A Failed Empire

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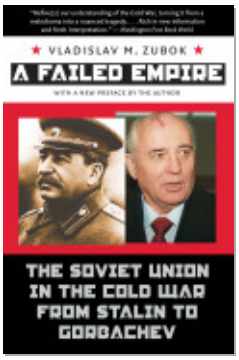

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(CHAPTER 9)

THE OLD GUARD'S EXIT, 1980–1987

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The quota of interventions abroad has been exhausted.
—Andropov, fall 1980

The superpower confrontation of the early 1980s had a feeling of déjà vu. The rampant arms race, covert battles between secret services around the world, and fierce psychological warfare gave the situation a resemblance to the last years of Stalin's rule. The Reagan administration sought to roll back the Soviet empire, just as the Truman and Eisenhower administrations had done in the early 1950s. Some in the West forecast a dangerous decade and predicted that "the Soviet Union would risk nuclear war if her leaders believed the integrity of the empire to be at stake."[1]

This chapter focuses on the behavior of the Kremlin in the face of growing confrontation. The last years of Brezhnev's rule and the next two years of interregnum under the leadership of Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko were times of deterioration of the political and economic foundations of Soviet power. Western analysts, including those in the CIA, suspected that the Soviet economy was in bad shape and that the Soviet hold on Central Europe was shaky. But they did not imagine how bad the situation really was. The Solidarity movement in Poland in 1980 and 1981 and the growing dependency of other countries of the Warsaw Pact on the economic and financial power of Western capitalist countries gravely undermined the empire built by Stalin. The Kremlin rulers lacked the political will and resourcefulness to stop the erosion of Soviet power. At no point from 1981 to 1985 did the Kremlin leaders contemplate anything resembling preparations for an ultimate showdown with the West.[2]

POLAND: A CORNERSTONE CRACKS

In August 1980, labor strikes in Gdansk escalated into a crisis of the Communist regime in Poland. The phenomenal success of Solidarity, especially the impressive coordination and efficiency of this seemingly chaotic democratic movement,

led the Kremlin rulers and some advisers to suspect a "hidden hand," perhaps a well-trained "underground" funded from abroad and leading the revolution. Even worse from the Soviet perspective was the enormous international outpouring of support for these "anti-socialist forces." The KGB reported on the ties between Solidarity, the Polish Catholic Church, the Vatican, and Polish émigré organizations in the United States. Zbigniew Brzezinski and Pope John Paul II were named as the most dangerous instigators of Polish events.[3]

The Polish revolution spilled over, politically and psychologically, into the borderlands of the Soviet Union itself. In 1981, the KGB reported about mass strikes at some plants and factories in the Baltic republics, especially in Latvia, that were influenced by the Polish workers' movement.[4] In the spring of 1981, the KGB's Yuri Andropov informed the Politburo that "the Polish events are influencing the situation in the western provinces of our country, particularly in Belorussia." Soviet authorities slammed down a new iron curtain on the borders with Poland, closing tourism, student programs, and cultural exchange with this "fraternal" country. Subscription to Polish periodicals was suspended and Polish radio was jammed.[5]

Many people in the Soviet Union and around the world nervously waited for the next Kremlin reaction to the Solidarity movement. Some foreign policy experts in the Central Committee in Moscow and members of the National Security Council in Washington feared a familiar prospect: a Soviet invasion as in Czechoslovakia in 1968. Leonid Brezhnev, however, was not ready for such a step. Even in his dotage, the increasingly detached and irritated general secretary did not want to give his consent to another military operation, least of all against the Poles.[6]

Brezhnev's determination to avoid intervention in Poland was known only in a very narrow circle. By that time, the general secretary had virtually disappeared from the Kremlin, becoming a recluse in his state dacha. In his absence, the troika of Andropov, Ustinov, and Gromyko monopolized security affairs. Mikhail Suslov also played a visible role—he became the head of the special Politburo commission on the Polish crisis. Of those people, Minister of Defense Dmitry Ustinov had the greatest reason to push for military intervention: Poland had to be secured as a crucial link between the Group of Soviet Forces in Germany and the Soviet Union. The Warsaw Pact made no sense without Poland; indeed, its headquarters was near the Polish city of Legnice. There were several instances when Ustinov's subordinates, chiefly Marshal Viktor Kulikov, commander in chief of the united forces of the Warsaw Pact, advocated "saving" Poland at any cost.[7]

KGB chairman Yuri Andropov was a pivotal figure in the Politburo's decision-

making circle. He had been the ardent advocate of Soviet invasions of Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Afghanistan. In the fall of 1980, however, Andropov said to a trusted subordinate: "The quota of interventions abroad has been exhausted."[8] Andropov had already begun to position himself as Brezhnev's heir apparent and realized that another military intervention would be a disastrous career move. The invasion of Poland would have killed European détente, still on the ropes after the Afghan intervention. It might even have meant the collapse of the entire Helsinki process, the biggest achievement of Soviet statesmanship of the 1970s.

Even Suslov concluded it would be preferable to admit a few social democrats into Poland's Communist government than to use Soviet troops.[9] This, however, did not mean that the Kremlin gave up on Poland. The Politburo began to lean toward "the Pilsudski scenario," meaning a nationalist-militarist dictatorship reminiscent of the regime established by Jozef Pilsudski in the 1920s. Among the candidates for "Communist Pilsudski" were the Polish first secretary, Stanyslaw Kania, and the head of the Polish armed forces, General Wojciech Jaruzelski. In December 1980, Brezhnev told Kania from a prepared script: "If we see that you are being overthrown," he said, "then we would go in." The whole meeting served the purpose of intimidating Kania with the prospect of Soviet invasion to make him take drastic steps against the Solidarity movement.[10] But the Polish party leader lacked the resolve and character needed to carry out the proposed coup. Leonid Zamyatin, a highly placed Soviet propaganda official, came back from Warsaw with the impression that the Polish party leader had become a nervous wreck and had taken refuge in drink.[11] Thus the way to force the Polish leadership into action was to make him and his entire entourage believe that a Soviet invasion was imminent. To facilitate this, a large-scale military exercise of the Warsaw Pact armies inside Poland and near its borders was organized to coincide with the meeting. This was a carbon copy of the Soviet actions in Czechoslovakia before the Kremlin had decided to invade.[12]

Twelve years earlier, the object of pressure had been Alexander Dubcek. Now it was Kania. In March 1981, Kania and Jaruzelski came to Moscow again, and Ustinov dressed down the Polish party leader like a schoolboy. "Comrade Kania," he shouted, "our patience is lost! We have people in Poland on whom we can rely. We give you two weeks' ultimatum to restore order in Poland!"[13] Soon after the Polish delegation left Moscow, Warsaw Pact forces and the KGB began a full-scale campaign of intimidation of Poland, including large-scale military exercises that lasted three weeks. Ustinov's threat, however, was empty: the Kremlin leaders were not planning an invasion.[14]

During the summer of 1981 the Soviets did their best to find and organize "healthy forces" inside the Polish Communist Party that could be an additional

source of pressure on Kania and Jaruzelski. What they found disheartened them: hard-line Communists in Poland were a vanishing breed, replaced by educated and reform-minded people, among them journalist Myaczyslaw Rakowski, whom many in the Kremlin viewed as a dangerous "rightist revisionist." The Communist leaders of the GDR, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia, and especially Rumania's leader, Nicolae Ceaucescu, were even more fearful of these developments. At their meetings with Brezhnev at his summer resort in the Crimea, they began to demand military intervention. Brezhnev, however, adamantly refused.[15]

Brezhnev still believed he could resuscitate détente in Europe and abhorred the prospect of invasion of Poland. In addition, he and other Soviet leaders were deterred by the economic dimensions of the Polish crisis. Fighting with the Poles would be disastrous enough, but equally calamitous would be the economic costs of invasion and occupation. Chernyaev commented in his journal in August 1981: "Brezhnev's approach is the only wise approach. We simply cannot afford to keep Poland as our economic dependent."[16] Indeed, the Kremlin did not have the surplus resources to pay for its rapidly expanding commitments. By the 1980s, the Soviet Union assisted or maintained sixty-nine Soviet satellites and clients around the world. Beginning in the second half of the 1960s, over a quarter of the Soviet GDP was spent every year on financing the military buildup. The regime routinely filled holes in the budget by borrowing from people's savings, selling vodka, and secretly amassing a budget deficit. Another crucial source of revenue was the export of oil and gas: from 1971 to 1980, the Soviet Union increased its oil and gas production sevenfold and eightfold, respectively, a rate matched by the ever-increasing Soviet deliveries of heavily subsidized oil and gas to Warsaw Pact countries.[17] After 1974, when world prices of oil quadrupled, Moscow was forced to double the price of Soviet oil delivered to its Warsaw Pact allies, compensating them through ten-year, low-interest loans. Soviet economic interests demanded reduction of such generous aid to Central European regimes, but the interests of the "socialist empire" and bloc commitments dictated instead further increases in this aid.[18]

The economic sanctions placed on the USSR by President Carter after the invasion of Afghanistan exacerbated economic tensions inside the Soviet bloc. No longer could the Soviet leaders force their client Central European regimes to share the economic burdens of the renewed Cold War. At a meeting in Moscow in February 1980, the party secretaries of these countries informed their Kremlin comrades that they could not afford any reduction of economic and trade relations with the West. The economic dependency of Warsaw Pact member states on NATO countries, previously the problem of only the GDR, had now become the case for Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Rumania, and Bulgaria as well.[19] Essentially,

the Communist allies told Moscow that plugging the holes in the "socialist community" would be exclusively a Soviet expense.

The Polish crisis painfully revealed the precarious position of the Soviet Union as the only economic and financial donor to the Eastern bloc. During the year after August 1980, the Soviets pumped four billion dollars into Poland, without any noticeable results. The Polish economy kept declining and anti-Soviet sentiment in Poland kept rising. Meanwhile, food shortages in the USSR continued and even worsened. Soviet agriculture, despite gargantuan state investments, sputtered, and the centralized system of food distribution suffered bottlenecks. Heavily subsidized bread, butter, oil, and meat disappeared from stores into the flourishing "black market" and sold at inflated prices. There were growing food lines, even in privileged Moscow. In this situation, the Kremlin had to suffer the ultimate embarrassment of allowing large-scale Western assistance to save the Poles from starvation. In November 1980, Brezhnev informed the leaders of the GDR, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Bulgaria that the Soviet Union would have to cut supplies of oil to these countries, "with a view of selling this oil on the capitalist market and transferring the gained hard currency" to help the Polish regime.[20] It became obvious that in the event of military invasion of Poland by Warsaw Pact forces, the USSR would have to pick up the tab of the occupation costs. And nobody could predict the impact of Western economic sanctions on the COMECON members.

