

**APPROVED FOR RELEASE**  
**CIA HISTORICAL-REVIEW PROGRAM**

**KEY JUDGMENTS<sup>1</sup>**

We believe that Soviet leaders regard military strength as the foundation of the USSR's status as a global superpower and as the most critical factor underlying Soviet foreign policy. As it enters the 1980s, the current Soviet leadership sees the heavy military investments made during the last two decades paying off in the form of unprecedentedly favorable advances across the military spectrum, and over the long term in political gains where military power or military assistance has been the actual instrument of policy or the decisive complement to Soviet diplomacy.

Since the mid-1970s the Soviet Union has demonstrated a new willingness to challenge the West in Third World settings as exemplified by its actions in Angola and Ethiopia and its invasion of Afghanistan. This more assertive Soviet international behavior is likely to persist as long as the USSR perceives that Western strength is declining and as it further explores the utility of its increased military power as a means of realizing its global ambitions.

A central question for the 1980s is whether the Soviets may be more inclined now than in earlier periods to confront the United States in a crisis. Moscow still views such a prospect as extremely hazardous. However, in light of the change in the strategic balance and continued expansion of general purpose forces, the Soviets are now more prepared and may be more willing to accept the risks of confrontation in a serious crisis, particularly in an area where they have military or geopolitical advantages.

**Policy Toward the United States**

The Soviet leadership sees the present US administration as basically hostile to the USSR and as intent upon linking Soviet behavior in the Third World to East-West relations, particularly arms control. Moscow has categorically rejected this "linkage" and has reaffirmed its

<sup>1</sup> In the view of the Director, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, and of the Special Assistant to the Secretary of the Treasury (National Security), the Memorandum tends to understate the historical continuity of the ideological and political underpinnings of Soviet assertiveness in the Third World. Moscow has pursued opportunities and advantages during periods of relative military weakness as well as during periods of enhanced strength (for example, Korea, Laos, Congo, Berlin, and Egypt). The factors, moreover, that have influenced Soviet actions in these regions have been more their view of the situation and opportunities and of the potential US responses to Soviet initiatives than the precise state of development of Soviet military programs.

commitment to support "national liberation" movements. Although the Soviets may doubt that the administration will actually be able to pursue as assertive a policy toward the USSR as it has suggested it would, they are probably reviewing their options for responding over the longer term to that possibility.

The Soviets will continue to stress the importance of the arms control dialogue with Washington as the key to bilateral relations, and they will seek to resuscitate detente as the most promising way of constraining US military policies, of advancing their military and political objectives, and of controlling the costs and risks of heightened international tensions. If they conclude that there is no prospect in the near term for meaningful results from renewed SALT, they may decide to go beyond the SALT II constraints, seeking to place the onus for failure on the United States and to exploit the breakdown to widen cleavages in the Atlantic Alliance. At the same time, Moscow would continue to urge the United States to enter SALT negotiations and would undoubtedly attempt to manipulate West European commitment to SALT in order to increase the pressure on Washington.

#### Europe

Moscow apparently views the policies of the present administration in Washington as likely to sharpen contradictions within the Atlantic Alliance. The Soviets see a lack of Western consensus—for example, in implementing NATO's program to modernize its long-range theater nuclear forces (LRTNF). They seek to exploit these differences with a dual purpose: to pursue certain economic and political interests with the Europeans even if Soviet relations with the United States deteriorate, and to generate pressures on West European governments to influence Washington toward greater flexibility in its dealings with the USSR.

The USSR perceives that some Western governments are more concerned about military imbalances such as the Soviet preponderance in LRTNF. The Soviets will continue to act politically to prevent the implementation of NATO's force modernization programs (particularly regarding US LRTNF) through arms control offers that would ratify Soviet military advantages in Europe and through threats of counter deployments.

