

At Cold War's End

Table of Contents

Foreword

Preface

The Road to Malta
The Empire Strikes Back
The Empire Collapses
“A Battle to the Death”
The Cold War Ends
The Estimates and the End of the Cold War

Chronology

1989

1990

1991

Appendix

Documents: A Compendium of National Intelligence Estimates and Assessments

(All Documents are in PDF format)*

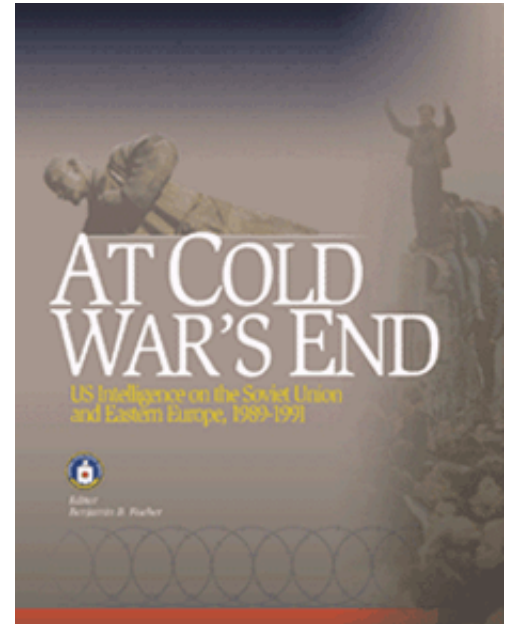
The Soviet Crisis: Gorbachev and the Perils of *Perestroika*

1. NIE 11-23-88, December 1988, *Gorbachev's Economic Programs: The Challenges Ahead* [PDF Only 1.17MB*]

2. SOV 89-10077, Central Intelligence Agency, Office of Soviet Analysis, September 1989, *Gorbachev's Domestic Gambles and Instability in the USSR* [PDF Only 1.19MB*]

3. NIE 11-18-89, November 1989, *The Soviet System in Crisis: Prospects for the Next Two Years* [PDF Only 1.7MB*]

4. NIE 11-18-90, November 1990, *The Deepening Crisis in the USSR: Prospects for the Next Year* [PDF Only 1.22MB*]



5. Central Intelligence Agency, Office of Soviet Analysis, April 1991, "The Soviet Cauldron" [PDF Only 386KB*]

6. NIE 11-18-91, July 1991, *Implications of Alternative Soviet Futures* [PDF 919KB*]

7. NIE 11-18.3-91, November 1991, *Civil Disorder in the Former USSR: Can It Be Managed This Winter?* [PDF Only 416KB*]

The End of Empire I: Eastern Europe

8. NIE 11/12-9-88, May 1988, *Soviet Policy Toward Eastern Europe Under Gorbachev* [PDF Only 1.5MB*]

9. NIE 12-90, April 1990, *The Future of Eastern Europe (Key Judgments only)* [PDF Only 160KB*]

The End of Empire II: National Secession and Ethnic Conflict in the USSR 180

10. SNIE 11-18.2-91, September 1991, *The Republics of the Former USSR: The Outlook for the Next Year* [PDF Only 1.47MB*]

"New Thinking": Soviet Foreign Relations

11. SNIE 11/37-88, March 1988, *USSR: Withdrawal From Afghanistan (Key Judgments only)* [PDF Only 164KB*]

12. SNIE 11-16-88CX, November 1988, *Soviet Policy During the Next Phase of Arms Control in Europe (Key Judgments only)* [PDF Only 200KB*]

13. NIE 11-4-89, April 1989, *Soviet Policy Toward the West: The Gorbachev Challenge* [PDF Only 1.34MB*]

14. SNIE 11/37-89, November, 1989, *Afghanistan: The War in Perspective (Key Judgments only)* [PDF Only 138KB*]

15. NI IIM 91-10006, November 1991, *Soviet Tactical Nuclear Forces and Gorbachev's Nuclear Pledges: Impact, Motivations, and Next Steps (Key Judgments only)* [PDF

