachev argued that the development of “cooperative links among the socialist countries” should be given “absolute priority” and should extend to all areas—political, economic, cultural, and military.²² In a thinly-veiled reaffirmation of the Brezhnev Doctrine, he declared that “socialist gains are irreversible” and that any attempt by internal or external forces to “wrench a country away from the socialist commonwealth would mean encroaching not only on the will of the people [in that country], but also on the entire postwar order and, in the final analysis, on peace.” His lengthy comments supporting the Polish regime’s martial-law crackdown in December 1981 on the Solidarity movement (which he characterized as the “internal enemies of socialist Poland”) reinforced the point.²³

¹⁹ “Niederschrift über das Treffen der Generalsekretäre und Ersten Sekretäre der Zentralkomitees der Bruderparteien der Teilnehmerstaaten des Warschauer Vertrages am 23. Oktober 1985 in Sofia,” 23 October 1985 (Top Secret), in *Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv* (SAPMO), *Zentrales Parteiarchiv* (ZPA), IV 2/1/638.

²⁰ “Programma Kommunisticheskoi partii Sovetskogo Soyuza,” *Pravda* (Moscow, 7 March 1986), 7.

²¹ “Niederschrift über die interne Beratung der Generalsekretäre und Ersten Sekretäre der Bruderparteien der Mitgliedsstaaten des Warschauer Vertrages am 11. 6. 1986 in Budapest,” 11 June 1986, in SAPMO, DY/30/2353, Blatt (Bl.) 11.

²² “X Zjazd Polskiej Zjednoczonej Partii Robotniczej—wystąpienie tow. Gorbaczowa M. S.,” *Trybuna Ludu* (Warsaw, 1 July 1986), 1.

²³ *Ibid.*, I.

On the other hand, some seemingly modest steps that went largely unnoticed laid the groundwork for more sweeping changes in the years ahead. Gorbachev's decision in February 1986 to hire Anatolii Chernyaev as a foreign policy adviser augured a fresh approach to Soviet foreign policy generally. Chernyaev, a long-time official at the CPSU International Department, was known as a sharp, innovative thinker, and he soon became one of Gorbachev's close aides. The appointment in March 1986 of Vadim Medvedev as the CPSU Secretary responsible for intra-bloc affairs, replacing Konstantin Rusakov (who had held the post since 1977), brought in another official on whom Gorbachev could rely to instill greater flexibility into the CPSU Department for Ties with Communist and Workers' Parties of Socialist Countries, the body most directly responsible for policy toward Eastern Europe.²⁴ In September 1986 Medvedev designated the long-time deputy head of that CPSU department, Georgii Shakhnazarov, to become first deputy head in place of Oleg Rakhmanin. Shakhnazarov at the time was already known as a reform-minded official, and he subsequently (from 1988) proved to be one of the chief advisers to Gorbachev on Soviet policy toward Eastern Europe, often working with Chernyaev. (A comparison of Shakhnazarov's and Chernyaev's memoranda for Gorbachev shows that the two advisers were in broad agreement about the need for far-reaching change in foreign policy, but that Chernyaev tended to be bolder than Shakhnazarov, whose somewhat more cautious inclinations were closer to Gorbachev's own outlook.)

More importantly, the official whom Shakhnazarov replaced, Rakhmanin, was a notorious hardliner who had published an article in *Pravda* in June 1985 that cast a pall on Soviet-East European relations.²⁵ The article warned the East European governments not to adopt any market-oriented economic reforms or political measures that would "compromise Marxism-Leninism as the basis of the fraternal states' unity" and "distort the general laws of socialist construction."

²⁴ See Medvedev's first-hand account, *Raspad: Kak on nazreval v "mirovoy sisteme sotsializma"* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 1994).

²⁵ The article was published pseudonymously as O. Vladimirov, "Vedushchii faktor mirovogo revolyutsionnogo protsessa," *Pravda* (Moscow, 21 June 1985), 3-4.

The article also repeatedly stressed the "common responsibility of all the socialist countries for the fate of world socialism" and declared that "on all major international issues the foreign policy of the USSR and of the Marxist-Leninist core of world socialism is identical." Chernyaev later wrote that Gorbachev was deeply irritated by the unexpected appearance of Rakhmanin's article, which apparently was published without sufficient authorization from the highest levels.²⁶ At a CPSU Politburo meeting a week after the article appeared, Gorbachev voiced his displeasure and rebuked Rakhmanin's superiors.²⁷ Although Gorbachev decided not to remove Rakhmanin immediately, the eventual appointment of Shakhnazarov as the department's new first deputy chief was a sign that concrete changes in Soviet policy toward the bloc might finally be coming.

Nevertheless, despite these glimmers of movement, Soviet policy toward Eastern Europe during Gorbachev's early years continued to reflect much of the residue of the past. When the Warsaw Pact's Military Council met in November 1986, the commander-in-chief of the alliance's joint armed forces, Marshal Viktor Kulikov, told the East European participants that the "growing danger of war" with NATO "compels us to adopt measures that will bolster the security of our countries and our peoples and to increase the combat readiness of the armed forces of the Warsaw Pact member-states."²⁸ The following month, at a meeting of the Pact's Council of Defense Ministers, a Soviet deputy defense minister, Army-General Evgenii Ivanovskii, reported that the Soviet Union planned to "deploy airborne assault forces on a wide scale in order to give a more dynamic character to

²⁶ A. S. Chernyaev, *Shest' let s Gorbachevym: Po dnevnikovym zapisyam* (Moscow: Progress-Kul'tura, 1993), 49-51. Chernyaev's account contains two minor mistakes, giving Rakhmanin's surname as Rakhmaninov and referring to July instead of June.

²⁷ "Rabochaya zapis' zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS, 29 iyunya 1985 god.," Notes from CPSU Politburo Meeting (Top Secret), in KDPP, vol. 1, 21-25.

²⁸ "Wesentlicher Inhalt der Ausführungen des Oberkommandierenden der Vereinten Streitkräfte zu den Ergebnissen und Schlußfolgerungen, die sich aus dem Treffen in Reykjavik ergeben," GVS No. A-470 410 (Top Secret), 10 November 1986, in Militärarchiv-Bundesarchiv (MA-BA), VA-01/32647, Bl. 2.

[the Warsaw Pact's joint] offensive operations."²⁹ In subsequent months, the Soviet defense minister, Marshal Sergei Sokolov, repeatedly vowed both publicly and privately that the Warsaw Pact countries would "never under any circumstances permit [NATO] to gain military superiority" over them. Sokolov emphasized that the USSR and its allies would have to maintain a "high level of combat readiness" for the indefinite future, and he called on the East European governments to contribute more to the Warsaw Pact's joint defense efforts.³⁰

Gorbachev himself remained cautious in his statements and actions vis-à-vis the Soviet bloc during the first several months of 1987, both publicly and privately. He held out hopes of change, but not change of a fundamental nature. When he met with senior East European officials in a closed session in mid-February 1987, he assured them that the Soviet Union "will not impose its own policy on anyone and will not call on you to act like us. We will, however, hope for solidarity and for understanding."³¹ He echoed these basic sentiments two months later during a long-awaited visit to Czechoslovakia. In his main public speech in Prague, Gorbachev declared that the Soviet Union was not "calling on anyone to imitate us. Every socialist country has its own specific features, and the fraternal [Communist] parties determine their own political line with an eye to national conditions." He insisted that "the entire system of political relations between the socialist countries can and must be based unswervingly on a foundation of equality and mutual responsibility," and he pledged that the

²⁹ Thesen zum Vortrag des Oberbefehlshabers der Landstreitkräfte und Stellvertreters des Ministers für Verteidigung der UdSSR, Armeegeneral J. F. Iwanowski, auf der 19. Sitzung des Komitees der Verteidigungsminister der Teilnehmerstaaten des Warschauer Vertrages zum dritten Tagesordnungspunkt 'Schaffung und Gefechtseinsatz der Luftsturmtruppen unter der Marineinfanterie in den verbündeten Armeen und Flotten,' VVS-No. A 470 389 (Top Secret), 1-3 December 1986, in MA-BA, DVW 1/7 1046, Bl. 2.

³⁰ See, for example, "Wesentlicher Inhalt der Ausführungen des Ministers für Verteidigung der UdSSR, Genossen Marschall der Sowjetunion Sokolow, am 18 Mai 1987," Notes from Sokolov's Remarks to Warsaw Pact Defense Ministers, No. 1c\021\87 (Top Secret), 18 May 1987, in MA-BA, VA-01/40373, Bl. 124-28

³¹ "Vstrecha Gorbacheva s sekretaryami TsK bratskikh partii po sel'skomu khozyaistvu, 11 fevryalya 1987 god.," Transcript of Discussion (Top Secret), 11 February 1987, transcribed in KDPP, vol. 2, 89-91.

Soviet Union would not “lay claim to a special status in the socialist world” or infringe on the “independence of every [Communist] party, its responsibility to its people, and its right to resolve problems of its country’s development in a sovereign way.”³²

Even though this rhetoric sounded a bit different from that of past Soviet leaders, Gorbachev qualified each of these assertions with language distinctly reminiscent of the Brezhnev Doctrine. After stating that the USSR would not seek to impose its ideas and policies on other Communist countries, he added: “At the same time, we do not conceal our conviction that perestroika in the Soviet Union is in accordance with the very essence of socialism and the justified needs of social progress.” A short while later, after referring to the right of every Communist party to resolve its own country’s problems in its own way, Gorbachev immediately qualified this with the stricture that each member of the socialist commonwealth must show “obligatory consideration not only for its own interests but also for the common interests” of the whole socialist camp, a phrase taken more or less verbatim from the Brezhnev Doctrine.³³

Gorbachev’s continued ambivalence about Soviet-East European relations was also reflected in his attempt during his visit to Czechoslovakia not to discuss, either favorably or unfavorably, the August 1968 invasion and the repressive “normalization” that followed it in Czechoslovakia. When confronted unexpectedly about the issue during a tour of Bratislava, he first tried to avoid a direct answer, describing the Prague Spring and ensuing crisis as a “stern school” and a “difficult period” that the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia had “experienced together with dignity and honor.” But then he suddenly added a blunt endorsement of the Soviet invasion: “We [in Moscow and Prague] have bravely thought about what happened. ... We came to the right conclusions then. Look how far Czechoslovakia has advanced since 1968.”³⁴

³² “Miting Chekhoslovatsko-sovetskoï družby: Rech’ tovarishcha Gorbacheva M. S.,” *Pravda* (Moscow, 11 April 1987), 2.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ “Obshchie tseli, edinyi kurs: Prebyvanie M. S. Gorbacheva v Slovakkii,” *Pravda* (Moscow), 12 April 1987, 1. These remarks later inspired Zdeněk Mlýnář to offer a caustic assessment of Gorbachev’s 1987 visit, transcribed in Gorbachev and Mlýnář, *Conversations with Gorbachev*, 86-9.

Events in subsequent months also suggested that Gorbachev had not yet decided how boldly he was willing to act in recasting Soviet-East European relations. In his keynote speech in November 1987 marking the 70th anniversary of the Bolshevik seizure of power, he spoke briefly about Eastern Europe, declaring that "all [Communist] parties are fully and irreversibly independent. We said this as far back as the 20th [Soviet Party] Congress. True, it took time to free ourselves from old habits. Now, however, it is an immutable reality."³⁵ But a few minutes later Gorbachev sharply narrowed this mandate by stipulating that intra-bloc relations must be based on "the practice of socialist internationalism," including a "concern for the general cause of socialism." He then added an even more explicit restatement of key elements of the Brezhnev Doctrine: "We know what damage can be caused by weakening the internationalist principle in mutual relations between socialist states, by deviating from the principles of mutual benefit and mutual assistance, and by failing to heed the common interests of socialism in action on the world scene."³⁶

A similar message was conveyed in Gorbachev's book *Perestroika*, which was published in dozens of countries just after the 70th anniversary celebrations (Gorbachev had worked extensively on it during a break in the late summer, assisted by a few key aides.) The book acknowledged certain shortcomings in Soviet relations with other Warsaw Pact countries in the past, and it pledged that every socialist state would have full independence to proceed along its own path of development. But the brief section on Eastern Europe went no further than Gorbachev's earlier statements, and it contained a passage that linked the domestic complexion of each member of the socialist commonwealth with the interests of all others:

³⁵ "Oktyabr' i perestroika: Revolyutsiya prodolzhaetsya—Doklad General'nogo sekretarya TsK KPSS M. S. Gorbacheva," *Pravda* (Moscow, 3 November 1987), 5. In the weeks prior to Gorbachev's speech, the CPSU Politburo discussed various drafts in great detail, but the often heated debate focused almost exclusively on how to reassess and present the darker periods of Soviet history. The sections on foreign policy, including Eastern Europe, did not spark any controversy.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

The socialist community will be successful only if every party and state cares for both its own interests and common interests, if it respects its friends and allies, heeds their interests, and pays attention to the experience of others. Awareness of this relationship between domestic issues and the interests of world socialism is typical of the countries of the socialist community. We are united, in unity resides our strength.³⁷

For East European readers of the book, this assertion of a “relationship between domestic issues and the interests of world socialism” was bound to be evocative of the Brezhnev Doctrine. In no respect did the book imply that drastic change in the political complexion of Eastern Europe would ever be tolerated in Moscow.

Sources and Signs of Change in Soviet Policy

The year 1988 proved to be a turning point for the USSR on many key issues, both domestic and foreign. The Soviet-East European relationship was no exception. Soviet policy toward Warsaw Pact countries finally began to loosen in early 1988, adumbrating a fundamental reorientation of Gorbachev’s approach. When the Soviet leader was confronted by stark choices and tradeoffs in relations with Eastern Europe, he opted to proceed more boldly, spawning events that soon went far beyond anything he had foreseen at the start.

THE CONTEXT OF POLICYMAKING

One of the reasons that Gorbachev was able to move ahead more decisively in 1988 is that by this point he had steadily expanded his power within the CPSU and had made many personnel changes that gave him greater leeway to act. His latitude was reinforced in the summer and fall of 1988 when he replaced numerous other long-time members of the CPSU Politburo and Central Committee who had become

³⁷ Mikhail Gorbachev, *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), 165.

alarmed by the increasingly unorthodox nature of developments in the USSR and Eastern Europe.³⁸ Although Gorbachev's consolidation of political power was not a *sufficient* condition for a drastic change of course vis-à-vis Eastern Europe, it clearly was a necessary condition. The new foreign policy that Gorbachev pursued in 1988 and especially 1989 would have been infeasible in the domestic environment of 1985 and 1986, even if he had been inclined to embrace a radical agenda during those early years (which he was not). By the time Gorbachev truly did want to make sweeping changes in Soviet policy toward Eastern Europe, he had amassed sufficient power to do so without fear of being ousted by hardline forces.

Gorbachev's inclination in 1988 to begin restructuring Soviet relations with Eastern Europe was spurred in part by the disappointing results of his early economic policies of *uskorenie* (acceleration). By mid-1988 he had come to believe that economic revitalization for both the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe would be impossible in the absence of thoroughgoing political reform. When Gorbachev first took office in 1985, he assumed that an overhaul of the economy would not require far-reaching political liberalization. He had hoped that a combination of administrative reshuffling, personnel changes, and increased discipline and order would be sufficient to bring about sustained eco-

³⁸ On Gorbachev's consolidation of power, see Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*; Matthew Evangelista, "Norms, Heresthetics, and the End of the Cold War," *Journal of Cold War Studies* vol. 3, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 5-35; Jerry F. Hough, *Democratization and Revolution in the USSR, 1985-1991* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1997); George W. Breslauer, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); and Graeme J. Gill, *The Collapse of a Single Party System: The Disintegration of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994). See also U.S. Director of Central Intelligence, "Whither Gorbachev: Soviet Policy and Politics in the 1990s," NIE-18-87 (Top Secret), November 1987; U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), "Gorbachev's Reorganization of the Party: Breaking the Stranglehold of the Apparatus," Research Paper No. SOV 89-10052X (Secret), June 1989; and CIA, "Gorbachev's Reform of the State Institutions: Toward a Parliamentary System?" Research Paper SOV 89-10024X, March 1989, all in CIA Records Search Tool (CREST), U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), College Park, MD.

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economic improvements.³⁹ But as the magnitude of Soviet economic problems became more apparent, Gorbachev increasingly emphasized political reforms to help mobilize popular support for his programs, to expose corrupt and incompetent officials, to undercut bureaucratic resistance to economic decentralization, and to yield more accurate economic and social data. This gradual shift in domestic priorities convinced Gorbachev that he also needed to scale back Soviet foreign and military policies that were financially burdensome and were apt to divert resources from urgent domestic needs. In particular, he wanted to ensure that he would not be forced to undertake the sorts of costly actions in Eastern Europe that had been deemed necessary in the past.

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Gorbachev's decision to move ahead with far-reaching changes in Soviet-East European relations was also facilitated by the significant easing of East-West relations since 1985, reflected above all in the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty of December 1987, which had been achieved thanks to major Soviet concessions. Not only did Gorbachev believe that the improved international climate would allow him "to focus on constructive endeavors at home" and obtain much-needed technology from the West; he also was confident that NATO governments would not try to undercut the Soviet Union.⁴⁰ Unlike in the past, when Soviet leaders feared that NATO would do everything it could to manipulate events in Eastern Europe against the USSR, Gorbachev was hopeful that the amelioration of East-West ties had created an opportunity for him to restructure Soviet policy toward Eastern Europe without endangering Soviet vital interests.

SIGNS OF CHANGE

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The first notable indicator of a shift in Gorbachev's policy came during his visit to Yugoslavia in March 1988, when the two sides issued a joint communiqué pledging "unconditional" respect for "the prin-

³⁹ See, for example, the declassified notes from CPSU Politburo meetings in KDPP, vols. 1 and 2. See also CIA, "Rejuvenating the Soviet Party Apparatus," Intelligence Assessment No. SOV 86-10011 (Secret), February 1986, in CREST/NARA.

⁴⁰ "Za bez'yadernyi mir, za gumanizm mezhdunarodnykh otnoshenii: Rech' M.S. Gorbacheva," *Pravda* (Moscow, 17 February 1987), 1.

principles of equality and non-interference” and for “the independence of [Communist] parties and socialist countries to define, for themselves, the path of their own development.”⁴¹ Although most of the communiqué applied strictly to Soviet-Yugoslav relations, the phrases about independence, equality, and non-interference were described as applying to relations among *all* socialist countries. In subsequent months the Soviet Union made good on these pledges by providing the East European governments with much greater latitude for internal political liberalization and market-oriented economic reforms—latitude that Hungary and Poland (though not the four other Warsaw Pact member-states) were quick to exploit.

Moreover, for the first time, Soviet analysts began to reevaluate and criticize the whole postwar history of Soviet-East European relations. As early as May 1988 a lengthy article in the weekly publication *Literaturnaya gazeta* by the prominent “new thinker” Vyacheslav Dashichev stressed that the Soviet Union’s “hegemonic policies and great-power mentality” in Eastern Europe after 1945, as reflected in “the spread of Stalinist socialism wherever possible and its standardization in all countries regardless of their national features,” had been directly responsible for the cycle of “sharp confrontations” between the Soviet Union and its supposed “fraternal allies” in Eastern Europe.⁴² Dashichev condemned “the expulsion of Yugoslavia from the socialist system in 1948 and the attribution of all deadly sins to its leaders for the simple reason that they had refused to submit to [Iosif] Stalin and obey his dictates.” The article also suggested that “hegemonism” and a domineering attitude toward Eastern Europe had continued under Stalin’s successors, leading in time to “armed clashes between socialist countries.” After berating the “stereotyped and cliché-ridden thinking and mentality of leading [Soviet] cadres who effectively became prisoners of their own propaganda,” Dashichev called for the “total surmounting of Stalinism in foreign policy” and for the rectification of “the mistakes and incompetent approach of the Brezhnevite leadership

⁴¹ Sovetsko-yugoslavskaya deklaratsiya, *Pravda* (Moscow, 19 March 1988), I.