On October 18, Prime Minister General Wojciech Jaruzelski took over the party leadership from Kania. Jaruzelski represented Moscow's last hope. Contrary to many hostile depictions in the West and inside Poland, Jaruzelski was not the obedient tool in Soviet hands. Deported to Siberia by the NKVD after the partition of Poland in 1939, he became an officer in the Soviet-sponsored Polish Army during World War II. Jaruzelski spoke Russian fluently and grew up believing in the primary importance of Poland's security. He also convinced himself that only the Soviet Union could guarantee Polish territorial integrity. For months, Jaruzelski resisted Soviet pressure to impose martial law. By November 1981, however, he had to give in: Poland teetered on the economic brink, with the imminent prospect of a harsh winter without enough fuel and food. Simultaneously, the moderate leaders of Solidarity began to lose ground to more radical and impatient forces demanding an end to the Communist Party regime in Poland. Jaruzelski began secret preparations for a coup. Still, he held the Kremlin in suspense. After a last-minute meeting with Jaruzelski, Nikolai Baibakov reported to the Politburo that the general had been transformed into a neurotic, "uncertain of his capacity to do anything." Jaruzelski repeatedly warned Moscow that the Polish Catholic Church might join forces with Solidarity and "declare a holy

war against the Polish authorities." The general ended up by asking for emergency economic assistance and the provision of Soviet troops as the backup force for the Polish army and police.[21] Jaruzelski was trying to turn the tables on his blackmailers in the Kremlin.

At an emergency Politburo meeting, Andropov took the floor. The KGB chief warned that Jaruzelski wanted to "blame everything" on the Soviet Union. Andropov firmly concluded that the Soviet Union could not afford a military intervention under any circumstances, even if the Solidarity movement came to power. "We must be concerned above all with our own country and the strengthening of the Soviet Union," the speaker concluded. "That is our paramount guideline." Andropov knew that food shortages threatened to engulf even Moscow and Leningrad and was concerned about domestic stability. The revolt of Polish workers made Andropov wonder if Soviet workers would stay patient forever.[22]

The KGB chairman came close not only to rejecting the so-called Brezhnev Doctrine but also to revising the expansive version of the revolutionary-imperial paradigm that the Kremlin had been practicing. Matthew Ouimet correctly concluded that the Polish Solidarity crisis "left the Brezhnev Doctrine of Limited Sovereignty very much like the man after whom it had been named. Both had become mannequins propped up by a fading imperial power desperate to preserve its role in world affairs. . . . Though still unaware of their accomplishment, the Polish people had forced the Soviet colossus into an imperial retreat from which it would never recover."[23]

Jaruzelski's imposition of martial law on December 13, 1981, removed the immediate challenge to the Warsaw Pact. But the Polish crisis was not at an end; it was symptomatic of the growing structural crisis of the entire bloc. The costs of keeping control of Poland remained high. Despite Soviet protestations, Jaruzelski received 1.5 billion dollars' worth of economic aid in 1981. Vast amounts of grain, butter, and meat went to Poland and immediately vanished there, like a drop in a bottomless pit. Polish industries also received vitally needed raw materials, including iron ore, nonferrous metals, tires, and, most important of all, Soviet oil.[24]

The Polish crisis was the most severe in the series of grave crises that began to buffet the Kremlin in the early 1980s. For the first time since the blooming of European détente and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, Soviet leaders clearly realized the limits of Soviet power, even in the areas adjacent to Soviet borders. Despite its approaching senility, the Kremlin Old Guard was poised on the brink of a fundamental reappraisal of Soviet security interests and foreign policy. However, these men did not take a final step in this direction. They looked backward, not forward, in the search for solutions.

POLITBURO AND REAGAN

The secret debates on Poland in the Kremlin overlapped with another painful discussion: how to deal with the provocative and bellicose behavior of the Reagan administration toward the Soviet Union. Reagan knew very well from Colonel Ryszard Kuklinski, an American spy in the Warsaw Pact military command, about the Soviet pressure on Poland. He took the imposition of martial law as a personal insult.[25] The president was determined to punish the Soviet Union to the maximum and to maximize Soviet economic problems. After December 1981, Reagan pushed Western European countries to impose an embargo on the construction of the transcontinental oil pipeline, the "Urengoi–Western Europe," a project pivotal for increasing Soviet oil revenues in the future. In the end, West Germany and France failed to support the U.S. sanctions, and, as a Russian scholar commented, "Reagan lost the first round against the USSR." The construction of the pipeline, however, was delayed by a few critical years. Simultaneously, CIA director William Casey and Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger sanctioned a number of highly provocative secret operations, including military exercises in the vicinity of Soviet borders and Soviet naval bases, to apply pressure on the Kremlin. The administration lobbied Saudi Arabia and the OPEC countries for a sharp reduction of world oil prices. These revelations of the administration's hard-liners, despite their tendency for exaggeration, reveal that the American pressure on the Soviets was at a level not seen since the 1950s.[26]

For Andropov, the actions of the Reagan administration began to form an ominous pattern. In a mirror image of U.S. fears at that time, the KGB chief began to warn that "the administration in Washington is attempting to push the whole development of international relations on to a dangerous path intensifying the danger of war."[27] In May 1981, Andropov invited Brezhnev to a closed session of KGB officers and, in his presence, told the surprised audience that the United States was making preparations for a surprise nuclear attack on the USSR. He declared that, from now on, a new strategic early warning system was to be created, on the basis of cooperation between the KGB and the GRU (Soviet military intelligence). The new intelligence operation was named RYAN—after the first letters of the Russian words *raketno-yadernoye napadeniie* (nuclear-missile attack). The skeptical intelligence professionals wrongly presumed this preposterous idea came from Ustinov and the military. Since the 1970s, the military no longer had assumed that an American attack might take place unexpectedly at any moment. Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev recalled later that he regarded the situation as "difficult, but not crisis-ridden." In fact, the RYAN idea was An-

dropov's own. Vigilant to the point of being somewhat neurotic, the KGB chief had old visions of "Barbarossa" and the early Cold War reawakened.[28]

Andropov hoped to shake up the Soviet bureaucracy and society, which were stagnant. Brezhnev, however, was against any radical departures. The general secretary repeated the détente mantra, expecting that sooner or later the Americans would reciprocate. Many in the Politburo hoped that Reagan would return to "realist" grounds of cooperating with the Soviet Union. Hoping to mollify Western public opinion with symbolic gestures, Brezhnev gave a speech in June 1982 renouncing the first use of nuclear weapons. Soon after, Ustinov publicly declared that the Soviet Union "does not count on achieving victory in a nuclear war."[29] This meant a de facto abandonment of the offensive military doctrine of the 1960s.

On November 10, 1982, Leonid Brezhnev died in his sleep. Almost immediately, the Politburo announced that sixty-eight-year-old Yuri Andropov was the new Soviet leader. For the first time, the Kremlin leadership managed to avoid the intrigues and power struggles that had crippled it during previous successions. Cold War tensions must have contributed to this outcome, but there was also the fact that the KGB leader enjoyed the full support of Ustinov and Gromyko. Tragically for Andropov, by that time he was already in the final phase of terminal kidney disease.

Andropov viewed Reagan with unrelenting suspicion. When Reagan sent a handwritten letter to Brezhnev proposing to talk about nuclear disarmament, Andropov and other members of the ruling troika in the Kremlin dismissed this as a phony gesture. Meanwhile U.S.-Soviet relations plunged to another low. On March 8, 1983, the U.S. president spoke of the Soviet Union as "an evil empire," breaking with the rhetoric of the previous administrations, which, at least publicly, had avoided challenging the legitimacy of the Soviet regime. On March 23, 1983, Reagan dropped another bombshell, announcing the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), with the goal of making all nuclear weapons "impotent and obsolete." For the Soviet military and the Kremlin leaders, it sounded like a threat to neutralize all Soviet ballistic missiles and make the USSR vulnerable to an American first strike. Adding to Reagan's "evil empire" speech and SDI initiative, U.S. military and intelligence activities around the world deepened Andropov's insecurity. In April and May 1983, the American Pacific Fleet, during a massive exercise, probed for gaps in Soviet ocean surveillance and early warning systems. The Americans also practiced simulated assaults on Soviet strategic submarines with nuclear missiles on board. The Kremlin responded with its own intense series of global military exercises, including, for the first time, a general re-

hearsal for mobilization and interaction with strategic nuclear forces. Against this backdrop, Operation RYAN continued unabated during 1983; all KGB agents abroad received "permanent operational assignments to uncover NATO preparations for a nuclear missile attack on the USSR."[30]

In hindsight, some veterans of the Reagan administration viewed this as the source and origin of subsequent changes in Soviet behavior. The CIA's Robert Gates assumes that "SDI did have a significant impact on the Soviet political and military leadership" by presenting it with the prospect of "an incredibly expensive new arms race in an area in which the USSR could hardly hope to compete effectively." Gates believes that "the idea of SDI" convinced "even some of the conservative members of the Soviet leadership that major internal changes were needed in the USSR."[31] In reality, Soviet reaction was far more ambiguous. There was no feeling of impending doom in political and military circles. A panel of scientists and experts on arms control negotiations, headed by physicist Evgeny Velikhov, concluded that Reagan's SDI initiative probably did not require immediate countermeasures. But this conclusion did not end the debate. The Soviet military realized that, in the longer run, SDI could boost the development of new military technologies. Ustinov took an energetic interest in the SDI problem. Together with the president of the Academy of Science, Anatoly Alexandrov, he started planning a long-term effort in response to Reagan's initiative. Some people inside the military-industrial complex, including academician Gersh Budker and missile designer Vladimir Chelomei, came up with proposals for Soviet versions of SDI.[32]

The Reagan administration sold SDI to the Congress by arguing that in two years this initiative would force the Soviets to start talks on nuclear disarmament on U.S. terms. At first, however, quite the opposite happened. Only days into office, Andropov launched a campaign against corruption, for the restoration of discipline, and for patriotic vigilance.[33] Also, ominously, he made "a final warning" to those inside the Soviet Union who "consciously or unconsciously served as a mouthpiece for foreign interests by spreading all kinds of gossip and rumors." As often had occurred in the past, the policy of toughness and vigilance evoked a broad positive response among elites and the public. Mikhail Gorbachev, who later expressed his disapproval of Andropov's hard line, supported it wholeheartedly in 1983. The military, KGB officers, and many in the diplomatic corps applauded Andropov's campaign. Years later, a sizable group of Russians, perhaps even a majority, continued to look back at Andropov with respect and nostalgia.[34]

Andropov's deep mistrust of Reagan became entrenched, fortified by emotions—contempt, animosity, and a tinge of fear. Anatoly Dobrynin heard him

saying: "Reagan is unpredictable. You should expect anything from him." On July 11, 1983, the U.S. president sent a handwritten personal message to Andropov. He assured the general secretary that the government and the people of the United States were dedicated to "the course of peace" and "the elimination of the nuclear threat." Reagan concluded: "Historically our predecessors have made better progress when communicating has been private and candid. If you wish to engage in such communication you will find me ready." In a narrow circle, the general secretary interpreted this offer as "duplicity and desire to disorient the Soviet leadership." Andropov responded with a polite and formal letter that ignored Reagan's offer.[35]

The more the pressure from Washington, the tougher the Politburo's stand. The war of nerves reached its climax in the KAL-007 affair in September 1983. When a Korean Airlines' Boeing-747 strayed over the Kurile Islands, an important part of the Soviet defense perimeter, on September 1, the nervous air-defense command mistook it for an American spy plane and ordered Soviet jet fighters to destroy it. Misled by Ustinov and the military, who promised him that the "Americans would never find out about it," Andropov, already hospitalized with kidney failure, decided to publicly deny the tragic accident. Reagan and Secretary of State George Shultz felt genuinely appalled at the loss of life and the Kremlin's prevarications. Yet many others in the CIA, the Pentagon, and the media were determined to score a propaganda victory over the "evil empire." Soviet denials of the truth provided them with a golden opportunity to unmask the Soviets before the entire world as callous murderers of innocent civilians.[36]