Only 130KB*]

The Military Balance I: Conventional Forces in Europe

16. NIE 11-14-89, February 1989, *Trends and Development in Warsaw Pact Theater Forces and Doctrine Through the 1990s* [PDF Only 1.22MB*]

17. M/H NIE 4-1-84, September 1989, *Warning of War in Europe: Changing Warsaw Pact Planning and Forces (Key Judgments only)* [PDF Only 245KB*]

18. NIC M 89-10002, September 1989, *The Post-CFE Environment in Europe* [PDF Only 236KB*]

19. NIC M 89-10003, October 1989, *Status of Soviet Unilateral Withdrawals* [PDF Only 528KB*]

20. NIC M 89-10005, November 1989, *Soviet Theater Forces in 1991: The Impact of the Unilateral Withdrawals on Structure and Capabilities (Key Judgments only)* [PDF Only 98KB*]

21. NIC M 90-10002, April 1990, *The Direction of Change in the Warsaw Pact* [PDF Only 767KB*]

The Military Balance II: Strategic Nuclear Weapons

22. NIE 11-3/8-88, December 1988, *Soviet Forces and Capabilities for Strategic Nuclear Conflict Through the Late 1990s (Key Judgments and Executive Summary)* [PDF Only 863KB*]

23. NIE 11-3/8-91, August 1991, *Soviet Forces and Capabilities for Strategic Nuclear Conflict Through the Year 2000 (Key Judgments only)* [PDF Only 369KB*]

24. NIE 11-30-91C, December 1991, *The Winter of the Soviet Military: Cohesion or Collapse?* [PDF Only 380KB*]

Foreword

The Center for the Study of Intelligence (CSI) of the Central Intelligence Agency and the George W. Bush Center for Presidential Studies at Texas A&M University co-sponsored a conference on "US Intelligence and the End of the Cold War" on the Texas A&M University campus at College Station from 18 to 20 November 1999. As a contribution to the conference, CSI prepared a compendium of newly declassified US intelligence documents covering the years 1989-1991. This period encompassed events in the USSR and Eastern Europe that transformed the postwar world and much of the 20th century's geopolitical landscape. It was a time when the tempo of history accelerated so rapidly that, as one historian put it, events seemed to be moving beyond human control, if not human comprehension.

Benjamin B. Fischer of CIA's History Staff selected, edited, and wrote the preface to the National Intelligence Estimates and other intelligence assessments included in this companion volume. ¹ In conjunction with the conference, the Intelligence Community will release to the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) the records reprinted in this compendium and those listed in the Appendix.

The declassification and release of these documents marks a new stage in the CIA's commitment to openness. The Agency has only rarely declassified and made available to the public and to scholars Cold War records of such recent vintage. The new release complements and supplements the previous declassification of more than 550 National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs) and Special National Intelligence Estimates (SNIEs) on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe from 1946 to 1985. CIA continues to review and declassify finished intelligence on these countries. These records are available at NARA's Archives II facility in College Park, Maryland, in Records Group 263 (Central Intelligence Agency Records). ²

Two of the documents reprinted in this volume originated with CIA's Office of Soviet Analysis (SOVA). Both have been cited in accounts of US-Soviet relations during the Bush administration and have been discussed elsewhere. ³ The complete texts appear here for the first time.

Mr. Fischer tried to identify and release the most important analysis available for this period. His selection is comprehensive. Some of the documents, especially those on military-strategic subjects, were only partially declassified, since they contain data from still-sensitive sources and methods. Readers should understand, however, that even the portions reprinted here contain information that until recently was highly classified. We want to note, in addition, that we have selected only estimates and assessments prepared during the Bush administration. We realize that, in some cases, estimates and other forms of finished intelligence issued before 1989 may have addressed some of the same issues and even reached some of the same conclusions as those that came later, but our focus is exclusively on what was written during 1989-1991.

