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## The Communist World in Transition--Focus on the U.S.S.R. and Eastern Europe

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**THE COMMUNIST WORLD IN TRANSITION:  
FOCUS ON THE U.S.S.R. AND EASTERN EUROPE**

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## The Communist World in Transition: Focus on the U.S.S.R. and Eastern Europe

Robin Alison Remington  
University of Missouri-Columbia

In the Soviet Union *perestroika* and *glasnost* are the same siamese twins of an attempted 'revolution from above' still in the process of becoming even as we meet. The spillover into East-Central Europe was inevitable and unpredictable, more recently unimaginable. By this August those repercussions had gone into warp seven. A Solidarity Prime Minister took over the Polish government, an estimated 40,000 young East Germans voted against the GDR's attempt to hold the line with their feet, this weekend the Hungarian Communist Party officially discarded Communism as an objective, changed its name to the Hungarian Socialist Party and called for the development of a multiparty, parliamentary democracy.

Communist politicians are engaged in agonizing reappraisal. Policymakers in Moscow and Washington alike are increasingly nervous about the consequences of 'instability' in East-Central Europe. Western scholars who make their living as Moscow or Warsaw watchers have been overtaken by events. Sovietologists are forced into rethinking not only the Soviet experience but their own models and methodologies. Scholars of East/Central Europe have their own identity crises within which the Russian/East European area studies approach upon which much of our scholarship has been built appears increasingly obsolete. Our discipline, like the Communist world, is in transition. I teach knowing that what I say today may have changed tomorrow.

Given this disclaimer, let me share with you my understanding of what has happened and what is happening in the Soviet Union and those neighboring East/Central European states that make up what we have variously called Soviet satellites, the Stalinist interstate system, the Soviet bloc and Moscow's client states.

Depending on when one is talking about it, *perestroika* is acceleration, restructuring, radical reform, revolutionary reform, or transformation of the Soviet economy. *Perestroika* rapidly spread into politics and society. It has become a process of systemic change with political and social ramifications.

*Glasnost* is most frequently translated as openness. A literal linguistic translation might be closer to publicity; politically there is an element of exposure. *Glasnost* simultaneously functions as an instrument and precondition of the desired change whatever is meant by *perestroika*.

### Why Perestroika?

In the Western press *Perestroika* is inseparable from Mikhail Gorbachev and Soviet economic decline. These are code terms for a somewhat more complicated process.

First, economically *perestroika* is a response to an international political-economy dominated by a scientific-technical revolution that left the Soviet economy in the dust. Soviet policymakers were looking at a declining growth rate that dropped from almost 8% in the 1950s to 5% in the 1960s and less than 2% by the beginning of the 1980s. The Soviet style command economy discouraged innovation, made accurate cost-benefit investment calculations virtually impossible, and had become a recipe for technological backwardness.<sup>1</sup>

Politically, the lack of an institutionalized succession mechanism meant that Leonid Brezhnev had a stranglehold on Soviet politics and economy alike. Brezhnev took over from Khrushchev in October 1964. He headed the Soviet Communist Party for 18 years, and indisputably by the late 1970s his declining capabilities and strategies for political survival contributed to economic/political stagnation.

Thus when Brezhnev died in 1982, the room at the top of Soviet politics was filled with senior citizens. The highest level of the Party was a gerontocracy; Mikhail Gorbachev, 52, the baby of the Politburo.



The demand for *perestroika* and solid research detailing the need for change already existed in Soviet academic institutes.<sup>2</sup> Former Soviet Chief of Staff Ogarkov had bluntly called for overhauling the economy that he said was no longer able to support what was needed for the security of the country.

Gorbachev articulated and has come to personify the demand for *perestroika*, he did not create it. That demand developed within a whole strata of Soviet society and economy fed up with the bureaucratic/anti-reform attitudes of the Party/bureaucracy. It was rooted in what is sometimes called the "red" versus expert dilemma of Communist societies, where technological elites become less concerned with ideological orthodoxy than results. It was a response not only to the high-technology revolution but to social alienation, alcoholism, and corruption.

#### **Reform Content:**

In attempting to deal with the problems of declining growth rate, the mismatch of supply and demand, and an economy that is over planned and overadministered, the war is against what is called "mindless egalitarianism." This is symbolized by the principle of "to each according to his work." *Perestroika* goes beyond an attempt to accelerate the growth rate. It is an effort to switch from administrative management to economic management.