The worldwide hate campaign against the Soviet Union orchestrated by the Reagan administration was the last straw for Andropov, at that time a bitter and dying man. On September 29, *Pravda* published his "farewell address" on Soviet-American relations. Andropov informed the Soviet people that the Reagan administration was set upon a dangerous course "to ensure a dominating position in the world for the United States of America." He denounced the Korean airliner incident as a "sophisticated provocation organized by U.S. special services" and blamed Reagan personally for using propaganda methods "inadmissible in state-to-state relations." Then came the punch line: "If anybody ever had any illusions about the possibility of an evolution to the better in the policy of the present American administration, these illusions are completely dispelled now."[37]

The last months of 1983 seemed to have corroborated Andropov's grim verdict. In late September, Soviet satellite surveillance systems repeatedly reported that a massive U.S. ICBM launch had taken place. The alarms turned out to be false, but the tension grew.[38] In late October, U.S. marines invaded Grenada in the Caribbean Sea and deposed the Marxist government of Maurice Bishop. In

November, NATO forces conducted the Able Archer exercises; to Soviet intelligence sources, this looked almost indistinguishable from preparations for an imminent attack. Also, despite the enormous antiwar demonstrations and the deep divide in Western public opinion, the first Pershing missiles began to arrive on American bases in West Germany. On December 1, the Kremlin sent repeated warnings to the allied governments of the Warsaw Treaty Organization. The Soviet leadership informed them about a decision to deploy atomic submarines with nuclear missiles along U.S. coasts in response to "the increased nuclear threat to the Soviet Union." Without such measures, read the text, "the adventurers from Washington might easily be tempted to make a first nuclear strike with the goal of prevailing in a limited nuclear war. The disruption of the military balance in their favor could prompt the ruling circles in the USA to undertake a sudden attack on the socialist countries." The American invasion of Grenada was cited as proof that "American imperialism can risk unleashing a full-scale war for the sake of its venal class interests."[39]

The Kremlin's discourse on international relations seemed to hark back to the mid-1960s. Andropov's anger and frustration, as well as his terminal illness, colored this new alarmist rhetoric. Another Soviet message to Warsaw Pact leaders stated that Washington "has declared a 'crusade' against socialism as a social system. Those who have now ordered to deploy new nuclear weapons on our threshold link their practical policies to this reckless undertaking."[40] Reflecting the new foreign policy course, Soviet negotiators walked out of the Geneva arms control talks on November 23, 1983. Only at the last minute did Foreign Ministry diplomats and General Staff experts manage to convince the Politburo to leave the door open for a Soviet return to the negotiating table.[41] On December 16, Andropov told a Soviet arms control negotiator who came to visit him in a hospital that the Soviet Union and the United States were on a collision course for the first time since the Cuban missile crisis. He complained that the Reagan administration was doing everything to bleed the Soviets in Afghanistan and was not interested in Soviet withdrawal there. "If we begin to make concessions," the dying leader darkly mused, "defeat would be inevitable."[42]

Meanwhile, alerted to the tension he provoked by intelligence signals and the Western peace movement, Reagan decided it was now time to talk with the Soviets. Convinced that the Kremlin might share his interest in avoiding nuclear war, he made a conciliatory speech in January 1984 meant to be "an initiative to end the Cold War." Secretary of State George Schulz, Robert McFarlane, Jack Matlock, and other Reagan advisers disagreed with the CIA's Casey and the Pentagon's Weinberger, who wanted to use the war in Afghanistan to undermine the Soviet system. The Reagan advisers group thought that American policy

should not challenge the legitimacy of the Soviet system, nor should it pursue military superiority and pressure the Soviet system into collapse. They worked out a four-part framework for future talks, including the renunciation of the use of force in international disputes, respect for human rights, open exchange of information and ideas, and reduction of armaments.[43] The embittered Moscow leadership, however, continued to believe that the administration was the hostage of the "bleeders" who wanted to beat the Soviet Union into the ground. They refused to notice the change in the White House. In September 1984, the same month he agreed to meet with Reagan for the first time since the Korean airliner incident, Gromyko told his assistants: "Reagan and his team have taken up as their aim to destroy the socialist camp. Fascism is on the march in America."[44]

Apparently, the Soviet foreign minister believed that Soviet-American relations had sunk to the lows of the early 1950s. Still, he was convinced that state interests required a dialogue with the American leader. Dobrynin concluded that "the impact of Reagan's hard-line policy on the internal debates in the Kremlin and on the evolution of the Soviet leadership was exactly the opposite from the one intended by Washington. It strengthened those in the Politburo, the Central Committee, and the security apparatus who had been pressing for a mirror-image of Reagan's own policy."[45] The author, then a junior researcher at the Institute of U.S. and Canada Studies in Moscow, could observe that Andropov's tough response to Reagan produced grave concern among experts. At the same time, American rhetoric in the anti-Soviet crusade irritated and angered even those who normally advocated improvement of U.S.-Soviet relations. Among the public, many began to wonder: "Will there be a war? When will it come?"[46]

Andropov's influence on Soviet international behavior was a bizarre mixture of grim realism and worst-case mentality, aggravated by his long association with the KGB. Until his health collapsed, he had enough will and vision to make his mark on foreign policy. His death on February 9, 1984, however, cut all his undertakings short. His successor, another septuagenarian, Konstantin Chernenko, was a walking mummy, who suffered from severe asthma and lived on tranquilizers. During Chernenko's brief tenure, Ustinov and Gromyko retained a virtual monopoly in military and foreign affairs. Nostalgia for Stalinist times began to surface in Kremlin deliberations. The Politburo even found time to readmit Vyacheslav Molotov to the Communist Party. Ustinov sharply criticized Khrushchev's policy of de-Stalinization, blaming Soviet international problems on it, and proposed to change the name of Volgograd back to Stalingrad. Some Kremlin elders looked nostalgically back to the 1940s when the Soviet Union were still a fortress country and the Soviet people had endured endless sacrifices and hardships.[47]

The General Staff was not unanimous on an adequate response to Reagan. Some believed it would require an increase in the military budget of 14 percent. Direct military expenses, that is, the cost of the armed forces and armaments, already amounted to 61 billion rubles and accounted for 8 percent of the GNP and 16.5 percent of the state budget. Total defense-related expenses, including indirect costs, as Brezhnev admitted in 1976, were two-and-one-half-times higher, around 40 percent of the budget. This figure was higher than in 1940, when the Soviet Union was preparing for World War II. Simple calculation shows that, in a time of a stagnant GNP, any drastic rise in defense expenditures would have necessitated drastic cuts in living standards and an end to Brezhnev's "live and let live" deal with the Soviet people.[48]

Soviet evidence does not indicate any debates in the Politburo on increasing military expenditures. The head of the Soviet General Staff, Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov, attempted to start a debate at the Defense Council. He criticized the stagnation in the military-industrial complex, which was controlled by Ustinov. In his opinion, there was too much inefficiency and too many costly mammoth projects and a suicidal penchant to pursue the United States in the arms race. Instead of debate, Ustinov dismissed Ogarkov, for a long time a thorn in his side. The Kremlin leaders also ignored the proposals borrowed from the 1940s, including a shift to a six-day working schedule and creation of a special "defense fund" to raise money for rearmament programs.[49] New realities discouraged the return to the old methods of mobilization. The society had irrevocably changed since the 1940s. The huge human resources Stalin had mobilized and squandered, those millions of the collectivized peasantry, young workers, and enthusiastic party cadres, were no longer available. There was little idealism among the elite educated youth; frustrated consumerism, cynicism, and pleasure-seeking took its place. Andropov's police measures to enforce discipline and a work ethic among blue-collar workers and the white-collar class quickly degenerated into a farce. Even the Politburo leaders were not the same as forty years earlier: most of them, because of their old age, began to think more about their health, reduction of their workload, and retirement perks than about the preservation of Soviet power. Konstantin Chernenko, Vladimir Scherbitsky, Dinmuhammad Kunaev, Nikolai Tikhonov, and other "elders" quietly resisted younger cadres brought to the Politburo and the Secretariat by Andropov, among them Mikhail Gorbachev, Yegor Ligachev, and Nikolai Ryzhkov.[50]

The Politburo elders fiddled, but the Grim Reaper did not wait. Ustinov died on December 20, 1984, and on March 10, 1985, it was Chernenko's turn. While Chernenko's funeral was in preparation, there was a flurry of behind-the-scenes

bargaining. As a result, the last survivor of the ruling troika, Andrei Gromyko, cast his decisive vote for Mikhail Gorbachev, the youngest Politburo member. In return for his support, Gromyko soon became the head of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union, an elevated position of a largely ceremonial nature.[51] Enormous power finally fell from the loosened grip of Stalinist appointees into the hands of a new, relatively inexperienced leader. Unfortunately for Gorbachev, huge problems and complicated responsibilities almost overwhelmed the assets he inherited.

A NEW FACE IN THE KREMLIN

Since 1985, many Western observers and Gorbachev's closest assistants have compared Gorbachev to Nikita Khrushchev. Despite a huge difference in generational experience, education, and style, both of them, indeed, had many things in common: a peasant social background; a sincere, even feverish, reformist urge; unflagging optimism and ebullient self-confidence; moral revulsion against the Soviet past; and a belief in the common sense of the Soviet people. Both reformers believed in the Communist system and in the major tenets of Marxism-Leninism. Both men also had great psychological potential for innovation and were willing to take responsibility for plunging into the unknown.[52] William Taubman, the author of a celebrated biography of Nikita Khrushchev, notes that Gorbachev regarded Brezhnev's domestic legacy as a conservative reaction against Khrushchev's de-Stalinization. Gorbachev took it as his mission to pick up where Khrushchev had failed.[53]

Gorbachev's personality, however, was the opposite of that of the fiery Nikita. Gorbachev was a consensus builder, not a fighter. Khrushchev was impatient; he attacked a problem like a tank attacking enemy defenses. By contrast, Gorbachev procrastinated and wove cobwebs of bureaucratic politics (see chapter 10). Khrushchev repeatedly put his life and career at risk during Stalin's purges, the war, and the plot against Beria. Gorbachev never had a close brush with death and received the supreme power almost on a silver plate. Behind him was a "junior team" of candidate members of the Politburo recruited by Andropov, among them Ligachev, Ryzhkov, and the KGB's Viktor Chebrikov. The military also welcomed his candidacy. Gorbachev's potential rivals, chairman of the Council of Ministers Nikolai Tikhonov, Leningrad party secretary Grigory Romanov, and Moscow party secretary Viktor Grishin, soon resigned without protest. There was no attempt to form a provisional collective leadership to supervise the young and untried general secretary.[54]

This remarkably easy victory testified to the strength of Andropov's network.

The peripheral and lower-rank party elites, not to mention the public, applauded Gorbachev with genuine enthusiasm. After years of senile administration, they welcomed a young, energetic leader. But despite such broad support, Gorbachev remained apprehensive and cautious. In his acceptance remarks at the Politburo, he declared that "there is no need to change policy." The existing course was the "true, correct, and genuinely Leninist" one. Only later, at the Party Plenum in April and during a televised trip to Leningrad in May 1985, did he say what many wanted to hear. The Soviet Union was in need of "perestroika."[55] A synonym for the taboo word "reform," "perestroika" (restructuring) meant, at first, only the changes in economic management. Later it would become the code word for Gorbachev's rule, yet its meaning eluded definition and systematization. Gorbachev's domestic caution betrayed a lack of specific cures for the ailing Soviet economy and society. Just as Franklin Delano Roosevelt did with his New Deal, Gorbachev wanted to improve the existing system; yet he had no idea how to achieve this. He knew, however, that the goal was to save socialism from stagnation and imminent crisis. In his memoirs, Gorbachev writes almost apologetically about his first steps: "One could not, naturally, liberate one's consciousness at once from previous blinkers and chains." It took Gorbachev two years to "free his mind" and prepare himself for the necessary radical reforms.