⁴² Vyacheslav Dashichev, “Vostok-zapad: poisk novykh otnoshenii—O prioritetakh vneshnei politiki Sovetskogo gosudarstva,” *Literaturnaya gazeta* no. 20 (Moscow, 18 May 1988): 14. In December 1988, Dashichev’s article was voted one of the best to have appeared in *Literaturnaya gazeta* in 1988.

toward the resolution of foreign policy problems.”⁴³ By the summer of 1988, criticisms of this sort were appearing regularly in the Soviet press, generating a spirited and intense public debate.

The main elements of Dashichev’s critique were incorporated into a “discussion paper” compiled in mid-1988 by the Institute of Economics of the World Socialist System (IEMSS), the only research institute in the Soviet Academy of Sciences that dealt primarily with Eastern Europe and intra-bloc ties. The authors of the paper called for drastic changes in Soviet-East European relations to overcome the “stagnant neo-Stalinism” bred by the “hegemonic aspirations” of earlier Soviet leaders.⁴⁴ Although the IEMSS did not have a direct role in the policymaking process, the institute was an important source of advice and information for senior officials in the CPSU and the Soviet government. The IEMSS director, Oleg Bogomolov, conferred with several of Gorbachev’s most trusted aides, including Shakhnazarov and Aleksandr Yakovlev. By disseminating the paper to policymakers and by publishing it in Moscow and abroad, the IEMSS specialists helped to make Soviet officials aware of the volatile conditions in Eastern Europe.

Gorbachev himself received a draft of the IEMSS paper from Shakhnazarov in June 1988 amid preparations for important meetings of CPSU organs and Warsaw Pact military-political bodies.⁴⁵ A cover note from Shakhnazarov summarizing the document was marked by Gorbachev in various places, indicating that he had read it (and presumably had also read the full draft). When the Soviet leader delivered his keynote speech at the CPSU’s 19th Party Conference in late June 1988, he echoed many points in the IEMSS document. Eschewing the platitudes used at earlier party gatherings, he condemned “the sediment that has accumulated on our relations” with the East European countries and promised that the Soviet Union in the future would adhere to a much different policy: “The external imposition of a social system, of a way of life, or of policies by any means, let alone mili-

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ The paper was published in both Moscow and the West. See “East-West Relations and Eastern Europe: The Soviet Perspective,” *Problems of Communism* vol. 37, no. 3 (May–August 1988): 60–67.

⁴⁵ Memorandum from Shakhnazarov to Gorbachev, 18 May 1988, with draft of IEMSS paper attached, in AGF, F. 1, Op. 1, Dok. 11731.

tary, is a dangerous trapping of the past.”⁴⁶ In subsequent months, Gorbachev returned to this theme many times, both publicly and privately. In February 1989, for example, when he met with senior party and state officials in Soviet Ukraine, he told them that the Soviet Union was “restructuring its relations with the socialist countries” and would henceforth emphasize “unconditional independence, full equality, strict non-interference in internal affairs, and rectification of deformities and mistakes linked with earlier periods in the history of socialism.”⁴⁷

The increasing boldness of Gorbachev’s pronouncements about Eastern Europe, combined with the publication of harsh reappraisals of earlier Soviet policies in the region (including condemnations of the Brezhnev Doctrine by name), fueled the ongoing political spillover from the Soviet Union into the other Warsaw Pact countries. As the pace of *perestroika* and *glasnost* accelerated in the USSR in the wake of the 19th Party Conference, the “winds of change” gradually filtered throughout the Communist bloc, bringing long-submerged grievances and social discontent to the surface. Under mounting popular pressure, the authorities in Hungary and Poland embarked on a wide array of ambitious reforms—more ambitious than what Gorbachev himself was pursuing. Rather than seeking to discourage or roll back the radical changes in Poland and Hungary, Gorbachev did just the opposite by praising developments in both countries.

The sweeping reorientation of Soviet-East European ties was symbolized in the latter half of 1988 by Gorbachev’s bid to restructure and scale back the CPSU’s role in political life. The crucial changes Gorbachev secured at the 19th Soviet Party Conference in July 1988, which were formally adopted at a landmark CPSU Central Committee plenum three months later, had the effect of eliminating or reducing the party’s ability to perform certain key tasks.⁴⁸ In par-

⁴⁶ “Doklad General’nogo sekretarya TsK KPSS M. S. Gorbacheva na XIX Vsesoyuznoi konferentsii KPSS 28 iyunya 1988 god.,” *Pravda* (Moscow, 29 June 1988), 3.

⁴⁷ “Rech’ M. S. Gorbacheva na vstreche s trudyashchimisya v g. Kieve,” *Krasnaya zvezda* (Moscow, 24 February 1989), 3.

⁴⁸ “Stenogramma Plenuma TsK KPSS 30 sentyabrya 1988 god.,” Plenum Verbatim and Corrected Transcript (Secret), 30 September 1988, in RGANI, F. 2, Op. 5, Ll. 163-76. For Gorbachev’s rationale for the

particular, Gorbachev abolished many of the CPSU Central Committee departments, including the Department for Ties with Communist and Workers' Parties of Socialist Countries, whose functions were merged with an expanded International Department (ID).⁴⁹ The reconfigured ID, in turn, was placed under the jurisdiction of the new CPSU Commission on International Policy, headed by Gorbachev's close ally, Aleksandr Yakovlev, whose advocacy of "new political thinking" in Soviet foreign policy had taken an increasingly radical turn.⁵⁰ During the first few years under Gorbachev, Yakovlev had focused mostly on improving the "image" and packaging of Soviet foreign policy and on "thwarting Western counterpropaganda against the new thinking."⁵¹ But by the latter half of 1988, as events in the USSR gathered pace, Yakovlev was urging "concrete changes" of a "fundamental nature"

changes, see his memorandum transcribed in *Izvestiya TsK KPSS* (Moscow), vol. 1, no. 1 (January 1989): 81–86.

⁴⁹ Mark Kramer, "The Role of the CPSU International Department in Soviet Foreign Relations and National Security Policy," *Soviet Studies* vol. 42, no. 3 (July 1990): 429–46.

⁵⁰ "Postanovlenie Plenuma TsK KPSS: O Komissiyakh Tsentral'nogo Komiteta KPSS," *Pravda* (Moscow, 29 November 1988), 1–2. For an overview of Gorbachev's restructuring of the CPSU and party-state relations, see Graeme Gill, *The Collapse of a Single-Party System: The Disintegration of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

⁵¹ "O protivodeistvii Zapada politike perestroika po kanalim propagandy," o perestroike kak faktore neozhidannosti dlya Zapada, o politicheskom razmezhevanii na Zapade v otnoshenii k perestroike v SSSR," Memorandum from A. N. Yakovlev to M. S. Gorbachev (Top Secret), 4 July 1987, in Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF), F. 10063, Op. 1, D. 387, Ll. 1–12; "O kurse na aktivizatsiyu vneshnepoliticheskoi deyatel'nosti SSSR," Memorandum from A. N. Yakovlev to the CPSU Politburo (Top Secret), 11 November 1986, in GARF, F. 10063, Op. 2, D. 69, Ll. 1–18; "Tekst vystupleniya A. N. Yakovleva na Politbyuro TsK KPSS v svyazi s proektom Postanovleniya TsK KPSS, vnesennym na rassmotrenie Politbyuro TsK KPSS o perspektivnykh zadachakh vneshnepoliticheskoi propagandy," Text of speech (Secret), 6 January 1987, in GARF, F. 10063, Op. 1, D. 243, Ll. 1–7; and "Stenogramma soveshchaniya, provedenogo A. N. Yakovlevym v TsK KPSS s rukovoditelyami informatsionnykh agentstv pechati stran sotssodruzhestva i stran sotsialisticheskoi orientatsii," Transcript of meeting with East-bloc press officials (Top Secret), 26 November 1987, in GARF, F. 10063, Op. 1, D. 171, Ll. 1–19.

that would “reshape [Soviet] relations with all of the socialist countries” in ways “consistent with the new directions in [Soviet] foreign policy.”⁵²

The elimination of the old CPSU department that had long coordinated intra-bloc affairs, the diffusion of the erstwhile department’s responsibilities, and the supervisory role given to Yakovlev over Soviet ties with Eastern Europe could not help but mitigate the CPSU’s entrenched habit of interfering in the activities of East European Communist parties and governments.⁵³ Thus, from an institutional standpoint, the reorganization of the Soviet central party apparatus in 1988 both contributed to and heralded the looser Soviet policy in Eastern Europe.

Genesis and Impact of Unilateral Force Reductions

Another dramatic sign of the reorientation of Gorbachev’s policy toward the Warsaw Pact countries came in December 1988 when he announced, in a landmark speech before the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, that the Soviet Union would unilaterally reduce its military forces in Eastern Europe by 50,000 troops, 5,300 tanks, and 24 tactical nuclear weapons within two years.⁵⁴ This shift to major uni-

⁵² “Tezisy vystupleniya A. N. Yakovleva na Politbyuro TsK KPSS o ‘novom politicheskom myshlenii’: Kontseptsyakh prodvizheniya vpered po ryadu napravlenii postanovke konkretnykh dolgovremennykh tselei takovogo prodvizheniya, prakticheskikh sdvigakh i samykh pervykh poka eshche rezul’tatakh” (Teoreticheskii aspekt),” Revised text of speech to CPSU Politburo Session (Secret), 27 December 1988, in GARF, F. 10063, Op. 1, D. 190, Ll. 1–7.

⁵³ See the illuminating account by Vadim Medvedev, a close ally of Gorbachev who headed the CPSU intra-bloc department until it was abolished and then became a CPSU Politburo member, *Raspad: Kak on nazreval v “mirovoi sisteme sotsializma”* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 1994), esp. 117–23, 248–51.

⁵⁴ “Vystuplenie M. S. Gorbacheva v Organizatsii Ob”edinennykh Natsii,” *Pravda* (Moscow), 8 December 1988, 2. In early 1989 the U.S. intelligence community prepared a classified assessment of the impact of these cuts. The document—U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), “Trends and Development in Warsaw Pact Theater Forces and Doctrine Through the

lateral reductions of Soviet forces in Eastern Europe, an approach long dreaded by Soviet military officers, was particularly significant in light of the far-reaching political changes under way in the USSR, Hungary, and Poland.

The decision to reduce Soviet troops and weapons unilaterally, and the related decision about precisely which forces to eliminate, were made exclusively in Moscow. Initially, at the end of October 1988, Gorbachev met with a small group of foreign policy advisers, including Shevardnadze, Aleksandr Yakovlev, Anatolii Chernyaev, Anatolii Dobrynin, and Valentin Falin, to determine how the initiative should be conceived and presented.⁵⁵ The proposal was then fleshed out with specific numbers and discussed by the full CPSU Politburo on 10 and 24 November and 2 December.⁵⁶ The USSR Defense Council, which Gorbachev also chaired, met on 11 November to determine which Soviet forces should be weeded out and how quickly they should be withdrawn. In none of these deliberations did the East European leaders have any say or play even the slightest role. Last-minute "consultations" with the East European governments about the matter were purely pro forma. The East German leader Erich Honecker, whose country was the most heavily affected by the reductions, was informed of Gorbachev's intentions only three days before the Soviet leader spoke at the UN.⁵⁷ According to Honecker's former associates, he was

1990s," *National Intelligence Estimate* (NIE) 11-14-89, February 1989 (Top Secret)—is available in slightly redacted form in CIA, Center for the Study of Intelligence (CSI), *At Cold War's End: U.S. Intelligence on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, 1989-1991* (Washington, DC: CIA 1999), Doc. 16. See also William E. Odom, *The Collapse of the Soviet Military* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 146-47.

⁵⁵ "Soveshchanie po podgotovke kontseptsii vystupleniya Gorbacheva v OON," notes taken by Anatolii Chernyaev, 31 October 1988, in KDPP, vol. 3, 491-94.

⁵⁶ "Zasedanie Politbyuro TsK KPSS 10 noyabrya 1988 god.," 10 November 1988 (Top Secret), in KDPP, vol. 3, 498-509; "Zasedanie Politbyuro TsK KPSS 24 noyabrya 1988 god.," 24 November 1988 (Top Secret), in KDPP, Vol. 3, 509-522; and "Zasedanie Politbyuro TsK KPSS 10 dekabrya 1988 god.," 2 December 1988 (Top Secret), in KDPP, vol. 3, 524-29.

⁵⁷ "Wesentlicher Inhalt des Gesprächs des Generalsekretärs des ZK der SED und Vorsitzenden des Nationalen Verteidigungsrates der DDR, Genossen

“stunned and dismayed” by the news, but he had little choice other than to express his perfunctory endorsement.⁵⁸

The aim of the reductions, according to the resolution adopted by the CPSU Politburo, was to “accentuate the defensive character” of the Warsaw Pact, to “give new and strong impetus to the process of lowering the military-strategic balance in Europe,” and to “improve relations between East and West and facilitate the process of disarmament.”⁵⁹ This last point was especially important for Gorbachev, who viewed the unilateral cuts as the best way to achieve economic savings in the near to medium term. At a CPSU Politburo meeting a few weeks after the speech, he claimed that unless the Soviet Union curbed its military forces and defense spending, it would “never be able to sustain a long-term economic and social policy.”⁶⁰

In both military and political terms, the reductions amply fulfilled Gorbachev’s objectives. The U.S. intelligence community, which carefully tracked the implementation of Gorbachev’s projected cuts, reported in September 1989 that the withdrawals were leading to “a very significant reduction in the offensive combat power of Soviet forces in Europe” and would result in “the most significant changes in Soviet general purpose forces opposite NATO since [Nikita] Khrushchev’s

Erich Honecker, mit dem Mitglied des Politburos des ZK der SED und Minister für Nationale Verteidigung, Genossen Armeegeneral Kessler, am Sonntag, dem 02. 12. 1988,” GVS-Nr. A 613 225 (Top Secret), 4 December 1988, in MA-BA, VA-01/32665, Bl. 154–60.

⁵⁸ See, for example, the comments of Heinz Kessler, *Zur Sache und zur Person: Erinnerungen* (Berlin: Edition Ost, 1996), 240–41; Hans Modrow, *Aufbruch und Ende* (Hamburg: Konkret Literatur, 1991), 131; Hans Modrow, *In historischer Mission: als deutscher Politiker unterwegs* (Berlin: Edition Ost, 2007), 181; Egon Krenz, *Herbst ’89* (Berlin: Neues Leben, 1999), 107; and Egon Krenz, *Wenn Mauern fallen: Die friedliche Revolution—Vorgeschichte, Ablauf-Auswirkungen* (Vienna: Paul Neff, 1990), 23–24.

⁵⁹ “Wesentlicher Inhalt des Gesprächs des Generalsekretärs des ZK der SED und Vorsitzenden des Nationalen Verteidigungsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, mit dem Mitglied des Politburos des ZK der SED und Minister für Nationale Verteidigung, Genossen Armeegeneral Kessler,” Bl. 158.

⁶⁰ “Zasedanie Politbyuro TsK KPSS 27-28 dekabrya 1988 god: O prakticheskoi realizatsii i prakticheskom obespechenii itogov vizita t. Gorbacheva M. S. v OON,” 27-28 December 1988 (Top Secret), in RGANI, F. 89, Op. 42, D. 24, Ll. 1–34.

drastic force reductions of the late 1950s and early 1960s." U.S. intelligence analysts concluded that even if the Soviet Army added infantry fighting vehicles to its units in Eastern Europe to help offset the cuts, "the loss of half the [Soviet] tanks previously stationed in Eastern Europe will significantly degrade Pact offensive capabilities."⁶¹ In political terms as well, the impact of the reductions was enormous. Gorbachev assured the CPSU Politburo that the cuts would "show that our new political thinking is more than just words" and would signal a new Soviet approach to relations with Eastern Europe. Some members of the Soviet Politburo warned that the withdrawals would strengthen the impression that the Soviet Union would no longer provide "fraternal assistance" to the East European regimes, thus causing "undesirable consequences for the entire socialist commonwealth."⁶² But Gorbachev was willing to accept that risk as he pressed ahead with his efforts to revive and restructure the Soviet economy, to recast Soviet foreign relations in accordance with "new political thinking," and to transform the Warsaw Pact into a defensive alliance.

The decision to embrace unilateral reductions provoked consternation within the Soviet High Command. The very thing that Soviet marshals and generals had long been denouncing as a "dangerous," "misguided," and "completely unacceptable" option was now enshrined as state policy. The chief of the Soviet General Staff, Marshal Sergei Akhromeev, resigned five days before Gorbachev's speech. Although Akhromeev at the time did not publicly disclose why he stepped down, and although he agreed to stay on temporarily as a personal military adviser to Gorbachev, he later revealed that he had been "distracted" about Gorbachev's willingness to act without gaining reciprocity by NATO.⁶³ In Akhromeev's view, the Soviet leader's failure to insist on corresponding Western reductions was

⁶¹ U.S. National Intelligence Council, "Status of Soviet Unilateral Withdrawals," Memorandum NIC M 89 10003 (Secret), October 1989, 2, 8, reproduced in CSI, *At Cold War's End*, Doc. 18.

⁶² "Zasedanie Politbyuro TsK KPSS 27-28 dekabrya 1988 god.," L. 31.

⁶³ Interview with Akhromeev in "Deutschland, das neue Europa, und die Perestroika: Exklusivinterview mit Marschall Achromejev," *Neues Deutschland* (Berlin, 4 October 1990), 8.

“incomprehensible” and a “betrayal.”⁶⁴ In subsequent weeks, many other high-ranking Soviet officers were dismissed, climaxing with the removal of Marshal Viktor Kulikov, the commander-in-chief of the Warsaw Pact, and his main deputy, Army-General Anatolii Gribkov, in early February 1989. The ouster of Kulikov and Gribkov, who together had been commanding the Warsaw Pact’s joint military forces since 1977 and had publicly opposed any unilateral reductions, brought a symbolic end to the Soviet military’s attempts to preserve the Pact as a cohesive, effective alliance. From then on, Soviet officers were hoping mainly that they could salvage at least something of the organization and stave off outright collapse.

The Challenge of Coping with Drastic Change

All these developments left little doubt by the end of 1988 that Gorbachev had implicitly renounced the Brezhnev Doctrine and opened the way for far-reaching internal change in Eastern Europe. The real issue for the Soviet leader from that point on was no longer whether he should uphold the Brezhnev Doctrine, but whether he could avoid the “Khrushchev Dilemma.” That is, the problem was not whether to accept peaceful domestic change, as in Czechoslovakia in 1968, but how to prevent widespread anti-Soviet violence from breaking out, as in Hungary in 1956. Gorbachev would have found himself in an intractable situation if he had been confronted by a large-scale, violent uprising in Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, or Hungary. On the two previous occasions when violent rebellions threatened Soviet control over those four countries—in East Germany in 1953 and Hungary in 1956—Gorbachev’s predecessors responded by sending large numbers of Soviet troops to subdue the opposition. If a comparable crisis had erupted in the late 1980s, the pressure for Soviet military intervention would have been enormous, just as it was on Khrushchev in 1956. No matter how Gorbachev might have responded, he would have suffered grave damage. On the one

⁶⁴ S. F. Akhromeev and G. M. Kornienko, *Glazami marshala i diplomata* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 1992), 187–88.

hand, if he had declined to reassert military control in the face of widespread anti-Soviet violence, his opponents within the CPSU undoubtedly would have accused him of recklessness and betrayal and would have done their best to remove him from office. On the other hand, if he had proceeded with a full-fledged invasion, the adverse effects on Soviet domestic reform and on East-West relations would have been immense, just as they were after previous Soviet crackdowns in the region.⁶⁵

Hence, Gorbachev's overriding objective was to avoid the Khrushchev Dilemma altogether. He could not afford to be confronted by a violent uprising in one of the key East European countries. Only by forestalling such a disastrous turn of events could he have any hope of moving ahead with his reform program. The problem, however, was that his very policies, by unleashing centrifugal forces within the Eastern bloc, had already made it *more* likely that a violent rebellion would occur. One of the main deterrents to popular anti-Communist uprisings in Eastern Europe after 1956 was the local populations' awareness that, if necessary, Soviet troops would intervene to restore control. Because this perceived constraint had been steadily diminishing under Gorbachev, the risk of a violent upheaval had increased commensurately.