At this stage of transition, that attempt has been translated into the March 1986 Decree on Agricultural Management, the January 1987 Law on Joint Ventures, followed by the 1987 Law on State Enterprise (Association), and the July 1988 Law on Cooperatives. These measures form the infrastructure of the effort to transform the Soviet economy. Each one could easily be a lecture in itself, and since I am not an economist, I am not the best person for that lecture. From the viewpoint of most of my colleagues who are, these are partial measures that do not go far enough to accomplish their objectives.

From the political perspective, the importance of these laws is as much how they were written as the end results. According to the key economic reformer, Abel Aganbegyan, the law on state enterprises was drafted by a group of experts that included directors of enterprises and academics. It was redrafted after a nationwide discussion that produced 180,000 suggestions, many of which were considered. It is the product of the thinking of the time and political compromise. It is not written in concrete, and if it does not do what needs to be done, there is substantial reason to think that it will be revised, as with the law on Agriculture that stops short of abandoning collectivization, but has upgraded to leasing land to farm households for up to fifty years.

Indeed, the most dramatic systemic changes have not come in the economy but in what Marx would call the superstructure. Political reforms adopted at the June 1988 Party Conference included new election laws, limiting party officials from the district/city level up to the Politburo and General Secretary himself to two five year terms with the possibility of a third term only if 75% of the membership of the relevant organization approved, redefinition of the party role as that of 'guiding and inspiring' rather than 'interfering and supervising'. Gorbachev was personally put in charge of a commission to supervise implementation of the reforms. And, indeed, the election changes were codified in time for the planned elections of the Congress of Peoples Deputies and the Supreme Soviet in the Spring of 1989.

This is clearly a populist attempt by Gorbachev to go over the heads of reluctant party bureaucrats; thereby bypassing the middle level apparatchik stronghold of conservative opposition. Notwithstanding open reservations by some of his advisers that a one party system cannot be democratized without an explicit recognition of a legal opposition,<sup>3</sup> Zaslavskaya's call for a non-Communist alliance of unofficial groups and individuals,<sup>4</sup> and acceptance of the non-Communist fronts in the Baltic republics, there is no intention to move beyond socialist pluralism. A multiparty democracy is not on Gorbachev's agenda.



*Zakonnost*--seen as socialist legality--is a component of *perestroika*. The need for admitting a defense council in preliminary investigations of criminal cases was established by Central Committee decree in November 1986. In January 1988 the Supreme Soviet endorsed a procedure to enable individuals to use article 58 of the Soviet constitution that allows for appeal in cases where officials violate the law and citizens rights alike by exceeding their powers. The June 1988 Party Congress went further and endorsed the presumption of innocence. This has been combined with an effort to redefine the role of a "kinder-gentler" KGB in terms of waging war on crime and drugs.<sup>5</sup>

A companion effort to reform the educational system to eliminate excessive regimentation and centralization is also underway. *Perestroika* cannot thrive in conditions of alienation and apathy. Indeed, even Ligachev has spoken out against primitive standardization and urged more variety in teaching methods. He also spelled out the consequences of the decline in the national education budget from 11 percent in 1970 to 8 percent in 1986, noting that 21% of Soviet schools have no central heating, 30 percent are without running water, and 40 percent had no indoor toilets. (speech to CC, Pravda, February 18, 1988).

Soviet politics is the epitome of William Faulkner's insight that not only is the past not dead, it is not even past. This is particularly true in the search for *perestroika* which has once again opened the grim closet of Stalin's crimes and rehabilitated Nicolai Bukharin, godfather of NEP purged by Stalin in 1938.<sup>6</sup>

This thaw in literature, culture, films, and the news media brings us to the twin of *perestroika*--*glasnost*. And, admittedly arbitrarily, here I am going to broaden my discussion of the dynamics of Soviet reform to include the widening ripples of that process in East/Central Europe.

### **Why Glasnost?**

In the political/bureaucratic battle that swirls around Mikhail Gorbachev's campaign to restyle the Soviet economy to keep pace with the scientific-technical

revolutions of the 20th and 21st centuries, *glasnost* has an ambiguous, elusive quality. On one level, this is seen as a means for getting at the problems to be corrected. On another, it is a method for mobilizing participation and commitment; for expanding the universe of ideas and energies.

As an aspiration *glasnost* has a symbolic reality. But at the same time, as Boris Yeltsin's rise, fall and reemergence on the road to *perestroika* signaled, there are limits, however ill-defined. In short what *glasnost* means is a matter of when one asks the question, for the substance of *glasnost* reflects the zig-zags of an ongoing internal party struggle in the Kremlin.

That is a problem for East/Central European policymakers under pressure to respond to initiatives from Moscow. It is also a problem for Western scholars attempting to sort out the implications of Gorbachev's attempted revolution for regime stability and systemic change in Eastern Europe.