Gorbachev's domestic policies during his first two years in power rarely diverged from the blueprints designed during Andropov's brief reign. The new general secretary believed that removing Brezhnev's corrupt cronies and inefficient bureaucrats would make the Soviet system run well. The Kremlin's special investigators and the KGB moved against the powerful corrupt networks in the central Soviet bureaucracies, as well as in the regional nomenklaturas of East Ukraine, South Russia, Kazakhstan, and Central Asia. Ligachev, with Gorbachev's approval, removed and reshuffled hundreds of regional party secretaries. Gorbachev also did not want to depart from the centralized planned economy. Years later, he explained that he had first wanted to use the existing state and party mechanisms for industrial modernization and only after that was accomplished, in the early 1990s, "prepare the conditions for a radical economic reform." The program of conservative modernization consisted of two parts. First, it stipulated almost doubling investment in heavy industry, largely through deficit financing. Under the wishful slogan of "acceleration," the Politburo planned to increase industrial production by over 20 percent in fifteen years. In a bizarre relapse into Khrushchev's "harebrained schemes" of the late 1950s, the Kremlin leaders even discussed how to catch up with the United States in industrial production.[56] Second, it envisioned administrative measures to fight corruption and laxity and to improve work discipline. The hallmark of the course was the

national anti-alcoholism campaign. Gorbachev, along with other Andropov recruits, had an illusion that a sharp reduction in alcohol retail sales would save Russians from compulsive drinking, their worst social problem. In reality, these initiatives achieved none of the goals they set and produced a huge financial black hole that would come to haunt the Soviet Union and Gorbachev in the next two to three years.[57]

In contrast to his domestic policies, Gorbachev's foreign policy became an arena for early innovations. Despite the international tensions from 1981 to 1983, the Politburo and the majority in Soviet bureaucracies did not want another uncontrolled confrontation with the West. They hoped it would be possible to return to détente. It also began to dawn on some officials and experts in the General Staff, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the KGB, and the Military-Industrial Commission that Soviet behavior had inadvertently contributed to the demise of détente. The decisions to deploy the SS-20 medium-range missiles in Central Europe and to invade Afghanistan fell under increasing scrutiny. There was strong bureaucratic momentum to resume the abrogated talks with the United States and NATO. Even before Chernenko's death in January 1985, Andrei Gromyko met with Secretary of State George Schulz and agreed on the framework for U.S.-Soviet arms talks. In April 1985, the Politburo halted deployment of SS-20 missiles.[58]

For personal and political reasons, Gorbachev was eager to achieve an early success in foreign affairs. In his memoirs, he recalls that very early on he had decided on "the need for serious changes in foreign policy." He explains the main reason: "Reforms in economic life and political system" were impossible without an "advantageous international environment."[59] The general secretary delegated domestic policies to Yegor Ligachev and Nikolai Ryzhkov and quickly moved to assert his supremacy in foreign affairs. His first step was to diminish Gromyko's role in this sphere. Rather than turning to Gromyko's deputies, Kornienko and Dobrynin, Gorbachev asked Georgia's party secretary, Eduard Shevardnadze, to serve as foreign minister. Shevardnadze knew nothing about foreign affairs but had enjoyed Gorbachev's trust since the 1970s. By 1987, Gorbachev and Shevardnadze, helped by a handful of loyal assistants, were monopolizing the making of foreign policy.[60]

It was in foreign policy discussions that Gorbachev first mentioned the need for "*novoe myshlenie*" (new thinking). Like "perestroika," it was a euphemism with an extremely broad interpretative range. Most of Gorbachev's colleagues and the party elites, who had become cynical during the decades of vacuous ideological campaigns, assumed it was mere rhetoric, at best an attractive propa-

ganda slogan.[61] They were wrong. The general secretary regarded foreign policy not just as a tool to win breathing space for domestic reforms but as a vehicle for change. He wanted to open the Soviet Union to the outside world and thus overcome Stalin's legacy of xenophobia and isolation. The old ideological dogmas had to be questioned and, if need be, dismantled. Soon the "new thinking" became a synonym for a fundamental ideological reassessment.

At first, Gorbachev's "new thinking" was the product of voracious reading, including books by Western socialist politicians and thinkers, which had been translated and published in limited editions for the party leadership. He also enjoyed frank discussions with trusted subordinates at private gatherings. His inner circle for such discussions included his wife, Raisa, Alexander Yakovlev, Valery Boldin, Yevgeni Primakov, and Eduard Shevardnadze. Raisa was the crucial participant of this private circle. By contrast to other Politburo spouses, who accepted the roles of housewives and had no ambitions, Raisa was a self-styled "woman of the sixties." A graduate of Moscow State University of 1955 vintage like Gorbachev, she was trained as a sociologist, had a perfectionist's passion for detail and systematization, and actively participated in cultural and intellectual events. When Gorbachev joined the Party Secretariat in 1978 and the couple moved from Stavropol to Moscow, Raisa "immediately plunged into the world of academic discussions, symposia, and conferences." She also plugged into the network of the graduates of Moscow State University and the Institute of Philosophy she had known since the period from 1950 to 1955. Every night, often after the Politburo sessions and other important meetings, Gorbachev took his wife out for a walk, on which they discussed the day's events and often came up with new ideas. "He was unable to make decisions without her advice," a senior Soviet official later told Jack Matlock.[62]

Yakovlev was another key participant in the inner group and its most intellectually ambitious member. He had had an early career as a party ideologist, was an exchange student at Columbia University in 1958, and later became the acting head of the Central Committee Department of Ideology and Propaganda. He organized, among others, virulent anti-American campaigns in the media. At the same time, he resisted the growing neo-Stalinist and conservative nationalist trend among the apparatchiks. As the result of a bureaucratic intrigue in 1971, Yakovlev was demoted and sent to Canada as ambassador. There, in external "exile," he secretly refashioned himself as a reform-minded social democrat. At the end of 1985, he proposed to Gorbachev far-reaching political reforms, aiming at the abolishment of the one-party system. Ultimately, as he recalled, the arguments revolved around the need to reject the Leninist-Stalinist precept of a

class-divided world, to grasp "the fact that we live in an interdependent, contradictory, but ultimately integral world." The general secretary was not yet ready for radical steps, but he listened to Yakovlev attentively.[63]

Gorbachev acquired an immediate and ardent following among the small group of "enlightened" apparatchiks, those who had started their careers in the 1950s and early 1960s and who called themselves "the children of the Twentieth Party Congress." This vibrant group consisted of people who had worked in Andropov's and Brezhnev's close circle as speechwriters, the directors of academic think tanks, and the international relations experts from the International Department of the Central Committee.[64] Some had worked as Brezhnev's speechwriters and "enlightened" advisers. But these well-informed people had grown disillusioned and cynical during the late Brezhnev years. They were sick of stagnation and corruption and still hoped to resume the policies of de-Stalinization and the cultural Thaw abrogated in the late 1960s. They also had been among the earliest and most consistent supporters of détente with the West. The head of the Institute of U.S. and Canada Studies, Georgy Arbatov, immediately sent Gorbachev a list of innovative proposals aimed at breaking Soviet international isolation: immediate withdrawal from Afghanistan; unilateral reductions of Soviet forces in Europe and on the border with China; and even a return to Japan of the Kurile Islands annexed in 1945.[65]

Gorbachev, skeptical of the academician's quick fixes, dispatched the memos to the archive. At the same time, in January 1986, he invited another "enlightened" apparatchik and talented speechwriter, Anatoly Chernyaev, to become a personal foreign policy assistant. Chernyaev shared all the ideas proposed by Arbatov and also was in favor of free emigration and the release of political prisoners. In October 1985, the general secretary granted the intellectual elites the long-lost privilege of meeting with foreigners without asking for permission. It was a momentous break with the xenophobic regime that had been in place since it was established by Stalin in the 1930s.[66] The general secretary already began to position himself as an "enlightened" ruler surrounded by intellectuals and freethinkers.

The rejection of the Stalinist bipolar worldview became the heart of Gorbachev's "new thinking." The logical conclusion from this would be the renunciation of global power games and recognition that the security of the Soviet Union was inseparable from, and in part compatible with, the security interests of other countries, including the United States. Gorbachev felt that curbing the nuclear arms race was especially urgent. He felt uneasy about military power, especially nuclear arms. The roots of this attitude went back to his formative experience. Gorbachev's birthplace, the land of the Kuban Cossacks, had suf-

fered terribly from revolutionary violence, fratricidal civil war, and Stalin's collectivization. Then the Nazi invasion came. Gorbachev belonged, in his own words, to the generation of war children. "The war touched us with its flame and made an impact on our characters and our entire worldview."[67] As a graduate of Moscow State University's Law Department, he was exempted from military service and exposed to views that clashed with official militarist propaganda.

In contrast to Stalin, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev, who supervised the military-industrial complex and understood the nuts and bolts of Soviet military power, Gorbachev came into contact with nuclear issues only when he became the general secretary of the CPSU.[68] According to the tradition established by Stalin and Khrushchev, the leader of the party was also the head of the Defense Council. Oleg Baklanov, who was the head of the Soviet atomic and missile complexes, later recalled that as late as 1987 Gorbachev demonstrated a lack of interest in or knowledge of missile technology.[69] In an interview with a Russian nuclear physicist, Gorbachev admitted a moral revulsion when he realized his personal responsibility for the accumulation and possible use of nuclear weapons. He also admitted that he was familiar with the report on "nuclear winter," which predicted that the fallout from a massive use of nuclear weapons would destroy life on the planet. When Gorbachev participated in a secret strategic game simulating the Soviet response to a nuclear attack, he was asked to give a command for the retaliation strike. He allegedly refused to press the nuclear button, "even for training purposes."[70]

Gorbachev and the "new thinkers" faced the enormous reality of the U.S.-Soviet confrontation, both inside the Soviet apparatus and across the ocean. Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, CIA director William Casey, and White House staff were determined to win in a crusade against Soviet Communism.[71] Reagan was impatient to meet with the new Soviet leader and, with the help of Shultz and McFarlane's National Security Council staff, prepared himself for negotiations. Unfortunately, Gorbachev and his immediate entourage knew nothing of Reagan's good intentions.[72]

Reagan's rhetoric on the third world irritated "new thinkers." Washington insisted on unilateral Soviet military withdrawal from Afghanistan, Angola, Ethiopia, and other troubled areas, while blocking any discussion of American interference in Central America. The Soviets also assumed, quite correctly, that senior members of the Reagan administration wanted to "bleed" Soviet troops in Afghanistan rather than facilitate their withdrawal. Therefore, Gorbachev was determined to avoid any international actions that could be interpreted as Soviet retreat or concession. Despite the numerous letters from soldiers' mothers and the appeals of his intellectual advisers, the Soviet leader decided against immedi-

ate withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. He jotted down on his working pad in the spring of 1985: "The conflict should be resolved in stages." He also wrote: "One thing is crucial: complete surrender of positions is unacceptable." In 1985 and 1986, the Soviet armed forces greatly intensified military operations against the Islamic fundamentalists; the inept Karmal was replaced with a stronger figure, the head of the Afghan security services, Muhammad Najibullah. The delay of Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, along with the misguided anti-alcoholism campaign and the absence of economic reforms, caused problems for Gorbachev's administration later on.[73]