The possibility of a violent explosion in Eastern Europe had long been apparent to prominent Soviet specialists on the region, such as Bogomolov and Dashichev. Their forebodings shaped the outlook of Shakhnazarov, Aleksandr Yakovlev, and Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, all of whom played crucial advisory roles on Eastern Europe. These senior officials—and eventually Gorbachev himself—came to realize that the longer the existing structures in Eastern Europe remained in place, the greater the danger would be for the Soviet Union. A secret memorandum prepared by Shakhnazarov for Gorbachev and the CPSU Politburo in October 1988 warned that “social instability and crisis might well engulf the whole socialist world

⁶⁵ The adverse domestic repercussions of Soviet military intervention in Eastern Europe were candidly assessed by Yurii Levada in “Reaktivnaya otdacha,” *Moskovskie novosti* (Moscow), 34 (20 August 1989): 7.

simultaneously.”⁶⁶ The memorandum offered a disconcerting appraisal of the situation:

There are countless signs that all the fraternal countries are plagued by basically the same problems, which are rapidly growing and intensifying. The fact that the symptoms are alike in all these countries shows that the disease is caused not by some sort of noxious virus, ... but by concrete factors rooted in the underlying economic and political model of socialism that was first developed in our country and that was then transferred, with essentially no modifications, to the countries that embarked on the socialist path in the postwar period.⁶⁷

Another of Gorbachev's key advisers on European affairs, Vitalii Zhurkin, later recalled that the Soviet authorities had finally “faced up to the fact . . . that the authoritarian and totalitarian systems in the countries of Eastern Europe were artificial and would not last forever.”⁶⁸ If those systems had been “prolonged for another five or ten years,” Zhurkin argued, the resulting “explosions” would have been far more “destructive” and would have caused greater “destabilization” and “problems for everyone, not least for us.”⁶⁹

Thus, both the record of previous crises in Eastern Europe and the prospect that new crises would emerge in the near future had convinced Gorbachev's advisers (and eventually Gorbachev himself) that, as Shevardnadze put it, “if positive changes [in Eastern Europe] were suppressed or delayed, the whole situation would end in tragedy.”⁷⁰ Far-reaching liberalization, they believed, was the only way to forestall such

⁶⁶ “K zasedaniyu Politbyuro 6/X-88 g.,” 6 October 1988 (Secret), in AGF, F. 5, Op. 1, Dok. 15107. The text of the memorandum is featured as an appendix in G. Kh. Shakhnazarov, *Tsena svobody: Reformatsiya Gorbacheva glazami ego pomoshchnika* (Moscow: Rossika-Zevs, 1993), 367–69 (quoted portion is from 367).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 368.

⁶⁸ Interview with Vitalii Zhurkin, adviser to Gorbachev on European affairs, in “Evropa v menyayushchikhsya koordinatakh,” *Izvestiya* (Moscow, 26 May 1990), 5.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ E. Shevardnadze, “O vneshnei politike,” *Pravda* (Moscow, 26 June 1990), 3.

crises. But Gorbachev was also aware that unless the "positive changes" they were seeking in Eastern Europe occurred peacefully, his domestic reform program—and his own political fate—would be in jeopardy.

Mindful of that dilemma, Gorbachev and his aides by late 1988 had established two basic goals for Soviet policy in Eastern Europe. First, they wanted to avoid direct Soviet military intervention at all costs. Shakhnazarov had emphasized in his memorandum to Gorbachev that "in the future, the prospect of 'extinguishing' crisis situations [in Eastern Europe] through military means must be completely ruled out."⁷¹ Second, they sought to achieve a peaceful but rapid transition to a new political order in Eastern Europe. By drastically modifying the region's political complexion, they could defuse the pressures that had given rise to violent internal crises in the past. But to ensure that the early stages of the process remained peaceful and that "positive changes" would indeed occur, the Soviet Union itself had to play an active, initiating role. Shakhnazarov in his October 1988 memorandum stressed the need for an active policy:

Some countries have followed our example or have even gone beyond us in undertaking profound reforms, but others, like the GDR, Romania, and Czechoslovakia, have still not acknowledged the need for reforms, primarily for political reasons and the current leaders' aversion to making changes in anything. In reality, all of these countries need fundamental changes, although we cannot speak about this publicly, lest they accuse us of trying to impose perestroika on our friends. But a fact remains a fact: The obvious signs of an impending crisis demand radical reforms everywhere in the socialist world. ... Those who stubbornly refuse to heed the pressures for change are just intensifying the ills they face and are greatly complicating matters for the future. This affects us in the most direct way. Even if we are not authorized to be an "elder brother" in the socialist world, we cannot reject the role of a leader, a role that objectively belongs to the Soviet Union as the most powerful socialist country. If the situation were to reach a crisis point in one or more socialist coun-

⁷¹ "K zasedaniyu Politbyuro 6/X-88 g." L. 1.

tries, we would have to come to their rescue at the cost of enormous material, political, and even human losses.⁷²

The basic problem, as Shakhnazarov indicated, was that if most of the East European Communist parties had been left to their own devices, they would have sought to avoid reforms indefinitely and to crack down harshly on protests and discontent. In late 1988 and the first few months of 1989, Gorbachev and his aides considered how to escape this predicament. Their discussions paved the way for landmark decisions in March 1989 that prefigured the USSR's responses to mass unrest in Eastern Europe later that year.

The Decision to Abandon Soviet Military Hegemony in Eastern Europe

Gorbachev's efforts to decide how to forestall or at least cope with the Khrushchev Dilemma came to a head in the first few months of 1989 when, at his behest, the CPSU Politburo and Soviet Defense Council endorsed crucial guidelines about how the Soviet Union should respond to possible internal upheavals in Eastern Europe. In effect, Gorbachev persuaded the Politburo and Defense Council to join with him in deciding well in advance that the Soviet Union would not take military action in Eastern Europe, even if the Communist governments there collapsed. Gorbachev thus ensured that his colleagues in the Politburo and Defense Council—the only people who potentially could get rid of him—bore equal responsibility for this momentous decision and had no basis for moving against him if he declined to authorize military repression in the face of widespread destabilizing unrest in Eastern Europe. By forging a high-level consensus not to use military force, Gorbachev preemptively defused the Khrushchev Dilemma.

The process began on 24 January 1989, when Gorbachev received a memorandum from one of his top aides, Vadim Zagladin, who said he wanted to “draw [the Soviet leader's] attention to a delicate and complicated matter that could take on immense significance

⁷² Ibid., LI. 1-2.

for us.”⁷³ Zagladin averred that the Soviet Union’s “new military-political thinking” necessitated a “painstaking review of our obligations regarding the provision of military assistance to foreign states in extreme circumstances.” The phrase “extreme circumstances” (*chrezvychainye obstoyatel'stva*), which could also be translated as “an emergency” in English, clearly referred not only to external military attack by NATO (which was deemed unlikely by this time) but also to a severe internal crisis, including the downfall of the Communist regime. Zagladin warned that as long as the Soviet Union’s existing obligations remained intact, “extreme circumstances might compel us to take actions that could halt and even totally negate what we have achieved” through the embrace of “new political thinking.” He argued that “obligations undertaken amid the circumstances of the Cold War ... have sharply constrained [the Soviet Union’s] freedom of action,” and he expressed particular anxiety about “unpublished and, for the most part, tightly held documents regarding certain understandings that could potentially create severe difficulties for us.” Zagladin said that in the future the Soviet Union must always “approach this issue from the perspective of new military-political thinking,” which presumably would bring the elimination of “outdated commitments.” In his view, the best way to “begin [is] by thoroughly analyzing *all* obligations we have undertaken that involve military assistance of any sort.”⁷⁴

Gorbachev promptly authorized Zagladin to coordinate an in-depth, high-level review of the matter that would offer recommendations for the CPSU Politburo. On 27 January, Zagladin sent a note to senior officials responsible for foreign policy and national security, asking them to work together in compiling a critical appraisal of “the USSR’s current obligations to provide military assistance to foreign countries, including under extreme circumstances.”⁷⁵ Top experts from the Soviet Foreign Ministry and Defense Ministry, with input from a few other ministries and agencies, jointly produced a detailed study

⁷³ “Dokladnaya zapiska o peresmotre obyazatel'stv po okazaniyu voennoi pomoshchi,” Memorandum from V. Zagladin to Mikhail Gorbachev (Secret), 24 January 1989, in AGF, F. 3, Dok. 7179, Ll. 1–3.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, Ll. 2–3 (emphasis in original).

⁷⁵ “Zapiska,” from V. Zagladin to E. Shevardnadze, D. Yazov, and V. Kamentsev, 27 January 1989, in AGF, F. 3, Dok. 7179a., L. 1, with attachment.

of major aspects of the issue that in effect repudiated the Soviet government's earlier interpretations of its multilateral obligations under the Warsaw Treaty and its bilateral obligations to each of the East European countries.

On 25 March 1989 Gorbachev received a 10-page memorandum from Foreign Minister Shevardnadze, Defense Minister Army-General Dmitrii Yazov, and State Foreign Economic Commission Chairman Vladimir Kamentsev, summarizing the findings of the review and laying out a series of far-reaching recommendations.⁷⁶ The memorandum noted that "the extreme circumstances that might trigger the provision of military assistance [to a Warsaw Pact country] pertain only to foreign threats, that is, situations when the right to individual or collective self-defense is carried out in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter." The document said that even "in the case of an armed attack" from outside, the "relevant provisions" in the Warsaw Treaty regarding collective defense were "flexible and did not automatically require the provision of military assistance." The Soviet Union's bilateral treaties with East European countries were "more definite" in calling for "the immediate provision of all manner of assistance, including military aid," but this was true only when "needed to defend against external armed attack."⁷⁷

Shevardnadze, Yazov, and Kamentsev stressed that "internal situations in the [Warsaw Pact] countries ... do not fall into the category" of contingencies covered by the Warsaw Treaty or by the bilateral defense treaties linking the Soviet Union with individual Warsaw Pact states "and therefore do not require us to take any sorts of measures in con-

⁷⁶ "Tovarishchu Gorbachevu M. S.," Memorandum No. 242/OS (Top Secret) to M. S. Gorbachev from E. Shevardnadze, D. Yazov, and V. Kamentsev, 25 March 1989, in Hoover Archives (Stanford University), Papers of Vitalii Leonidovich Kataev, Box 13, Folder 14, 1-10. Vitalii Kataev was deputy head of the CPSU Defense Industry Department (renamed Defense Department in 1991) during the Gorbachev era and served as an adviser to the CPSU General Secretary on military issues, arms control, and weapons production. Before he died in 2001, he and his daughter had arranged for copies of his papers to be transferred to the Hoover Institution, which acquired them in 2002. Five of the twenty boxes of papers have not yet been released, but all the rest are accessible.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

nection with our treaty obligations.” The memorandum noted that “two of the [Soviet Union’s bilateral] treaties—those with Czechoslovakia and the GDR—contain clauses about the defense of people’s socialist gains,” and the three Soviet officials acknowledged that these clauses “are construed in the West as codifying a right to the collective defense of socialism, including the use of military force, against internal as well as external threats.” This was indeed the way Western observers had always interpreted those clauses in the two treaties, and it was also the way Soviet leaders had construed them prior to 1989. Shevardnadze, Yazov, and Kamentsev argued that such interpretations were invalid and that “the language in the [USSR’s bilateral treaties with the GDR and Czechoslovakia] is in fact very general and does not in any way stipulate that military assistance must be provided.”⁷⁸

The three officials argued that “the phrasing of the Warsaw Treaty concerning the provision of military assistance is adequate for the current situation in the world and does not require any sorts of changes to be introduced.” They added that

although the obligations contained in the USSR’s bilateral treaties with allied states are formulated more strictly and could be construed in ways undesirable for us, it would not be appropriate for us to take the initiative in suggesting modifications or a reexamination of the treaties, in light of the travails being experienced by these states and the complex processes under way in them. Such an initiative might result in a weakening of allied relations and exacerbate the centrifugal trends in the [socialist] community and facilitate the destabilization of the situation in several of the countries.⁷⁹

The memorandum went on to say that “if the question of reexamining a bilateral treaty is raised by the allied state itself, as is now being done by Bulgaria, then of course we should pursue the task of clarifying the treaty’s terms, albeit without detriment to the allied obligations laid out therein.” The three officials said that “concretely what we have

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 5.

in mind is to include in a new bilateral treaty the phrasing that now appears in the Warsaw Treaty regarding the provision of [Soviet] military assistance" to a country under attack.⁸⁰

Zagladin's original memorandum to Gorbachev on 24 January had proposed that "after carrying out a review [of the USSR's military obligations] and taking account of the results of this review, we could consider raising this matter in strict confidence with the American side."⁸¹ Gorbachev did not reject the idea, and Zagladin subsequently recommended to Shevardnadze, Yazov, and Kamentsev that the Soviet Union "should discuss with the American side on a confidential basis [the USSR's] obligations concerning the provision of military assistance to allies." The implication was that they should privately let U.S. officials know that the Soviet Union would no longer be coming to the aid of East European regimes faced with severe internal crises. Shevardnadze, Yazov, and Kamentsev said they found Zagladin's proposal to be of "dubious merit," not only because "the USA would promptly inform its allies about such discussions" but also because the confidential discussions "inevitably would be leaked to the press and we would appear in the eyes of our allies to be conspiring behind their backs with the Americans regarding our obligations to our allies. The political effect of this [in Eastern Europe] would be extremely negative." Although Shevardnadze, Yazov, and Kamentsev expressed strong support for "the further positive development of the Soviet-American dialogue," they warned against explicitly taking up such sensitive matters with the U.S. government and argued that Soviet officials should instead discuss in a more general way with their American counterparts how the two sides could "constructively approach the regulation of concrete problems that currently exist or could arise in different regions of the world."⁸²

Even though Zagladin's proposal was not ultimately adopted, the mere fact that he suggested it underscores the firmness of the Soviet Union's decision to avoid the use of military force in Eastern Europe and illustrates how much the international context of Soviet-East

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁸¹ "Dokladnaya zapiska o peresmotre obyazatel'stv po okazaniyu voennoi pomoshchi," Ll. 3.

⁸² "Tovarishchu Gorbachevu M. S." (see note 74 *supra*), 9.

European relations had changed during the Gorbachev era. In the past, especially during the halcyon days of U.S. “rollback” and “liberation” policies in the 1950s, the zero-sum nature of the Cold War rivalry would have caused Soviet leaders to fear that even the slightest relaxation of Soviet control in Eastern Europe would be exploited by the United States.⁸³ No Soviet official prior to the late 1980s would ever have suggested holding confidential discussions with the United States about Soviet intentions in Eastern Europe. Since 1985, however, the rapid improvement of U.S.-Soviet relations had given Soviet leaders ample confidence that the United States was no longer trying to undermine Moscow’s vital political-military interests in Eastern Europe.

Indeed, this very matter had come up explicitly in bilateral talks in mid-January 1989 (shortly before Zagladin sent his memorandum to Gorbachev), when former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger traveled to Moscow unofficially on behalf of the Trilateral Commission with the knowledge and quiet blessing of the incoming administration of George H. W. Bush.⁸⁴ Kissinger’s confidential discussions with Gorbachev and Yakovlev focused on, among other things, Soviet policy toward Eastern Europe in the context of U.S.-Soviet relations. In a conversation with Yakovlev, Kissinger proposed that senior U.S. and Soviet officials begin a secret “political dialogue” that would help to promote “political evolution” in Eastern Europe in an orderly way, eliminating the “potential for instability.” The aim would be to defuse the “dangerously volatile conditions” in the region and to avert any “political explosions.” Kissinger reported that he had “discussed this matter in detail with G. Bush’s entourage,” and that “the incoming U.S. administration would be ready to discuss these questions in a confidential format” while “taking full account of [the USSR’s] legitimate

⁸³ See, for example, Khrushchev’s comments in late October 1956 about the U.S. government’s malevolent designs vis-à-vis Hungary, cited in Mark Kramer, “The Soviet Union and the 1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland: Reassessments and New Findings,” *Journal of Contemporary History* vol. 33, no. 2 (April 1998): 191.

⁸⁴ On the Kissinger-Gorbachev talks, see Jack F. Matlock, Jr., *Autopsy on an Empire: The American Ambassador’s Account of the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (New York: Random House, 1995), 190–92.

security interests" in Eastern Europe.⁸⁵ Gorbachev promptly surmised, as he later told the CPSU Politburo, that Kissinger was in effect advocating "a U.S.-Soviet condominium in Europe"—a largely accurate characterization of Kissinger's intention (though not necessarily of any measures the incoming Bush administration would have been willing to embrace in public).⁸⁶

Although Gorbachev clearly welcomed Kissinger's proposal, he expressed concern that it would give the impression of "an attempt at collusion between the USSR and the USA at the expense of Europe." When Shevardnadze, Yazov, and Kamentsev turned down Zagladin's proposal, the reasons they cited were not that the United States was hellbent on fomenting or taking advantage of turmoil in Eastern Europe. Instead, the problem, as they (and Gorbachev) saw it, was the opposite: namely, that relations between the United States and Soviet Union had warmed so much over the past few years that East European leaders would be inclined to suspect that U.S. and Soviet officials were conniving behind the backs of the East European governments to promote the superpowers' common interest in the region's fate. The far-reaching improvement of U.S.-Soviet relations was thus conducive to innovative Soviet actions vis-à-vis Eastern Europe—actions that would have been inconceivable at any previous stage of the Cold War.

The Push for Far-Reaching Change and the Impact of Tiananmen

After forging a high-level consensus that the Soviet Union would not use military force to suppress internal upheavals in Eastern Europe, Gorbachev and his aides still faced the challenge of ensuring that what Shakhnazarov's memorandum in October 1988 had described

⁸⁵ "Zapis' besedy A. N. Yakovleva s G. Kissindzherom (SShA) 16 yanvary 1989 g. po mezhdunarodnym problemam," Summary Transcript of conversation (Secret), 17 January 1989, in GARF, F. 10063, Op. 1, D. 258, Ll. 1-5.

⁸⁶ "Zapis' zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS, 24 yanvary 1989 god.," Transcript of CPSU Politburo Session (Top Secret), 24 January 1989, in AGF, F. 10, Op. 2, Ll. 198-99.

as the “fundamental changes” and “radical reforms needed everywhere” in the region would occur peacefully. This question took on particular urgency in the spring and summer of 1989 amid a surge of unrest in the USSR itself, including fighting between Azerbaijanis and Armenians over Nagorno-Karabakh and mass demonstrations in Tbilisi that were crushed by the Soviet Army in April 1989. The violent suppression of the disturbances in Tbilisi, killing 19 people and wounding nearly 300, was implemented locally without Gorbachev’s authorization and against his expressed wishes. Both Gorbachev and Shevardnadze promptly disavowed and condemned the operation, pledging that “this sort of tragedy will never be allowed to happen again.”⁸⁷ Even though Gorbachev was increasingly preoccupied by instability at home and other pressing domestic issues, the growing restiveness in several Soviet republics reinforced his desire to prevent violent turmoil from erupting along the USSR’s western flank.

Because far-reaching liberalization was already under way in Hungary and Poland, the main task for Soviet officials in those two countries was to encourage continued progress and to dispel any doubt that the Soviet Union would stand in the way of drastic change there. Even when the Hungarian government moved well ahead of the USSR itself in reassessing the 1956 Hungarian revolution and other sensitive issues in bilateral Soviet-Hungarian relations, Soviet leaders refrained from hindering the process.⁸⁸ The ceremonial reburial in June 1989 of Imre Nagy, the reformist prime minister who returned to power at

⁸⁷ For a full account and evidence from declassified sources, see Mark Kramer, “The Collapse of East European Communism and the Repercussions within the Soviet Union (Part 2),” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 64 (Fall 2004): 27–32.