Poland presents the USSR with the most threatening and complex challenge to its vital interests to emerge in Eastern Europe in the postwar period. Soviet leaders are prepared to use military force to preserve Soviet domination if they become convinced that changes taking place in Poland jeopardize the USSR's hegemony over Eastern Europe. However, because they know that the political, military, and economic costs of intervention would be extremely high, they may bring

themselves, so long as Poland's commitment to the Warsaw Pact is assured, to live with a much-modified Communist system in Poland.<sup>2</sup>

The Soviets probably anticipate that their military intervention in Poland, even under the most favorable scenario, would cause a harsh West European reaction and an initially unified US-West European stand against them. They see this as removing or reducing, at least temporarily, what they would otherwise expect to be the restraining influence of the European allies on the United States. Nevertheless, the Soviets would expect that differences between the United States and the European allies on the scope, intensity, and duration of countermeasures against the USSR would gradually emerge and provide the USSR with opportunities for renewing detente with at least Western Europe.

### China and Japan

The Soviets are deeply concerned by what they perceive as a quasi-alliance evolving between the United States and China, and they will seek to frustrate and to delay the emergence of a "Washington-Beijing-Tokyo axis" with links to NATO directed against Moscow. They will also cooperate with the Vietnamese who, although wary of Moscow's embrace, have become a junior partner in the Soviet effort to reduce US influence in Indochina and encircle and neutralize China. The present Soviet leaders developed the containment policy against China and built the forces as well as the alliance and diplomatic framework to support this policy. They are unlikely to abandon this policy for the extreme alternatives of either far-reaching concessions to placate Chinese demands or military measures to defeat or coerce the Chinese leaders.

### Third World

The Soviets believe that they have the legitimate right and the military strength to pursue an aggressive foreign policy in the Third World. In seeking to assert the USSR's status as a power with broad, global interests, they will attempt to:

- Create as well as to exploit opportunities stemming from regional conflicts to enlarge Soviet influence, using military assistance and Soviet military power.
- Reduce Western—particularly US—influence by expanding the USSR's presence and encouraging anti-Western regimes and elements.

<sup>2</sup> We are unable to judge the precise limit of Soviet tolerance, and we doubt that the Soviet leaders themselves have as yet determined this limit.

- Augment Soviet strategic reach and counter Western military activity.
- Increase hard currency earnings as well as to promote political and strategic interests through arms sales.

More specifically, in the Middle East, Moscow seeks to:

- Preserve and exploit the strategic advantages it holds by virtue of geography, potentially reinforced by the Soviet military presence in Afghanistan, and by Soviet influence in Syria, Libya, and South Yemen.
- Encourage a shift of Persian Gulf states from a pro-Western to a more "nonaligned," and eventually pro-Soviet position, while at the same time helping "national liberation" movements that might seize power in the Gulf. In this context the Soviets have attempted also to improve relations with the conservative, pro-Western governments in the Gulf region.
- Improve Soviet access to and ultimately establish control over Persian Gulf oil, with all that would mean for enhanced Soviet leverage over Western Europe and Japan.

In attempting to realize these objectives, Soviet policymakers also have to take into account more fundamental concerns. First, they must approach with care any move that could lead to a direct military clash with the United States. Second, they must assess the impact of actions in the Gulf on their own global strategic, political, and economic interests. And, third, they must judge how they wish to affect—and to be seen affecting—Gulf oil supplies to the West. Such considerations might not deter the Soviet leaders if they were confronted by strategic opportunities or severe challenges in the Gulf region. Soviet behavior during the Iran-Iraq war and the evolution of its diplomatic position on Gulf security suggest, however, that Moscow seems more immediately interested in averting a major US military buildup in the region and in advancing Soviet claims for recognition as a legitimate coguarantor of Gulf security than in risking the employment of its military forces.

Moscow's present goals in Afghanistan—not easily realized—are to achieve political control and military consolidation while avoiding the introduction of major additional forces. The Soviets seek to establish conditions for political domination and a continued military presence in the country; the scale and nature of any postinsurgency military presence will reflect their broader regional objectives. Moscow will increase pressure on Pakistan through military threats, border incidents, subversion, and possibly strengthened ties with India in an effort to persuade Islamabad to accommodate Soviet objectives in Afghanistan.