Mr. Fischer and I would like to thank all those responsible for making this compendium and the conference possible. Above all, we would like to thank former President George Bush and his staff for enthusiastically endorsing the conference and Director of Central Intelligence George J. Tenet for his support and cooperation. We also would like to thank CIA's Executive Director, David W. Carey, for his assistance in releasing the documents. Closer to home, we want to thank CIA's Office of Information Management, headed by Edmund Cohen, and in particular James Oliver, chief of the Historical Review Program, Howard Stoertz, John Vogel, and James Noren. We also would like to thank readers who took the time to examine this volume in draft

and to make comments, and Michael Warner, Deputy Chief of the History Staff, who worked closely with us on this project.

Gerald K. Haines
Chief Historian
September 1999

Preface

The last great drama of the Cold War—the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and the end of the four-decade-old East-West conflict—unfolded in three acts between 1989 and 1991. Even as the story began, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev already had made the largest opening to the outside world in Russian history. To convince the West, and above all the new administration in Washington, of his sincerity, Gorbachev had made major concessions on arms control, withdrawn Soviet troops from Afghanistan, pledged to reduce Soviet ground forces by half a million, and rejected class warfare in favor of “pan-human values” as the basis of Soviet foreign policy. Initially skeptical because of past disappointments with *détente*, President George Bush and his foreign policy team gradually convinced themselves that Gorbachev was ready for dialogue and compromise. They set a high price for cooperation, however, and were gratefully surprised to find that the Soviets were willing to pay it.

The second act of the drama began in the fall of 1989 with peaceful revolutions in Eastern and Central Europe (except Romania) and the fall of the Soviet “outer empire.” The *de facto* collapse of the Warsaw Pact (it would formally dissolve itself a year later) plus a new treaty that substantially reduced Soviet superiority in conventional forces in Europe resulted in a stronger Western alliance—so strong that the US could redeploy forces from Europe to the Persian Gulf for use against Iraq. East Germany, the USSR’s main prize from World War II, was united with West Germany and integrated into NATO.

The third and final act closed with the 1991 dissolution of the USSR. The centrifugal forces in the “outer empire” stimulated and accelerated those in the “inner empire” as the Soviet republics sought sovereignty and then independence from Moscow. At the same time, Gorbachev’s domestic reforms ran into serious trouble, and the economy went into a tailspin. Gorbachev’s struggle with the old imperial elite in the communist party, the armed forces, and the military-industrial complex culminated in the August 1991 coup, which, when it failed, finished off the USSR—and Gorbachev himself. On Christmas Day 1991, at 7:35 p.m., the Soviet flag flying over the Kremlin was lowered and replaced by the new Russian banner. The USSR officially ceased to exist on 31 December. The Cold War was over.

The National Intelligence Estimates and other intelligence assessments reprinted below reveal publicly for the first time how the US Intelligence Community interpreted and predicted the rapidly unfolding events that led to the collapse of communism and the end of the Cold War. The Bush administration’s stewardship of American foreign policy coincided with some of the most momentous changes of the 20th century. For a brief span of time, the extraordinary became an almost daily event. Estimates that seemed premature or pessimistic or alarmist often turned out to be too conservative in their forecasts within six months or a year. Some key

events, such as Soviet acquiescence in German unification within NATO, happened so quickly and unexpectedly that they do not even appear in any of the Estimates. The Estimates, in fact, often accurately anticipated an event or development but misjudged the time it would take for it to materialize—an indication of the acceleration of history in this period.