⁸⁸ Until October 1991, by which time the Soviet regime was in its terminal phase, Gorbachev never criticized the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 or reassessed the Hungarian revolution. As late as March 1989, in a private conversation with Hungarian Prime Minister Miklós Németh, Gorbachev argued that the unrest in Hungary in October 1956 had “deteriorated into counterrevolution and bloodshed,” and he expressed disapproval of attempts in Hungary to characterize the revolution as a “popular uprising.” See “Zapis’ besedy M. S. Gorbacheva s chlenom TsK VSRP, Predsedatelem Soveta Ministrov VNR Mikloshem Nemetom, 3 marta 1989,” Notes of Conversation (Top Secret), 3 March 1989, in AGF, F. 1, Op. 1, Dok. 8325, L. 3.

the height of the 1956 revolution and was then executed and buried in an unmarked grave in June 1958 after the Soviet invasion of Hungary in November 1956, leading to the installation of a new government headed by János Kádár, was the culmination of a series of key events in 1989 linked with Hungary's efforts to come to terms with the 1956 revolution and the forceful suppression of it by Soviet troops.⁸⁹

On 15 June, the day before the re-interment of Nagy, a small demonstration occurred in front of the Soviet embassy in Budapest. The next day, more than 250,000 people turned out for the ceremony, which featured emotional and often fiery speeches (including some with a distinctly anti-Soviet tinge), marking a turning point in Hungary's democratization. Official Soviet commentary on the reburial referred to it as a "humane act" undertaken "in the spirit of national reconciliation"—a striking contrast to the furious reaction that such an event (or anything remotely like it) would have provoked in Moscow under previous Soviet leaders.⁹⁰ Soviet officials were even willing to forgo any criticism of the anti-Soviet comments voiced by some orators at the reburial, describing these as merely Hungary's "internal affair."

In Poland from late 1988 on, Gorbachev and his aides had to take a more active role than in Hungary as they nudged along the process of change and ensured that the Polish regime headed by Wojciech Jaruzelski would not try to backtrack and end the liberalizing reforms.⁹¹ Soviet leaders encouraged the re-legalization of Solidarity, the convocation of Round Table talks between Solidarity and the Communist regime, and the arrangement to hold partly free elections for a new Polish legislature. As far back as September 1988, Gorbachev had told a senior PZPR official, Józef Czyrek, that the Polish Communists would lose out in the Round Table unless they finally "took account of real-

⁸⁹ Mark Kramer, "Beyond the Brezhnev Doctrine: A New Era in Soviet-East European Relations," *International Security* vol. 14, no. 3 (Winter 1989–1990): 44–45.

⁹⁰ Vladimir V. Kusin, "Hard-Line Response to Imre Nagy Reburial and Intensification of Hungarian Reforms," RAD Background Report 115 (Eastern Europe), *Radio Free Europe Research*, (29 June 1989), 1–10.

⁹¹ For a detailed discussion of the Soviet Union's role vis-à-vis the changes in Poland, see Mark Kramer, "The Collapse of East European Communism and the Repercussions within the Soviet Union (Part 1)," *Journal of Cold War Studies* vol. 5, no. 4 (Fall 2003): 178–256.

ities [in Polish society] that cannot be ignored” and stopped “acting out of fear.” Gorbachev sensed that because the PZPR had “wasted so much time,” the party would find it hard to “cope with the prominence and broad popularity of the opposition.”⁹² Whenever Jaruzelski or other senior Polish Communist officials expected (or hoped) that the Soviet Union might try to curtail the liberalization, Soviet leaders did just the opposite, pushing the authorities to compromise with Solidarity and signaling approval of any outcome that might emerge.

In the four other Warsaw Pact countries—Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Bulgaria, and Romania—the Communist regimes had staunchly eschewed any hint of liberalization and had, if anything, become increasingly repressive and intransigent as the internal and external pressures for reform grew. Leading officials in those countries were heartened in early June 1989 when the Politburo of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) ordered a brutal attack by army troops and security forces against a vast crowd of unarmed people around Tiananmen Square in Beijing, bringing an end to several weeks of protests.

The crisis in Beijing had begun in mid-April 1989 when a fledgling “pro-democracy” movement coalesced in Tiananmen Square, inspired in part by the death of the ousted CCP leader Hu Yaobang (who had been removed in 1987 after seeking to move ahead with political liberalization) and also by the rapid changes under way in the Soviet Union, Hungary, and Poland. Mass demonstrations spread to Shanghai, Harbin, Chengdu, Nanjin, and other cities in China, but the primary focus both for the Chinese regime and for the international community was the unrest in Beijing. Several weeks of peaceful if boisterous protests ensued by vast throngs of students, young workers, peasants, and other people in and around Tiananmen Square.⁹³

⁹² “Zapis’ besedy M. S. Gorbacheva s Sekretarem TsK PORP Yu. Chirekom,” Notes from Conversation (Secret), 23 September 1988, in AGF, F. 10, Op. 2, Dok. 0097.

⁹³ For varying perspectives on the Tiananmen Square crisis, see Timothy Brook, *Quelling the People: The Military Suppression of the Beijing Democracy Movement* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998); Dingxin Zhao, *The Power of Tiananmen: State-Society Relations and the 1989 Beijing Student Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Yu. M. Galenovich, *Protivostoyanie: Pekin, Tyan’an’men’, 1989*

Hunger strikes by students starting in mid-May drew particularly wide notice both at home and abroad. The CCP General Secretary, Zhao Ziyang, wanted to pursue a genuine compromise with the demonstrators and to introduce broad political reforms, but he was unable to win support from his colleagues in the CCP Politburo.⁹⁴ Although one senior official, Hu Qili, did side with Zhao, the two of them were outflanked by eight party elders led by Deng Xiaoping, who warned that “if things continue this way, we could even end up under house

god., 3 vols. (Moscow: Institut Dal'nego Vostoka, 1995); Thomas Reichenbach, *Die Demokratiebewegung in China 1989: Die Mobilisierung durch Studentenorganisationen in Beijing* (Hamburg: Institut für Asienkunde, 1994); Kasymzhomart Tokaev, *Kak eto bylo: Khronika volnenii v Pekine, aprel'-iyun' 1989* (Almaty: SP 'Diana,' 1994); and the useful compendium of essays and documents edited by Ruth Cremerius, Doris Fischer, and Peter Schier, *Studentenprotest und Repression in China, April-Juni 1989: Analyse, Chronologie, Dokumente* (Hamburg: Institut für Asienkunde, 1990).

⁹⁴ Zhao Ziyang's invaluable memoir, *Prisoner of the State: The Secret Journal of Zhao Ziyang*, trans. and ed. by Bao Pu, Renee Chiang, and Adi Ignatius (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009), esp. 3–49, offers a fascinating perspective on the events of 1989 in China. His memoir amply corroborates the collection of notes from the deliberations of Chinese Communist leaders in April–June 1989 published by Andrew Nathan and Perry Link, eds., *The Tiananmen Papers: The Chinese Leadership's Decision to Use Force Against Their Own People* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001). Although the exact provenance of these notes is still uncertain, Zhao Ziyang's memoir dispels lingering doubts about their authenticity. The notes, like Zhao's memoir, show that Zhao spoke strongly in favor of a political compromise at sessions of the CCP Politburo's Standing Committee on 13, 16, and 17 May 1989, but Deng Xiaoping left no doubt that he fundamentally disagreed with Zhao. See Nathan and Link, eds., *The Tiananmen Papers*, 147–52, 177–81, and 184–49. From then on, Zhao's ouster was only a matter of time (He was demoted on 20 May and then replaced altogether by Jiang Zemin shortly after the crackdown.) When reading Zhao's comments nowadays about the need to “use the methods of democracy and law” in accommodating the protesters, one cannot help but be struck by the similarity to the policies advocated in the late 1980s and early 1990s by leading Soviet “new thinkers” such as Yakovlev and Shakhnazarov. By contrast, the staunch hardliners on the Chinese Politburo in 1989, particularly Wang Zhen and Li Peng, were similar in their outlooks to the ultra-hardliners in Moscow, such as Oleg Baklanov and General Valentin Varennikov, both of whom were instrumental in the attempted coup in August 1991.

arrest.”⁹⁵ Other Politburo members expressed strong support of Deng’s views, arguing that any “retreat” in the face of such an audacious challenge would lead to the “destruction of the People’s Republic” and the “overthrow of our party and government.”⁹⁶ Loudest of all in calling for a massive crackdown was Wang Zhen, a staunch hardliner on the CCP Politburo, who described the protesters as “goddamn bastards” and declared that the army should “show them no mercy.” At Deng’s behest, the CCP Politburo approved “decisive measures to put down the counterrevolutionary riot” in Beijing and authorized the “use of any means necessary to remove people who interfere with this mission.”⁹⁷

On the evening of 3-4 June, cordons of troops from the 27th Group Army Unit and special-purpose security forces moved into the center of Beijing and clashed with demonstrators at numerous points around Tiananmen Square. The troops then surrounded the area and repeatedly opened fire on serried crowds of protesters, killing more than a thousand and wounding at least several thousand.⁹⁸ Tens of

⁹⁵ Comments by Deng at meeting of the CCP Politburo’s Standing Committee on 17 May 1989, in Nathan and Link, eds., *The Tiananmen Papers*, 189. See also Zhao, *Prisoner of the State*, 43–45.

⁹⁶ Comments by Deng Yingchao, Chen Yun, and Wang Zhen at an enlarged meeting of the CCP Politburo’s Standing Committee on 18 May 1989, in Nathan and Link, eds., *The Tiananmen Papers*, 204–11.

⁹⁷ Transcript of an enlarged session of the CCP Politburo’s Standing Committee on 2 June 1989, *ibid.*, 355–62.

⁹⁸ The precise number killed and wounded is as yet unknown and may never be known. Based on a canvass of major hospitals in Beijing, the Chinese Red Cross concluded that 2,600 civilians and troops were killed and more than 7,000 were wounded. In a secret cable to U.S. Secretary of State James Baker on 22 June 1989, the U.S. embassy in Beijing described the Chinese Red Cross’s figures as “not an unreasonable estimate” but noted that the totals “do not include [unrecorded] deaths on the streets.” See “What Happened on the Night of June 3/4?” Cable No. 1411 (Confidential), 22 June 1989, in George Bush Presidential Library, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, Subject File: China Documents, FOIA Documents Collection 2000-0950-F, Doc. E44. Other estimates—some lower, some higher—also have been proposed, but no firm corroboration is yet available. Apparently no one was killed in Tiananmen Square itself because President Yang Shangkun (on behalf of Deng Xiaoping) had ordered the troops not to open fire there. The crackdown occurred at many key sites around the square, ranging up to a kilometer away.

thousands of other protesters were arrested over the next few days on charges of "counterrevolutionary rioting."

The sweeping crackdown in the Chinese capital offered mixed lessons for Communist party leaders in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. On the one hand, the crisis illustrated the potential efficacy of all-out force against internal unrest. The massacre and systematic arrests of "lawless elements and counterrevolutionary ring-leaders" in Beijing put an abrupt end to the escalating protests in China and allowed the Chinese Communist authorities to reestablish tight control. The decisive crackdown was seen by some hardliners in Moscow—and, even more, by orthodox Communist leaders in Eastern Europe, who spoke appreciatively of the "Chinese solution"—as a model for the sort of large-scale repressive actions that might soon be needed in most of the Warsaw Pact countries if mass unrest there continued to grow.⁹⁹

On the other hand, the repression in China had a jarring effect on many high-ranking Soviet officials, including Gorbachev, who by all accounts was taken aback and dismayed by the scale of the bloodshed.¹⁰⁰ The massacre came less than three weeks after Gorbachev had made a landmark visit to China, the first such visit by a Soviet leader

⁹⁹ East German and Romanian Communist leaders were especially enthusiastic about the "Chinese solution." See, for example, the text of a secret speech delivered on 9 June by East German State Security Minister Erich Mielke, reproduced in "Krenz und Mielke vereinbarten auf Geheimkonferenz chinesische Lösung," *Die Welt* (Hamburg, 21 May 1990), 6. See also the secret deliberations recorded in "'Chinesische Lösung': Wollten Stasi-Leute ein Blutbad unter Demonstranten provozieren?" *Der Spiegel* 51 (Hamburg, 18 December 1989), 42–44; Ewald König, "Der Honecker-Befehl zum Blutbad war am 9. Oktober schön unter geschrieben," *Die Presse* (Vienna, 24 November 1989), 4; and the two-part article by Cordt Schnibben, "'Ich bin das Volk': Wie Erich Honecker und sein Politbüro die Konterrevolution erlebten (I)," *Der Spiegel* no. 16 (Hamburg, 16 April 1990): 72–90; and "'Makkaroni mit Schinken, bitte': Wie Erich Honecker und sein Politbüro die Konterrevolution erlebten (II)," *Der Spiegel* no. 17 (Hamburg, 23 April 1990): 78–98.

¹⁰⁰ The jarring effect that the Tiananmen crackdown had in Moscow in 1989 was emphasized by Shakhnazarov, Yakovlev, and Chernyaev in several interviews with the author in Moscow, 14 March and 7 May 1998 (Shakhnazarov), 10 June 2001 (Chernyaev), and 21–22 January 2003 (Yakovlev).

in thirty years. When the protests began in Beijing in April 1989, the Chinese authorities had hoped that they would soon peter out and that the demonstrators would be gone from Tiananmen Square by the time Gorbachev arrived on 15 May.¹⁰¹ Far from diminishing, however, the protests—and foreign press coverage of them—increased sharply in the leadup to Gorbachev’s visit, which itself attracted even greater publicity to the demonstrations. Although Chinese officials who coordinated the Soviet delegation’s itinerary tried to keep Gorbachev away from Tiananmen Square, the overflowing crowds there rapturously welcomed his presence in Beijing, believing that he shared their aims and would be able to convince the Chinese authorities to negotiate with them. The demonstrators held up large photographs of Gorbachev alongside placards exclaiming “We salute the messenger of democracy!”¹⁰² Gorbachev’s statement during a public appearance that economic reform would work only if accompanied by broad democratization (a view championed by Zhao Ziyang, whom Gorbachev regarded as a like-minded leader in Beijing) struck a particular chord of approval among the protesters.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Zhao Ziyang’s memoir and the records of CCP Politburo meetings published by Nathan and Link bear out much of the analysis in a secret, 16-page report issued by the CIA three months after the crackdown, *The Road to the Tiananmen Crackdown: An Analytic Chronology of Chinese Leadership Decision Making*, EA 89-10030 (Confidential/No Foreign Distribution), September 1989, declassified in March 2000, available in NARA/CREST. Some of the dates and details in the CIA report are off, but the thrust of the report and many specific details hold up surprisingly well against the newly released evidence.

¹⁰² The account here is drawn from Novosti television evening news broadcasts on 15, 16, and 17 May 1989 (program videotapes stored at Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Harvard University) as well as from descriptions of Gorbachev’s trip in *Ekho planety* (Moscow) vol. 22, no. 61 (25 May 1989): 21–22, and press coverage in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Financial Times* (London), and *Le Monde* (Paris).

¹⁰³ On Gorbachev’s highly favorable assessment of Zhao Ziyang, as well as other interesting details about the Soviet delegation’s arrival, see “Informatsiya M. S. Gorbacheva o poezdke v Kitai,” Report to the CPSU Politburo (Top Secret), 20 May 1989, and “Razgovor Gorbacheva (po telefonu iz Pekina) s Medvedevym, 15 maya: 1989 god.,” Notes from Telephone Conversation, 15 May 1989, both in KDPP vol. 4, 392–93 and 391–92, respectively.

Two days after arriving in Beijing, Gorbachev was asked at a news conference what he would do if confronted by large-scale demonstrations in Moscow comparable to those taking place in the Chinese capital. He replied that “if problems of this sort or of a similar nature were to occur in the Soviet Union, we would analyze their specific features and seek political methods of resolving them.” He praised the efforts that Chinese leaders (or at least Zhao Ziyang individually) were making to initiate a “constructive dialogue” with the demonstrators.¹⁰⁴ Although Gorbachev stressed that his comments were not intended as “advice to the Chinese people [sic] about how they should act in this specific situation,” and although he believed that the Chinese authorities were justified in trying to restore order and tranquility in the capital, he made clear throughout his visit that he supported “political processes and political solutions,” not mass bloodshed.¹⁰⁵

After Gorbachev returned to Moscow on 18 May, he had to focus on important sessions of the Soviet parliament and the CPSU Central Committee. Nonetheless, his trip to China continued to reverberate in both China and the USSR. On 21 May, tens of thousands of pro-democracy activists in Moscow held a rally calling for bolder reforms and expressing fervent admiration of the protesters in China. Cries of “Long live the demonstrators on the streets of Beijing!” earned thunderous applause at the rally. By this point, however, Gorbachev’s foreign policy advisers sensed that the situation in China was taking a turn for the worse.¹⁰⁶ On 20 May, Prime Minister Li Peng had declared martial law and brought armed soldiers into central Beijing, and this was soon followed by indications that Zhao Ziyang (with whom Gorbachev had developed a special rapport during his visit) had been stripped of all his functions. In light of the growing uncertainty about events in China, the official Soviet media featured restrained

¹⁰⁴ “Press-konferentsiya M. S. Gorbacheva v Pekine,” *Pravda* (Moscow, 18 May 1989), 3. The dilemma facing Gorbachev during the trip is well captured in Palazhchenko, *My Years with Gorbachev and Shevardnadze*, 134-8.

¹⁰⁵ On the Chinese leaders’ reaction to Gorbachev’s visit, see especially the comments at meetings of the Chinese Politburo on 16 and 17 May 1989, transcribed in Nathan and Link, eds., *The Tiananmen Papers*, 180-98.

¹⁰⁶ See the diary entry for 21 May 1989 in A. Chernyaev, *Sovmestnyi iskhod: Dnevnik dvukh epokh, 1972-1991 gody* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2008), 795-98.

(though generally favorable) coverage of the protests in Tiananmen Square in the final week of May and first few days of June.¹⁰⁷ To the extent that Soviet leaders were monitoring events abroad, their attention was focused mostly on Poland, where partly free legislative elections were slated to be held on 4 June.

As it turned out, the 4th of June was also the day of the massacre in Beijing. Shakhnazarov, Yakovlev, and Anatolyi Chernyaev later recalled that when Gorbachev learned about the harshness of the crackdown in China and the high death toll, coming so soon after his visit, he was “shocked,” “nearly speechless,” and “shaken.”¹⁰⁸ Yakovlev remembered being “appalled” at the violence and said that he and Gorbachev “realized right away that the methods they used in China were exactly what we [in Moscow] had to avoid.”¹⁰⁹ Gorbachev’s interpreter, Pavel Palazhchenko, likewise recalled that both Gorbachev and Shevardnadze found the massacre “abhorrent” but were in a “real quandary” about how to respond.¹¹⁰ Gorbachev had concurred with the Chinese leaders’ goal of restoring order in Beijing and avoiding “chaos and social upheaval,” but in his view the price they paid in achieving it was so onerous that it would be wholly unacceptable if replicated in Eastern Europe or the Soviet Union itself. The number killed in Beijing was at least 50 to 100 times greater than in Tbilisi in April 1989, an event that had caused weeks of intense controversy and anguish in the USSR and recriminations against the Soviet Army.

Televised images of the carnage in China in early June, juxtaposed with news from Poland that Solidarity had won an overwhelming victory in the parliamentary elections (gaining all but one of the 261 seats it was allowed to contest), reinforced the widespread belief in Moscow that urgent steps were needed to forestall a cycle of violent unrest and repression in Eastern Europe that might escalate and lead to a Tiananmen-

¹⁰⁷ For a very useful analysis, see Alexander Lukin, “The Initial Soviet Reaction to the Events in China in 1989 and the Prospects for Sino-Soviet Relations,” *The China Quarterly* 125 (March 1991): 119–36.

¹⁰⁸ See the interviews adduced in note 100 *supra*.

¹⁰⁹ Interview by the author with Yakovlev, in Moscow, 21–22 January 2003.