The arena in which Gorbachev moved with the greatest speed was arms control. By the summer of 1985 he was corresponding with Ronald Reagan on how to reduce the threat of nuclear war and curb the nuclear arms race. Gorbachev dropped the condition, imposed since 1977, that any meeting between the superpower leaders must be linked to the signing of significant agreements. Most of Reagan's advisers were against the idea of a summit with the young and energetic Soviet leader, but the president had waited since 1983 for a personal and frank exchange of opinions, and he agreed to meet Gorbachev in Geneva in November 1985. In preparation for this first summit, the leaders restored the diplomatic back channel between Washington and Moscow and conducted a high-volume correspondence through it. Rejecting Reagan's broader framework for talks on Afghanistan and human rights, Gorbachev suggested focusing on the reduction of nuclear weapons. He warned Reagan that the Soviet Union would not tolerate the SDI program. Although the SDI did not present an immediate danger to Soviet security interests, it could eventually open a new, dangerous, and costly round of the U.S.-Soviet arms race. "The program of 'star wars [SDI],'" he opined, "already seriously undermines stability. We urgently advise you to wind down this sharply destabilizing and dangerous program." On the eve of the Geneva summit, Gorbachev wrote to Reagan that "aversion of nuclear war, removal of military threat is our mutual and dominant interest." He pushed the American president to agree to the "non-militarization of space." In support of Gorbachev's rhetoric, in August 1985 the Soviet Union announced unilaterally a moratorium on nuclear tests.[74]

Gorbachev's foreign policy agenda still looked strikingly similar to Brezhnev's agenda from the early 1970s. The pre-summit instructions approved by the Politburo also reflected it; they reiterated the détente clichés, while reaffirming Soviet geopolitical ambitions in the third world. The experts who drafted the pre-summit instructions for the Politburo correctly predicted that there would be no agreement on the third world conflicts. Also, they warned, "Reagan certainly would not agree to ban SDI."[75]

Soviet diplomats and the military carefully watched Gorbachev's performance in Geneva and were satisfied. The Soviet leader used his charm but was a tough negotiator. As expected, the leaders agreed on only one thing—"a nuclear war could not be won and must never be fought." It was a common opinion in Moscow that one could hardly achieve more with the current U.S. administration. Before the Politburo and party elites, Gorbachev criticized Reagan's "crude primitivism, caveman views and intellectual impotence." He continued to believe that the American president was a pawn of the military-industrial complex and pledged to strengthen Soviet defenses. Privately, however, the general secretary was shocked to find that Reagan genuinely believed in what he said. And he was "almost embarrassed" by his failure to convince Reagan to abandon SDI. The Soviet leader tried to guess Reagan's motives and failed to understand them. He recalls musing after the summit: Was this military program a fantasy, a means of pressing the USSR into diplomatic concessions? Or was it an "awkward attempt to lull us into complacency," while preparing the first strike?[76]

In the aftermath of Geneva, the Soviet leader feverishly searched for new ideas and approaches that could help break the vicious circle of the U.S.-Soviet rivalry. Unlike Brezhnev, who under similar circumstances waited for American initiatives, Gorbachev decided to go on a "peace offensive" and engage the U.S. president on the issue of nuclear disarmament. On New Year's Eve 1985, he met with Soviet arms negotiators and demanded fresh ideas and approaches. On the basis of their ideas and proposals, Gorbachev announced a plan of general and complete nuclear disarmament by the year 2000. Dismissed by the Reagan administration as a propaganda ploy, this plan reflected the profound allegiance of Gorbachev to the idea of nuclear disarmament. The sweeping and quasi-utopian nature of the initiative revealed again Gorbachev's optimistic nature and belief in big ideas. Anatoly Chernyaev recalls that Gorbachev and his entourage came to believe that "one can remove a war threat by focusing only on the issue of disarmament."[77]

Gorbachev used these conversations to prepare for the Party Congress to be held in February and March 1986, a ceremonial, but nevertheless vital moment in domestic politics. He retreated to a Black Sea resort where, together with Yakovlev and Boldin, he studied the proposals from academic think tanks and discussed the draft of the political report to the Party Congress. His predecessors could never square the circle between their desire for détente and their bipolar ideological vision of the world. Gorbachev replaced the formula of the "two camps," socialist and imperialist, with the idea of the world's integrity and interdependence. This theoretical innovation, he recalled later, "had a huge impact on our own policy and the policy of the rest of the world." The draft stated

that "the policy of total, military confrontation has no future," and that the "arms race, as well as a nuclear war, cannot be won," and that "the task of building security appears as a political task, and it can be resolved only by political means."[78] This episode reveals Gorbachev's strong inclination toward new and broad theoretical concepts, rather than the nuts and bolts of foreign policy.

When Gorbachev presented his draft for his colleagues' discussion, many of them insisted on adding to it the old ideological postulates. A veteran head of the Central Committee's International Department, Boris Ponomarev, privately grumbled: "What is this 'new thinking' about? Let the Americans change their thinking instead. What are you trying to do to our foreign policy? Are you against force, which is the only language that imperialism understands?"[79] The final version of Gorbachev's report was a compromise between new ideas and the old language of "proletarian internationalism." Still, as Robert English concludes, the report removed the ideological tenet that peaceful coexistence is another form of class struggle, and that nuclear war, if it occurs, would lead to socialism's triumph. Stalin's doctrine of "two camps," an integral part of the Soviet revolutionary-imperial paradigm since 1947, was no more.[80]

The intellectual component of the Soviet national security establishment, particularly consultants and the leaders of think tanks, regarded the disarmament initiative and Gorbachev's Congress report as a turning point. Raymond Garthoff, a long-time observer of the Soviets, happened to be in Moscow at the time and was surprised when his old contacts admitted that U.S. security interests were legitimate and could be, in principle, reconciled with Soviet interests.[81] Immediately after the Party Congress, the general secretary warned his inner circle of advisers not to regard Soviet initiatives merely as a means to score propaganda points. "We really seek détente and disarmament. Dishonest game is no longer possible today. It is impossible to cheat anybody anyway." In the same conversation, Gorbachev stressed that the "new thinking" made it imperative for the Soviet Union to recognize U.S. national interests and seek a compromise with the other superpower and its allies.[82]

Washington, however, did not trust Soviet words. The Reagan administration wanted to see signs of real change in Soviet behavior in Afghanistan and on human rights, the most important criteria for the president's assessment of Soviet intentions. The Americans ignored the Soviet nuclear moratorium and announced a big series of nuclear tests. The CIA continued to escalate the war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan and waged intelligence warfare against the KGB. In March 1986, two American warships carried out a highly provocative maneuver in Soviet territorial waters six miles off the coast of the Crimea, where

Gorbachev was vacationing at the time. Operations of the same nature were carried out off the coast of Libya, an ally of the USSR, leading to a confrontation and U.S. air strikes on this country.[83] Above all, many in Reagan's entourage regarded SDI as a stone that could kill three or more birds: it could provide a moral basis for the costly military buildup, boost the domestic economy, and scare the Soviets into retreat on all fronts.[84]

Gorbachev reacted harshly. He ordered his speechwriters to "give the US a substantial kick in the shin." Before the Politburo he was rude: "We cannot cook anything with this gang." For a moment he even mentioned again freezing high-level contacts with the U.S. administration.[85] A closer study of Soviet internal discussions, however, reveals that Gorbachev's harsh rhetoric was just that: rhetoric. He rejected the tit-for-tat approach and continued to insist on rapprochement with the United States and the rest of the world. "We are in a diplomatic offensive, because we have been proposing realistic approaches to the world, and acknowledge US interests, but not their hegemonic demands." A month earlier, he had said to his advisers that even if the Americans and the Western Europeans continued to waltz around the issue of disarmament, the Soviet Union should move ahead and continue "the Geneva process" in its own interests.[86] Thus, concepts of "new thinking" motivated Gorbachev to build détente, independently or even *against* the wishes of the American side. It is also noteworthy that Gorbachev saw his new multilateralist worldview as "realistic."

The Soviet leader, however, could not get SDI off his mind.[87] Gorbachev spent considerable time inspecting research and development laboratories and discussing possible "countermeasures" to SDI with leading scientists. At Gorbachev's request, new head of the Council of Ministers Nikolai Ryzhkov reviewed the three-year-old conclusions of the expert commission chaired by Evgeny Velikhov in order to find an "asymmetrical response" to SDI. Soviet experts concluded that such a response would cost ten times less than a full-scale program.[88] Did the general secretary recognize the contradiction between his new vision of security and his obsession with Reagan's "star wars"? Sometimes he came close to that. In late March 1986, Gorbachev began to think aloud in his narrow circle of advisers about "the dangerous program" of SDI: "Maybe we should just stop being afraid of the SDI! [The Reagan administration] indeed expects that the USSR is afraid of SDI in the moral, economic, political, and military sense. That is why they are putting pressure on us—to exhaust us. But for us this is a problem not of fear, but of responsibility, because the consequences would be unpredictable."[89]

Gorbachev needed more help in overcoming his inner contradictory assumptions. Two dramatic events provided this help.

CHERNOBYL AND REYKJAVIK

On April 26, 1986, at 1:30 A.M., a huge explosion destroyed the fourth block of the Chernobyl nuclear reactor. The explosion caused the second-worst manmade nuclear catastrophe, after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This sudden disaster in Ukraine created a radically new perspective on security affairs for Gorbachev and the entire Soviet leadership. At first, a majority of the Soviet leadership and the Soviet military-industrial complex instinctively chose to downplay and cover up the incident, in essence bluffing in the face of the whole world, as it had following the KAL-007 tragedy. Just as then, the bluff was called, and the international uproar over the nuclear fallout, resulting from the accident, penetrated through radio broadcasting to Soviet society. Panic spread in waves, and from Ukraine it soon reached Moscow. Soviet authorities, after days of delay, evacuated 100,000 people from the irradiated area. A decade later, it became known that the radiation spread after the Chernobyl accident killed 8,000 men and women. It affected the health and well-being of 435,000 people, and the list is not yet finished.[90]

The Chernobyl catastrophe consumed the Politburo's energies for three months. It shattered ossified bureaucratic structures and the old militarized mentality to the core.[91] Gorbachev was humiliated by the international scandal and indignant at the rigidity of bureaucratic structures, and he chose to scapegoat the military-industrial complex. The most secret and impenetrable part of the Soviet system, its nuclear program, became the object of blistering criticism, its heroic and romantic image tarnished beyond repair. Military scientists and the military command were shaken, too. It was the first time that the Soviet armed forces participated in a rescue and decontamination operation on such a large scale. To the head of the General Staff, Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev, Chernobyl was reminiscent of the Great Patriotic War. But, instead of lessons of vigilance and military buildup, the catastrophe revealed that the military doctrine of "victory" in nuclear war was a hollow hulk. And it dawned on the military command what a disaster it would be to have even limited nuclear warfare in a Europe studded with atomic reactors. Akhromeyev recalled that after Chernobyl "a nuclear danger for our people ceased to be abstraction. It became a palpable reality."[92]

