

Michael Mandelbaum

ENDING THE COLD WAR

The cold war has dominated American foreign policy for four decades. For all of this time the American aim has been to encourage fundamental changes in the Soviet Union's relations with the rest of the world. For forty years the West has waited for signs of such changes. Now they have begun to appear. Mikhail Gorbachev has launched the most ambitious, sweeping and, from the West's point of view, promising program of reform in the history of the Soviet Union.

While the outcome of the process that he has set in motion is by no means certain, there can no longer be any doubt that something of extraordinary importance is taking place in the Soviet Union, with potentially profound consequences for American foreign policy. A marked improvement in Soviet-American relations has already occurred, and even more dramatic improvement is possible. It is now time to think seriously about what is required to end the cold war.

This is not, to be sure, the first time that a dramatic improvement in Soviet-American relations has seemed to be at hand. Indeed, declarations of a new day of harmony between East and West have been a recurrent theme of the postwar period. Hopes for a durable accommodation and expanded cooperation between the two great powers were highest at the time of the *détente* of the early 1970s, and its failure led to deep, bitter disappointment. The parallels between that period and the present one do not, at first glance, offer grounds for optimism.

Then, as now, a series of summit meetings between the leaders of the two countries took place. Then, as now, there was talk of expanded economic relations. Then, as now, many who wished to leave the Soviet Union were allowed to do so. Yet the *détente* of the 1970s did not bring a lasting improvement in relations between the two superpowers. Why should

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things turn out differently now? There are, in fact, two important differences between the two periods that make the present moment far more promising.

First, the international conditions are substantially different. In the early 1970s the Soviet Union was on the rise; it achieved nuclear parity with the United States and was able for the first time to project non-nuclear military force beyond Europe. Its Eastern European empire was tranquil: the liberal currents in Czechoslovakia had been snuffed out in 1968, and workers' demonstrations in Poland in 1970 and 1976 were effectively contained. The United States, on the other hand, was beleaguered—defeated in Vietnam, divided at home, with a politically crippled chief executive for a crucial part of the decade and a distaste for international entanglements for much of the rest of it.

Because they approached détente from differing circumstances, the two countries understood it in different and incompatible ways. For the Soviet leaders it represented the American acknowledgement that their country had become the international equal of the United States and was thus entitled to all the rights and privileges, as they saw it, that the other superpower had long enjoyed. The United States had been forced to make this concession, in Moscow's view, by Soviet strength and American weakness, which some Russians came to believe represented a permanent shift in the balance of strength between the two.

Americans, by contrast, saw détente as a Soviet commitment to abide by the international rules of good behavior as defined by the United States. When Moscow behaved otherwise the American public felt alarmed and then betrayed.

Now the positions are reversed. It is the Soviet Union that is beleaguered—disengaging from an unwinnable war in Afghanistan, with clients under pressure in Southeast Asia and southern Africa and restive satellites in Eastern Europe, and beset by severe social, political and economic difficulties at home. The present leadership must cope with the legacy of the Brezhnev period, in which a steep decline in economic performance left the country falling ever further behind the advanced industrial democracies. The Brezhnev foreign policy also appears in retrospect a failure. The Soviet Union did not gain military superiority over the West; its new clients turned out to be poor and unstable; it failed in Afghanistan; and its

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relations with the United States, China and Japan all deteriorated.

Therefore, while the earlier détente was undertaken by the Soviet Union for offensive motives, in the late 1980s the overriding Soviet purpose is defensive. The United States, of course, has problems of its own, notably its huge budget and trade deficits. Nonetheless, it is more confident than it was in the early 1970s.

International setbacks such as the Soviet Union has experienced often produce tactical retreats. But the potential now exists for a transformation of the U.S.-Soviet relationship, rather than merely a temporary lull in their forty-year conflict as the détente of the 1970s proved to be, because of a second difference between the earlier period and the present one: the trend in Soviet internal affairs.

The 1970s were a conservative time within the Soviet Union; Leonid Brezhnev was a resolute custodian of the status quo. He shunned new ideas, new policies and new personalities. Mikhail Gorbachev, by contrast, is promoting sweeping, even revolutionary change. The focus of his program of reform is domestic rather than international. Domestic reform, however, has important consequences for Soviet foreign policy, and therefore for Soviet-American relations.

In the short term reform makes the Soviet Union more accommodating and less aggressive abroad. Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze has said that the purpose of Soviet foreign policy is to foster conditions in which domestic restructuring can succeed. These conditions include the relaxation of tensions with other countries.

More important, Gorbachev's reforms may ease the Soviet-American rivalry by altering the conceptual basis of Soviet foreign policy. Moscow is reconsidering precepts that have governed its foreign policy in the past and that have put it at odds with the West. If new ideas come to shape policies, the underlying causes of the cold war cannot help but be affected.