Moreover how one approaches that problem is integrally linked to where one comes down in the conceptual debate that divides scholars on the nature of Soviet-East European relations. There are imperial, hierarchical/systemic models; theories of dependency and interdependence; differences over whether the ties that bind the East European capitals to Moscow are or are not 'organic'.<sup>7</sup>

This is the consequence of the arbitrary, politically determined boundaries established at the end of World War II. Postwar Eastern Europe is an historical freak. It is a meaningless label. Rather, in current usage, Eastern Europe refers to ideological/political boundaries that separate those countries in East/Central Europe that underwent Communist revolutions largely by virtue of where the Red Army stopped fighting as the war ended.

Typically Eastern Europe includes the Warsaw Pact/Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) six--Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania--nonaligned Yugoslavia and still largely isolated Albania. As

a region this is a population of some 137 million people living in eight states. It is a rich tapestry of historical experience, cultural orientation, nationality composition, language and religion. These states range in size from roughly 3 million Albanians to 37 million Poles. They differ widely in natural resources, level of economic development and political legacies.

Thus East/Central European Communist systems took root in enormously different environments and developed in the context of very different opportunities and restraints. Notwithstanding the homogenizing efforts of the Stalinist interstate system, the dominant characteristic of these countries is diversity. They represent multiple political environments; country-specific sources of tension that influence how East European political elites respond to opportunities and risks entailed in *perestroika/glasnost*.

#### **Analytical Assumptions:**

My analysis is based on the assumption that East/Central Europe is a distinct subset within the international Communist system with an historically binding relationship to Tsarist Russia that colors the intensity of Soviet feelings vis-a-vis domestic developments in the region.

This region is Moscow's front yard. Long before there was a Soviet Union the Russian Tsars were obsessed with East/Central Europe and meddled in the domestic politics of their neighbors. After 1917 the socialist revolution substituted ideological millenarianism and obligations to 'save' fraternal socialist countries for Tsarist conviction of Moscow's messianic mission based on theology and panslavism. The ideological rationale was new. The political system to be protected had changed radically, yet the underlying political/strategic concern remained much the same. Stalin was not the first ruler in Moscow dedicated to security related expansion or to want buffers around his borders.

I accept the existence of an atavistic, symbiotic relationship between Soviet-East/Central European Communist systems. I have no ideas as to how to measure whether or not that relationship was or is organic.

However, in my view, prior to Gorbachev, Soviet political leaders believed that it was. There is enough evidence to say that from Stalin to Brezhnev those who made Soviet policy considered East European imitation of the Soviet model an important validation of Soviet domestic choices. Nor is there reason to suppose that Andropov and Chernenko thought any differently.

Yet there has been a pattern of differentiation among East European states in that regard ever since Stalin miscalculated when he thought that he could shake his little finger, topple Tito, and whip the Yugoslav communist party back in line in 1948. Stalin was right that the problem was 'conceptions different from our own.' He was wrong in what he tried to do about that.<sup>8</sup>

For our purposes, the lesson of the Yugoslav alternative, Moscow's ability to tolerate Albania as an island of Chinese influence in the Balkans, and the grudging acceptance of Ceaurescu's socialism in one family in Romania is that whether or not those dedicated to 'real socialism' liked it, the Soviets had learned to live with a relatively elastic interpretation of socialist organization/norms.

That elasticity was not infinite as demonstrated by the "allied socialist" intervention that put an end to the 1968 Czechoslovak reform movement. The Brezhnev doctrine drew the line.<sup>9</sup> But subsequent Soviet responses during the 1971 political/social crisis in Poland and the 1980-1981 challenge of Solidarity blurred that line again. And it remains to be seen where *perestroika/glasnost* have redrawn it. On October 8, Secretary of State James Baker III, said on Meet the Press, that the Soviets (presumably Foreign Minister Shevardnadze) had told him in Wyoming that the East/Central European countries were free to decide on their own political systems, but that the bottom line was membership in the Warsaw Pact.



The Hungarian Communist Party's decision to officially abandon Communism as a goal and transform itself into a social democratic party committed to competing within a multiparty system and a market economy will test whether or not his sources spoke for the Politburo.

My assumption is that in practice there is not one line, but lines; that regional crisis management in Moscow continues to be fundamentally a bilateral business with multilateral implications. Notwithstanding Yugoslav fears in 1968, three generations of Soviet leaders had tolerated a much more serious challenge to the 'leading role' of the party in the form of self-managing institutions than the pluralism of the Prague Spring that sent 'allied socialist' troops marching to save the Czechoslovak Communist Party (KSC) from itself.