¹¹⁰ Pavel Palazhchenko, *My Years with Gorbachev and Shevardnadze: The Memoir of a Soviet Interpreter* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 137–38.

style crackdown. The broadcasts from China also coincided with live television coverage of the newly opened session of the Soviet parliament. Gorbachev did not want strong criticism of China to be voiced in public at the parliament, and he turned off the microphone when Andrei Sakharov started giving a speech denouncing the massacre and calling for the Soviet ambassador in Beijing to be withdrawn in protest.¹¹¹ Sakharov also organized a group of parliamentary deputies to issue a statement publicly condemning the mass killing in China and "urging the Chinese government to stop the bloodshed now."¹¹² In Hungary, too, senior officials expressed "great shock and indignation" at the "massacre" and "deeply condemned the use of military force and terror against unarmed crowds." Thousands of ordinary Hungarians took part in a protest rally in front of the Chinese embassy in Budapest, with the Hungarian government's tacit consent. The demonstrators voiced "outrage" at the "bloodbath" perpetrated by "mass murderers."¹¹³

Although Gorbachev and his advisers did not join in the public criticism of the Chinese regime in the immediate aftermath of the Tiananmen Square crackdown, the Soviet leader did soon afterward address the Soviet parliament in public about "our reaction to the well-known events in Beijing." He tactfully but firmly rejected the approach used by the Chinese authorities and the consequences that ensued:

We have expressed our attitude to the tragedy that happened in Beijing [on 4 June]. We deplore that it turned out that way. We are in favor of having the most acute problems solved solely

¹¹¹ Sakharov's speech on 7 June was excluded from the proceedings published in *Izvestiya* the next day, but the full text was put out as a brochure by the Inter-Regional Group in mid-June 1989. Soon thereafter, the American lawyer Edward Kline, a long-time champion of Sakharov's defense of human rights, translated the full text of the speech and published it as Andrei Sakharov, "A Speech to the People's Congress," *The New York Review of Books* vol. 36, no. 13 (17 August 1989): 30-31.

¹¹² "Obrashchenie Mezhhregional'noi gruppoi narodnykh deputatov (iyunya 1989 g.)," 9 June 1989, reproduced in A. D. Sakharov, *Vospominaniya: V dvukh tomakh* 2 vols. (Moscow: Prava cheloveka, 1996), vol. 2, 574.

¹¹³ Alfred Reisch, "Hungarian Government and Party Condemn Use of Military Force in China," RAD Background Report No. 119 (Hungary), *Radio Free Europe Research*, 30 June 1989, 1-6.

through political dialogue between the authorities and the people. This is what we believe. Such is the method we have chosen for ourselves. Each people solves its problems in its own way, but [reliance on dialogue] is our principled and, I believe, irreversible position."¹¹⁴

Even though Gorbachev's public criticism of the Tiananmen Square massacre was not as strong as the speech delivered by Sakharov, the Soviet leader's comments left no doubt that he viewed the bloodshed as a "tragic" blunder. Far from seeing the Tiananmen Square crackdown as a model for what should be done in the Soviet bloc, Gorbachev and other high-ranking Soviet officials, especially Shevardnadze, Yakovlev, and Shakhnazarov, regarded it as something to avoid in Eastern Europe (and the USSR) at all costs.

The Tiananmen Square crackdown thus accelerated the trends that had been shaping Soviet policy toward Eastern Europe since late 1988. The brutal repression in China, and the widespread condemnation it evoked around the world, reinforced the decision the CPSU Politburo had taken a few months earlier to eschew any Soviet military responses to internal crises in Eastern Europe. Equally important, the traumatic example of the mass unrest and violent reaction in Beijing impelled Gorbachev to strive more actively in the latter half of 1989 to promote peaceful, far-reaching liberalization in Eastern Europe.

Contending with Hardline Regimes

Even if Gorbachev and other senior officials in Moscow saw the massacre in China as a reason to push ahead with democratizing reforms in Eastern Europe and the USSR, the "lesson" drawn by the leaders of East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Romania was just the opposite—namely, that any move toward political liberalization would be dangerous and that large-scale violent repression, as in China, would

¹¹⁴ "Vystuplenie M. S. Gorbacheva na pervoi sessii Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR po itogam vizitov v Velikobritaniyu, Federativnuyu Respubliku Germanii i vo Frantsiyu i ob uchastii v soveshchanii PKK gosudarstv-uchastnikov Varshavskogo Dogovora," *Pravda* (Moscow, 2 August 1989), 2.

enable them to crush any opposition that might emerge. But even the most hardline officials in those countries were aware that any attempt they might make in the future to emulate the Tiananmen Square crackdown—if the need should arise—would require at least tacit Soviet approval and probably direct backing.

Gorbachev was well aware that Communist leaders in East Berlin, Prague, and Bucharest were alarmed by what was going on in Hungary, Poland, and the USSR and were determined to avoid any movement in that direction themselves. Shakhnazarov had argued in his October 1988 memorandum that the East German, Czechoslovak, and Romanian authorities were “averse to making changes in anything” and were “stubbornly refusing to heed the pressures for change”—sentiments that became even more pronounced as 1989 wore on. Hence, the challenge Soviet officials faced was to push, discreetly but meaningfully, for liberalization in the four holdout countries. At a minimum, Soviet leaders wanted to convey the message through all possible channels that the Soviet Union would oppose the use of violent repression. To this end, Gorbachev’s public comments about Eastern Europe grew bolder. In a speech before the Council of Europe in July 1989, he expressed support for the maintenance of socialism in Europe, but then indicated a willingness to accept whatever result might come:

The social and political orders of certain countries [in Europe] changed in the past, and could change again in the future. However, this is exclusively a matter for the peoples themselves to decide; it is their choice. Any interference in internal affairs, or any attempts to limit the sovereignty of states – including friends and allies, or anyone else – are impermissible.¹¹⁵

The speech, coming at a time when Solidarity seemed poised to form a non-Communist government in Poland and when “round table” talks were moving briskly ahead in Hungary, dispelled any lingering hopes the hardline East European regimes might have had that Gorbachev would try to rein in the forces he had unleashed. The

¹¹⁵ “Rech’ M. S. Gorbacheva,” *Izvestiya* (Moscow, 7 July 1989), 2.

morale of the East German, Czechoslovak, and Romanian leaders, which had been eroding for at least a year, plummeted further, and a sense of desperation crept in during the latter half of 1989.

The quickening pace of events throughout the Soviet bloc in the late summer of 1989 culminated in two developments that together marked a point of no return in the political complexion of Eastern Europe and also in Soviet policy toward the region: the formation of a Solidarity-led government in Poland in late August, and the Hungarian government's announcement on 10 September that it would open Hungary's border with Austria to let out thousands of East German citizens who had been pouring into Hungary over the previous few months, hoping to make their way from there to the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). A year or two earlier, neither of these developments would have seemed plausible, but by August-September 1989 they not only were occurring but were occurring with the Soviet Union's consent.

ASCENDANCE OF MAZOWIECKI'S GOVERNMENT

On 27 May 1989, a week before the elections in Poland, the CPSU Politburo received a memorandum from the deputy head of the CPSU International Department, Rafail Fedorov, reporting that "the election campaign [in Poland] has not unfolded in the PZPR's favor" and that "the authority of the PZPR has continued to fall." Fedorov expressed concern that "results that are very unfavorable for the PZPR will be dangerous [for the Soviet Union] both at this point and in the future." He warned that although "the PZPR leadership has belatedly come to appreciate the danger of the situation," the party's "efforts to halt all the negative trends" might not be enough to turn the situation around.¹¹⁶ Sobering as Fedorov's report may have been, it actually underestimated the humiliation that was about to be inflicted on the PZPR. On 4 June the Polish Communists suffered a resounding defeat, which left the leaders of the party in stunned disbelief.

¹¹⁶ "TsK KPSS: O predvybornoi kampanii v Pol'she," Memorandum No. 17-382 (Top Secret) from R. Fedorov, first deputy head of the CPSU International Department, to the CPSU Politburo, 27 May 1989, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 102, D. 762, Ll. 123-26.

Despite this unwelcome setback, Gorbachev and his advisers publicly and privately expressed acceptance of the results, giving the Polish Communist authorities no choice but to go along with their party's defeat, if only reluctantly. Plans devised by the Polish Ministry of Internal Affairs for the possible imposition of martial law in the event of an undesired outcome had to be shelved.¹¹⁷ Gorbachev's speech at the Council of Europe declaring that the Soviet Union would "respect the absolute right of every nation to choose its own social system as it sees fit" provided a further boost to Solidarity in Poland's post-election maneuvering. To dispel any ambiguity about this phrasing, Gorbachev instructed one of his top aides, Vadim Zagladin, to make clear that Poland, like every other nation, had the "absolute right to choose its own social system," including the option of a non-Communist government. When Zagladin was asked, on the eve of Gorbachev's visit to Strasbourg, whether the Soviet Union would be willing to tolerate a Solidarity-led government in Warsaw, he replied: "We will maintain ties with any Polish government that emerges after the recent elections. This is purely a Polish internal affair. Any solution adopted by our Polish friends will be acceptable to us."¹¹⁸

By indicating that the question of whether Poland would remain a Communist state was "purely a Polish internal affair," Zagladin sent a powerful message to the Polish authorities (and, indirectly, to all the other leaders in Eastern Europe). Certainly no one in the PZPR could any longer hope that the Soviet Union would, in extremis, come to the rescue—militarily or otherwise—of the decaying Communist regime in Warsaw.

The Soviet Union's role in the process remained vital in late July 1989, when pressure mounted in Poland for the establishment of a non-Communist government headed by Solidarity. Jaruzelski tried to stave off this development by publicly warning that "adjoining states,"

¹¹⁷ For details on these plans, see Kramer, "The Collapse of East European Communism and the Repercussions within the Soviet Union (Part 1)," 195–97.

¹¹⁸ Cited in "Każdy rząd będzie dla nas partnerem," *Gazeta wyborcza* (Warsaw, 4 July 1989), 1. See also the commentary by Adam Michnik, "Pożegnanie doktryny Breżniewa," *ibid.*, 5.

especially the Soviet Union, would "look at this askance."¹¹⁹ The Polish leader was hoping that the Soviet government would back him up, but his hopes proved in vain. After consulting with Gorbachev, Aleksandr Yakovlev discreetly sought assurances from Solidarity that it would uphold Poland's obligations in the Warsaw Pact and under bilateral treaties with the USSR. Having obtained these assurances, Yakovlev declared that "political arrangements in Poland are solely for the Poles themselves to decide, without interference from outside." The Soviet Union, he added, would accept any government that emerged, "no matter who is in charge."¹²⁰

With that, the PZPR's last hope of preserving its "leading role" (i.e., hegemonic political position) in Polish society disappeared. By the third week in August the Polish Communist authorities were forced to give Solidarity an opportunity to form its own government under Tadeusz Mazowiecki. Before Mazowiecki's government could actually take office, however, Soviet intervention was required again. The PZPR First Secretary, Mieczysław Rakowski, made a last-ditch effort to undercut the new government by declaring that he would not go along with Mazowiecki's appointment unless the PZPR was given additional ministerial slots beyond the two already promised. Lech Wałęsa and Mazowiecki warned Rakowski to "stop rocking the boat" with "threats and blackmail," and a deadlock ensued.¹²¹ For a brief while the whole arrangement in Poland seemed on the verge of collapse, but Gorbachev stepped in to salvage it. He brought the matter before the CPSU Politburo and gained unanimous support for a direct admonition to Rakowski.¹²² The Soviet leader then placed

¹¹⁹ Cited in "Przed utworzeniem rządu – mówią uczestnicy konsultacji," *Trybuna Ludu* (Warsaw, 27 July 1989), 2.

¹²⁰ Quoted by TASS, 29 July 1989, Item 1127/203. See also "Predlozheniya o razgovore s pol'skimi deyatel'nyami," Memorandum from A. N. Yakovlev to M. S. Gorbachev (Secret), 18 August 1989, in GARF, F. 10063, Op. 2, D. 187, L. 1-5.

¹²¹ "Więcej rozumu, mniej serca," *Gazeta wyborcza* (Warsaw, 23 August 1989), 1; and "Nowy premier, nowy rząd: Czego się po nich spodziewać," *Gazeta wyborcza* (Warsaw, 24 August 1989), 1.

¹²² "Postanovlenie Politbyuro TsK KPSS No. 164/133 21 avgusta 1989 g.," CPSU Politburo Resolution (Top Secret), 21 August 1989, in RGANI, F. 3, Op. 103, D. 180, L. 63.

a forty-minute telephone call to Rakowski as the process reached its most delicate stage. Although Gorbachev assured him that the PZPR would continue to enjoy staunch Soviet backing, he “recommended” that the Polish Communists avoid a costly and prolonged confrontation with Solidarity—a striking reversal of the situation in 1980-1981 when the Soviet Politburo had vehemently demanded that the leaders of the PZPR crack down harshly on Solidarity as soon as possible.¹²³ Right after the phone call, Rakowski announced that he would seek “partnerlike cooperation” between the PZPR and Solidarity and would no longer insist on receiving extra portfolios. Shortly thereafter, a PZPR press official hailed Solidarity for its “realistic approach,” and the outgoing Communist prime minister, Czesław Kiszczak, lauded Mazowiecki as “an outstanding personality” and “a wise man.”¹²⁴

The prospect of a non-Communist government in Poland provoked alarm among the anti-reformist East European states, which openly expressed consternation at “the destruction of socialist gains in Poland.” The Romanian authorities publicly denounced the pending changes in Poland, arguing that they would benefit “imperialist, reactionary forces” and “jeopardize the interests of socialism, including the Warsaw Pact.”¹²⁵ In an ironic reversal of Romania’s position in 1968, leaders in Bucharest secretly urged the other Warsaw Pact states to join in sending troops to Poland to prevent Solidarity from coming to power:

As a Communist party and socialist country, [we] cannot consider this to be solely a Polish internal affair. [We] believe it concerns all socialist countries. ... The Communist and workers’ parties of the socialist countries, representing the members of the Warsaw Pact, should adopt a stance and demand that Solidarity not be entrusted with the mission of forming a government. [We] have decided to appeal to ... the leaders of the parties in the Warsaw

¹²³ “Konferencja prasowa rzecznika KC: Wtorek wydarzen i rozmów,” *Trybuna Ludu* (Warsaw, 23 August 1989), 1–2.

¹²⁴ Cited in “Rząd – kiddy, jaki, czyj?” *Gazeta wyborcza* (Warsaw, 23 August 1989), 3; and “Murem za sprawami wsi,” *Gazeta wyborcza* (Warsaw, 24 August 1989), 1.

¹²⁵ “De la Varşovia,” *Scînteia* (Bucharest, 20 August 1989), 1.

Pact countries and other socialist countries to express serious concern and to ask for joint [military] action to avert the grave situation in Poland and to defend socialism and the Polish people.¹²⁶

Soviet leaders immediately dismissed any such notion and lodged a stern protest with the Romanian leader Nicolae Ceaușescu, whose relationship with Gorbachev had long been uneasy and strained.¹²⁷ Ceaușescu had sought to gain the PZPR's backing for joint Warsaw Pact action against Solidarity, but Polish Communist leaders had swiftly rejected the "invitation" and openly criticized it. The CPSU Politburo thereupon told Ceaușescu that "the PZPR is better qualified than anyone to judge whether such action would be worthwhile," and that the Romanians should "heed the PZPR's advice" and drop the matter.¹²⁸ The Soviet Politburo emphasized to Ceaușescu that the USSR would refuse to "take any steps that would vitiate Poland's sovereignty," a position that Ceaușescu himself had championed until August 1989.

¹²⁶ The full text of Romania's appeal, dated 19 August 1989 (the same day that Mazowiecki was officially invited to form a government), is reproduced in "Dokumenty: Polska-Rumunia," *Gazeta Wyborcza* (Warsaw), 29 September-1 October 1989, 6. This bizarre episode was reported at length in the same issue of *Gazeta Wyborcza*.

¹²⁷ "Postanovlenie Politbyuro Tsentral'nogo Komiteta KPSS No. P164/132: Ob obrashchenii t. N. Chaushesku," CPSU Politburo Resolution No. 164/132 (Top Secret), 21 August 1989, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 102, D. 180, Ll. 2, 6-7, 63; "Postanovlenie Politbyuro Tsentral'nogo Komiteta KPSS No. P164/169: Ob otvete rumynskomu rukovodstvu na predlozhenie o provedenii vstrechi rukovoditelei bratskikh partii sotsialisticheskikh po voprosu o polozhenii v Pol'she," CPSU Politburo Resolution No. P164/169 (Top Secret), 21 August 1989, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 102, D. 180, Ll. 2, 7, 76; and "Otvete rumynskomu rukovodstvu na predlozhenie o provedenii vstrechi dlya obsuzhdeniya o polozhenii v Pol'she," Draft Letter (Top Secret) from CPSU Politburo to Nicolae Ceaușescu, 21 August 1989, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 102, D. 181, Ll. 140-41.

¹²⁸ "Otvete rumynskomu rukovodstvu na predlozhenie," L. 140. In Hungary the authorities expressed even sharper criticism of the Romanian proposal. See "Jegyzőkönyv az Elnökség 1989. augusztus 21-én megtartott üléséről: 7. A Román Kommunista Párt és Nicolae Ceaușescu üzenete a magyar vezetéshez a lengyelországi eseményekkel kapcsolatban," MSZMP Elnökség 1989/141 (Top Secret), 21 August 1989, in Hoover Archives, Imre Pozsgay Papers, Box 45, Folder MSZMP Elnöksége, 1989, Group 5.

In subsequent days, the Soviet press went out of its way to commend Mazowiecki for being a "calm, equable politician" who during "his many years of experience" had "never sought to promote himself."¹²⁹ Coverage of Solidarity also turned distinctly favorable. High-ranking Soviet officials stressed that "the Poles have chosen their own path of development" and "are able to decide their fate for themselves."¹³⁰ Mazowiecki's government was able to take office without further ado, and the Soviet Union transmitted a message of congratulations pledging continued "friendship and cooperation" with Poland.¹³¹

Gorbachev reaffirmed his willingness to accept and even welcome the new Polish government when he sent the head of the Soviet State Security Committee (KGB), Vladimir Kryuchkov, who was also a CPSU Politburo member, to Warsaw shortly after Mazowiecki took office. Kryuchkov conveyed Gorbachev's "wishes of great success" and praised Mazowiecki as "a solid man" who "knows what his country needs."¹³² In a separate meeting with senior PZPR officials, Kryuchkov warned that the Polish Communists must help, rather than hinder, the new prime minister. Rakowski heeded this message by promptly ordering all PZPR members in the state administration to work loyally for Mazowiecki and his ministers.¹³³

¹²⁹ L. Toporkov, "Trudnyi vybor: V Pol'she skladyvaetsya novaya rasstanovka politicheskikh sil," *Izvestiya* (Moscow), 23 August 1989, 4; and A. Starukhin, "Reshenie seima PNR," *Pravda* (Moscow, 25 August 1989), 7.

¹³⁰ Comments of Evgenii Primakov, chairman of the Council of the Union of the USSR Supreme Soviet, transcribed in "Press-konferentsiya v Londone Predsedatelya Soveta soyuza Verkhovnogo soveta SSSR E. M. Primakova," TASS, 5 September 1989, item 3 (Two weeks later, Primakov was elevated to candidate membership on the CPSU Politburo.) See also the interview with Nikolai Shishlin, in *Libération* (Paris), 22 September 1989, 4.

¹³¹ "Predsedatelyu Soveta Ministrov Pol'skoi Narodnoi Respubliki Tadeushu Mazovetskomu," *Izvestiya* (Moscow, 25 August 1989), 4.

¹³² "Vstrechi v Varshave," *Izvestiya* (Moscow, 27 August 1989), 3.

¹³³ Information about Kryuchkov's visit was supplied by Georgii Shakhnazarov when I interviewed him in Moscow in March and May 1998. Kryuchkov himself offered essentially the same account when I interviewed him in Moscow in July 1999. See also Antoni Dudek, "Kalendarium, 1986-1989: Polska droga do demokracji," in Instytut Studiów Politycznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk, *Polska 1986-1989*:

Even though Gorbachev undoubtedly would have preferred to see the Polish government come under the control of reform-minded Communists rather than Solidarity, he and his advisers on Eastern Europe increasingly sensed that no Communist leader in Poland could win sufficient popular support to guarantee political stability. Only a government led by Solidarity could take the steps needed to forestall political turmoil and dangerous crises in Poland and the unpalatable dilemmas that would follow. Faced with a choice of promoting the formation of a stable, non-Communist government in Poland or upholding orthodox Communist rule by any means necessary, Gorbachev—unlike his predecessors—opted for the former.