How should the United States respond to all this? It is first necessary to decide what is central to the cold war and what is peripheral, to separate the threatening aspects of Soviet conduct from those features that are merely annoying. The Soviet goal, Moscow regularly declares, is "normal" relations with the United States. To establish them requires some definition of what has been "abnormal" for forty years.

To this distinction another must be added—between what

is feasible and what is not. Were it within the power of the United States completely to recast Soviet foreign and domestic policies, the result would be dramatically different from the Soviet Union of today. The United States does not, however, have that power, and it would be foolish, indeed counterproductive, to insist that the Soviet Union conform entirely to Western standards and preferences in order to end the cold war.

Deciding what is feasible is an act of political judgment, and not an easy one. For if it is a mistake to expect too much, it is also an error to ask too little of the Soviet Union, to set the standards for ending the cold war too low by assuming that substantial improvements in the present state of affairs are impossible.

To end the cold war the initial task for the United States, then, is to set standards for progress in the three principal areas of conflict with the Soviet Union—regional disputes, the military confrontation and human rights. Americans must decide what, in relations between the United States and the Soviet Union, is the best of all possible worlds, if not the best of all imaginable worlds.

II

Like other great-power conflicts of the past, the cold war has concerned territory and its control. The United States and the Soviet Union have competed to implant or impose their own political systems beyond their borders.

In the 1970s the most vigorously contested territories were in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The *détente* of that decade foundered on the Soviet role in the Arab-Israeli war of 1973, Soviet assistance to the Vietnamese communists in their war of conquest in Indochina, and Soviet sponsorship of Cuban intervention in Angola and Ethiopia.

Striking changes in the Soviet approach to conflicts in the Third World have occurred under Gorbachev, and some changes predate his accession. In the early 1980s articles began to appear expressing disenchantment with the clients that Moscow had acquired beyond Europe and asserting that most Third World countries were unpromising candidates for socialism.

Under Gorbachev Moscow has acquired no new clients and has on the whole been strict with existing ones, for example, chastising the Vietnamese and the Cubans for wasting Soviet aid, and denying the Nicaraguan Sandinistas and the Marxist

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government of Angola anything like the support Cuba and Ethiopia receive.

Even more dramatically, whereas Moscow's attitudes toward regional conflicts once ranged from tolerant to enthusiastic, recently the Soviet leadership has displayed more than a passing interest in bringing the bloodiest and most dangerous ones to an end. While contributing little to ending the Iran-Iraq War, the Soviet Union nevertheless made clear its preference that it not continue. It has demonstrated more flexibility in its approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict than at any time in twenty years, first telling Syria's leader Hafez al-Assad that it was "not normal" for the Soviet Union to have no diplomatic relations with Israel, and then, gradually and without public fanfare, restoring relations with Israel in all but name.

Cuba's agreement to withdraw from Angola and Vietnam's decision to leave Cambodia were undoubtedly undertaken in no small part because this is what Moscow wanted. The most dramatic shift in Soviet Third World policy has occurred in Afghanistan. Early in 1989, after nine years of occupation and a brutal struggle with the Afghan resistance, the last Soviet soldier returned home.

Afghanistan is an important country for the Soviet Union, and the decision to withdraw marks a major shift in Soviet foreign policy rather than simply a tactical retreat from an overextended military position. For Afghanistan has been a communist country ruled by a Leninist party, to which the Brezhnev regime committed more than 100,000 troops to maintain in power. The fall of that party would repudiate the so-called Brezhnev Doctrine, according to which once a communist government has been installed in a country it must be kept in place at all costs.

For most Americans the term "regional conflict" suggests images of exotic locales and unfamiliar people—tribal disputes in Africa and guerrilla campaigns in the mountains of Southwest Asia. By far the most important Soviet-American regional conflict, however, is the one in Europe. Europe is the most valuable contested area on the planet. It is where the cold war began in the 1940s. It is where the stakes continue to be the highest, and therefore where the two sides are most heavily armed. Should there be a third world war of the twentieth century it would be, like the first two, a conflict for dominance in Europe.

The continent has, it is true, been peaceful for a generation.

The last major East-West crisis there, over Berlin, occurred in 1961. Much of the West and the rest of the world have come to see Europe as stable and its political conflicts as settled. In fact, neither perception is accurate.

The core of the cold war in Europe is Soviet domination of Eastern Europe. Moscow has imposed unwanted and illegitimate communist regimes on countries that, if free to choose, would have governments much more like those in Western Europe. This is an affront to American values.

More important, Soviet domination of Eastern Europe threatens American security. The American military commitment to Western Europe is based on the fear that without it the Soviet Union would do to France, Italy, the Benelux countries and West Germany what it has already done to Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and East Germany. The threat of Soviet aggression against Western Europe is credible because it has already taken place—and continues to the present—against Eastern Europe.

