

Soviet Foreign Policy in Transition

edited by

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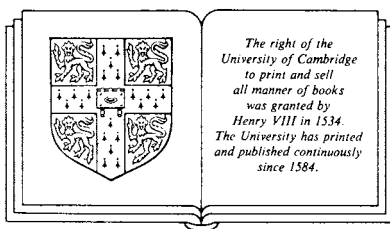
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Cambridge University Press

*Cambridge New York Port Chester
Victoria Sydney*

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY10011-4211, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Victoria 3166, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1992

First published 1992

Printed in Great Britain at the University Press, Cambridge

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

Library of Congress cataloguing in publication data

Soviet foreign policy in transition / edited by
Roger E. Kanet, Deborah Nutter Miner, Tamara J. Resler.

p. cm.

“Selected papers from the Fourth World Congress for Soviet and East
European Studies, Harrogate, July 1990.” – p.

Includes index.

ISBN 0 521 41365 6

1. Soviet Union – Foreign relations – 1985 – Congresses. 2. Europe,
Eastern – Foreign relations – Soviet Union – Congresses. 3. Soviet Union –
Foreign relations – Europe, Eastern – Congresses. 4. Soviet Union – Foreign
relations – Developing countries – Congresses. 5. Developing countries –
Foreign relations – Soviet Union – Congresses. I. Kanet, Roger E.,
1936– .

II. Miner, Deborah Nutter. III. Resler, Tamara J. IV. World Congress
for Soviet and East European Studies (4th: 1990: Harrogate, England)
DK289.S685 1992

327.47 – dc20 91-22135 CIP

ISBN 0 521 41365 6 hardback

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Introduction

Deborah Nutter Miner

The chapters in this book were written over the period of an extraordinary twelve months from March of 1990 to March of 1991, a year which saw the last events of Gorbachev's reforms – the creation of the post of President of the USSR (eventually to be elected by popular vote) and of Presidential and Federation Councils, the end of the Communist Party's legal monopoly of power; and, in foreign policy the acceptance of the reunification of Germany, and the decision by the leadership to support the US-sponsored resolution in the United Nations permitting the use of force in the Persian Gulf by a US-led coalition against a former Soviet ally. The year also witnessed the beginning of what can only be called reaction caused by the unexpected consequences of Gorbachev's ambitious changes. This reaction took the form of an embargo against Lithuania, a long wait for resolution of the debate over economic reform, capped by the defeat in September 1990 of Shatalin's 500-day plan, Gorbachev's assumption of emergency powers in September, outbursts in the Supreme Soviet by conservative officers, the resignation speech by Foreign Minister Shevardnadze warning of impending dictatorship and his actual resignation, the appointment of conservatives to the posts of Minister of the Interior and Vice-President coupled with the abandonment of Gorbachev by important reformers, the placing of units of the armed forces to patrol the streets in the cities, and the death of fifteen people in Vilnius at the hands of the Soviet army in the course of storming the TV tower. And finally, these last months have witnessed the meteoric rise of Boris Yeltsin as the leader of the opposition to Gorbachev, as the leader of whatever might remain of reform in the Soviet Union. This was the period in which the long-prophesied occurred, although in a somewhat unexpected form: Gorbachev was not pushed out by the right; he chose to move to the right himself.

This dramatic, Janus-like year followed a truly remarkable year of foreign policy reform during which Eastern Europe sprung free of the Soviet Union, of the country that had held it in its grip for over forty years, a country that now stood still and watched, perhaps even lent

support, as communist government after communist government fell in what is now called East-Central Europe.

Both the reform and the reaction, of course, are the result of the leadership's decision to deal head-on with the inheritance of the so-called era of stagnation under Brezhnev and actually to begin to dismantle the Stalinist system that had continued in place, albeit without the terror of Stalin, under both Khrushchev and Brezhnev. During these years, Stalin's hard-won battle to industrialize and become a global power, even a superpower, had been slowly reversed by a collective decision not to challenge the comfortable positions of either the party as a whole, the nomenklatura or the important institutional groups into which they had formed. In short, the choice by the leadership of stability for themselves as a group and, hence, policy stagnation during a period of rapid technological, economic, and political change in the rest of the world, seriously weakened the position of the Soviet Union in the international pecking order.

As the Soviet Union has struggled to deal with its decline or crisis of superpowerhood, as it has also been called, Gorbachev and others in the Soviet elite have set out to fashion and implement a foreign policy suitable, not for a superpower in decline, but perhaps for an injured superpower in the process of retraining for future competitions, still with its eye on the gold. It would appear that, although there has been an official, albeit flexible, policy, there have been alternative views within the Soviet elite both of the nature of the Soviet problem and of its solution.

It is not difficult to imagine the confusion and angst generated among the elite by the realization during the last years of the Brezhnev era and the first years under Gorbachev that the Soviet Union had not kept pace with, and had actually fallen far behind, the other industrialized states. The level of surprise, anger, and despair must have fallen along a broad spectrum. The energetic and optimistic Gorbachev of the early years, with his enthusiasm for a reformed socialism and his now discredited belief, expressed in perestroika, that most people in most countries would opt for socialism if given the choice, must have provided the discouraged Soviet elite with a vision and a plan under which they could go forward with some degree of unity and confidence. Now, of course, the internal parts of this plan lie in shambles; and the question is whether the external portion of Gorbachev's reforms will survive and in what form.