OPENING OF THE HUNGARIAN BORDER

Barely two weeks after Mazowiecki took charge of the Polish government, an equally momentous development rocked the GDR. On 10 September the Hungarian government announced that it would allow free passage from Hungary into Austria for many thousands of East German citizens ensconced on Hungarian territory. Because Austria was contiguous with both Hungary and West Germany, the East German squatters viewed it as their most viable route of entry into the FRG, where they knew they would be granted citizenship automatically. Thus began the largest exodus of East Germans to the West since August 1961, when the building of the Berlin Wall had essentially halted the flight of GDR citizens to the FRG.

The Hungarian announcement did not come out of the blue. Pressure for it had been building since early May 1989, when the Hungarian government sought to burnish its liberal, pro-Western credentials by “dismantling the Iron Curtain” along the border with Austria, the only Western country adjoining Hungary.¹³⁴ The deci-

Koniec systemu—Materialy międzynarodowej konferencji, 3 vols. (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2002), vol. 1 (Pawel Machcewics, ed., *Referaty*), 205.

¹³⁴ For brief but perceptive accounts of this episode in the larger context of Hungary's relations with the two German states, see Friedrich Kurz, “Ungarn 89,” in Dieter Grosser, Stephan Bierling, and Friedrich Kurz, *Die sieben Mythen der Wiedervereinigung: Fakten und Analysen zu einem Prozeß ohne Alternativen* (Munich: Ehrenwirth 1991), 123–63; and István Horváth

sion to take this symbolically important step had been adopted by Hungarian leaders at the end of February 1989 with the consent of Gorbachev, who met in Moscow a few days later with Hungarian Prime Minister Miklós Németh and said approvingly that both Hungary and the Soviet Union were “becoming more open.”¹³⁵ The Hungarian authorities’ gesture of removing electronic barriers and barbed wire at border points with Austria (and also with Yugoslavia) did aptly convey a new spirit of openness, but it also had the unintended effect of spurring tens of thousands of East Germans to travel to Hungary, a country they were allowed to visit with minimal restrictions. Once in Hungary, the East Germans moved en masse to the western border area, hoping to be granted permission to cross into Austria.

After Hungarian officials did little to prevent a few hundred East Germans from entering Austria, leaders in the GDR angrily demanded that Hungary abide by a 20-year-old bilateral treaty, which required that individuals attempting to cross a border illegally (i.e., without proper authorization from their own country) be returned to their country of origin. To forestall a bitter confrontation with the GDR, the Hungarian government temporarily blocked any border crossings until a satisfactory arrangement could be worked out between East Germany and West Germany. In the meantime, the Hungarian government declined to return any of the East Germans to the GDR and instead set up makeshift refugee camps for them, much to the irritation of authorities in East Berlin, who insisted that “citizens of the GDR who are illegally present on Hungarian territory are not ‘refugees’ and must be returned immediately.” As several more weeks dragged by and the dispute remained at an impasse, conditions in the camps deteriorated with the onset of summer rains and mud. Hungarian commentators and members of parliament increasingly urged the government to

and István Németh, *És a falak leomlanak: Magyarország és a német egység (1945–1990)* (Budapest: Magvető, 1999), 329–33. For additional context, see István Horváth, *Az elszalasztott lehetőség: A magyar-német kapcsolatok 1980–1991* (Budapest: Corvina, 2009), 131–34.

¹³⁵ “Zapis’ besedy M. S. Gorbacheva s chlenom TsK VSRP, Predsedatelem Soveta Ministrov VNR Mikloshem Nemetom, 3 marta 1989,” Notes of Conversation (Top Secret), 3 March 1989, in AGF, F. 1, Op. 1, Dok. 10325.

settle the matter "in accordance with Hungary's humanitarian commitments and goals."¹³⁶

By late August the situation in the camps was becoming untenable to maintain for much longer. On 25 August, Hungarian leaders met in the FRG with their West German counterparts to resolve the matter irrespective of what the GDR wanted. In discussions with West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher at Gymnich Castle outside Erfstadt, Hungarian Prime Minister Miklós Németh and Foreign Minister Gyula Horn agreed to allow the East Germans in the camps to leave for Austria en route to the FRG. In tacit exchange for this step, the West German leaders promised to give Hungary financial support for its democratization and market reforms and to encourage other major Western countries to do the same.¹³⁷ This bargain was struck before the Hungarians had consulted with Soviet leaders (though some Soviet diplomats in Bonn and Budapest had gotten wind of the arrangement by this point). Subsequently, Foreign Minister Horn spoke to Shevardnadze, who agreed with the Hungarian position that the East German refugees "must not be returned by force" and should be allowed to go. Chancellor Kohl, for his part, contacted Gorbachev to gauge his reaction to the plan. The Soviet leader replied laconically that "the Hungarians are good people," a phrase he intended as a green light.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Horváth and Németh, *És a falak leomlanak*, 331.

¹³⁷ Gyula Horn, *Freiheit, die ich meine: Erinnerungen des ungarischen Außenministers, der den eisernen Vorhang öffnete* (Hamburg: Hoffmann and Campe Verlag, 1991), 317–20; and Hans-Dietrich Genscher, *Erinnerungen* (Berlin: Siedler, 1995), 639–40. Declassified German transcripts of the negotiations held on 25 August, "Vermerk des Bundesministers Genscher über das Gespräch des Bundeskanzlers Kohl mit Ministerpräsident Németh und Außenminister Horn auf Schloß Gymnich" and "Gespräch des Bundeskanzlers Kohl und des Bundesministers Genscher mit Ministerpräsident Németh und Außenminister Horn während des Mittagessens auf Schloß Gymnich," are reproduced in Hanns Jürgen Küsters and Daniel Hofmann, eds., *Dokumente zur Deutschlandpolitik: Deutsche Einheit Sonderedition aus den Akten des Bundeskanzleramtes 1989/90* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1998), 377–83.

¹³⁸ Helmut Kohl, "Ich wollte Deutschlands Einheit" (Berlin: Propyläen, 1996), 71–75.

Over the next two weeks, Hungarian leaders made a last-ditch attempt to resolve the matter with the GDR's consent, but these efforts, too, proved futile. East German officials continued to insist that the refugees first had to return to the GDR, where "with legal assistance they could pursue their individual exit visas." In response, Horn emphasized that the East Germans on Hungarian territory had "no desire to return to the GDR." He told his East German counterparts that their proposal to coerce people into going back "was simply out of the question." Horn expressed great skepticism when East German Foreign Minister Oskar Fischer claimed that his government did "not intend to restrict travel to Hungary from the GDR."¹³⁹

The leaders of the East German Socialist Unity Party (SED) tried to convene an emergency session of the Warsaw Pact's Committee of Foreign Ministers that would compel the Hungarians to return East German refugees to the GDR. Soviet, Hungarian, and Polish officials demurred, arguing that such a gathering would be an inappropriate venue for dealing with the situation. When the SED Politburo met on 5 September, the assembled officials had no doubt that "Hungary will be yielding to pressure from the FRG" and "will not play its cards openly."¹⁴⁰ The SED Secretary for ideological affairs, Kurt Hager, complained that Hungary was "behaving hypocritically" and "doing the bidding of Bonn" at the expense of "hitherto normal relations with [the GDR]." Others at the meeting expressed confidence that by "strengthening allied ties [in the Warsaw Pact], especially with the Soviet Union," East Germany could weather the worst of the storm.¹⁴¹ Soviet diplomats in the region had indeed shown distinct sympathy for the East German regime's plight and had tried to persuade the

¹³⁹ These exchanges are recounted on the basis of a conversation between West German and Hungarian Foreign Ministry officials, the latter of whom described Horn's meeting with Fischer, transcribed in "Fernschreiben des Staatssekretars Bertele an den Chef des Bundeskanzleramtes Ausreisewillige DDR-Burger; Lage in Ungarn und in der Standigen Vertretung," 1 September 1989, in Küsters and Hofmann, eds., *Dokumente zur Deutschlandpolitik*, 391.

¹⁴⁰ "Verlauf der SED-Politburositzung am 5. September 1989," Stenographic Summary of SED Politburo meeting (Top Secret), 5 September 1989, in SAPMO, Zentrales Parteiarchiv (ZPA), J IV 212/039/77.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, Blatt (Bl.) 3.

Hungarians to avert any exodus.¹⁴² But the SED Politburo's hopes that the highest Soviet leaders, including Gorbachev, would begin pressuring Hungary to reverse its policy were quickly dashed. Gorbachev by this point had no intention of cracking down.

Most revealing of all at the SED Politburo meeting was Erich Mielke's comment that "Hungary is betraying socialism" (*Ungarn verrät den Sozialismus*)—a sentiment that reflected East German leaders' dismay at the whole course of events in the Soviet bloc over the past year-and-a-half.¹⁴³ Mielke, Erich Honecker, and other senior East German officials had long feared that far-reaching internal liberalization in Hungary, including sweeping reassessments of the 1956 revolution, would erode Hungary's loyalty to Warsaw Pact allies, especially the GDR. The East German hardliners were alarmed by what they saw as Hungary's steady "movement out of the community of socialist states," reflected in public discussion in Budapest of the possibility of "abandoning Marxism-Leninism, doing away with democratic centralism, and abolishing the centrally planned economy in favor of private ownership."¹⁴⁴ Even though Gorbachev by late 1988 had jettisoned the Brezhnev Doctrine, the members of the SED Politburo clearly had not. They were averse to deviations from orthodox Communism anywhere in the Soviet bloc, and they were especially worried now that the USSR, far from trying to block and undo the democratic changes under way in Hungary and Poland, was itself embracing similar policies and encouraging liberalization in other countries.

The East German authorities' fears of being isolated in the Warsaw Pact came to a head on 10 September when Horn publicly announced that Hungary would allow some 20,000 East German refugees to cross freely into Austria, from which they could make their

¹⁴² "Vermerk über das Gespräch des Ministers für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten der DDR, Oskar Fischer, mit dem Außerordentlichen und Bevollmächtigten Botschafter der UdSSR in der DDR, Wjatscheslaw Kotschemassow, am 7.9.1989," Notes from Conversation (Secret), 7 September 1989, in SAPMO, ZPA, J IV 212/AI3/239.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, Bl. 4.

¹⁴⁴ Comments by SED officials cited in "Jegyzőkönyv a Politikai Bizottság 1989 szeptember 19-i üléséről," Verbatim Transcript of MSZMP Political Executive Committee session (Secret), 19 September 1989, in Magyar Országos Levéltár, M-KS 288, F. 5/1068. ő.e.

way to the FRG. Hungary, he declared, did not want to "become a country of refugee camps" and was determined to "resolve the situation on humanitarian grounds."¹⁴⁵ Hungarian Foreign Minister Ferenc Somogyi told journalists that in taking the decision, the Hungarian government was seeking "to open up and diversify relations with Western Europe and the West in general" and to "keep [Hungary] from losing prestige and respect in the international community." He stressed that Hungary was now giving "absolute primacy to universal humanitarian values" and was thereby moving much "closer to the West in humanitarian concerns" and away from the GDR.¹⁴⁶

Honecker and his colleagues had been expecting the announcement but still reacted with fury. They had received a scathing report on 11 September from the East German ambassador to Hungary, Gerd Vehres, who insisted that "discussions with the GDR" regarding the refugees had led to nothing more than "stonewalling and deliberately misleading the GDR." Hungarian officials, Vehres claimed, had "made no serious attempts" to persuade the East German citizens to return to the GDR and had obstructed efforts by East German embassy officials to "contact GDR citizens in the camps to explain the GDR's point of view." The ambassador blamed the Hungarian media for "stirring up and promoting a campaign directed against the GDR" that had "encouraged GDR citizens to stay" in Hungary.¹⁴⁷ Similar complaints were voiced by high-ranking Communist officials in Bucharest and Prague, who feared that the destabilization of the GDR would endanger their own hardline regimes.

¹⁴⁵ Horn, *Freiheit, die ich meine*, 327–28.

¹⁴⁶ Henry Kamm, "Hungary's Motive: Earning Western Good Will," *The New York Times*, 15 September 1989, A10. On this point, see also "Jegyzőkönyv az Elnökség 1989. szeptember 11-én megtartott üléséről: 4. Nyers Rezső elvtárs szóbeli bejelentése alapján," MSZMP Elnökség 1989 (Top Secret), 11 September 1989, in Hoover Archives, Imre Pozsgay Papers, Box 45, Folder MSZMP Elnöksége, 1989, Group 8, pp. 4–6.

¹⁴⁷ "Schreiben von DDR Botschafter in Ungarn, Gerd Vehres, an den Außenminister Oskar Fischer vom 10. September 1989," Cable (Top Secret) from Vehres to Foreign Minister Fischer, 10 September 1989, in SAPMO, ZPA, J IV 2I2/A13/239, Bl. 1–2. Annotations indicate that copies were distributed to all SED Politburo members on 11 September 1989.

In Moscow, however, the Hungarian decision generated only a low-key response and no protest at all from the Soviet government. The Soviet Foreign Ministry's spokesman, Gennadii Gerasimov, merely said that the step was "unusual" and then added—in a statement that must have stunned East German leaders—that "it does not affect us [in the USSR] directly."¹⁴⁸ Official Soviet television coverage of Hungary's decision was surprisingly sympathetic, pointing out, for example, that "the situation on the Austro-Hungarian border had become tense, and there were a growing number of illegal border crossings and various crimes. It was in this context that the Hungarian government was forced to take its decision." The Soviet news broadcast also pointed out that Hungarian leaders had spent a great deal of time "consulting with the appropriate agencies" and had acted only after "talks between the GDR and the FRG on this matter had produced no results."¹⁴⁹

The Soviet Union's willingness to go along with the Hungarian decision, and Gerasimov's comment separating the USSR from the GDR, were bound to deal a further blow to the morale of the East German regime. Even though Honecker still hoped that, when push came to shove, the Soviet Union would never allow the SED to be ousted from power, he had finally started to worry that a scenario he once thought would never happen—namely, that his regime would be abandoned by the Soviet Union—was coming true. Honecker conveyed his deep unease to a sympathetic CPSU Politburo member, Egor Ligachev, who happened to be visiting the GDR at the time.¹⁵⁰ Ligachev himself had become increasingly disaffected with the changes under way in the Soviet Union as well as in Hungary and Poland, and he did his best to stiffen Honecker's resolve and reassure him that the USSR fully supported its East German ally. Ligachev prom-

¹⁴⁸ "V Press-tsentre MID SSSR," 12 September 1989, TASS newswire, item 2-12.

¹⁴⁹ Cited in Jan Obrman, "East European Reaction to Hungary's Decision on East Germany Refugees," *Radio Free Europe Research*, RAD Background Report No. 174 (Eastern Europe), 15 September 1989, 2.

¹⁵⁰ On Ligachev's discussions with SED leaders, see "Niederschrift über das Gespräch von Günter Mittag mit KPdSU-Sekretär Jegor Ligatschow am 14. September 1989," Notes from Conversation (Top Secret), September 1989, in SAPMO, ZPA, J IV 2/2A/3241.

ised that Gorbachev would be attending the celebrations in October 1989 marking the fortieth anniversary of the founding of the GDR, as a demonstration of Moscow's support. (At a meeting with Gorbachev in Moscow on 28 July 1989, Honecker had invited—indeed urged—him to attend the 40th-anniversary celebrations, and the Soviet leader had initially agreed to take part.¹⁵¹ But by early September Gorbachev had tentatively changed his mind about going to East Berlin, lest he be seen as trying to strengthen Honecker's position against more reform-minded Communists in East Germany. Thus, Ligachev's comments to Honecker at the time were not strictly accurate. Only after considerable hesitation and further discussions with advisers did Gorbachev finally decide to travel to the GDR.¹⁵²)

Honecker welcomed the news that Gorbachev would be coming, evidently hoping that it would stabilize the situation in the GDR. But in the meantime the departure of East German citizens to the FRG—mostly from Austria via Hungary but also some via Czechoslovakia and other transit countries—continued at a brisk pace, reaching a total of more than 230,000 within several weeks.¹⁵³ The East German government tried to stem the outflow by imposing severe restrictions on travel to Hungary, including a strict visa requirement; but many people were still able to cross into Hungary. The exodus helped to fuel political unrest and mass demonstrations in the GDR itself, and by early October 1989 the very survival of the East German regime, not to mention Honecker's hold on power, was increasingly in doubt.

¹⁵¹ "Postanovlenie Politbyuro TsK KPSS 30 iyulya 1989 god.: VII. Ob itogakh besdey t. Gorbacheva M. S. s General'nym sekretarem TsK SEPG, Predsedatelem Gosudarstvennogo soveta GDR t. E. Khonekkerom," CPSU Politburo Resolution No. 152/VII (Top Secret), 30 July 1989, in RGANI, F. 3, Op. 103, D. 177, Ll. 6–7.

¹⁵² Valentin Falin, *Politische Erinnerungen* (Munich: Droemer Knaur, 1993), 484.

¹⁵³ The figure of 230,000 comes from "Telefongespräch des Bundeskanzlers Kohl mit Generalsekretär Gorbatschow 11. November 1989," Transcript of Telephone Conversation (Secret), 11 November 1989, with notation "zdA T[eltschik] 16/11," in Küsters and Hofmann, eds., *Dokumente zur Deutschlandpolitik*, 165–69. See also Kurz, "Ungarn 89," 159–60.

Change and Upheaval in Eastern Europe

If Gorbachev had been determined to prevent Hungary from allowing the East German refugees to depart for the FRG, he certainly could have done so. Even though Hungarian leaders were acting with greater independence by the summer of 1989, they would not have defied the Soviet Union if Soviet political and military officials had applied strong pressure and engaged in threats. Far from exerting pressure, however, Gorbachev did the opposite when he indicated to Hungarian and West German leaders that the Soviet government would not object if Hungary permitted the East Germans to enter Austria. Soviet policy on this matter in 1989 amounted to a fundamental rejection of the principles and assumptions that had guided Soviet policy until the late 1980s. No Soviet leader prior to Gorbachev would have even contemplated allowing an event to happen that would cast doubt on the legitimacy and *raison d'être* of the GDR.

Gorbachev's determination to avoid violent repression against peaceful protests in Eastern Europe, no matter how turbulent the situation became, was a remarkably bold posture to adopt in circumstances that would have induced all previous Soviet leaders to crack down. The pressure of events can often force undesirable actions, but Gorbachev sedulously resisted it. Moreover, by siding with the Hungarian and Polish governments as they undertook far-reaching liberalization and democratization, Gorbachev signaled his endorsement of their domestic policies. By the same token, even though he claimed that the Soviet Union would not be imposing reforms on other socialist countries, he left no doubt in his public and private comments that he believed all the East European governments must sooner or later enact major changes at home—changes that no previous Soviet leader would have tolerated, much less encouraged. The growing radicalization of Gorbachev's own political agenda, combined with his approbation of the sweeping political programs in Hungary and Poland, was bound to provoke a good deal of restiveness in the four East European countries that had tried to eschew any loosening of political control.

This surge of ferment was reinforced by the increasing perception in Eastern Europe that the Soviet Union would not defend hard-line regimes against internal challenges—a perception that not only

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emboldened protesters but also demoralized the Communist leaders who were targets of the protests. The full magnitude of the forces unleashed by Gorbachev's policies and by the "winds of change" that spread from the Soviet Union (and Hungary and Poland) to other Warsaw Pact countries became apparent in the last few months of 1989, when millions of people in Eastern Europe—most of whom until 1989 would never have dared to join mass protests against Communist rule—seized the opportunity to push, both collectively and individually, for sweeping political change and democratization. Events that would have been unthinkable even a year or two earlier suddenly happened in rapid succession: a peaceful revolution from below in East Germany, the opening and gradual dismantling of the Berlin Wall, popular unrest and the downfall of Todor Zhivkov in Bulgaria, the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia, and violent upheaval and the execution of Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu in Romania. Change from below in East Germany and Czechoslovakia had been made possible by change at the top in the Soviet Union and had accelerated once the morale of hardline elites in Eastern Europe began collapsing as they increasingly realized that the Soviet Union would not be intervening on their behalf. None of these factors on its own, however, would have been enough to transform the political complexion of the region. Only through the interaction of these sources of change, along with some degree of luck, could the Soviet bloc have fallen apart.