Ending the cold war requires ending the Soviet threat to Western Europe, which requires ending Soviet subjugation of Eastern Europe, which means allowing the people of that part of the world to decide freely how to govern themselves. The principal requirement for the end of the cold war, in short, is self-determination for Eastern Europe.

The goal is easy enough to state but will be far from easy to achieve. It cannot be achieved suddenly or violently. Nor can it be achieved against the determined opposition of the Soviet Union. Moscow will retain the power to impose its will in the region for the foreseeable future.

Nor—and this is the most difficult point of all to understand as well as to accomplish—does self-determination for Eastern Europe necessarily require the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact. It is not the presence of Soviet troops in these countries per se that is the cause of the conflict with the West. It is rather the fact that these troops are deployed to keep in power governments that could not survive without them. Their purpose is not to protect the security of the Soviet Union but to impose Moscow's ideological preferences on people whose political values are different. Were they to cease to do so, and were they to be reorganized to carry out defensive rather than offensive military missions, they would be far less threatening to Western Europe. Thus what is needed is for Moscow to separate its security from its ideology.

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The changes that have taken place in Eastern Europe since 1985 are promising. The Gorbachev years have seen the acceleration of the trend, under way since the death of Stalin, for the individual ruling parties of Eastern Europe to acquire increasing latitude to manage their own affairs. Indeed, Gorbachev appears willing to permit considerable autonomy, as long as each country remains "socialist" (which may even entail the local communist party's sharing political power with an institutionalized opposition) and as long as each remains within the Warsaw Pact. The result is that some East European countries, notably Hungary and Poland, are taking steps toward freer social, political and economic practices, while in others—East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Romania—the leadership is resisting such policies.¹

Still, the obstacles to genuine self-determination in Eastern Europe remain formidable. What is required in the first place is a fundamental change in the way the Soviet Union defines its own security.² Only when Moscow concludes that the forcible maintenance in power of unwanted communist regimes in the capitals of Eastern Europe is not necessary for Soviet security, indeed that this makes the Soviet Union less rather than more secure, will the necessary changes in the region be possible. Far from separating security considerations from ideological preferences, however, the Soviet leaders have seen them as identical throughout the postwar period.

It has been an axiom of postwar Soviet politics that the countries of Eastern Europe must retain some kind of Soviet-style socialism. It will be difficult to discard this principle because the existence of communist regimes outside the Soviet Union is bound up with the Communist Party's own claim to rule in Russia.

That claim has a nationalist basis. The party guided Russia through its greatest trial in modern times, the Second World War. The Eastern European empire is the principal spoil of that war, and thus part of the party's nationalist credentials. Moreover, its military foothold far to the west of Russia's

¹ See Charles Gati, "Eastern Europe on Its Own," *Foreign Affairs, America and the World* 1988/89, pp. 99–119.

² There are signs of change on this subject. A prominent Soviet authority on Eastern Europe has been quoted as envisioning the possibility of developments in Hungary leading to a political system like those of Sweden and Austria, while Hungarian membership in the Warsaw Pact continues. Henry Kamm, "Hungary Prints a Liberal Soviet View of 1956," *The New York Times*, Feb. 11, 1989, p. 28.

traditional borders fulfills the ancient Russian dream of becoming a dominant power in Europe. Unlike the overseas clients that Moscow has acquired in the postwar period, the European empire is popular with most Russians, who consider it rightly theirs because they paid for it in blood. The Eastern European empire is also important because Marxism-Leninism claims to be an international creed and the control of Eastern Europe is its principal tangible achievement beyond Russia's borders.

Even if Moscow is open to reconsidering what forms of government are desirable in Eastern Europe, moreover, many of the local leaders are not. Their positions, after all, depend ultimately on Soviet military support. Genuine self-determination would, in many cases, sweep them away. They can be expected to resist changes that would lead to their removal from power.³

Another obstacle to the changes in Eastern Europe necessary to end the cold war is the possibility that, over the next decade, the region may experience not steady progress toward more open political and economic systems but rather political explosions like the Hungarian uprising of 1956. Given the current governments' lack of political legitimacy, such stability as there has been in Eastern Europe has been the result of economic gains. In the 1980s, however, economic performance across the region has faltered. The different countries suffer from some of the same problems that afflict the Soviet economy: a smothering bureaucracy, obsolete technology and a lack of incentives for managers and workers.

In the past economic stringency has touched off political rebellion, notably in Poland but also elsewhere in the region. Rebellions could break out again in the 1990s and, ironically, are all the more likely to the extent that Soviet intervention seems unlikely. But a political explosion somewhere in Eastern Europe could provoke Soviet intervention, which might well scuttle not only the movement toward liberalization there but also reform in the Soviet Union.

Further complicating the prospects for self-determination in Eastern Europe is the division of Germany. For while it is at least conceivable that governments chosen by the people of Poland or Hungary or Czechoslovakia would agree to remain in the Warsaw Pact and play host to Soviet troops as part of a

³ The gap between rulers and ruled varies widely in Eastern Europe. See Gati, *op. cit.*, p. 99ff.