Moreover, ever since the Soviets decided to ignore Albanian withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact in 1968, Albania has been in a separate category. Therefore this analysis focuses on the Warsaw Pact East European members; leaving the Yugoslavs and Albanians to one side for the moment.

That is a somewhat artificial choice. For Gorbachev's travels to Yugoslavia can-- and should--be seen as a part of his restyling of socialist international relations. Nonetheless past practice and current political dynamics mean that systemic change in these two Balkan mavericks does not have the same domestic salience in Moscow.

Finally, with respect to the Warsaw Pact six, I am considering *glasnost* in three dimensions:

- 1) a package of political reforms
  - reduced censorship
  - secret, multicandidate elections of state  
and party officials
  - criticism of officials
  - exchange of experience



--increased contact with the outside world

- 2) an instrument of political struggle
- 3) an aspiration for expanded political access/democratization of party and society

#### **Variables Determining East/Central European Responses:**

In considering the hopes and fears surrounding *glasnost* in Eastern Europe, there are shared as well as country-specific concerns. Most prominent among these was the lack of synchronization between Soviet and East European political situations.

Mikhail Gorbachev took over as General Secretary of the Soviet Union in March 1985. He was in the vanguard of a new generation; young Turks that could reform against the mistakes imbedded in the hardening of the political arteries during Brezhnev's eighteen years in power.<sup>10</sup>

The leaders of Eastern Europe could not reform against the past. They symbolized that past. Consider the cohort of East European leaders that Gorbachev joined in 1985:

**Bulgaria**--Todor Zhivkov, born September 11, 1911, First Secretary of The BCP since 1954. (Replaced by Petar Mladenov, November 1989)

**Czechoslovakia**--Gustav Husak, born January 10, 1913. Head of the KSC since 1968. (Replaced by Milos Jakes, December 1987)

**East Germany**--Erich Honecker, born August 25, 1912. First secretary of the SED since 1971. (Replaced by Egon Krenz, November 1989)

**Hungary**--Janos Kadar, Born May 22, 1912; First Secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party since 1956. (Replaced by Karoli Grosz, May 1988)

**Poland**--Wojciech Jaruzelski, born July 6, 1923, First Secretary of the Polish United Workers Party since October 1981. (Replaced as head of Party by Mieczyslaw Rakowski, July 1989; remained as President)

**Romania**--Nicolae Ceausescu, born January 26, 1918, Head of the RCP since 1965.

As a rule politicians do not like to repudiate their records, and East/Central Europeans are no exception. Moreover, for those in their mid-seventies the whole process was uncomfortably linked to their own eventual political retirement.

These men shared a body of political experience. Even Jaruzelski was thirty shortly after Stalin died in 1953. They had experienced the destabilizing impact of Malenkov's New Course, de-Stalinization and Khrushchev's rapprochement with Yugoslavia. They knew only too well the floods that followed the Soviet thaw from 1953-1956. They witnessed the fate of Khrushchev's own reform efforts. They had either participated or watched as the Prague Spring collapsed into the long hot summer of 1968.

The state of the economy also undoubtedly influenced and influences the reaction of individual East European leaders to the prospects of *perestroika* and their concerns vis-a-vis the repercussions of *glasnost*. In 1987 East European hard currency debts to the west ranged from the 2/3 billion on the part of Czechoslovakia to an estimated 33 billion Polish debt (reportedly almost 40 billion by the time Solidarity Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki took office in August 1989). See Table 1.

Paul Marer has argued persuasively that a substantial part of the problem was economic mismanagement on the side of East European planners, that borrowed funds were used less effectively than they might have been.<sup>11</sup> Yet even if their economic management had been much better than it was, East/Central European economic options in the 1980s would be bleak. For small and medium-sized countries Communist and non-Communist alike are not masters of their fate in the international, global economy. East European regimes are even less so in that they can not control the spillover of superpower politics into their economies.

The receptivity or the lack of it of the international community to East European economic needs becomes a factor in the degree of economic dependence on Moscow. Leaving aside Poland and Hungary, Western credits are still hard to get and, even for Warsaw and Budapest, depend on potentially destabilizing austerity programs.

With the exception of Romania--where Ceausescu has deliberately diversified--the economies of the Warsaw Pact East European members are symbiotically tied to their trade with the Soviet Union. Moscow remains the dominant regional supplier and customer. Soviet trade is essential for continued economic development of Eastern Europe. It is primarily bilateral and determined by a range of political/military considerations.