Chernobyl's effect on the Soviet political leadership was greater than any other single event since the Cuban missile crisis. "We learned what nuclear war can be," Gorbachev said to the Politburo. Certainly, the catastrophe was much more responsible for the drastic changes in Soviet official mentality than the previous years of American pressure and military buildup. The catastrophe demanded the end of xenophobia and obsessive secrecy and a reappraisal of security policies in

the nuclear age. Within a year after this accident, Soviet foreign policy, positions on nuclear arms control, the approach to negotiations with the United States, and military doctrine would drastically change. Chernobyl also forced the Politburo to introduce glasnost, the practice of public discussion of contentious issues that the country had not known since the 1920s. Several weeks after the disaster, Gorbachev said to his colleagues: "Our work is now transparent to the whole people, to the whole world. *There are no interests* that could force us to hide the truth."[93]

Gorbachev suggested to his Politburo colleagues that the Soviet Union should come up with better and bolder disarmament initiatives to stop the arms race. In late May 1986, the general secretary made an unprecedented appearance in the Foreign Ministry and addressed a large group of diplomats. The Reagan administration, Gorbachev told them, was trying to box in the Soviet Union in an exhausting arms race. "Soviet foreign policy," he concluded, "must alleviate the burden" of military expenditures, must "do anything in its capabilities to loosen the vise of defense expenditures." Diplomats were told to get rid of the mentality of bureaucrats without individual voice and initiative, the mentality that had prevailed during the tenures of Molotov and Gromyko. Gorbachev criticized the old Soviet diplomacy for "senseless stubbornness." Instead of digging Cold War trenches and waiting for a more conciliatory leadership in Washington, Soviet diplomacy had to engage the Reagan administration, envelop it with peace initiatives, and influence it via its own Western European allies.[94]

The first tangible result of the post-Chernobyl foreign policy was a breakthrough on conventional arms control and verification in Stockholm. These talks had lasted for years, as the Soviet side refused to accept on-site inspections proposed by the Americans. The General Staff was horrified at the prospect of NATO inspections, which might reveal the many Potemkin villages in the armed forces. At the Politburo, Akhromeyev challenged the top Soviet negotiator in Stockholm, casting doubt on his "Soviet patriotism." After Chernobyl, however, secrecy no longer won the day. Instead, at Politburo instructions, Akhromeyev himself had to go to Stockholm to announce Soviet acceptance of on-site inspections. The marshal, deeply shaken by Chernobyl, obeyed and after a few weeks the treaty was signed.[95]

By that time, the general secretary had undertaken a private study of international relations that included the works of the Palme Commission and Western social democrats on disarmament and "common security." He also read the Russell-Einstein Manifesto of 1955 and the works of the Pugwash Movement of scientists against nuclear war.[96] Armed with new ideas, Gorbachev next appealed to the socialist-leaning U.S. allies, arguing for a new security philosophy. Presi-

dent of France François Mitterrand, Prime Minister of Spain Felipe Gonzalez, and Prime Minister of Canada Pierre Elliot Trudeau expressed sympathies with the "new thinking" and were very critical of the U.S. leadership. At a meeting with the French president in July 1986, the Soviet leader attacked Reagan and "the forces and groupings that brought him to power" for promoting SDI and failing to understand the new security needs of humanity. Mitterrand admitted that "the military-industrial complex might be applying strong pressure on the US administration." At the same time, he added, "one should keep in mind that Reagan, for all the influence of his own milieu, is not without common sense and intuition." He appealed to Gorbachev not to view the political situation in the United States as something set in stone: "The situation may change." He also catered to Gorbachev's genuine security concerns, posing as a middleman between the Soviet Union and the Americans.[97]

British conservative prime minister Margaret Thatcher played the role of an informal ambassador between Gorbachev and Reagan. There was a remarkable personal affinity between Thatcher and Gorbachev, despite the ideological chasm that separated them. From the start, Thatcher fully grasped the double-sided idea of reform and disarmament promoted by Gorbachev but categorically rejected the idea of a nuclear-free world as a dangerous romantic utopia. In retrospect, Thatcher was right, as the process of disarmament followed her vision more closely. But, as Chernyaev commented, "if Gorbachev had not been so pushy, and so implacable in his desire to prove to all that nuclear weapons are an absolute evil and one cannot build world politics on it, then the process [of détente] would never have begun at all."[98]

Another informal middleman between the Kremlin and the White House was retired U.S. president Richard Nixon. Nixon still enjoyed a good standing among Soviet leaders as the architect of détente in the 1970s. In July 1986, he told Gorbachev: "You are right—there are people in the [Reagan] administration that do not want agreements with the Soviet Union. It seems to them that if they can isolate the Soviet Union diplomatically, apply economic pressure on it, achieve military superiority then the Soviet order would collapse. Of course, this is not going to happen. During many years Reagan, as you know, was considered a part of the grouping that shared these views. However, today he is not one of them. I learned from conversations with him that the meeting with you had a slow, but undeniable impact on the evolution of his thoughts."[99]

These conversations made Gorbachev more impatient to put his "new thinking" to work. Another impulse came from bad economic and financial news. Perestroika was not going well; slogans of domestic reforms contrasted sharply with a sluggish economy and continued social stagnation. One month after the

accident, the cost of Chernobyl had already come to three billion rubles. The unforeseen expenses affected Politburo discussions of the financial burden that the continuation of the strategic arms race with the West would entail. Perhaps for the first time since the debates during the Polish crisis, it became poignantly clear that the Soviet Union was seriously overcommitted financially. In July 1986, Gorbachev admitted that the Soviet budget had lost nine billion rubles, due to the rapid drop in oil prices. The Soviets also expected a trade deficit. And the anti-alcohol campaign had reduced state revenues by 15 billion rubles.[100] In domestic affairs, the general secretary, with the help of Ligachev in the Party Secretariat, radically repopulated the bureaucratic and party cadres, hoping to rejuvenate the Soviet party-administrative system.[101] But Gorbachev was not yet ready for drastic measures, such as fixing prices and fighting hidden inflation. And he did not know how to transform the socialist economy. He hoped to alleviate the economic situation by reducing international tensions, thus obtaining the "peace dividends"—lower military expenditures and Western credits.

U.S.-Soviet relations were exacerbated by what amounted to a virtual espionage war, and this war caused real casualties. In Moscow, the KGB obtained from the CIA's Aldrich Ames complete information on American spies in the Soviet Union. In 1986, with Gorbachev's consent, they were arrested; some of them were tried and sentenced to death. At the same time in the United States, long-time Soviet moles in the FBI and the National Security Agency were found out and arrested. The nasty warfare continued to escalate in late August, when the FBI arrested a KGB agent, Gennady Zakharov, working under cover at the UN Secretariat. In retaliation, the KGB framed and arrested *U.S. News and World Report* correspondent Nicholas Daniloff.[102] A new wave of anti-Soviet feelings in the American mass media, vigorously promoted by the Reagan administration, seemed to return U.S.-Soviet relations to the 1983 low.

Gorbachev was impatient for a dramatic breakthrough. In early September, in the midst of the Zakharov-Daniloff controversy, he wrote a letter to Reagan, proposing that, instead of waiting for the next regular summit in Washington, they have a quick one-on-one meeting, "let us say in Iceland or in London." In an attempt to separate Reagan from his right-wing entourage, Gorbachev suggested "a strictly confidential, private and frank discussion (possibly with only our foreign ministers present)." The purpose of the meeting would be "to draft agreements on two or three very specific questions," to ensure they would be ready for signing at the next summit.[103]

Later, Margaret Thatcher and Reagan's advisers claimed that Gorbachev had lured Reagan into a trap. Indeed, Gorbachev was prepared not only to discuss "two or three very specific questions" but also to present a revolutionary agree-

ment on nuclear arms reductions. But the Soviet leader was not trying to ambush Reagan. As part of summit preparations, he instructed the General Staff to abandon the offensive strategy of reaching the English Channel in several days and to work out a new military doctrine based on "strategic sufficiency" and defensive posture.[104] He also told the military that he would like to accept Reagan's proposal on elimination of all Soviet and U.S. medium-range missiles in Europe ("zero option"). Finally, he suggested that the Soviet negotiating package include acceptance of 50 percent cuts on the "heavy" ICBMs, the backbone of the Soviet strategic arsenal.[105] As a result of all this, the meeting in Reykjavik, Iceland, turned out to be the most dramatic diplomatic event in the concluding years of the Cold War.

Soviet proposals were based on the ideas of "strategic sufficiency," which had long circulated in Moscow's academic institutes and among arms control negotiators. These ideas held that it was not vital to maintain a numeric parity in strategic armaments. Of course, nobody except Gorbachev dared to propose these ideas openly, fearing cries of treason from the Ministry of Defense and the General Staff. Even Gorbachev had to explain his "new thinking" as a pragmatic necessity. He argued at the Politburo in early October 1986 that the USSR could not afford to react to the Reagan challenge in traditional tit-for-tat fashion: "We will be pulled into an arms race that is beyond our capabilities, and we will lose it, because we are at the limit of our capabilities. Moreover, we can expect that Japan and the FRG could very soon add their economic potential to the American one. If the new round begins, the pressure on our economy will be unbelievable."[106]

SDI again proved to be a stumbling bloc for Gorbachev's "new thinking." British political scientist Archie Brown believes that for Gorbachev at that moment SDI was not so much a security concern as an excuse to argue "for the kind of policy innovation which would break the deadlock and end the vicious spiral of arms race."[107] The evidence speaks to the contrary: Reagan's program was indeed a real concern for the Soviet leader. He still could not understand if Reagan's intentions were aggressive or not. As with the Geneva summit, Politburo instructions for the Reykjavik meeting were a compromise between Gorbachev's new ideological approaches and his traditional security fears. While the military leadership would have done the same, it was Gorbachev who firmly linked any agreement on cuts of strategic armaments to a single condition: Reagan had to bury the idea of SDI and affirm American adherence to the 1972 ABM treaty. Speaking to a small group of "new thinkers" during the preparations for Reykjavik, Gorbachev argued that it was necessary to dislodge Reagan from his position on SDI. "If it fails, then we will be able to say: This is what we were ready for!"[108]

The Reykjavik summit began with an amiable one-on-one conversation between the two leaders.[109] The president began by laying out the U.S. four-point agenda, linking the progress in disarmament to changes in Soviet behavior in the third world and observance of human rights at home. Gorbachev assured Reagan that he would support "ultimate liquidation of nuclear weapons" on the principles of "equal security." He also said he would go "as far on the matter of verification as would be necessary" to remove U.S. doubts. At the same time, the Soviet leader clearly linked a date for a Washington summit to the reaching of an agreement on arms reductions—an echo of the similar Soviet linkage during the Carter administration.[110]