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purely defensive military coalition, if given the freedom to choose the citizens of the German Democratic Republic would most probably join their fellow Germans in the Federal Republic. This the Soviet Union will not permit, and even Western Europeans would not necessarily be happy at the prospect.

The reasons for this are strategic as much as ideological. Any government in Moscow would be wary of a reunified Germany, regardless of its political stripe. The existence of the Warsaw Pact and especially the presence of a large contingent of Soviet troops in East Germany guarantee the division of Germany. This is one of the reasons Moscow is unlikely to countenance the dissolution of its military bloc, regardless of whatever changes take place in the internal character of the governments of Eastern Europe.

The question of Germany's role in Europe and the world was at the heart of the two great wars of this century and was solved by a set of military and political arrangements that have been part of the cold war. No other solution acceptable to all concerned is available at the moment. So the division of Germany will be the last part of the cold war in Europe to be liquidated.

Still, for all the difficulties involved, national self-determination and internal independence for the countries of Eastern Europe other than East Germany are now conceivable in a way that they were not before Gorbachev came to power. Political developments in Poland and Hungary in the first months of 1989 moved those two countries dramatically in that direction. In both countries the regime has agreed in principle to abandon what has been fundamental to communist rule everywhere, the Communist Party's monopoly of political power. Negotiations have taken place in both for a transition to genuine political pluralism. These are developments of extraordinary importance, which, if carried through, would do much to remove the central cause of the Soviet-American conflict in Europe. If the end of the cold war there is still some distance away, the beginning of the end may now be at hand.

III

The military confrontation to which the political rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union gave rise has been the most visible part of the cold war. It has received the most sustained bilateral attention, having been the subject of

sporadic international meetings since the 1940s and continuous negotiations since the early 1970s.

Because the weaponry the two sides have accumulated is so powerful, the wish to do away with it completely has found persistent expression in many official proposals. "General and complete disarmament," as it was called in the 1950s, is not, however, an appropriate standard for the end of the cold war because it is not possible. The existence of armaments is rooted ultimately in the anarchic character of the community of sovereign states, not in the relationship between any two of them. Because there is no world police force to prevent one state from attacking another, each must be prepared to defend itself. So each provides itself with weapons.

Therefore, all nuclear weapons will not be abolished, despite Gorbachev's proposal that this be achieved by the year 2000. These arms cannot be disinvented. Even if all existing ones were destroyed, the knowledge of how to make them would remain. The need for self-protection that drives states to arm themselves leads to the desire for the most effective weapons available, which in the last decade of the twentieth century happen to be nuclear weapons.

This does not mean that all states must have nuclear weapons; the ranks of nuclear-armed states are relatively small, but they do include countries other than the United States and the Soviet Union. France, Britain and China are no more likely than the two superpowers to relinquish their nuclear stockpiles.

In the military confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union, the best of all possible arrangements is equilibrium, which may be defined as deployments on each side that are defensive. With such arrangements each country would remain armed, probably heavily armed, but their forces would be designed to repel or respond to an attack rather than to launch one.

The military forces of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact are, with some notable exceptions, geared much more explicitly to attack than those of the United States and NATO. To establish equilibrium based on defense, therefore, broader change is required on the Eastern than on the Western side of the division in Europe. To this end, some of the statements that the Soviet leaders have made over the last four years are promising. They have embraced principles that, were they to become the basis for actual military deployments, would do a great deal to bring

about the equilibrium that would, in military terms, mark the end of the cold war.

Moscow has minimized the rivalry with the West, with Foreign Minister Shevardnadze stating that "class conflict"—that is, hostility between the communist bloc and the capitalist states—is no longer the central feature of international politics. It would seem to follow that the military requirements of the Soviet Union are now more modest than they were when the struggle with the United States and its allies was defined as central.

Gorbachev himself has endorsed the idea of "common security," according to which one side cannot be secure at the expense of the other. This implies, although it hardly guarantees, an end to the arms competition with the United States. Each country, according to the logic of common security, should recognize the futility of seeking an advantage over the other and settle for a stable balance between them.

Gorbachev and others have also asserted that the doctrine governing the size and disposition of Soviet military forces is one of "defensive sufficiency." Here, too, the logical consequence is a series of deployments that are less threatening to the West.⁴

Words alone do not affect the military balance. Still, they are not without significance. They are especially important when they come from the highest level in the Soviet political system. Authoritative pronouncements establish new doctrinal standards; they broaden the boundaries of permissible debate.

Since 1985 the Soviet Union has gone beyond words in recasting its side of the military balance. A series of agreements and announced unilateral measures, while modest in and of themselves, have broken with patterns of the past and established precedents for new policies that, if carried forward, would move the military balance toward defensive equilibrium.