With respect to Iran and Iraq, the Soviets will seek an outcome of their current war that leaves both dependent to some extent on the USSR, and that does not foreclose the possible further acquisition of oil from Iraq by the USSR and other Soviet Bloc countries. The Soviets will attempt to maintain Iraqi dependency on the USSR for arms supply, and they will seek in the near term to prevent any improvement in US-Iranian relations and to influence the Khomeini succession in a way that might lead a follow-on regime to adopt a posture more favorable to Soviet interests.

There will clearly be continuing opportunities in Africa for the USSR and its proxies. The most acute problems Soviet and Soviet proxy actions in Africa may create for the United States in the next several years could be:

- A substantial increase in Soviet backing for or involvement in the insurgency in Namibia.
- Extension of the USSR's influence elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa by providing military assistance—either directly or through the Cubans—to Soviet clients in order to develop or exploit internal instability in Zaire, Zambia, or Zimbabwe, or by collaborating to further Libyan aims in Chad and Sudan.
- Soviet provision of significantly larger numbers of advisers and equipment, or more support for the Cubans, in order to prop up Moscow-oriented regimes in Angola, Mozambique, or Ethiopia if they are threatened by dissident elements or faced by internal collapse.
- Military conflict between a Soviet client regime and a third country—with or without Soviet encouragement. (For example, Ethiopian encroachment on Somalia, or—less likely—clashes between Angola or Mozambique and South Africa related to Namibia or bilateral disputes.)

Inspired by the success of revolution in Nicaragua in 1979, the USSR is actively seeking to promote insurgencies in Central America aimed at bringing anti-US leftist regimes to power. Cuba is an increasingly important outpost for Moscow in the hemisphere, as well as a surrogate in the Middle East and Africa. The Soviets will continue to use Cuban airfields and other facilities and to underwrite the Cuban economy. Beginning in 1980 the USSR has actively been encouraging and facilitating Castro's return to militancy in Central America. The Soviets seek to maintain a degree of revolutionary momentum in the region, to undermine US interests, and to keep the Atlantic Alliance embroiled over how to deal with Soviet- and Cuban-sponsored instability and civil war thrust on friendly governments in Central America.

## Domestic Considerations

Several sources of domestic pressure and vulnerability in the Soviet system could force difficult choices on the leaders in the 1980s. These include deteriorating economic performance, a growing possibility of social instability and internal dissidence, and a change in leadership. None of these factors alone will necessarily alter Soviet behavior. Their interaction could, however, lead to significant changes in foreign policy; it certainly will make this policy less predictable.

As the USSR begins its 11th Five-Year Plan, economic prospects are gloomier than at any time since Stalin's death, and there is a strong possibility the economic situation will get progressively worse in the second half of the decade. Annual increments to national output even in the early 1980s will be insufficient to avoid having to make choices among the competing demands for investment, consumption, the cost of empire, and continued growth in defense spending. As Soviet leaders survey what they regard as a hostile external environment, however, foreign policy and military requirements are likely to dominate their policy calculations. They will therefore try to maintain high defense spending, promote higher productivity and assure domestic control by appeals to a more extreme patriotism, and, if social instability arising from consumer dissatisfaction or ethnic tensions makes it necessary, by resorting to repressive measures.<sup>3</sup>

It is difficult to assess what impact the forthcoming leadership succession may have on Soviet policy, particularly since the environment in which a new top leadership has to act will probably be more important than the individual views of its members. If the new leaders believe the global "correlation of forces" to be favorable, especially if they are less impressed than Brezhnev with US military might and more impressed with their own, they might employ military power even more assertively in pursuit of their global ambitions. Greater caution in foreign policy could result, however, from the pinch of internal economic difficulties and popular dissatisfaction. On balance, although the policies of the new leadership cannot be confidently predicted with any precision, we believe that they will display general continuity with those of the Brezhnev era.

<sup>3</sup> The Special Assistant to the Secretary of the Treasury (National Security) notes that investment, labor, and consumption shortfalls will still be likely, and believes that these will place constraints on major Soviet foreign policy initiatives.