Readers of the Estimates that follow may find the terms of discussion familiar, since they generally paralleled contemporary discussions in the press and academe. They may be surprised, however, to discover that the Intelligence Community early on took a pessimistic view of Gorbachev's chances for success in reforming the Soviet system when that was not a popular view inside or outside the government. The Estimates also predicted the impending implosion of the Soviet system and anticipated some of the problems for internal, regional, and international stability that the collapse of Soviet power would create. Fortunately, the direst predictions of widespread famine and civil war proved wrong. Although some readers may be familiar with the Estimates that describe political and economic issues surrounding the collapse of communism and the end of the Cold War, they should find the Estimates on military-strategic issues unique. Estimates and intelligence memoranda on Soviet and Warsaw Pact military forces—especially the NIE 11-3/8 series on *Soviet Forces and Capabilities for Strategic Nuclear Conflict*, the bible on Soviet strategic nuclear weapons for US military planners, weapons program managers, and arms control specialists—reveal facts and interpretations that were once among the Intelligence Community's most highly classified secrets. While these Estimates helped the United States maintain its defenses, they also made it possible for US policymakers to engage the Soviet Union in conventional and strategic arms talks that led to the end of the arms race even before the Cold War itself had ended.

The Road to Malta

President George Bush entered office in January 1989 determined to put his own stamp on America's foreign policy and make US-Soviet relations its main focus. ⁴ He intended to build on the legacy of his predecessor without reprising Ronald Reagan's policy. On 15 February 1989 the President ordered a review of US policy toward the USSR and Eastern Europe, which, for a variety of political and bureaucratic reasons, took longer and proved more complicated than expected. ⁵ In behind-the-scenes discussions, the new foreign policy team quickly divided into those who wanted to open an immediate dialogue with Gorbachev and those who took a skeptical view of the new-style Soviet leader. ⁶

The first Soviet challenge to the new Bush administration arrived even before the President's inauguration. To reverse the foreign policy course inherited from his predecessors and to relieve tensions that had accumulated in US-Soviet relations in the 1970s and 1980s, in 1987 Gorbachev signed the US-Soviet Treaty on Elimination of Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles (INF), the first nuclear arms reduction (actually an arms destruction) accord in history. Then in 1988, he announced his intention to withdraw Soviet forces from Afghanistan within a year. ⁷ Addressing the United Nations General Assembly in December 1988, Gorbachev went further, delivering the most important foreign policy speech of his career. He renounced class warfare as the basis of Soviet foreign policy, embraced "pan-humanist values" and "global interdependence," and pledged to convert an "economy of armaments into an economy of

disarmament.” He invited the US to cooperate in ending the Cold War by halting the arms race and seeking settlements of regional conflicts. Then he made dramatic unilateral concessions, pledging to reduce Soviet ground forces by 500,000 and to withdraw 50,000 troops from Eastern Europe, as well as 10,000 tanks, 8,500 artillery systems, and 800 combat aircraft, over a two-year period.⁸ The speech had a stunning impact in Western Europe—and not just there. The *New York Times*, not normally given to hyperbole, wrote:

Perhaps not since Woodrow Wilson presented his Fourteen Points in 1918 or since Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill promulgated the Atlantic Charter in 1941 has a world figure demonstrated the vision Mikhail Gorbachev displayed yesterday at the United Nations.⁹

The question of Gorbachev’s intentions animated policy discussions in the White House and in the US Intelligence Community. The leading skeptic was national security adviser Brent Scowcroft, a White House veteran with a broad background in Soviet affairs. His skepticism was rooted in the experience of the 1970s and 1980s, when America’s initial euphoria over détente turned sour, leading to the renewal of the Cold War at the turn of the decade. Scowcroft now worried that the USSR could induce the US to disarm while leaving its own military structure intact. “I was suspicious of Gorbachev’s motives and skeptical of his prospects,” Scowcroft wrote.¹⁰ Still, much of the administration’s planning “depended heavily on Gorbachev,” on his intentions, and on his domestic and foreign policy:

To oversimplify, I believed that Gorbachev’s goal was to restore dynamism to a socialist political and economic system and revitalize the Soviet Union domestically and internationally to compete with the West. To me, especially before 1990, this made Gorbachev potentially more dangerous than his predecessors, each of whom, through some aggressive move, had saved the West from the dangers of its own wishful thinking about the Soviet Union before it was too late.¹¹