Much of a new treaty on strategic nuclear weapons was completed during the Reagan Administration. Its terms provide for the Soviet Union and the United States to reduce substantially, for the first time, their main nuclear arsenals. Of greater importance is the fact that the Soviet side has been willing, for the first time, to accept reductions in the weapons

⁴ On the Soviet "new thinking" in military affairs, see David Holloway, "Gorbachev's New Thinking," and Robert Legvold, "The Revolution in Soviet Foreign Policy," in *Foreign Affairs, America and the World 1988/89*, pp. 66–98.

that the United States considers most threatening because they are most useful for a preemptive attack—heavy land-based missiles armed with multiple warheads.⁵

During the Reagan Administration the United States and the Soviet Union also signed a nuclear arms treaty eliminating intermediate-range missiles stationed in Europe. The accord was hailed as the first ever to eliminate an entire class of nuclear weapons. In fact, its significance lies less in its effect on the overall military balance, which is modest, than in its provisions for on-site inspection to verify compliance with its terms. In a break with all precedent, American officials will be permanently stationed in the Soviet Union (and Soviet inspectors in the United States) to make certain that any violations are detected.

Because it has been a fundamental American principle that all provisions of every arms control accord must be subject to independent verification, and because there are limits to what can be monitored by reconnaissance satellites, the Soviet acceptance of on-site inspection broadens the range of potential agreements.

Just as important as this treaty, although greeted with far less fanfare, is the set of measures covering the actual operation of military forces in Europe that emerged from the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe held in Stockholm in 1986. They include provisions for the advance notification of all ground-force exercises involving 13,000 or more troops or 300 or more tanks, for the dispatch of observers to exercises involving more than 17,000 troops, and for up to three short-notice on-site inspections per year to ensure compliance with the first two provisions.

These measures set a precedent not only for on-site inspection but also for Soviet-American agreements on non-nuclear forces, which are in some ways more important than the two nuclear arsenals. Unlike nuclear weapons, non-nuclear forces can be used. Conventional war is conceivable in a way that nuclear war is not. The Soviet non-nuclear forces in Europe, moreover, have a particular political significance: they embody the aggressive intentions that the West imputes to Moscow.

⁵ The prospective treaty on strategic nuclear weapons will not automatically reduce the theoretical susceptibility of American land-based missiles to a preemptive attack. Whether the agreement makes the balance more stable depends on what if any unilateral measures the United States takes. See Edward L. Warner III and David A. Ochmanek, *Next Moves: An Arms Control Agenda for the 1990s*, New York: The Council on Foreign Relations, 1989, Chap. 2.

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Finally, in his speech to the United Nations on December 8, 1988, Gorbachev announced the unilateral withdrawal of 50,000 of the 565,000 Soviet troops in Eastern Europe. The forces to be withdrawn are to include those most useful for launching an attack—tanks and units with bridging equipment. This announcement established another important precedent because it is a unilateral measure. The West contends that the Eastern bloc has the stronger non-nuclear forces and that to move toward equilibrium in Europe therefore requires deeper reductions on the Eastern than on the Western side. The Gorbachev troop cut is asymmetrical in this way.⁶

The conversion of Soviet forces from an offensive to a defensive orientation, it should be noted, has not yet been accomplished. Moreover, there are obstacles to the establishment of military equilibrium apart from Soviet reluctance to reduce and reshape its forces, a number of which stem from the fact that the negotiations on non-nuclear armaments will be more complicated than those covering nuclear weapons.

For conventional armaments, it is more difficult to judge which weapons and strategies are offensive and which are defensive, and to define a military equilibrium. Matters are further complicated by the fact that the geostrategic positions of the two countries are different, and so therefore are their basic military requirements. The United States is a maritime power with commitments to allies from which it is separated by vast oceans; the Soviet Union is a land power that confronts adversaries from both the east and west.

Conventional weapons are harder to count than nuclear weapons, so a conventional arms treaty will be more difficult to verify. The two sides' nuclear arsenals consist of several thousand large pieces of machinery, almost all of which can be readily distinguished and tallied through satellite reconnais-

⁶ The institutional arrangements that govern military policy in the Soviet Union have also changed. The armed forces have less political influence now than they did in the Brezhnev era. To be sure, the party has always exercised strict control over the military, but under Brezhnev the party leadership deferred to the generals on strictly military questions. Now the civilian leaders are more skeptical and critical, and seek counsel from scientists and civilian analysts. The military has lost political clout in another way. Dimitri Ustinov, the longtime defense minister under Brezhnev, was a trusted member of the Politburo's inner circle. The present defense minister, Dimitri Yazov (unlike Ustinov a professional officer rather than a career party official), is only a candidate member of the Politburo, with far less influence. Finally, under Gorbachev a perceptible decline has occurred in what might be called the "militarism" of Soviet society—that is, the glorification of the military and the emphasis on its role in the history of the country—which has saturated Soviet public life since World War II.

sance. The conventional armies in Europe, by contrast, include hundreds of different kinds of weapons and millions of men. These huge, complicated forces are far more difficult to monitor.