There is considerable academic debate as to whether this is an asset or a liability from the Soviet perspective. That remains an unsettled question. More importantly in terms of East European options, tying the CMEA pricing mechanism to a moving average based on world oil prices in 1975 sent a clear signal that the Soviets intended to cut their perceived losses.

As a result East Central Europeans are having to pay more and look elsewhere in order to meet their own projected energy consumption needs.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, Soviet response to their allies' debt servicing crises in the 1980s has made clear that neither East European borrowers or Western lenders can count on a Soviet umbrella to protect them from the fallout of potential defaults.<sup>13</sup>

Thus Soviet preoccupation with Moscow's own economic problems even before Gorbachev became committed to *perestroika* was making it more and more essential for East Central European regimes to seek other economic alternatives, suppliers and markets. Whatever the formal commitment to increased integration and coordination of national plans within the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, the reality is less Soviet assistance.

Consider the implications of the 1984 CMEA Moscow Summit Declaration insistence that CMEA countries have been "consistent opponents of economic isolationism," the support for "increased exploitation of the potential for the development of business cooperation with capitalist states and also with their businesses and companies."<sup>14</sup>

Finally, the reaction of East/Central European political elites to *perestroika/glasnost* is tied to the crisis of legitimacy that continues to plague these Communist regimes. With the exceptions of Yugoslavia and Albania, East European Communist revolutions piggy-backed to power on the coattails of the Red Army. Soviet liberation and scientific socialism has proved a poor substitute for indigenous revolutionary myth.

The rationale/legal basis of legitimacy exists via East European constitutions that are strong on form but have little relation to the actual political life. Notwithstanding Ceausescu's personality cult, European Communist statesmen are short on charisma--frequently described as the least worst choice by large parts of their own populations. Not the best political position for politicians.

Not surprisingly in an effort to improve their image, these regimes have tilted towards 'socialist patriotism'; cautious nationalism, consumerism, and cooptation of technical and cultural intelligentsia.

Western scholars have been skeptical. Yet for those East Europeans dedicated to change, the only political game in town has been tinkering with party reform under the mantle of national roads to socialism. In this fashion I would agree with Alfred Meyer that, "throughout the European Communist world the societal base is tending to reassert its sovereignty over the political superstructure."<sup>15</sup>

These official and unofficial reformers are the natural allies of *perestroika*; the beneficiaries of *glasnost*. Then there is the constituency created by a widening generation gap. Throughout East Central Europe teenagers are dropping out of developed socialism. They are alienated, hostile to the Calvinist style regimentation, and bored by the Marxist-Leninist jargon of their grandfathers.

Adolescent rebellion is not unique to Communist systems. Young people in East and West alike live in a youth culture increasingly permeated with political apathy and hard to reach. Parents, never mind politicians, can't talk their language.



In Communist systems, however, the communications problem has been compounded by the felt need to explain reality in ideological terms that give the appearance of unity whether or not it exists. In the past this was a direct reflection of the Soviet assumption that the appearance of unity--and most especially unity based on the Soviet model--was an important validation of Soviet domestic choices.

To the degree that the appearance of unity has been a core element of Moscow's political agenda, it has intensified the crisis of legitimacy for East/Central European Communist leaders whose credibility depends on the appearance of indigenous solutions. Insisting that what is good for the Soviet Union is good for Eastern Europe is hardly "new thinking" in Soviet-East European relations. On one level the problem with *perestroika* is that it is another Russian transplant. The logical consequence of *glasnost* would be the East Europeans saying so.

But politics has its own logic. And in fairness, that is an oversimplification of the process.

#### **The Tangled Web:**

Predictably, East/Central Europeans largely adopted a wait and see attitude toward the winds of change coming from Moscow. In 1985-1986 Gorbachev was clearly considered the new boy on the block. He had not consolidated his position. Getting on the bandwagon could be a risky business. Certainly Imre Nagy had not enhanced his political future by linking it to Malenkov's Course. If Gorbachev slipped, he would take his supporters and clients down with him.

At the top East Central European leaders are engaged in a delicate balancing act. There is a succession choreography of two steps forward and one step back, as the potential successors to the current communist gerontocracies attempt to keep their options open in case Gorbachev is not the political leader they must relate to as when the changing of the guard takes place on their own political turf.



At the same time official and unofficial reformers have been strengthened in their demands. Equally importantly those same East Central European reformers have become a factor in the political momentum of the reform debate within the Soviet Union itself.

Soviet policymakers have their allies among academics and scholars, who tilt towards Hungarian, East German, even Bulgarian reform varieties.<sup>16</sup> East European reformers cite selectively from Soviet sources to defend preferred strategies at home.