What went on between the two leaders seemed almost surreal to other participants, veterans of the decades of standoff. Reagan and Gorbachev seemed to have resolved more disarmament issues than all their predecessors had done. In the view of American experts, Gorbachev made more concessions than they had received from the Soviet Union in twenty-five years. Secretary of State George Schultz reacted to this curtly: "Fine, let him keep making them. His proposals are the result of five years of pressure from us."[111] Other more ideologically driven members of the administration were alarmed. Reagan saw an opportunity to accomplish what he viewed as his mission—to prevent the nuclear Armageddon. Without bothering to consult the Pentagon or American allies, he laid out on the table, first, the idea of complete elimination of nuclear ballistic missiles by the year 1996, and then the elimination of *all* nuclear weapons. Gorbachev agreed, but insisted on excluding any plans to test components of missile defense in space. Reagan, however, was convinced by his friend Caspar Weinberger that Congress would "kill" SDI if it was limited to laboratories. He asked Gorbachev for "a personal favor" to allow testing in space. A concession on SDI, he told the general secretary, would have a "huge influence on our future relations." Gorbachev, however, stuck to his guns: complete renunciation of SDI, including the interim period of laboratory testing, or nothing.[112] The summit collapsed, and the visibly shaken general secretary and the U.S. president had to face the consequences of their failure at home. As is clear today, ten or more years of laboratory testing would not have "killed" or "created" the antimissile shield, as Reagan and Gorbachev feared. Gorbachev was not ready for elimination of all Soviet nuclear weapons, not to mention Soviet ballistic missiles.[113]

Gorbachev left for Moscow complaining that the Americans "did not abandon the quest for superiority" and just came to Reykjavik came to pocket his concessions—essentially true as far as most of the U.S. delegation was concerned. To the Politburo, Gorbachev said that Reagan "is unable to handle his gang" and "appears to be a liar."[114] Just a few years later, however, the Soviet

leader described the Reykjavik effect as an epiphany, similar to the shock of Chernobyl. It may be that, again, traditional fears battled in the soul of the general secretary with concepts of "new thinking." Inwardly, he was surprised to discover that Reagan's belief in nuclear disarmament seemed to be genuine. Other Soviet participants in the summit felt the same. Anatoly Dobrynin recalled later that "Reagan's vision of nuclear apocalypse and his deeply rooted but almost hidden conviction that nuclear weapons should ultimately be abolished, would prove more powerful than his visceral anti-Communism."[115] The image of Reagan as enemy in the Soviet foreign policy establishment shaped by the earlier confrontation began to change, but this happened slowly, in fits and starts.

"NEW THINKING" AND THE LOOMING CRISIS

The failure of the Reykjavik summit did not diminish Gorbachev's appetite for "new thinking" in global affairs. On the contrary, he soon went to Kyrgyzstan to discuss the nuclear threat and political responses to it on a beautiful mountain lake with the world's intellectual elite: writers, sociologists, economists, ecologists, futurologists. Excited by the quality of the audience, Gorbachev spoke publicly for the first time about the priority of "human interests over class interests." Gorbachev's theoretical innovations evoked puzzlement from Ligachev and party propagandists. "A bomb exploded in the camp of orthodox thinkers!" rejoiced Gorbachev in his memoirs. By spring 1987, Gorbachev's ideological transformation made him feel alienated from his most loyal and effective supporters, Ligachev and Ryzhkov. They could no longer see eye to eye with him ideologically.[116] The post-Reykjavik months highlighted the first stage of disagreement between Gorbachev and his Politburo colleagues, who had viewed his "new thinking" as mere rhetorical cover for a pragmatic policy of temporary retreat and retrenchment of Soviet power. From changing people in key command positions to achieve economic "acceleration," Gorbachev began to shift to changing the guiding ideology of the Soviet Union.

The anti-Soviet "crusaders" in the Reagan administration meanwhile continued to complicate Gorbachev's reformist plans. On December 1, the administration announced that the United States would not observe the limitations on its strategic forces imposed by SALT-2. The provocative behavior of the U.S. leadership, for the second time after the second summit, presented the Politburo with a choice: to give up on Reagan and wait for future opportunities or continue the peace offensive with more vigor and strength. At the Politburo, Gromyko could not help uttering a skeptical remark about Gorbachev's fixation on disarmament: "If we destroy nuclear weapons that we had been building for twenty

five years, what would then happen? Will we depend on good faith of the Americans? Where is a guarantee that they will not surpass us in the space race? No, further concessions will not get us American agreement. The United States will not agree to an equal agreement."[117]

In addition to Gromyko, Ligachev and KGB chairman Viktor Chebrikov also voiced concern about the Reagan administration's "crusade" against the Soviet Union. Gorbachev, however, was already determined to pursue his new policies no matter what. He said that playing the tit-for-tat game with the Reagan administration would be "a nice present to these types who disrupt treaties and spit on public opinion. They would say: the Soviets had just waited for such a moment." The Politburo decided to exert pressure on the Reagan administration through moderate members of the U.S. Congress, U.S. allies, and the American public.[118]

Just about this time, the Soviet top brass were told to relinquish their longtime goals of achieving superiority over the enemy and agree to deep unilateral cuts in the Soviet strategic stockpile. Soon after Reykjavik, Sergei Akhromeyev presented the draft of the new military doctrine at the Academy of the General Staff, the elite senior military school. The document stated the impossibility of victory in a future war (since it would be nuclear) and proposed that the Soviet military should no longer strive for parity with the Americans. The document threw the military audience into a state of profound shock. There were muffled cries of treason.[119] These cries reached Gorbachev's ears, and a sharp exchange took place at the meeting on December 1 between Gorbachev and Marshal Akhromeyev, who had just resigned from the General Staff only to be appointed a military assistant to the general secretary.

GORBACHEV: We have not made any real concessions. However, our generals try to scare us, they are afraid to be left with nothing to do. I know there is a lot of hissing in their midst—what kind of leadership is this that is disarming the country?

VITALY VOROTNIKOV (POLITBURO MEMBER): People do think so!

GORBACHEV: Ogarkov is very upset. He demands more and more. At a time when 25 million people here live below the officially proclaimed minimal living standard.

AKHROMEYEV: Generals are good people. Yes, they are good party members. However, if a general believes he cares about the country more than the Politburo does, we should sort it out with him.

GORBACHEV: If we fail to struggle for peace, people will not support us. And if we let down our defense, people will not support us either. They are robust chauvinists.[120]

Gorbachev used his rhetorical skills to overcome the resistance from the military and obtain what he wanted. On New Year's Eve, acting as commander in chief and head of the Defense Council, he approved the new military doctrine. This was a momentous change—but it also marked the end of the initial enthusiasm that the military had felt about Gorbachev and his reformist course.

Gorbachev's "new thinking" continued to evolve, even in the absence of any signs of détente with the United States, in marked contrast to Brezhnev's détente politics. But a surprising consensus, at least in appearance, prevailed in the Politburo. Nobody among the conservatives or the military was willing to challenge the general secretary. Even the General Staff, for all its dismay at the new disarmament proposals and military doctrine, never dared to oppose Gorbachev's policies at the Politburo. Also, contrary to the impression that Gorbachev's memoirs may convey, the direction of his evolution was still unclear to conservative modernizers and "new thinkers" in the party, as well as to state elites. The general secretary was bafflingly inconsistent in his rhetoric and, in particular, in his actions. He seemed to thrive on ambiguity and enjoyed the role of moderator, listening with equal attention to the opposite opinions, mediating in discussions, papering over rifts, and nipping confrontation in the bud. The most formidable of the conservative strongholds, the KGB, still believed in early 1987 that Gorbachev was implementing Andropov's program of controlled conservative modernization and imperial retrenchment. It did not occur to the KGB leadership that Gorbachev intended to dismantle the entire regime of police repression that had survived de-Stalinization and become entrenched during the Brezhnev-Andropov years. Vladimir Kryuchkov, head of the KGB branch for foreign intelligence, recalled that he had never doubted Gorbachev's devotion to the Soviet system and "socialism" and was horrified later by the extent of his "betrayal."[121]

Gorbachev was careful not to challenge the basics of official ideology openly. On the contrary, his ideological vigor and frequent public pledges "to live up to the potential of socialism" confused the sophisticated Moscow elites who had long regarded Communist ideology to be a cadaver. His misguided economic gambits and the anti-alcohol campaign indicated to many outside and inside the Soviet Union that he just wanted to give new vigor to the old system. Yakovlev complained privately that the Soviet leader remained a captive of ideological, class-based mythology. "During the first three years of *perestroika*," Chernyaev admits, the Soviet leader "thought about improvement of the society in Marxist-Leninist categories. Gorbachev was convinced that had Lenin lived ten years longer, there would have been a fine socialism in the USSR." The general secretary worshipped the founder of Bolshevism; he kept Lenin's works on his desk and reread them in the search for clues and inspiration.[122]

Thus the time of open ideological and political divides over Gorbachev's course still lay ahead. On some foreign policy issues, the dividing line was not so much ideological principles as the strategies of Soviet retrenchment. This revealed itself most strikingly in Politburo discussions of the hopeless situation in Afghanistan. Assisted by CIA funds, the Pakistani regime of General Zia-ul Haq armed and trained Islamic fundamentalists who waged unrelenting war against the Soviet troops and the pro-Soviet Afghan regime. The Soviets could not defeat the unconventional fundamentalist formations operating from Pakistani territory.[123] Gorbachev, along with the rest of the Politburo, was still against the immediate withdrawal of troops. He argued that the Soviets should set up a friendly moderate Islamic regime in Afghanistan and thus avoid a situation in which the United States or the fundamentalist forces would control this country. By 1987, it became clear that this was a chimerical idea, primarily due to the alliance between the United States, Pakistan, and the fundamentalist Muslim forces. Minister of Defense Sergei Sokolov, Marshal Akhromeyev, and the commander of Soviet troops in Afghanistan, General Valentin Varennikov, advocated immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops. Deputy Foreign Minister Georgy Kornienko supported them. Ironically, even Gromyko, the last living original proponent of the invasion of Afghanistan, stood up for immediate withdrawal.[124]

The two ranking members of the Politburo commission on Afghanistan, Shevardnadze and the KGB's Kryuchkov, however, insisted on continuing efforts to "save" Afghanistan, fearing a bloodbath in Kabul and damage to Soviet security interests in case of a fundamentalist victory. Back in 1986, the KGB had promoted Najibullah as a better alternative to Babrak Karmal and now stuck with its candidate. At that time, the leading advocate of the "new thinking," Yakovlev, had also supported the Afghanization of the war. Gorbachev, as the records and memoirs reveal, supported their position and ignored the warnings of Akhromeyev and Kornienko. Later, Gorbachev and Yakovlev both claimed that it was the relentless policy of the United States that prolonged the war in Afghanistan.[125]

Gorbachev's position on Afghanistan was not an isolated episode. In general, he continued to support and maintain all traditional Soviet clients and friends in the third world, including the anti-Israeli nationalistic Arab regimes, Vietnam, Mengistu Haile Mariam's regime in Ethiopia, Castro's Cuba, and the Sandinistas in Nicaragua.[126] The dynamics and motivation behind this costly policy demands explanation. Did Gorbachev want to reform the Soviet Union while sustaining its great power role and alliances around the world? Did he, as well as Shevardnadze, still adhere, through inertia, to the legacy of the revolutionary-imperial paradigm in the third world?