Finally, whereas negotiations on nuclear arms control have involved the direct participation of only the United States and the Soviet Union, the formal talks on conventional reductions include the European allies of both. As difficult as it will be for the United States to agree with the Soviet Union on a mutually acceptable military balance in Europe, it may be even more difficult to find common ground on this issue with Great Britain, France and West Germany.

These obstacles to achieving military equilibrium, however, are as much technical as political, and if the political climate of East-West relations improves, the military questions will become easier to resolve. If the Soviet Union becomes a less obtrusive presence in Eastern Europe—that is, if the countries of the region move toward more liberal political and economic practices—the perceived need for military forces on both sides is bound to ease, and equilibrium will therefore be more readily achievable.

The arms control accords of the past, and not only of the Gorbachev era, represent modest progress in that direction. They provide a foundation on which further agreements can be built. In fact, for the military balance between East and West, the best of all possible worlds is not entirely different from the world of the present: there is a rough military equilibrium now between the two military blocs in the sense that neither is likely to launch an attack, and both sides recognize this.

In the best of all possible worlds the two sides' forces, especially those of the Soviet Union, would conform more closely to the technical definition of defense, each would have fewer weapons, and neither would be racing to gain a technical advantage over the other. Although the military balance is relatively stable today, it can be made more stable. But both sides are destined to remain well armed. In that sense, the end of the cold war will bear a distinct family resemblance to the cold war itself.

IV

Of the three areas of conflict that have come to comprise the cold war, the most difficult to address is human rights

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because it touches on, indeed is inseparable from, the internal political order of the Soviet Union. There is a strong chance, moreover, that the issue of human rights will have much wider ramifications for Soviet domestic politics in the future.

So difficult an issue is human rights that some American administrations have been reluctant to address it. The question of human rights is firmly on the agenda of Soviet-American relations, however, because the American public has insisted that it be there.⁷ The West Europeans share Americans' political values but generally believe they should nonetheless be kept out of foreign policy. Because Americans feel so strongly about human rights and the broader question of the political rights of Soviet citizens, however, the issue cannot be deleted from the agenda of Soviet-American relations. The American public will treat the question as a litmus test of serious change in the Soviet Union.

Human rights are relevant to the basic issues of the cold war. For example, domestic changes in the Soviet Union are intimately related to the changes in Eastern Europe that are necessary to end the cold war. The further that reform proceeds in Russia—the less like the state that Stalin created and the more like the West the country becomes—the weaker will be its impulse to impose communist governments on Eastern Europe, because the regime will then have other sources of legitimacy. At the same time, Soviet political practices themselves will become less alien and obnoxious to the people of the region.

Similarly, domestic change in the Soviet Union has opened the way for movement toward military equilibrium. The "new thinking," which promises new policies, is partly the result of a freer political climate in which previously taboo ideas can be advanced and discussed.

Internal change in the Soviet Union bears on yet another issue of direct relevance to ending the cold war. A frequently expressed American concern is that Gorbachev's policies could be swept away if he were to be replaced or simply to change his mind. Having made concessions in response to the previous policies, it is feared, the United States would find itself suddenly vulnerable. What guarantees are there, policymakers must

⁷ On the sources of the American preoccupation with human rights, see Seweryn Bialer and Michael Mandelbaum, *The Global Rivals*, New York: Knopf, 1988, pp. 28–36, 98–103.

therefore ask themselves, that the changes Gorbachev has initiated will endure?

There are no ironclad guarantees that the Soviet Union, or any country, will forever keep its commitments. In politics nothing is either irreversible or permanent. Although hardly foolproof, the best hedge against sudden, unfavorable shifts in a country's foreign policy is an open political system in which policies are discussed and debated for all the world to hear, and in which it is not possible for a single person or a small group acting secretly to alter abruptly the course of policy. To the extent that the Soviet Union becomes a more open society and the public is given a voice in the political process, the United States can have some confidence that Moscow will not abandon commitments it has made without warning and in a way that would put the West at risk. Openness provides other countries with an early warning system.

Of the three areas that make up the cold war, the changes in human rights since Gorbachev came to power are the most striking. Some of the practices that outrage the West have been abandoned. Prisoners of conscience have been released. Psychiatric torture of dissidents has diminished sharply. More and more Jews have been permitted to emigrate.⁸

In the first half of the 1980s Andrei Sakharov was the symbol of Soviet repression. He was sent into internal exile in the city of Gorki by Leonid Brezhnev for criticizing the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Under Gorbachev he has returned to Moscow, resumed his position at the Academy of Sciences, traveled abroad and offered himself briefly as a candidate for the new Congress of People's Deputies.