The crucial test case in all this, at least for Soviet policy, was the GDR, which for historical, geographic, and strategic reasons was the keystone of the Warsaw Pact. Demonstrations that had begun there in September 1989 escalated in early October, spreading to many cities.¹⁵⁴ Although the protesters still worried that the East German regime might resort to deadly force, fears of a Tiananmen-style onslaught steadily waned in light of the stance taken by Soviet

¹⁵⁴ See, for example, Charles S. Maier, *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 108–67; Andreas Apelt, *Die Opposition in der DDR und die deutsche Frage 1989/90* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2009), 145–72; and relevant essays in Eckart Conze, Katharina Gajdukowa, and Sigrid Koch-Baumgarteneds, eds., *Die demokratische Revolution in der DDR 1989* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2009).

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leaders, notably during Gorbachev's visit to the GDR in early October 1989, which Honecker mistakenly had assumed would help shore up his position in the SED. Gorbachev's presence at the 40th anniversary celebration did give a dose of support to the GDR, but the impact of his visit on Honecker personally was much less auspicious. Gorbachev had told his aides beforehand that he had "no desire to go" to the GDR, and he vowed "not to say a single word in support of Honecker."¹⁵⁵ Gorbachev's initial meeting with Honecker on 7 October took place after the two leaders had walked by crowds of East Germans who conspicuously ignored Honecker and joyfully chanted "Gorby! Gorby!" and held up signs in Russian exclaiming "Gorbachev, you are our only hope!"

During the initial discussions with Honecker, Gorbachev implied that the East German leader was "deeply confused" about the political changes under way in the Soviet Union. Honecker, for his part, stuck to old dogmas, claiming that the only people "pressuring the GDR to adopt reforms" were the state's "opponents," especially the "chauvinists" in West Germany, who "are seeking to dictate rules of behavior to us."¹⁵⁶ Honecker insisted that "the working class and especially the peasants [in the GDR] are in a good mood now. The workers support the party's line." Years later, Gorbachev recalled that Honecker's dulcet characterization of the social mood in the GDR was particularly "bewildering." The East German leader's comments, Gorbachev said, "had nothing to do with reality" and were "100 percent rubbish."¹⁵⁷

At a follow-on meeting later in the day with Honecker and other SED Politburo members, Gorbachev was blunter than usual in indicating that it was time for Honecker to go. The Soviet leader began by warning that "when the party lags behind in a theoretical and practical

¹⁵⁵ Diary Entry for 5 October 1989, in Chernyaev, *Sovmestnyi iskhod*, 805–6.

¹⁵⁶ "Zapis' besedy M. S. Gorbacheva s E. Khonekkerom," Notes from Conversation (Secret), 7 October 1989, in AGF, F. 1, Op. 1, Dok. 10205. For the German transcript, see "Niederschrift über das Gespräch des Generalsekretärs des Zentralkomitees der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Erich Honecker mit Generalsekretär des ZK der UdSSR, Michail Gorbatschow, am 7.10.1989, mit handschriftlichen Korrekturen von Honecker," Marked-up Transcript (Top Secret), 7 October 1989, in SAPMO, ZPA, J IV 2/2035/60.

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Gorbachev, in Moscow, 15 March 2007.

sense, there will be bitter fruit to harvest.”¹⁵⁸ He then stressed that the SED had been lagging behind under Honecker and that an overhaul was needed:

Adopting a decision to carry out political changes is definitely not an easy matter. The time awaits you when you will have to make courageous decisions. ... People are demanding a new social atmosphere and more oxygen in the society, especially because this pertains to a socialist order. ... I am referring here to the need to create not only a material but also a social-spiritual atmosphere for the development of society. It seems to me this is a lesson for us. It is important that you not miss your chance. Life punishes us when we are late. ... On the basis of our own experience and the experience of Poland and Hungary in particular, we can say with great confidence to you that if your party pretends that nothing special is going on and does not react to the demands of life, it will be doomed. ... You and we have only one choice—to move decisively forward or to be defeated. ... We often see that someone among the leaders cannot pull his weight any longer, but we do not decide to replace him, as though we are afraid of offending him. In the meantime, problems fester and become extremely acute. On the whole, there are many “warning bells” for your party.¹⁵⁹

Separately, Gorbachev spoke with Egon Krenz, a leading figure in the SED who was 25 years younger than Honecker and was widely seen

¹⁵⁸ “Zapis’ besedy M. S. Gorbacheva s chlenami Politbyuro TsK SEPG,” Notes from Gorbachev’s meeting with SED leaders (Top Secret), 7 October 1989, in AGF, F. 1, Op. 1, Dok. 10174, Ll. 1-9. For the German version, see “Treffen der Genossen des Politburos des Zentralkomitees der SED mit dem Generalsekretär des ZK der KPdSU und Vorsitzenden des Obersten Sowjets der UdSSR, Genossen Michail Sergejewitsch Gorbatschow, am Sonnabend, den 7. Oktober 1989 in Berlin-Niederschönhausen: Stenografische Niederschrift,” Transcript of Meeting (Top Secret), 7 October 1989, in SAPMO, ZPA, J IV 2/2035/60.

¹⁵⁹ “Zapis’ besedy M. S. Gorbacheva s chlenami Politbyuro TsK SEPG,” Ll. 1-3, 4-6, 9.

as the likely successor, about the need to replace Honecker as soon as possible.¹⁶⁰

On 11 October, a few days after Gorbachev had returned to Moscow, he received word from the Soviet ambassador in the GDR that Krenz would be pushing for a leadership change at the next session of the SED Politburo.¹⁶¹ The news came as an obvious relief to Gorbachev, who, upon returning from the GDR, had told his aides that Honecker was a “jackass” (*mudak*) who wanted to stay in power indefinitely and who kept on muttering the same empty shibboleths. Gorbachev felt that Honecker would have done a service to everyone, including himself, if he had resigned voluntarily rather than waiting until he was forced out:

He could say to his people that he has had four surgical operations and is now 78, and a lot of strength is required for such a turbulent period, and could you please release me from my duties now that I have done my part. That way, he could keep his place in history.¹⁶²

Gorbachev's aides were more doubtful that Honecker would be remembered favorably even if he resigned right away. In their view, he was so “reviled by his own people” that nothing he could do would improve his image.¹⁶³

Even as Honecker was about to be removed, he and Mielke were still desperately hoping that Gorbachev would ultimately give them the go-ahead for a full-scale crackdown in the GDR. The East German ambassador in Moscow left no doubt about this later on in a private conversation with Aleksandr Yakovlev describing the “extraordinary nervousness” at the highest levels of the SED.¹⁶⁴ Rather than providing

¹⁶⁰ Diary Entry for 8 October 1989, in Chernyaev, *Sovmestnyi iskhod*, 806. See also Egon Krenz, *Herbst '89* (Berlin: Verlag Neues Leben, 1999), 77–78, 80–83.

¹⁶¹ Diary Entry for 11 October 1989, in Chernyaev, *Sovmestnyi iskhod*, 808–9.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 808. Actually, Honecker at the time was 77, not 78.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ “TsK KPSS: Zapis' besedy s poslom GDR v SSSR G. Kenigom 20 oktyabrya 1989 g.,” Memorandum of Conversation from A. N. Yakovlev to the CPSU Politburo (Secret), 21 October 1989, in GARF, F. 10063, Op. 2, D. 185, Ll. 1–13.

a green light, however, Soviet officials went out of their way to stress that they wanted change in the GDR to move ahead without repression. This message was conveyed to the leaders of the SED through all available channels, and the 380,000 Soviet troops in the GDR received orders to stay in their barracks.¹⁶⁵

Having failed to secure Moscow's approval for the violent quelling of protests, the leaders of the SED concluded that they could not deploy the East German State Security (Stasi) forces and National People's Army to crush internal unrest over Moscow's strong opposition. An operation of this sort, on the scale of China's brutal crackdown in June 1989, would have required at least Soviet acquiescence and more likely direct support, given the huge presence of Soviet troops on GDR territory and the KGB's extensive influence over the Stasi. Even though East German leaders were planning to subdue the demonstrations with their own security forces and troops rather than asking for Soviet military assistance, they knew that such action would be impractical if the Soviet Union vehemently objected to it.¹⁶⁶ Hence, Honecker and Mielke ultimately took no action against the protests, paving the way for Krenz's move against Honecker, who was ousted on 17 October, barely a week after Gorbachev visited and issued his injunction.

If Krenz had displaced Honecker a few months earlier, he might have been able to gain control of the situation and nip the wave of popular unrest in the bud. Krenz was by no means a dynamic or innovative leader, but if he had come to power in June or July he might have been able to forge viable compromises with church leaders and others who ended up playing key roles in the protest movement. The delay of a mere few months in such a fluid situation proved crucial. By the time Honecker was actually removed on 17 October, the situation was too far gone. Rather than diminishing, the protests waxed ever larger and spread to almost every part of the GDR. With remarkable celerity, the SED's erstwhile dominant position in East German society ebbed and disappeared. East German officials had spurned

¹⁶⁵ See, for example, Vyacheslav Kochemasov, *Meine letzte Mission: Fakten, Erinnerungen, Überlegungen* (Berlin: Dietz, 1994), 168–69.

¹⁶⁶ Reinhold Andert and Wolfgang Herzberg, *Der Sturz: Honecker im Kreuzverhör* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1991), 182–83.

reforms earlier, and essentially what they found in October and early November 1989 was that drastic changes were forced on them, bearing out Gorbachev's warning that "life punishes us when we are late."

The Opening of the Berlin Wall

As events unfolded in the last few months of 1989, the role of chance and contingency became crucial. Nothing illustrated this better than the opening of the Berlin Wall, which occurred on 9 November largely by chance.¹⁶⁷ By the time the Wall opened, the GDR had been in political turmoil for nearly two months, Honecker's regime was long gone, and throngs of East Germans were continuing to try to flee to the West via Hungary or Czechoslovakia. The sudden opening of the Wall thus did not seem as startling as it would have a few months earlier, but the precise timing was unexpected, driven by a series of fortuitous events.

On 9 November, after considerable work had been done by officials from relevant government agencies to codify new travel regulations for East German citizens, the SED Central Committee approved draft guidelines permitting East Germans to pass through checkpoints along the border between the GDR and West Germany and between East Berlin and West Berlin, starting the following week.¹⁶⁸ The East

¹⁶⁷ This event has been recounted and reassessed in many works about the events of October–November 1989 in the GDR. See, for example, Hans-Hermann Hertle and Kathrin Elsner, *Mein. 9. November: Der Tag, an dem die Mauer fiel* (Berlin: Nicolai, 1999); Hans-Hermann Hertle, *Der Fall der Mauer: Die unbeabsichtigte Selbstaflösung des SED-Staates*, 2nd ed. (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1999); Hans-Hermann Hertle, *Chronik des Mauerfalls: Die dramatischen Ereignisse um den 9. November 1989* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1996); Michael Funken, *Das Jahr der Deutschen: Die glückliche Geschichte von Mauerfall und deutscher Einheit* (Munich: Pendo, 2008); and Heribert von Schwan and Rolf Steininger, eds., *Mein 9. November 1989* (Düsseldorf: Artemis & Winkler, 2009).

¹⁶⁸ "10. Tagung des ZK der SED im Plenarsaal des ZK-Gebäudes in Berlin, 8. November 1989," Record of SED Central Committee plenum (Secret), 8 November 1989, full transcript in SAPMO, ZPA, Ton YI/TD738, reproduced in Hans-Hermann Hertle and Gerd-Rüdiger Stephan, eds., *Das Ende der SED: die letzten Tage des Zentralkomitees* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1997), 135–439.

German government later in the day expanded the measure to cover private travel for people with appropriate documents.¹⁶⁹ The main impact of the document was on people seeking to leave the GDR permanently, but the distinction between this category and temporary travelers got lost when a senior SED Politburo member, Günter Schabowski, who had just returned to East Berlin and had not yet seen the directive or taken part in any discussions about it, was given the task of announcing it on East German television.

In response to questions from journalists, Schabowski mistakenly claimed that the measure was effective immediately, and when asked by reporters whether it applied to checkpoints along the Berlin Wall, he responded affirmatively. In response to other questions, he erroneously stated that the regulations applied to everyone, and he characterized the guidelines in an open-ended way, implying that all trips were covered and that access through border points was essentially unrestricted. Both of these assertions were erroneous, but Schabowski apparently was unaware of the significance of what he was saying.

Schabowski's announcement spurred subsequent broadcasts on West German and East German television and radio claiming that the Wall had already opened. The reports were incorrect, and initially almost no one was even present at the border checkpoints, which were still closed with no one passing through. But as the broadcasts continued, many Germans on both sides of the border assumed that they were true and that free passage was now allowed.¹⁷⁰ Large numbers of people began streaming toward the Berlin Wall from both sides, gradually forming an immense crowd. East German border guards, who were still technically under orders to prevent any crossings, had no idea what they should do and tried to ease the crush by letting out a small number of people. Far from helping matters, those crossings caused greater confusion and restiveness. The border guards tried repeatedly to call the authorities to obtain up-to-date instructions, but most of

¹⁶⁹ Ministerrat der DDR, "Beschluß: Zur Veränderung der Situation der ständigen Ausreise von DDR-Bürgern nach der BRD über die ČSSR," 9 November 1989, in Bundesarchiv Postdam, DC 20, 1/3-286.7.

¹⁷⁰ For an interesting compendium of younger people's reactions in impromptu letters and notes, see Peter Jung, ed., *AufBRUCH*, 9. November '89: *Leserbriefe aus der DDR* (Cologne: PapyRossa, 2009).

the highest officials were taking part in an SED Central Committee meeting and could not be reached. No one else at upper levels was willing to give orders to enforce the existing rules. Hence, the erroneous broadcasts triggered actions that ultimately converted the error into reality.

Without any clear instructions to follow, the border guards started to let more people through, at first in a trickle and then in an overwhelming wave. When the SED meeting ended, party leaders were startled to learn what was going on, but they realized it was too late to defuse the situation or to return to the status quo ante.¹⁷¹ Germans gathered along the wall, crossed over it, danced on it, hacked away at it, hugged, drank euphoric toasts, and savored a moment that many until very recently had felt they might never experience. The sheer exuberance of that magical night was unforgettable for those who witnessed it.

The response in Moscow to the opening of the Wall was low-key overall.¹⁷² Even as leaders in Warsaw, London, Paris, and one or two other capitals privately expressed great unease and even alarm about what they saw as “the excessively rapid pace of events in the GDR” (to use the words of Lech Wałęsa, the leader of Solidarity in Poland), officials in Moscow avoided any shrill reactions to the unexpected turn of events.¹⁷³ Although the Soviet ambassador to the FRG, Yulii Kvitsinskii, was unnerved by the events and hoped that a four-power meeting would be convened, senior officials in Moscow were far more restrained. Because of the 2-hour time difference in Moscow, Gorbachev was already in bed when the crowds were gathering along the Wall. The

¹⁷¹ Krenz, *Herbst '89*, 236–50.

¹⁷² In *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 105–7, Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice mistakenly claim that the opening of the Wall sparked “euphoria” in London and Paris but “barely disguised panic” in Moscow. Their characterizations of the reactions in all three of these capitals are inaccurate. Declassified documents make clear that in both London and Paris leaders were deeply uneasy about the situation, whereas in Moscow the reaction was far short of panic.

¹⁷³ “Gespräch des Bundeskanzlers Kohl mit dem Vorsitzenden der Gewerkschaft ‘Solidarität,’ L. Wałęsa,” Transcript of Conversation, 9 November 1989, in Küsters and Hofmann, eds., *Dokumente zur Deutschlandpolitik*, 492–96.

next day he learned what had happened from the Soviet ambassador to East Germany, Vyacheslav Kochemasov, who was surprised by the equanimity of Gorbachev's reaction.¹⁷⁴ In a telephone conversation on 11 November with West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, Gorbachev was upbeat about Soviet-FRG relations and said that "events in the GDR" marked a "historic turning point toward new relations and indeed a new world."¹⁷⁵ Although Gorbachev worried that some people in the GDR or FRG might be tempted to "force the situation" and create "chaos," he was confident that he and Kohl could ensure that "profound changes" would unfold in a "stable" and "balanced" way. Gorbachev's comments reflected a certain degree of unease, but overall he seemed relieved that the situation had not spun out of control and that everything had remained peaceful. An even greater sense of relief was expressed by his adviser Anatolii Chernyaev, who wrote in his diary on 10 November that by having facilitated the opening of the Wall, Gorbachev "has proven to be a great figure" who "has sensed the pace of history and has helped it reach its 'natural turn.'"¹⁷⁶

The Wall did not fully open until several weeks later, but the breach of it on 9 November signaled the rapid end of Communism in the GDR and the growing movement toward German reunification. It also marked the death knell of East European Communism and the end of the Cold War. Less than 24 hours after the Wall opened, the long-time Communist dictator in Bulgaria, Todor Zhivkov, who had been in power for 35 years, was forced to step down. A week later, the Velvet Revolution began in Czechoslovakia, escalating within a few days to demonstrations in Prague involving more than a million people. By the end of the month, Communist rule in Czechoslovakia was fatally weakened and soon disappeared altogether. So drastically did the situation change in Czechoslovakia that the renowned dissident writer Václav Havel, who as recently as January 1989 had been imprisoned after criticizing the harshness of the Czechoslovak regime, was elected president on 29 December 1989. At the start of November

¹⁷⁴ Kochemasov, *Meine letzte Mission*, 199–201.

¹⁷⁵ "Zapis' telefonnogo razgovora M. S. Gorbacheva s G. Kolem, 11 noyabrya 1989 god.," Transcript of Conversation (Secret), 11 November 1989, in AGF, F. 1, Op. 1, Dok. 8841.

¹⁷⁶ Diary Entry for 10 November 1989, in Chernyaev, *Sovmestnyi iskhod*, 816–17.

1989, a modicum of uncertainty had still existed about the duration of Communism in Eastern Europe, but by the end of the month there was no longer any doubt that the Soviet bloc was irrevocably in tatters. Never before had political change of such colossal magnitude occurred so quickly with almost no bloodshed.

In January 1989, at a commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the birth of the theologian and rebel leader Thomas Müntzer, Erich Honecker had declared that “the [Berlin] Wall will be standing in 50 and even in 100 years, if the reasons for it are not yet removed” (*Die Mauer wird in 50 und auch in 100 Jahren noch bestehen bleiben, wenn die dazu vorhandenen Gründe noch nicht beseitigt sind*).¹⁷⁷ What Honecker (and others) did not foresee is that the “reasons for it” would be “removed” before the year was out.

Aftermath

By presiding over the demise of the Communist bloc, Gorbachev vastly improved the climate for East-West relations (including East-West trade) and eliminated the perceived burden that Eastern Europe had long imposed on Soviet economic and military resources.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ “Erklärung von Erich Honecker über den Fortbestand der Berliner Mauer, 19.1.1989,” audio recording of Honecker’s speech, 19 January 1989, in the superb audio collection, *Die Mauer fällt: Die Wende in Deutschland vom Januar 1989 bis zum 3. Oktober 1990*, assembled by Walter Roller for the Deutsches Historisches Museum, Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv, Frankfurt am Main.

¹⁷⁸ The impact on East-West relations is highlighted in memoirs by former key Western officials: George H. W. Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Knopf, 1998); James A. Baker III, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War, and Peace, 1989–1992* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1995); Robert M. Gates, *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider’s Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996); Matlock, *Autopsy on an Empire*; Helmut Kohl, *Ich wollte Deutschlands Einheit*, ed. by Kai Diekmann and Ralf Georg Reuth (Berlin: Propyläen, 1996); Hans-Dietrich Genscher, *Erinnerungen* (Berlin: Siedler, 1995); and Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993). See also the new memoir by the Soviet ambassador in Washington from 1986 to 1990, Yurii Dubinin, *Vremya peremen: Zapiski posla SShA* (Moscow: Aviarus-XXI, 2003).