Even Gorbachev has declared his willingness to make use of "anything which is advantageous or appropriate for our own country."<sup>17</sup> This a new twist to the exchange of socialist experience. It is new thinking as to the possible source of "real socialism". It is a new approach to unity and the appearance of unity. Take Gorbachev's statement to the CPSU 27th Party Congress:

The communist's movement's immense diversity and the tasks that it encounters are likewise a reality. In some cases this leads to disagreements and divergencies... there generally can not be an identity of views on all issues... We do not see the diversity of the movement as a synonym for disunity, much as unity has nothing to do with uniformity, hierarchy, interference by some parties in the affairs of others or the striving of any party to have a monopoly over what is right<sup>18</sup>

Until this August, I would not have gone so far as to say that Gorbachev thereby put the Soviet model on the rubbish heap of socialist experiments. However he did come down squarely on the side of legitimate socialist pluralism. And in doing so, he legitimized East Central European variations on the theme of *perestroika*.

If there was any doubt about what the Soviet leader meant at the 27th Party Congress, he attempted to remove it when he took the message of *perestroika* on the road

in the spring of 1987. In his travels, the General Secretary spoke of what he called the "generalizations" inherent in the exchange of experience on socialist construction.

The entire system of relations between socialist countries ... should be built on the foundation of equality and mutual responsibility. No one has the right to claim special position in the Socialist world. The independence of each party, its responsibility to its people, the right to resolve questions of the country's development in a sovereign way--for us these are indisputable principles.<sup>19</sup>

This goes substantially beyond Soviet insistence that their East European allies follow them around the corner onto Malenkov's New Course in the mid-1950s. Rather Gorbachev has called for "pooling efforts of the fraternal parties aimed at studying and using experience in building socialism."<sup>20</sup> By implication, building socialism has become a joint construction project rather than a matter of models.

Indeed, Gorbachev has specifically expressed his willingness to learn from the experiences of East European socialism and even the Chinese.<sup>21</sup> Although the emphasis initially appeared to be on Hungarian reform initiatives such as the bankruptcy law, there is a belief in Warsaw that Soviet interest in the Polish law on enterprises constitutes borrowing from the Polish experience. The interest in a two-tiered planning bureaucracy may have been inspired by the GDR, while discussions of self-management draw on Yugoslav and Polish examples.

The actual degree to which Soviet *perestrōika* reflects East European innovations is less important than transformation in the dominant-subordinate relationship implied by the process itself.

Subsequently, the Soviet leader went on to describe the intended restructuring of relations among socialist countries in sweeping terms.

"the entire range of political, economic, and humanitarian relations with socialist countries is being cast anew. This is dictated by the objective needs of each country's development and by the international situation as a whole, rather than by emotions."<sup>22</sup>

Nonetheless, Gorbachev's blunt language in Romania underlined his expectation that while each party might have the right to resolve problems based on their indigenous conditions, they would be under sustained pressure to admit that problems existed and to tackle them.

David Mason has argued persuasively that the economic advantages sought by the advocates of *perestroika* require East European economies with increased productivity and higher quality production; economies that are at least NOT a liability to their Soviet trading partner.<sup>23</sup>

I would not minimize the importance of economics. But in my view the political momentum of the reform debate within the Soviet Union was an equally important factor. It is just as likely that Gorbachev was pushed by political imperatives to expand the struggle for *perestroika* to Eastern Europe. The immediate need to strengthen the hand of his domestic supporters may well have had more urgency than the longer term desire to create healthy partners for a restructured Soviet economy.

In doing so, he escalated the unpredictability of the reform process. To whatever degree Soviet domestic *perestroika* was validated by pressing his East European comrades to get into the act, doing so could backfire. This is not only a matter of East European regime stability. As Charles Gati has speculated, there is the danger that the effort to combine Communism and *glasnost* could 'unravel in Warsaw, Budapest, or Prague';<sup>24</sup> creating a powerful backlash against Soviet reform, perhaps shortening Gorbachev's own meteoric political career.

## The Lessons of 1968

Increasingly there is a tendency to speak of a Moscow Spring, note the oft quoted statement of Gennadi Gerasimov that the difference between *perestroika* and the Prague Spring is "ninteen years". Not that Alexander Dubcek's search for socialism with a human face has been rehabilitated. But it is officially being 'reexamined'.<sup>25</sup>

Gorbachev's reply to journalists during his July 5, 1989 interview in Paris that Poles and Hungarians were free to determine their own political future appeared to underline his commitment to 'new political thinking' in Soviet-East European relations. Nonetheless, the relationships that the general secretary referred to clearly still are in the process of becoming. Official willingness to reassess the star-crossed Czechoslovak reform of 1968 expressed during the 70th anniversary of the October Revolution will accelerate the rate--perhaps even the nature--of change. In my view, as the debate continues, differences on the relationship of economic to political reform along a Czechoslovak spectrum of progressive, centrist, and dogmatic positions are almost inevitable.