1989: The Year That Changed the World

Even in retrospect it is hard to grasp how much and how quickly the world changed in 1989. In a mere twelve months, the face of Cold War Europe changed forever. Columnist George Will called it Europe’s Second Reformation—the “most startling, interesting, promising and consequential year ever.”^a Neal Ascherson of the *Observer* (London) labeled 1989 the “pivotal year of the 20th century.”^b Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, in his 1990 New Year’s address, declared 1989 the “year of ending the Cold War.”

This was the year when:

The USSR withdrew its last soldier from Afghanistan. Gorbachev demanded that the retreat be

orderly and dignified—he didn't want television images reminiscent of the chaotic 1975 US pullout from Vietnam. "We must not appear before the world in our underwear or even without any," he told the Politburo inner circle.^c "A defeatist position is not possible." The withdrawal was intended as a sign of conciliation toward the West and reassurance to the East Europeans, but it encouraged the national minorities to challenge Soviet power.

The communist party lost its monopoly of power. In the USSR, multi-candidate elections were held for the first time.^d In Poland, Solidarity emerged from underground to win a stunning electoral victory over the communists and form the first coalition government in Eastern Europe since 1948. In Hungary, the communists agreed to multi-party elections, which occurred the next year.

Communism collapsed in Eastern Europe. The USSR renounced the "Brezhnev doctrine" and condemned the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia. As one historian noted, in Poland communism took ten years, in Hungary ten months, in East Germany ten weeks, and in Czechoslovakia ten days to disappear.^e In Romania—the bloody exception to the rule of peaceful transition—the end came with the execution of Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife on Christmas Day.

Nationalism trumped communism. The Soviets believed they had solved the problem of nationalism and ethnic conflict within their multinational state. But nationalism was in fact the gravedigger of the Soviet system. As the center disintegrated and Gorbachev opened up the political process with *glasnost* (openness), the old communist "barons" in the republics saw the handwriting on the wall and became nationalists; they "first of all attacked the USSR government ... and subsequently destroyed the USSR."^f Asked when he decided to secede from the USSR, Ukrainian party boss Leonid Kravchuk replied: "1989."

The Soviets pondered the fate of their revolution as the French celebrated the bicentennial of theirs. The Soviets considered their revolution both the heir to and a superior version of the French Revolution of 1789 because it had solved the problem of class inequality by eliminating private property and the irrationality of the business cycle by replacing the market with the plan. But as historian Francois Furet wrote: "It is 1917 that is being buried in the name of 1789."^g A protest banner summed up the Soviet experiment: "72 Years on a Road to Nowhere." The system's failure was evident. Then *perestroika* (restructuring) turned into *katastroika*, a neologism that was heard more and more on Moscow streets as Gorbachev's reform program faltered and then failed. The next year, a Soviet citizen could ask, only half-jokingly: "If there were socialism in the West, whom would we buy food from? The Ethiopians perhaps?"^h

The Berlin Wall, the paramount symbol of the Cold War and the division of Europe, fell. When Gorbachev visited East Berlin in October (ironically to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the East German state), his mere presence rocked the foundations of the Stalinist regime. Young marchers, handpicked and bussed in from the countryside to present an image of unity and conformity, spontaneously chanted: "Gorby! Gorby! Help us!" German unification a year later accelerated the Soviet political and military withdrawal from Europe. When it was over, Russia's borders had been pushed back to those of 1653, undoing more than 300 years of Tsarist and Soviet advance toward the West and leaving behind a country that was more Eurasian than European.