He also removed a major impediment to his program of domestic reform. Whereas previous Soviet leaders were wont to invoke the concepts of "socialist internationalism" and a "socialist commonwealth" to confer "legitimacy" on the traditional Marxist-Leninist model, Gorbachev and his aides could point to the developments in Eastern Europe as evidence of the model's bankruptcy. Yakovlev, for example, argued in November 1989 that the upheavals in Hungary, Poland, East Germany, and Bulgaria "pose a threat to no one, except, perhaps, to the countries that have not yet gone through the process of democratization."¹⁷⁹ Another of Gorbachev's aides, Sergei Karaganov, stressed in early 1990 that "the changes in the German Democratic Republic, Czechoslovakia, and Romania have provided a potent push for perestroika. ... They have strengthened its irreversibility and showed that there is no reasonable alternative to the democratization of the political system and the marketization of the economy."¹⁸⁰ The upheavals in the East-bloc countries thereby negated a key external prop on which Gorbachev's opponents in Moscow might have relied. In all these respects, the dissolution of Soviet hegemony over Eastern Europe was highly beneficial for the Soviet leader:

At the same time, Gorbachev's policy, for all its positive aspects, was fraught with severe costs. The historian Vyacheslav Dashichev has rightly observed that "no one in the Soviet Union – neither Gorbachev nor the ruling political elite nor the wider Soviet society – was ready, either psychologically or conceptually, for the fundamental turnaround that occurred."¹⁸¹ By late 1990, the Soviet Union was unable to salvage what little remained of its political and military leverage in Eastern Europe. Even before the Warsaw Pact was formally abolished in July 1991, the erstwhile effectiveness of the alliance had disappeared. The fundamental political changes that occurred in Eastern Europe in 1989 and 1990—changes that the Warsaw Pact in earlier decades was supposed to prevent, especially in the GDR—deprived the alliance of its main *raison d'être*. Soviet officials themselves privately acknowledged in

¹⁷⁹ TASS, 16 November 1989.

¹⁸⁰ Sergei A. Karaganov, "The Year of Europe: A Soviet View," *Survival* vol. 32, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 122.

¹⁸¹ V. Dashichev, "Edinaya Germaniya v edinoi Evrope," *Svobodnaya mysl'* 7 (Moscow, July 1999): 119.

early 1990 that the collapse of Communist regimes throughout Eastern Europe had "shifted the military balance on the European continent in favor of the West."¹⁸² Some in Moscow concluded at an early stage that the shift in the military balance was "fundamental" and "decisive," especially with the prospect of a unified Germany in NATO. Other Soviet officials initially hoped that the Soviet Union could "minimize [its] 'losses'" by "promoting the formation of an all-European security system" that would supplant both NATO and the Warsaw Pact.¹⁸³ It soon became clear, however, that no such system would ever actually materialize.

Instead, the Warsaw Pact rapidly disintegrated, leaving NATO as the only security organization in Europe. The elaborate command-and-control infrastructure that Soviet leaders had worked so long to develop for the Pact became defunct, and pressures quickly mounted for the withdrawal of all Soviet troops and weapons from the region.¹⁸⁴ In February 1990 the Soviet Union agreed to remove its entire Central and Southern Groups of Forces from Czechoslovakia and Hungary by July 1991, a schedule that many Soviet military officers believed was too compressed.¹⁸⁵ Marshal Viktor Kulikov, who had served as commander-in-chief of the Warsaw Pact until February 1989, later recalled

¹⁸² "Voenno-politicheskie aspekty obstanovki v Evrope (Analiticheskaya zapiska)," prepared by the Soviet Foreign Ministry's Directorate on Arms Control and Disarmament, n.d. (c. early March 1990), in AGF, F. 2, Op. 2, D. 12, Ll. 1-16.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, Ll. 1, 2.

¹⁸⁴ S. F. Akhromeev and G. M. Kornienko, *Glazami marshala i diplomata* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 1992), 295.

¹⁸⁵ "Soglasenie mezhdru Pravitel'stvom Soyuzu Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik i Pravitel'stvom Chekhoslovatskoi Sotsialisticheskoi Respubliki o vyvode sovetskikh voisk s territorii Chekhoslovatskoi Sotsialisticheskoi Respubliki," *Vestnik Ministerstva inostrannykh del SSSR* (Moscow), No. 6 (31 March 1990): 4-5; and "Soglasenie mezhdru Pravitel'stvom Soyuzu Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik i Pravitel'stvom Vengerskoi Respubliki o vyvode sovetskikh voisk, vremennno nakhodyashchikhsya na territorii Vengrii," 9 March 1990, supplement to "Postanovlenie TsK KPSS: O vyvode sovetskikh voisk iz Vengrii," K-227/OS (Secret), 9 March 1990, 10-13, in RGANI, F. 89, Per. 8, D. 21, Ll. 1-8. The Hungarian and Czechoslovak governments initially had pressed for the withdrawals to be completed by the end of 1990. Only with reluctance did they settle for the mid-1991 deadline.

the bitterness that he and other military commanders had felt about the pace of the withdrawals:

To call it a give-away is putting it far too mildly. I would say it bordered on criminality. The decision to pull troops so quickly out of Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and especially Germany was rash and ill-conceived. The officer corps was left in a disastrous state, bereft of housing, material support, and the right to a new job. Everything was done in a slapdash manner. ... I have to acknowledge that [we in] the military leadership were too docile; we were not perseverant enough and failed to insist that our troops should be pulled out in an orderly manner, with adequate support for our armed forces, the officer corps, and their families.¹⁸⁶

Despite these sentiments (which some Soviet military officers voiced in public), the withdrawals from Hungary and Czechoslovakia proceeded with great alacrity over the next sixteen months, finishing slightly ahead of schedule. A provisional agreement regarding the Soviet Union's Northern Group of Forces was concluded with the Polish government in October 1991, and it was then reaffirmed in a formal Russian-Polish treaty in May 1992. Under that treaty, all combat soldiers from the ex-Soviet Army were taken out of Poland by the end of October 1992, and the small number of remaining logistical troops departed by September 1993.¹⁸⁷ The withdrawal of several hundred thousand Soviet/Russian troops and support personnel from eastern Germany was completed in September 1994, four months ahead of the timetable laid out in treaties signed by the Soviet and German governments a few weeks before German reunification in the fall of 1990.¹⁸⁸ The final pullout of forces from German territory put an end to the

¹⁸⁶ Interview with Kulikov in Ekaterina Labetskaya, "Marshal Kulikov: 'Voennye byli slishkom poslushnymi,'" *Vremya MN* (Moscow), 6 September 1999, 2.

¹⁸⁷ Marek Henzler and Włodzimierz Kalski, "Wychała: Armia Radziecka z nami od dziecka," *Polityka* 39 (Warsaw, 25 September 1993): 12-13.

¹⁸⁸ "Dogovor ob okonchatel'nom uregulirovanii v otnoshenii Germanii," *Izvestiya* (Moscow, 13 September 1990), 4.

presence of the former Soviet Army in Eastern Europe, thus completing the disintegration of the Warsaw Pact.

The fate of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance was no better. Although most of the East European states after 1989 still relied heavily on the Soviet Union for trade and energy supplies (both natural gas and oil) and many raw materials, the inexorable trend in the region was toward much greater economic contact with the West. The new East European governments looked upon CMEA as a cumbersome, antiquated organization that should be abolished, and they drafted formal proposals to that effect. Soviet leaders, too, soon acknowledged that the organization had never come close to living up to its stated aims and that its erstwhile functions had been overtaken by events.¹⁸⁹ Even if the Soviet government had tried—very belatedly—to implement drastic reforms in CMEA, the organization was doomed by the upheavals of 1989-1990. Hence, like the Warsaw Pact, it was formally disbanded in mid-1991.

In all these ways, events in Eastern Europe moved so far and so fast, and the Soviet Union's influence in the region declined so precipitously, that the fate of the whole continent eluded Soviet control. The very notion of a "socialist commonwealth" lost its meaning once Gorbachev not only permitted, but actually facilitated, the collapse of Communist rule in Eastern Europe. Hopes of "reforming" or "adapting" the structures that had undergirded Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe, or of replacing them with an "all-European security system," proved illusory. Despite gaining certain benefits from the disintegration of the bloc, Gorbachev found that the steady elimination of all remnants of Soviet influence in Eastern Europe undercut his political fortunes and cast doubt on the long-term viability of the USSR.

Conclusion

Gorbachev did not come to office intending to abandon the Soviet bloc in Eastern Europe, nor did he foresee that the changes he initiated both domestically and externally would lead to the demise of Communism

¹⁸⁹ See, for example, A. Shabalin, "Ekonomika vostochnoevropeiskikh stran: Mify i real'nost'," *Pravitel'stvennyi vestnik* (Moscow, 14 April 1990): 8-9.

in Eastern Europe. He had never anticipated that Communist rule in Eastern Europe would simply dissolve. On the contrary, he believed that his program would strengthen rather than undermine the socialist camp, placing it on a much sounder footing than in the past. He hoped to preserve the integrity of the Warsaw Pact and other multilateral institutions and to create favorable conditions in Eastern Europe for a liberalized form of Communism ("socialism with a human face") that would enable the socialist commonwealth to overcome the destabilizing political crises that had plagued it so often in the past.

But the problem for Gorbachev was that his approach to Eastern Europe was based on conflicting objectives. Even though he wanted to buttress Soviet ties with the other Warsaw Pact countries and to encourage movement toward reformist Communism, his paramount goal by 1989 was to avoid the use of military force in Eastern Europe if internal crises arose there. Well into 1989, considerable uncertainty persisted in Eastern Europe about Soviet intentions and the bounds of Soviet tolerance, but when "life itself" (to use one of Gorbachev's pet phrases) increasingly showed that the Soviet Union in fact had no intention of intervening militarily in any of the Warsaw Pact countries no matter what the provocation, pro-democracy elites and millions of ordinary people in Eastern Europe took matters into their own hands. Even when the process of change in the region developed a revolutionary momentum, Gorbachev declined to interrupt it or even to try to slow it down. He consistently stuck to his policy of avoiding the use of military force in Eastern Europe. Hardline Communist leaders in the Soviet-bloc countries, who would have been perfectly willing to rely on violent repression to quell mass unrest as the Chinese regime did, lost their will to do so when they finally concluded that the Soviet Union would not be backing them up.

These converging trends—from above, from below, and from outside—produced an outcome in Eastern Europe that Gorbachev had neither desired nor anticipated. The upheavals of 1989 transformed the region so completely that they eliminated Soviet influence. The Warsaw Pact and other Soviet-led organizations ceased to function in any meaningful way after 1989 and were soon abolished, a fate that rarely happens to an international organization even after it becomes dysfunctional. Gorbachev's foreign policy adviser Anatolii Chernyaev was not quite right when he wrote in his diary in early October 1989

that events in Eastern Europe were leading to "the total dismantling of socialism as a world phenomenon."¹⁹⁰ In fact, Communist regimes in China, North Korea, Vietnam, Laos, and Cuba survived the distant upheavals of 1989 and subsequently fended off all pressure for political liberalization. Nonetheless, even though a handful of Communist regimes outside Europe proved resilient, Chernyaev's point was fully apt about Eastern Europe and later the USSR (and also Mongolia). Chernyaev in his diary contended that the dissolution of Communist regimes in Eastern Europe was, "truth be told, an inevitable and good" process that would return "humanity to foundations of common sense."¹⁹¹ Gorbachev himself clearly did not view things in as positive a light, but he accepted the outcome and tried to make the best of it.

Even though Gorbachev prior to 1989 did not anticipate that Communist rule would disintegrate in Eastern Europe or that the reunification of Germany would suddenly loom large on the East-West agenda, his basic approach to Soviet-East European relations proved remarkably successful in averting mass violent turmoil. Had it been left to the East German or Czechoslovak authorities in the fall of 1989, Tiananmen-style repression would have resulted and would have severely complicated the situation for the Soviet Union. The lack of violence was attributable in part to the remarkable discipline shown by East European protesters, in part to the eroding will of East European leaders who in earlier years would have forcibly crushed unrest, and in part to the deliberate policies adopted by Moscow. Throughout the latter half of 1989 (and even earlier in Poland and Hungary), the Soviet Union took timely and effective action to forestall violence and promote liberalization in the Warsaw Pact countries. At each of the many points when the Soviet Union could have stepped in to halt or reverse the process of fundamental change in Eastern Europe, Gorbachev instead expedited it, sometimes deliberately and on other occasions inadvertently. By eliminating any prospect that the Soviet Union would use military force in Eastern Europe, he effectively deprived the hard-line East European Communist leaders of the option of violent repression.

¹⁹⁰ Diary Entry for 5 October 1989, in Chernyaev, *Sovmestnyi iskhod*, 806.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

The one notable exception of Romania, with its bloody and chaotic revolution *cum coup d'état*, merely proves the rule.¹⁹² From the mid-1960s on, Soviet influence in Romania had always been much weaker than in the other Warsaw Pact countries. If the Soviet Union had been able to maintain the same degree of influence in Romania that it enjoyed elsewhere in Eastern Europe, the violent rebellion of December 1989 might not have occurred. The Romanian crisis was illuminating in its own right, however, insofar as it underscored the lengths Gorbachev was willing to go to avoid Soviet military intervention in Eastern Europe. Despite serious provocations by the forces loyal to Nicolae Ceaușescu, including the firing of shots at the Soviet embassy in Bucharest and threats by the Romanian Securitate to blow up nuclear power stations near the Soviet border, and despite explicit statements by the U.S. and other Western governments that they would *welcome* Soviet intervention in Romania, Soviet leaders refrained from sending in any troops.¹⁹³ Indeed, newly declassified documents confirm that Gorbachev was so determined to avoid the use of military force in Eastern Europe that he did not even seriously broach such a step when the CPSU Politburo gathered at the height of the Romanian crisis to discuss what to do.¹⁹⁴

Gorbachev's fundamental reorientation of Soviet policy toward Eastern Europe encompassed not only his success in getting the CPSU Politburo to decide in March 1989 to eschew any use of military pressure and force in the region, but also his role in promoting

¹⁹² For a solidly researched, perspicuous account of the Romanian crisis, see Peter Siani-Davies, *The Romanian Revolution of 1989* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2007).

¹⁹³ Thomas L. Friedman, "Baker Gives U.S. Approval If Soviets Act on Rumania," *The New York Times*, 25 December 1989, 6; and Steven Greenhouse, "France Offers Aid to Ceaușescu Foes," *The New York Times*, 25 December 1989, 6.

¹⁹⁴ "Vypiska iz protokola No. 175 zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 23 dekabrya 1989 god.: O pervoocherednykh merakh v svyazi s obstanovkoi v Rumynii," CPSU Politburo Discussion No. P175/50 (Top Secret), 23 December 1989, in RGANI, F. 89, Op.8, D. 77, Ll. 1-3. See also "Postanovlenie Politbyuro TsK KPSS No. P175/61 'O napravlenii pozdravlenii novym rukovoditelyam Rumynii,'" CPSU Politburo Resolution No. P175/61 (Top Secret), in RGANI, F. 3, Op. 103, D. 192, Ll. 2, 26-27, 144-5.

far-reaching liberalization. In addition to tolerating drastic changes in the Warsaw Pact countries, Gorbachev helped to bring about those changes, indirectly in some cases and directly in others, as when he pushed for a new direction and change of party leadership in the GDR in October 1989. Gorbachev had pledged in mid-1988 that the Soviet Union "would not impose [its] methods of development," including perestroika and glasnost, "on anyone else," but the situation in Eastern Europe was so volatile and was changing so rapidly by early to mid-1989 that it necessitated greater Soviet involvement than he initially anticipated.¹⁹⁵ Valentin Falin, who as head of the CPSU International Department oversaw Soviet relations with Eastern Europe during this crucial period, later acknowledged:

The CPSU Central Committee was aware of the unsavory processes under way in the [East European] countries and therefore – to the extent permitted by the principle of non-interference in internal affairs and respect of the right of peoples to choose – we tried to influence the situation.¹⁹⁶

Unlike in the past, when Gorbachev's predecessors relied on military force to "defend socialist gains" in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union in 1989 tried to do what it could to counteract the "unsavory processes" that might eventually have triggered widespread violent upheavals in one or more of the Warsaw Pact countries.

The dissolution of the Soviet bloc and the opening of the Berlin Wall were by no means inevitable. Momentous historical phenomena often seem inevitable in retrospect, but the reality is bound to be more complex. Gorbachev did have choices to make in 1989; nothing was preordained. If he had been determined to uphold orthodox Communist rule in Eastern Europe, as his predecessors were, he undoubtedly could have succeeded. The Soviet Army in the late 1980s was still fully capable of enforcing the Brezhnev Doctrine, provided that Soviet political leaders were willing to shed blood. If the top post

¹⁹⁵ "Otvety M. S. Gorbacheva na voprosy gazety 'Washington post' i zhurnala 'N'yusuik'," *Pravda* (Moscow, 23 May 1988), 2.

¹⁹⁶ "XXVIII S"ezd Kommunisticheskoi Partii Sovetskogo Soyuza," *Pravda* (Moscow, 9 July 1990), 5.

in the CPSU in March 1985 had gone to a hardline Politburo member such as Viktor Grishin, Grigorii Romanov, or Nikolai Tikhonov instead of Gorbachev, the Brezhnev Doctrine undoubtedly would have remained in full force. It is inconceivable that Grishin, Romanov, or Tikhonov—all of whom nearly outflanked Gorbachev in 1985—would have even contemplated a drastic change of policy vis-à-vis Eastern Europe or would have refrained from using military force if necessary to keep the Soviet bloc intact.

The peaceful disintegration of the bloc was the unintended consequence of Gorbachev's reorientation of Soviet domestic priorities—a reorientation aimed at “laying to rest all remnants of Stalinism and starting the Soviet Union on its way to the twentieth century.” This was the phrasing used by Adam Ulam in an interview for Radio Free Europe in May 1975, ten years before Gorbachev became General Secretary of the CPSU. Ulam was speculating about what would happen if “ten years from now, some individual or group in the [Soviet] Politburo emerges with the avowed intent” of doing away with the Stalinist legacy in the USSR:

Modernization, rationalization, economic reform, political relaxation, and the proper observance of the Soviet Constitution would follow. In the political and cultural climate created by such a change, I cannot see how Romanian, Polish, Czechoslovak, and Hungarian claims for independence could be resisted.¹⁹⁷

To be sure, in 1975 neither Ulam nor anyone else expected a figure like Gorbachev to come to power in Moscow ten years later. But what Ulam did correctly foresee is that any Soviet leader who was truly intent on extirpating the Stalinist residue at home would have to be willing to implement drastic changes in policy toward Eastern Europe. Far-reaching political liberalization and much greater openness within the USSR would have been incompatible with, and eventually would have been undermined by, a policy requiring military intervention on behalf of Communist dictatorships in Eastern Europe. As Ulam rightly

¹⁹⁷ Interview with Adam B. Ulam, May 1975, RFE/RL Research Institute, verbatim transcript in Open Society Archives (Budapest), F. 8, Subfond 200, Series 8, Subject File, Interview—Ulam, Adam B.

predicted, a fundamental reorientation of Soviet domestic priorities toward democratization, public accountability, and a relatively free press necessitated the relinquishment of Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe.

By the end of 1989, the pace and scope of events in Eastern Europe had greatly outstripped Gorbachev's expectations. Millions of people in the region had decided that the opportunity for drastic political change was finally at hand, and they took full advantage of it. Two years later, the USSR ceased to exist, and over the next decade-and-a-half all of the East European countries except for a few of the former Yugoslav states (and excluding the former Soviet republics other than the three Baltic countries) were integrated into NATO and the European Union. Numerous problems persisted in the region, both economic and political, but the upheavals of 1989 brought lasting improvements, above all the spread of democratic polities and free-market economies. The combination in 1989 of reform from above, pressure from below, and sheer luck produced some of the most propitious and memorable events of the twentieth century.

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