Conservative modernizers in the Politburo, like hard-liners in the Reagan

administration, assumed that it was so. But the general secretary was most likely procrastinating, not quite ready to begin a unilateral dismantling of the Soviet empire. It also appears that the third world issues never really interested Gorbachev, whose "new thinking" ideology made him focus on the integration of the Soviet Union into the "first world"—cooperation with the most advanced capitalist powers. In 1987, Gorbachev was already beginning to articulate his beliefs in the global interdependence between Soviet socialism and democratic capitalism. Just like Khrushchev in 1955–57, the Soviet leader began to combine peace offensives and de-Stalinization, negotiations with the West and liberalization at home. But Khrushchev had resumed domestic repression after the Hungarian and Polish uprisings. Gorbachev wanted to go further than his reformist predecessor and never turn back. He used the preparations for Reykjavik to demand reassessment of Soviet policies on human rights, immigration, and persecution of domestic political and religious dissidents. After the failure of the Reykjavik summit, Gorbachev argued that it was vital to win back the sympathies of Western European leaders, the educated elite, and the general public. Without pressure from Western Europeans, it would be impossible to bring the Reagan administration around to a more conciliatory position. In particular, Gorbachev suggested at the Politburo that Andrei Sakharov, the most famous dissident in the Soviet Union, should be allowed to return to Moscow from his exile in Nizhniy Novgorod. In January 1987, the Soviets stopped jamming the BBC, the Voice of America, and West Germany's Deutsche Welle.[127]

By this time, the majority of Soviet officials, even in the KGB, grudgingly recognized that the persecutions of dissidents and religious groups presented a major obstacle for negotiations with the United States. They remembered how upset Reagan had been in 1983 by the Soviet refusal to allow a group of Pentecostal Christians to immigrate to the United States. At the Politburo discussion, KGB chairman Chebrikov proposed freeing one-third of political prisoners and bringing the figure to one-half later. This proposal was of the same nature as Andropov's plot to use Jews and dissidents as a bargaining chip in the détente negotiations during the 1970s. After 1986, the KGB began to reduce the number of arrests for "political crimes" and intensified instead its so-called prophylactic measures, that is, intimidation and blackmail of Soviet citizens who fell under suspicion.[128]

A major factor influencing Gorbachev and the Politburo at this time was the ongoing economic slump and the looming deficit. The initial programs for perestroika and improvement of the Soviet economy lay in ruins. Beginning in 1985, the USSR had to spend more hard currency than it was able to earn; this led to the double burden of a trade deficit as well as foreign debt[129]—a dangerous

situation that had saddled the economies of Eastern European countries since the 1970s. Also, in the first two months of 1987, industrial production, in disarray from partial decentralization and other misguided experiments, plunged by 6 percent, with heavy and consumer industries suffering most. There was an 80 billion rubles gap between state revenues and expenditures. Gorbachev in his memoirs does not explain why the economic and financial situation had sharply deteriorated since he had come to power.[130]

Before fall 1986, rank-and-file Politburo members were not informed about the true figures of military expenditures, foreign assistance, and other secret budgetary items. The figures were shocking. In addition to the defense expenses that swallowed up 40 percent of the Soviet budget, the Soviet Union supported Central European allies and other numerous clients abroad. Politburo members learned with amazement that the annual "cost" of Vietnam was 40 billion rubles. Other clients were only marginally less expensive: Cuba cost 25 billion rubles, Syria cost 6 billion, and so on. Since the 1950s, the Soviets had sent to Iraq, Libya, and Syria great amounts of military equipment, including first-line tanks, aircraft, and missiles, but had never received payment for this equipment.[131]

The Soviet budget felt the burden of 67.7 billion rubles of the defense expenditures (16.4 percent of the budget). But the budget sustained even greater losses from the 1985 decision to invest an additional 200 billion rubles and hard currency into the modernization of the machine-building industries—a necessary investment but one that could not give any return soon. Meanwhile, the revenue from alcohol fell, and the last big source of revenue, the export of oil, continued to diminish, as oil prices plummeted from longtime highs to $12 a barrel in April 1986 and continued to fall. By 1987, the Soviet state had no other means to increase its revenues besides taxes and price increases. On October 30, 1986, Gorbachev said that the financial crisis "has clutched us by the throat." Yet he refused to balance the budget by raising consumer prices and reducing the state subsidies for food. Six months later, the Politburo learned that without price reform these subsidies alone would reach 100 billion rubles by 1990. Nevertheless, despite numerous discussions, preparations, and drafts, the price reform was never implemented. There were piecemeal measures, but all of them only aggravated the financial malaise. The reasons for Gorbachev's temporizing are not clear. It is obvious that he and the rest of the Politburo lacked even basic knowledge of macroeconomics. It is also possible that Gorbachev realized that drastic rises in prices would create turmoil in the society and undermine his domestic standing.[132]

The bleak economic and financial situation made détente and Soviet retrenchment look like an urgent necessity even in the eyes of the Politburo's conserva-

tives. The Soviet Union simply could not afford further diplomatic gamesmanship. Gromyko was among those who urged the improvement of relations with Western countries without delay. In February 1987, Gromyko and Ligachev became vocal supporters of a "zero option" agreement with the United States to eliminate all intermediate-range missiles.[133]

In February 1987, Gorbachev was about to begin the third round of his peace offensive against Ronald Reagan. In advance of their next summit in Washington, he came up with more asymmetrical cuts in the Soviet military arsenal. During a meeting with Gorbachev late in the month, Italian prime minister Giulio Andreotti praised the Soviet leader for "boldly" agreeing to dismantle the intermediate-range missiles directed at Europe. Andreotti then encouraged Gorbachev "to take just another small step" and unilaterally cut Soviet short-range missiles. This "courageous step" in his opinion would undercut U.S. plans to deploy short-range missiles in Western Europe.[134] In their April meeting with George Shultz, Gorbachev and Shevardnadze accepted Reagan's "zero option" on intermediate ballistic missiles as the Politburo had decided. To everyone's surprise, Gorbachev and Shevardnadze told Schultz that the Soviet Union also would pledge to cut its new short-range missiles, the SS-23 ("Oka"). This proposal meant that the Soviet Union would dismantle many of its missiles that specifically targeted Western European territories. This was a minor, but highly significant, step past the boundaries of the pro-détente consensus outside the Politburo.[135] The military was aghast. It grumbled about the hasty squandering of Soviet strategic assets. As if to prove this point, Schultz pocketed Soviet concessions and left for home without giving anything back. Akhromeyev, however, was bound by his personal loyalty to Gorbachev. He, along with the rest of the military, chose to blame Shevardnadze for selling out to the Americans.[136]

Soon Gorbachev had a chance to reduce potential military resistance to his policies. In May 1987, Matthias Rust, a young West German pilot, flew a sport plane into the USSR from Finland and landed on Red Square. The bizarre "Rust affair" allowed Gorbachev to remove most of the old top brass, beginning with the minister of defense, Marshal Sergei Sokolov. Rust, after spending several months in the KGB Lubianka prison, quietly obtained amnesty. The Soviet leader handpicked a new minister of defense, Dmitry Yazov, a veteran of World War II and former head of the Far Eastern military district, who had little charisma or authority among the top brass. Gorbachev began to advocate "transparency and candor" on the issue of conventional arms in Europe, admitting a huge Soviet superiority of 27,000 tanks and almost 3.5 million soldiers. Simultaneously, the Soviet military began to implement the new military doctrine. The new doctrine

of the Warsaw Pact, a carbon copy of the Soviet one, was adopted in July 1987. William Odom believes that the new policy replaced the old vision of war in Europe.[137] As a consequence, it also shook the ideological and psychological foundations of the Soviet military presence in Central Europe.

Meanwhile, with tacit encouragement from Alexander Yakovlev (who was in charge of media), as well as from Mikhail and Raisa Gorbachev, an informal network of the "men and women of the sixties," "enlightened" apparatchiks and intellectuals, and those who had been devoted to de-Stalinization and democratic change twenty years earlier began to grow and influence the public climate. Since 1986, these people had rapidly come to occupy strategic positions in the state-controlled media. Yakovlev's protégés would become the editors of some leading periodicals, among them Sergei Zalygin in *Novy Mir*, Vitaly Korotich in *Ogonek*, and Yegor Yakovlev in *Moscow News*. The "new thinkers" began publishing forbidden manuscripts, promoting anti-Stalinist films and novels, and criticizing the Brezhnev era of stagnation.

In the summer of 1987, Gorbachev revealed his intentions to a narrow circle, including Yakovlev and Chernyaev: he wanted to overhaul "the whole system—from economy to mentality." Chernyaev jubilantly recorded Gorbachev's words: "I would go far, very far."[138] By that time, Gorbachev already had nothing to fear from the conservative side, including the Politburo and the party nomenklatura. On the contrary, among the new cohort of party officials, people, among them Boris Yeltsin, head of the Moscow party organization, were beginning to grumble about Gorbachev's slow pace of domestic reforms. In November 1987, in his speech marking the seventieth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, Gorbachev for the first time took up Khrushchev's criticism of Stalin, saying that there were still "blank pages" in Soviet history.[139] It was a turning point in the interaction between foreign policy innovations and domestic developments. From the early phase, with its emphasis on arms control and détente, Gorbachev moved on to the next phase in which he combined his peace offensive with Khrushchev's unfinished task of de-Stalinization. Chernyaev explains: "To achieve a success in foreign policy, we had to depose myths and dogmas of the confrontational ideology, and this had an impact—through mentality of the general secretary and the reformist mass media—on the entire intellectual environment of the society."[140]

The rapid ascendancy of this highly idealistic and reform-motivated "new thinking" did not end Gorbachev's baffling inconsistencies. On June 27, 1987, in his conversation with Robert Mugabe, the prime minister of Zimbabwe, Gorbachev described Soviet foreign policy philosophy in the same terms as Khrushchev would have used thirty years earlier. He concluded that "an increasing

pressure has to be brought to bear on [Western countries]." On October 23, 1987, Gorbachev told Shultz that he would not come to Washington for a summit until Reagan renounced the SDI program. Simply signing a treaty on the reduction of intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF Treaty) would not be enough to justify the summit. The Soviet leader asked his group of inner advisers, including Shevardnadze, Yakovlev, Akhromeyev, Chernyaev, and deputy foreign minister Alexander Bessmertnykh, for advice. Some of them told him to wait until a new administration was in Washington and ready to deal with the SDI issue. Chernyaev, however, urged Gorbachev not to back out of the summit.[141]

Gorbachev's vacillations and his obsession with SDI could only add to the extreme skepticism about Soviet intentions within the Reagan administration and among neoconservatives in Washington. But the phenomenon of "new thinking" was not a public relations trick. Gorbachev moved on to ideas of radically transforming Soviet ideology and the political and economic systems and truly opening the Soviet Union to the world. Being realistic dictated caution, prudence, and a careful strategy, but Gorbachev was impatient. His radical reformism was driven by the deterioration of the Soviet economy and the financial crisis. But even more it was driven by romantic notions about international affairs and by his reformist abilities. Only a few in the Soviet leadership and political classes followed Gorbachev with reformist zeal and enthusiasm. The rest watched with tacit approval as Gorbachev's new foreign policy elevated Soviet international status to unprecedented heights and achieved substantial results in reducing Cold War tensions.

Soon, however, this approval was replaced by concern and dismay. The conservatives, the modernizers, and the military realized that the Soviet Union could ill afford its commitments in Central Europe, Afghanistan, and all over the world.[142] And they advocated cautious retrenchment to postpone the crumbling of the Soviet sphere of influence. In contrast, Gorbachev and the "new thinkers" began to proclaim a policy of noninterference in Central Europe. Soon they would be leaving Soviet allies completely to their own devices. Still, the Politburo majority, the KGB, and the military did not imagine that Gorbachev would be prepared to bring the Cold War to an end, at the cost of destruction of the Soviet external empire in Central Europe and fatal instability in the Soviet Union itself.