Gorbachev introduced glasnost (openness) to create popular support for his reforms. By doing so, however, he opened a Pandora's box of revelations about the Gulag, the Great Terror, genocidal famines, mass deportations, and killing fields that had turned the USSR into one large charnel

house in Stalin's time. *Glasnost* underscored Gorbachev's key dilemma: by allowing the truth to emerge, it destroyed the foundation of lies on which the communist system was built. One example: After releasing a map showing that the government had covered up the actual extent of contamination caused by the 1986 Chernobyl' nuclear reactor catastrophe, Moscow confiscated dosimeters from civil defense units so that people in the affected areas could not measure radiation levels.

^a George F. Will, "Europe's Second Reformation," *Newsweek*, 20 November 1989, p. 90.

^b Neal Ascherson, "1989 stands out as pivotal year in 20th century; Chain reaction ends Cold War," *Washington Times*, 26 April 1999, p. A17.

^c Dmitri Volkogonov, *Autopsy for Empire: The Seven Leaders Who Built the Soviet Regime* (New York: The Free Press, 1998), p. 105. The author cites the minutes of a Politburo meeting held 18 April 1988.

^d The USSR did not formally rescind the communist party's monopoly of power until March 1990, but that was a culmination of a trend that began in 1989.

^e Timothy Garton Ash.

^f Michael Ellman and Vladimir Kantorovich, "The Collapse of the Soviet System and the Memoir Literature," *Europa-Asia Studies* 49:2 (1997), p. 268.

^g Francois Furet, "From 1789 to 1917 & 1989," *Encounter* 75:2 (September 1990), p. 5.

^h P. Yemelin, "The Army and Politics," *Literaturnaya Rossiya*, 14 December 1990, p. 8.

Scowcroft was not the only skeptic on the Bush foreign policy team. Secretary of State James A. Baker III observed that "Gorbachev's strategy, I believed, was premised on splitting the alliance and undercutting us in Western Europe."¹²

Gorbachev's UN speech caught the US off guard. In late 1988, Douglas MacEachin, the chief of Soviet analysis at CIA, told Congress straightforwardly that, despite Gorbachev's initiatives in domestic and foreign policy, the Agency had "never really looked at the Soviet Union as a political entity in which there were factors building which could lead to at least the initiation of political transformation that we seem to see [at the present time]." He added:

Moreover, had [such a study] existed inside the government, we never would have been able to publish it anyway, quite frankly. And had we done so, people would have been calling for my head. And I wouldn't have published it. In all honesty, had we said a week ago that Gorbachev might come to the UN [in December 1988] and offer a unilateral cut of 500,000 in the military, we would have been told we were crazy. ¹³

Two intelligence Estimates, both written in late 1988, give a “before” and “after” picture of the Community’s thinking. SNIE 11-16-88, *Soviet Policy During the Next Phase of Arms Control in Europe*, November 1988 (Document 12), which appeared on the eve of the Gorbachev speech, concluded that the Kremlin had substantial political, military, and economic motives to engage in conventional force reduction talks; but it also observed that Moscow would prefer “mutual” reductions in order to maintain the Warsaw Pact’s numerical advantage. An agreement acceptable to the USSR “could take years—and might not even be possible.”

The second Estimate, issued just after Gorbachev’s UN speech, was more upbeat on prospects for favorable agreements with the USSR. NIE 11-23-88, *Gorbachev’s Economic Programs: The Challenges Ahead*, December 1988 (Document 1), dealt mainly with internal economic reforms, which, it concluded, were not working and would almost certainly fail to produce marked improvement over the next five years. Even that turned out to be too optimistic. This Estimate was the first one to underscore the connection between the USSR’s domestic vulnerabilities and its new foreign policy face. It stated that “Gorbachev needs the many benefits of a non-confrontational international environment,” adding that this would give the US and its allies

considerable leverage in bargaining with the Soviets over the terms of that environment on some security issues such as regional conflicts and arms control and on some internal matters such as human rights and information exchange. The margins of this leverage will be set by Moscow’s determination not to let the West affect the fundamental nature of the Soviet system or its superpower status.