New thinking is a carefully thought out construction that integrates domestic and foreign policy and carefully links policy in all regions of the globe. In this sense it shares similarities with old thinking; but the

changes in foreign policy growing out of the new thinking have been diverse and dramatic. Each region of the globe has been affected. The chapters in this volume analyze the new thinking, and assess its impact, as well as its likely longevity. They focus on the Nordic countries, Eastern Europe, the European neutrals, Central America, Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and South Korea. In short, they deal mainly with what might be called the regions rather than with the “great powers” – the United States, Japan, Germany, and China. The relationships among the great powers in the emerging multi-polar world, or what Joseph Nye has called the polycentric world, constitute the framework within which these states and regions will have to maneuver.

The authors of the following chapters answer a group of questions different from those generally asked from 1985 to 1989, which encompass the first two periods of perestroika and new thinking delineated by Roger Kanet and Garth Katner of the University of Illinois in chapter 6. The questions have gone from “Is Gorbachev sincere?” and “How long will he last?” to include “How far to the right will he go?” and “How much of new thinking will survive the conservative reaction?” The authors here have the advantage in their analysis of having been able to view more than five years of new thinking, as well as the advantage of the existence of a fairly open debate within the Soviet Union over its success and validity. These authors chronicle in sufficient detail and with insight these debates among the Soviet political and academic elite. These debates provide the clearest indication of the policy alternatives supported by various groups within the elite and hence the changes that we might see in Soviet foreign policy. Chapter 1 by Deborah Miner of Simmons College outlines the international imperatives for reform that will most likely continue to circumscribe the choices available to the Soviet leadership.

The contributors to this volume provide varying perspectives on Soviet foreign policy, in part because they are a truly international group, with different concerns and insights. Most are from the areas about which they write. Only four substantive contributions were written by Americans – those by Deborah Miner, Roger Kanet and Garth Katner, Jan Adams, and Carol Saivetz. Mette Skak and Ole Nørgaard are from the Danish University of Aarhus. Skak writes about the issues of cohesion and viability in the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe and looks at future Soviet relations with East-Central Europe, and Nørgaard focuses on changes in Soviet–Nordic relations. Lena Jonson from the Swedish Institute of International Affairs analyzes the role of signaling in Soviet–Nordic relations during the Lithuania crisis of 1990; and Stephen Kux, from the University of Zurich in Switzerland, looks at the

Soviet approach to neutrality and the role it could play in Soviet thinking about Europe and the Republics. Anuradha Chenoy of Jawaharlal Nehru University in India focuses on national liberation movements and the dramatic changes in the Soviet interpretation of these movements; and Pierre du Toit Botha of the Africa Institute of South Africa traces the Soviet reassessment of socialist orientation in Africa. Zafar Imam, also of Jawaharlal Nehru University, makes a striking case for the negative impact of new thinking on the position of the Third World; Carlyle Thayer of Australia's Defense Force Academy offers insight into the changing Soviet relationship with Indochina; Bilveer Singh of the Singapore Institute of International Affairs chronicles the evolving ASEAN policy of the current Soviet leadership; and Ho-Won Jeong, a South Korean Ph.D. candidate at the Ohio State University, analyzes the economic, political, and military dimensions of the emerging relationship between South Korea and the Soviet Union. Jan Adams of the Ohio State University examines the shifts in Soviet policy in Central America, and Carol Saivetz of Harvard University's Russian Research Center analyzes recent developments in Soviet policy in the Middle East. Finally, Tamara Resler of the University of Illinois pulls together the major strands of argumentation presented in the individual chapters.

In short, these are refreshing perspectives, approaches and insights that attest to the benefits of the growing global interdependence in social science research. Our epistemology holds that objectivity is our primary goal, but clearly the richness of varying experience and training continue to impress upon us the truth that our field encompasses the subjective as well as the objective, and that it is not sufficient to study our field from a single perspective. The contributors to this volume blend rigorous scholarship and objective standards with the special perspective of being close to the issues at hand.

All but one of the authors share the view that new thinking has represented a significant improvement over the former, Marxist-Leninist-based policy of the Soviet Union. Each, for one reason or another, views the changes in the region about which they write as a positive move toward normalization. In this, the authors represent the views of many peoples and states in the world. On the other hand, new thinking has complicated and made more difficult the situations of those who have seen the Soviet Union as an alternative to the power of the United States and to a Western model of development, one which emphasizes market economies and trade dominated by multinational corporations. Zafar Imam articulates this view clearly in chapter 11. The other contributors – including the editors – ascribe to a Western, non-class-based

view of international relations; and they watch with concern the move to the right in Soviet politics. At the same time, as their chapters make clear, their analysis leads to the conclusion that it is not possible for old thinking as we knew it to replace new thinking and that many of the foreign policy changes that have taken place in the past few years will perforce survive into the post-glasnost era.