From our perspective, the core of that process is the relationship between *perestroika* and *glasnost*. Radical systemic change requires looking squarely at the problems and considering even once unacceptable solutions. It requires mobilizing modernizing elites; expanding political access; releasing creative energies--i.e. *glasnost*.

Roughly twenty years ago the Czechoslovak censors called for an end to censorship,<sup>26</sup> the epitome of *glasnost* before its time. That move released far more than the Czechoslovak Communist Party could handle. It effectively blew out the circuit breakers and opened up the reform process to a freewheeling political debate.

With interest group activity allowed to function openly, demands emerged for an opposition party. Groups such as KAN, the ill-fated club of Committed Non-Party Members, were not content to limit the dialogue of political change to how to clean up and repair the road to socialism. Scabs of silence and pretence were torn off. A painful past became tangled in a host of sensitive topics about where to go from here. Not surprisingly, some of these were "anti-Soviet".



Understandably East/Central European policymakers, even those convinced of the need for economic/political reform, approach *glasnost* gingerly. Political careers and self-image are at stake. In societies built on ideological myth and run by bureaucratic ritual, calling a spade a spade and forcing decision-makers to defend their decisions in a market place of ideas is political wildfire.

Yet at least part of the *glasnost* reform package is essential to get their economies back on track. Moreover, whether or not the aging leaders would prefer to sweep the whole issue under the nearest rug, official and unofficial reformers have been substantially strengthened by the language of *perestroika/glasnost* in Moscow. Never mind if the reality is less radical than already existing East/Central European initiatives. Now that reality is real.

#### **Tentative Conclusions:**

Unless Gorbachev miscalculates and *perestroika/glasnost* become an 'anti-party' conspiracy in subsequent revisions of Soviet history texts, *glasnost* will be the language of politics in Eastern Europe for the foreseeable future.

Where any particular East/Central European regime falls on that spectrum will demand on its own internal dynamics; on the choreography of succession struggles. There will not be one *perestroika* but many. And "real *perestroika*" may prove as illusive as 'real socialism'.

*Glasnost* as reform package will see many variations on the basic theme of democratization/participation. It will be used to defend unpopular policies as well as to attack them--witness the Jaruzelski regimes' initial dismissal of the defeat of its austerity program at the polls as a tribute to political openness.

Yet the voices will not be silenced. For in the popular mind *glasnost* has become the right to be heard. Outcomes are no longer a question of what politicians will tolerate. Throughout East/Central Europe civil society has entered the political drama as an anomic political actor. Whether or not Gorbachev accepts Honecker's view that the East



German economy does not need restructuring, he has become a hero to a generation of young East Germans intent on *glasnost* with or without *perestroika*.<sup>27</sup>

East/Central European, *glasnost* is a demand for a piece of the political action. Party leaders are split between those who scramble to ally with civil society as in Poland and Hungary and those desperately trying to hold the line. The Soviet revolution from above has become an East/Central European revolution from below. Like the Indian Goddess Durga, Communist politicians are riding a tiger. They can't get off; they can't let go.

#### Update: November 10, 1989

- October 9: Gorbachev returns from the 40th anniversary of the founding of the GDR, 70,000 demonstrate in Leipzig, and East Germany party leader Erich Honecker compares the continuing unrest to the China democracy uprising, raising the specter of military repression.
- October 16: 100,000 East Germans protest in Leipzig.
- October 18: Honecker resigns "for reasons of health" from his posts as head of the Party (SED), state, and chairman of the National Defense Council. Egon Krenz, 52 and the youngest member of the Politburo, takes over as head of Party.
- October 27: GDR government lifts ban on visa free travel to Czechoslovakia.
- November 4: Half a million demonstrate for democratic reforms in East Berlin.
- November 6: Half a million go into the streets in eight German cities demanding free elections and travel.
- November 7: The GDR government resigns.
- November 8: GDR Party Politburo resigns. Membership drops from 21 to 11.
- November 9: East Germany opens frontiers to the West; the Berlin wall collapses as the symbol of a divided Germany becomes the stage for a festival of celebration.
- November 10: Bulgarian leader, 78 year-old Todor Zhivkov, head of the Bulgarian party for more than three decades resigns.