NIE 11-23-88 was still cautious, however, depicting Soviet weaknesses as an opportunity for the West to achieve marginal bargaining advantage—not to end the Cold War and the arms race.

Over the spring of 1989, moreover, there was some “new thinking” in the policy and intelligence debates. Divergent views were reflected in NIE 11-4-89, *Soviet Policy Toward the West: The Gorbachev Challenge* (Document 13), which appeared in April as the administration was completing its policy review. The Estimate included an unusual section labeled “Disagreements” in the main text rather than relegating dissents to a footnote:

There is general agreement in the Intelligence Community over the outlook for the next five to seven years [i.e., that the US could reach favorable agreements with the USSR], but differing views over the longer term prospects for fundamental and enduring change toward less competitive behavior:

- Some analysts see current policy changes as largely tactical, driven by the need for breathing space from the competition. They believe the ideological imperatives of Marxism-Leninism and its hostility toward capitalist countries are enduring. They point to previous failures of reform and the transient nature of past “détentes.” They judge that there is a serious risk of Moscow returning to traditionally combative behavior when the hoped-for gains in economic performance are achieved.
- Other analysts believe Gorbachev’s policies reflect a fundamental rethinking of national interests and ideology as well as more tactical considerations. They argue that ideological tenets of Marxism-Leninism such as class conflict and capitalist-socialist enmity are being revised. They consider the withdrawal from Afghanistan and the shift toward tolerance of power sharing in

Eastern Europe to be historic shifts in the Soviet definition of national interest. They judge that Gorbachev's changes are likely to have sufficient momentum to produce lasting shifts in Soviet behavior.

The NIE concluded that the USSR would remain an adversary for the foreseeable future and would pose serious challenges to NATO unity. It was sanguine, however, about Gorbachev's chances for survival and did not anticipate major changes in Soviet policy even if he left the scene.

On 12 May 1989, President Bush delivered a speech at Texas A&M University that incorporated the results of his policy review and redefined US policy toward the Soviet Union. It did not attract a lot of attention at the time—Gorbachev's dramatic gestures were still grabbing headlines—but it remains important to understanding the end of the Cold War. Its theme was that the US should “move beyond containment” by bringing the USSR into the international community. ¹⁴ While offering to cooperate on mutually beneficial issues, President Bush made it clear that Washington had lingering doubts about Soviet intentions: “[A] new relationship cannot simply be declared by Moscow or bestowed by others; it must be earned. It must be earned because promises are never enough.” In effect, the President was challenging Gorbachev to back up his attractive words with bold deeds.

Gorbachev's pronouncements fed Cold War weariness at home and abroad. In April, George Kennan, the *doyen* of American Soviet-watchers, told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that the USSR no longer posed a military threat to the United States. During February and March, the *New York Times* had run a series of op-ed columns by leading experts under the rubric “Is the Cold War Over?” The paper's answer was an unqualified yes. In Europe, many began complaining that the United States, for reasons that were either naive or sinister, was ignoring an opportunity to end the Cold War. “Everyone was tired of the Cold War, and some leaders such as British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher were now declaring it over,” Scowcroft noted. ¹⁵

The White House was worried that “Gorbymania” would lull the West into a false sense of security. Gorbachev's well-received pronouncements gave the impression that the Cold War had already ended. But saying so didn't make it so. Third World conflicts were still a contentious issue. Scowcroft believed the Soviets had “narrowed” their priorities while intensifying efforts to hold key positions. “Soviet recalcitrance in the Third World deepened my reservations about Gorbachev,” he wrote. ¹⁶ This was especially the case with Afghanistan, where the Kremlin's handpicked ruler, Najibullah, was still in power thanks to massive Soviet aid, and in Nicaragua and El Salvador, where Cuba and East Germany had taken up some of the Soviet slack. ¹⁷ Such trouble spots led Scowcroft to comment that *perestroika* looked like a “Brezhnev system with a humanitarian paint job.” ¹⁸