In Brezhnev's day all this might have been dismissed as an effort to brighten the Soviet image in the West by gestures that please Western opinion while costing the Soviet regime nothing. The changes in the treatment of intellectuals who dissent from official policy and of Jews and other minorities who wish to leave, however, are merely a small part of much more sweeping changes that have taken place in Soviet political life since 1985.

The policy of glasnost has vastly expanded the range of officially tolerated public discussion. Proposals for far more sweeping economic changes than Gorbachev has himself en-

⁸ Even more remarkably, émigrés have been permitted to return to the Soviet Union for visits and Soviet citizens without official positions have been allowed to travel abroad.

dorsed have been aired, as have criticisms of the Stalin period as sharp as any ever made in the West. Freedom of association, once nonexistent, is beginning to be a part of Soviet life. Thousands of private clubs, discussion groups and informal associations have formed all across the country. Economic liberty is also growing; a small private sector has come into being.

The elections to the new legislative assembly in March 1989 were a small, tentative and unfamiliar step toward political democracy. Although the members of the new assembly were largely chosen by the Communist Party in the old way—secretly and arbitrarily—in a few places genuine contests took place.

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With human rights, as with Europe and the military balance, it is important to understand what changes are *not* feasible. The Soviet Union will not, in the foreseeable future, become a Western-style country, with a capitalist economy, an open society and a democratic political system with several competing parties in which individual rights are safeguarded as zealously as in the West. This is not Gorbachev's aim. Russia has virtually no experience with Western institutions and practices. The values necessary to sustain them have feeble roots there. No doubt such a constellation of social, economic and political arrangements ought to be the long-term American preference for the Russians and the other peoples of the Soviet Union; it ought to be the ultimate American goal for every country. It is not realistic, however, to expect it to be achieved soon in Russia, and it is mistaken, indeed counterproductive, to dismiss as insignificant those developments that fall short of making that country a Western democracy.

What is realistic to expect of the Soviet Union is a country that, while still governed in an authoritarian manner, permits religious freedom, allows its citizens to emigrate and to travel, tolerates a private economic sector, refrains from intruding into every corner of social life and enshrines some fundamental rights in effective legal codes. There are, after all, many such countries in the world, some of which are allied with the United States.

These friendly authoritarian regimes, it should be noted, are not admired by all Americans. Since Chile, Taiwan, South Korea and the Philippines have been subject to U.S. criticism

for undemocratic practices, it is hardly to be expected that even a more liberal Soviet Union would escape censure in the United States. Until the Soviet Union measures up to American standards of internal governance, therefore—and that time is far away—human rights will continue to be an issue in Soviet-American relations.

Indeed, the rights of Soviet citizens may become a much more complicated part of the Soviet-American conflict than it is today if it becomes entangled with an issue of growing importance and explosive political potential in the Soviet Union—the national question.

The Soviet Union is a multinational state. Moscow dominates the non-Russian nationalities, which range from the Baltic peoples in the northwest to the Christian Georgians and Armenians in the Caucasus to the Muslims of Central Asia.

The Gorbachev era has seen more open and extensive displays of nationalist feeling and activity than at any time since the 1920s. As Moscow has loosened the reins of authority, the non-Russian peoples of the country have taken the opportunity to express their own grievances and press their own causes. In the Baltic republics the Lithuanians ostentatiously celebrated their national day in defiance of a long-standing Kremlin prohibition; the Latvian Communist Party endorsed a program that amounted to a demand for autonomy; and a new “national front” was established in Estonia that was, in effect, a political alternative to the Communist Party. The Estonian parliament has called for “sovereignty” within the Soviet Union, and the council of an independent mass movement in Lithuania has gone even further, endorsing the ultimate aims of independence and neutrality.

In the Caucasus the status of the small, predominantly Armenian enclave in Azerbaijan called Nagorno-Karabakh provoked demonstrations and violence inspired by nationalist sentiment. The Armenians demand its transfer to Armenia; the Azerbaijanis demand that it remain part of their republic. Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as in Armenia itself, staged massive strikes during 1988. There was violence between the Christian Armenians and Muslim Azerbaijanis that led to hundreds of deaths and the flight of thousands of people from their homes.

Gorbachev has in one sense been fortunate: the nationalist turmoil that has occurred has thus far posed little threat to the dominant position of the Russians in the Soviet Union. The

Baltic peoples are too small numerically to mount a serious challenge. The Armenians and Azerbaijanis are motivated by bitterness and anger at each other; their protests initially lacked an anti-Russian cast, although over time some of their anger was directed at Moscow for not resolving the conflict. But there are signs that other, more dangerous nationalist discontents are brewing. If they should erupt in the non-Russian Slavic republics—Byelorussia and, above all, the Ukraine—this would be extremely dangerous for the regime, whose power rests on an unspoken bond of solidarity among all the Slavic peoples.