### Postscript:

The speed with which the Honecker government crumbled and the transformation of the East German hard line stance against reform into a platform that pledges open borders, free elections, and legal status for the opposition movement, has left policymakers and scholars alike dizzy if not speechless. President Bush stressed the need for a "prudent, welcoming" response. Soviet foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze said that opening the border was a "sensible thing to do." The increasing talk of German reunification has been bluntly called premature by Soviet foreign ministry spokesmen and Margaret Thatcher alike. Politics makes strange bedfellows.

Egon Krenz' gamble that a commitment to open borders will reverse the mass psychology of "leave now before the window of opportunity slams shut," and encourage East Germans to visit instead of move--perhaps even to come back--may work. This is partly because as West German Minister of the Interior Wolfgang Schauble put it, the strain on West Germany resources of the 225,000 East Germans and some 300,000 other ethnic Germans who flooded into the Federal Republic this year may mean that future East German migrants could face worse living conditions in the West than those they left behind. (The New York Times November 10, 1989).

For the moment there is a coincidence of interest between the East German government, who wants to stop the mass migration before it becomes a government without a people and the GDR economy is fundamentally crippled by the loss of young, skilled labor; the East German opposition, who needs those committed to reform to stay home and keep the pressure on; the West German government, whose resources are severely strained and wants a face saving breathing space to deal with the economic consequences and social tensions that have come in the wake of its ideological success; Moscow, where there is real fear of a German reunification; and Washington, where concern for East European stability and unforeseen repercussions for NATO add up to nervous "prudence" in response to the symbolic demolition of the Berlin Wall--long seen as the most unbreachable stretch of the Iron Curtain dividing East and West.

In the short-run this appears likely to result in substantial West German aid to Krenz' government if his reform agenda stays on track. It is possible--less likely--that Washington will engage in some form of significant cost-sharing with Bonn in this regard. Moscow as well has a vested interest in keeping a reformist East German government in place and holding the line against German reunification until/unless that is worked out as a package deal involving the dissolution of both the Warsaw Pact and NATO. Here is where "old political thinking" dominates the mind-set both in the Kremlin and the White House. For the Bush administration has made quite clear that in its view a unified Germany can exist only in the form of a democratic, member of NATO.

These differences are unlikely to be resolved during the Bush-Gorbachev shipboard meetings scheduled for this December. Undoubtedly they will be discussed. However, the agenda for that meeting is not actually in the control of either superpower. If Krenz cannot stem the tide or if the proliferating opposition groups in East Germany do not accept the reform course of the "new" politburo (seven of whose eleven members were retained, notwithstanding the significant addition of the Dresden party chief Hans Modrow considered a leading reformer), all bets are off. Paradoxically, contrary to all expectations, *perestroika* and superpower relations alike are hostage not in Warsaw, Prague, or Budapest but in East Berlin.

Finally, if the winds of change sweeping the East continue in the form of dramatic, nonviolent, transformation of these Communist political systems; Western leaders may well face identity crises not unlike those that have traumatized Soviet-East/Central European politicians. Without the evil empire, who are we? In the political economy of the 21st century will Japanese and post-1992 European economic competition become more of a threat to our national interest than Soviet military power? And if so, will clinging to our own ideological stereotypes make us less able to compete?

These are complex issues. There are no easy answers. But there are lessons to be learned from watching the Communist world in transition. In East and West alike politicians are increasingly judged on criteria of economic performance and

accountability. The repercussions of these events so unthinkable even when I made this presentation a month ago require a rethinking of our role in a rapidly changing world, i.e. "new political thinking" by Washington as well as Moscow.



Table I

Billion US \$

EAST EUROPEAN GROSS HARD CURRENCY DEBT TO THE WEST: 1980-1986

Year	1980	1982	1984	1985	1986	1987
Bulgaria	3.5	2.7	2.2	3.6	4.8	6.1
Czechoslovakia	4.9	4.0	3.6	3.8	4.4	2/3
East Germany	14.1	13.0	12.1	13.9	16.7	20.4
Hungary	9.0	7.7	8.8	11.7	15.0	17.7
Poland	25.0	24.8	26.8	29.3	33.5	38.9 <sup>*</sup>
Romania	9.4	9.7	7.1	6.6	6.0	4.9 <sup>**</sup>

Source: CIA Handbook of Economic Statistics, (Washington, D.C.: September 1987), p. 60.  
 1987 figures from CIA World Fact Book (Washington, D.C.: 1989).

<sup>\*</sup> Polish figure for 1988, by 1989 the Polish debt was estimated at almost forty million.

<sup>\*\*</sup> In the spring of 1989, Romania claimed to have eliminated its hard currency debt.



## NOTES

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