General Secretary [Mikhail] Gorbachev's policies have increased the potential for instability in Eastern Europe. But they have also expanded the scope for diversity and experimentation, affording new possibilities for evolutionary reform in the region.

Gorbachev has set an ambitious agenda for Eastern Europe. His aims are to secure East European support for the Soviet modernization drive, promote broader Soviet foreign policy objectives through closer Warsaw Pact coordination, and stimulate a deeper process of economic and political regeneration in the region. Aware of the region's diversity, he has set general guidelines for reform rather than detailed plans. But he faces East European realities-severe economic problems, aging leaderships, and mounting social discontent-that conflict with Soviet objectives. Soviet policy under Gorbachev has sought to balance the competing objectives of encouraging change and promoting stability. Although Gorbachev has avoided a high-risk strategy of forcing change on these fragile political systems, continuing Soviet pressure, as well as the example of the Soviet reform program, has introduced new tensions into the region....

1. Not since the early [Nikita] Khrushchev years have policy changes in the USSR had so profound an impact on Eastern Europe as those now being pushed by General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev. These new winds blowing from Moscow, as well as serious internal economic and political dilemmas, have ushered in an era of considerable uncertainty-and potentially of significant change-in Eastern Europe. With the impending passing of an entire generation of leaders in the region, Soviet policy over the next three to five years is likely to be decisive in determining the scope and direction of change and, ultimately, the stability of the Soviet empire....

56. Gorbachev's agenda of reform, openness, and experimentation is congruent with US goals of promoting pluralism in Eastern Europe and greater independence from Moscow. This endgame is not what Gorbachev has in mind, of course; but in encouraging change as the key to dynamism and ultimately to greater viability, he has sanctioned diversity and expanded the limits of the thinkable in Eastern Europe.

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