With the rise of nationalist political activity in the Soviet Union, the question of human rights has taken on a new dimension. In the previous decade the regime could treat the issue largely as a matter of foreign policy. Dissidents and would-be emigrants were indulged, if at all, in order to produce goodwill in the West. Nationalist stirrings, however, have the profoundest possible domestic consequences; they call into question the very structure of the Soviet state. They pose a stark dilemma, to say the least, for Gorbachev and his associates. Greater liberty, the leaders are apparently persuaded, is necessary for the social and economic health of the Soviet Union and even its military power; but greater liberty may undermine the very foundations of the union of Soviet republics.

Nationalism in the Soviet Union will also pose a dilemma for American policymakers. It will be difficult to ignore national movements there, especially when demonstrations staged almost anywhere can be seen the same day on television screens the world over. The non-Russian peoples of the Soviet Union, moreover, have claims as strong as any who have enlisted Western sympathies in the past. Armenians and Georgians have longer histories as self-conscious nations than the Russians themselves. If Poland is entitled to genuine self-determination, why should this be denied to Lithuania?

Yet the national question is an extraordinarily sensitive one for the Russian leaders of the Soviet Union, and an issue, as well, over which other countries have little leverage. Most Western governments are likely to prefer to ignore it, and this may well be the prudent diplomatic course; but Western, and especially American, publics may insist on making it a central issue in East-West relations, just as the Soviet government's

treatment of dissidents and would-be emigrés was forced onto the agenda in the 1970s.

VI

A conflict as intense and long-standing as the cold war will not end without effort. One reason it has proved so bitter and so durable is that it has had more than a single source. The political rivalry in Europe and elsewhere, the competition in armaments, and the deep differences between the United States and the Soviet Union concerning human rights have reinforced one another, and together created the hostility and mistrust of the last forty years. The present stage is promising precisely because changes are taking place across the board of Soviet-American relations, which together can have a far more powerful effect than any could have alone.

The ultimate source of these changes, the master key to ending the cold war, is the process of internal reform that Mikhail Gorbachev has begun in the Soviet Union. It is these reforms that make the current phase of Soviet foreign policy at least potentially something other than merely an effort to secure a breathing space before a resumption of the mortal rivalry with the West. What is now occurring within the Soviet Union has opened the possibility of a new era in international relations. This raises the question of whether the United States and the West should expressly favor the Gorbachev reforms and, if so, whether the members of the Atlantic alliance ought to provide active support for them.

Some reforms are more attractive than others to the West. Glasnost and the movement toward more democratic political practices are appealing not only because they promote Western values but also because they contribute to a less belligerent, more accommodating, more dependable Soviet foreign policy.

The gains at which the Gorbachev reforms are aimed are economic as well as political. The leadership's goal is to make the Soviet Union a modern, powerful state in economic terms. The United States has no interest in fostering a Soviet Union that is the economic equal of the West; that outcome, however, is not in prospect. Gorbachev's Russia is not about to become a Slavic Japan or a multinational version of Germany. The achievable goal of the economic reforms is much more modest: improving the standard of living for the average citizen and keeping the gap in productivity and technology with the West from widening further. These goals do not threaten the United

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States, and unless Gorbachev can make progress toward achieving them, the political changes that he has sponsored—in which the West *does* have an interest—may be in jeopardy.

Should the United States help these reforms along? We should not try to hinder them, and we should be prepared to accept broader Soviet participation in the international economy. To this the West Europeans, and especially the West Germans, are already firmly committed. The help that the West can usefully supply is, however, limited. Soviet success or failure depends on whether sweeping reforms occur in the way the Soviet economy is organized and operated. Here other countries do not have major roles to play.

The question of Western help is far more pertinent to Eastern Europe. Substantial economic and political changes congenial to the West are more likely there, in the short term, than in the Soviet Union. Such changes are the subjects of active discussion and negotiation in Poland and Hungary. If and when Eastern Europe releases its economies from the grip of planners, permitting wider private ownership and initiative and foreign investment, and if and when the countries of the region permit genuine public participation in the institutions of governance and the sharing of power with those outside their communist parties, the United States and its allies ought to consider providing the substantial economic aid needed to make reforms work.⁹

In Eastern Europe, as in the evolution of the military balance and in human rights, there is no fixed point, no line of demarcation at which the cold war can be declared definitively over. The ending of the cold war is a process, not an event. Thus the conflict will not end with either a bang or a whimper. It will probably not end in a way that can be readily noticed. But the developments necessary to reduce its intensity and its importance are clear, and they have begun. If they go far enough, then this great global rivalry, which has dominated international politics for four decades, can finally end.

⁹ See Michael Mandelbaum, "The United States and Eastern Europe: A Window of Opportunity," in William E. Griffith, ed., *Central and Eastern Europe: The Opening Curtain?*, An East-West Forum book, Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1989.

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