Of all the questions raised by *perestroika*, however, none from the White House's perspective was more important than its impact on Soviet military power—above all its implications for strategic nuclear weapons targeted on the US. In his Texas A&M speech, President Bush had emphasized that deterrence would remain the basis of US defense policy—and with good reason. NIE 11-3/8-1988, *Soviet Forces and Capabilities for Strategic Nuclear Conflict Through the 1990s*, December 1988 (Document 22), concluded that “in terms of what the Soviets spend, what they procure, how their strategic forces are deployed, how they plan, and how they exercise, *the basic elements of Soviet defense policy and practice thus far have not been changed by*

Gorbachev's reform campaign" [emphasis added]. The Estimate projected that, based on current development and deployment efforts, the Soviets would continue to modernize their strategic forces into the late 1990s. The bottom line—no observable changes here: "To date, as demonstrated in the strategic forces programs and resources commitments we have examined, we have not detected changes under Gorbachev that clearly illustrate that either new security concepts or new resource constraints are taking hold." **19** This did not surprise the estimators, since it would have required a long leadtime for Gorbachev's "new thinking" to make an impact on deployments, plans, exercises, and major programs in Soviet strategic forces. For this reason, as noted below, changes in Soviet conventional forces were better indicators of a change in military policy. The Estimate noted the apparent economic need to reduce military expenditures (most of which were spent on relatively much more costly conventional forces) and the resulting incentive to achieve foreign policy goals through arms control agreements; but it noted that the USSR remained "more strongly influenced by the requirement to meet military and political objectives than by economic concerns." This assessment jibed with Brent Scowcroft's reaction to Gorbachev's UN speech. He remarked that it contained "little of military significance" but had, as intended, put the United States on the psychological defensive, creating a "heady atmosphere of optimism." **20**

Gorbachev's ability to move beyond promises soon became clear. His mission and that of the *perestroishchiki*, his brain trust of pro-reform advisers, was to reorganize and revitalize the Soviet system; but to do so they needed to create a favorable international situation that would enable them to relieve the material burden of arms competition with the West. That was their minimum goal. Their maximum objective was to win Western—and especially American—diplomatic and economic support for *perestroika* while trying to maintain—even enhance—the USSR's superpower status. *Perestroika*, in Gorbachev's view, was the strategic mission of both foreign and domestic policy.

Gorbachev had entered office determined to scrap old assumptions about Soviet foreign policy. He, like Scowcroft, had drawn lessons from the return of Cold War tensions in the early 1980s—and they scared him. **21** One of his first decisions in 1985 was to kick the veteran Soviet foreign minister, septuagenarian Andrei Gromyko, upstairs to the ceremonial post of Chairman of the Supreme Soviet. **22** Gromyko was the preeminent symbol of "old thinking"—an advocate of the view that the USSR would emerge victorious in the Cold War if it continued building up its arsenal and fostering "progressive" regimes in the Third World in places like Angola, Ethiopia, and especially Afghanistan.

To replace Gromyko, Gorbachev had chosen Eduard Shevardnadze, a Georgian *apparatchik* with virtually no foreign affairs experience but with a strong commitment to "new thinking." Like Gorbachev and the other *perestroishchiki*, Shevardnadze saw a close correlation between foreign and domestic policy, especially in the elimination of fear—the foundation of the regime at home and in Eastern Europe. When, for example, the Polish dissident Adam Michnik asked Shevardnadze why Soviet foreign policy had changed, he replied: "Why has our relationship to other nations changed? Because our relationship to our own people has changed." **23**

National and Special National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs and SNIEs) are prepared for the President, his Cabinet, the National Security Council, and senior policymakers and officials. NIEs focus on strategic issues of mid- or long-term importance to US policy and national security, and SNIEs address near-term issues of more urgent concern. Both types of Estimates are prepared under the auspices of the National Intelligence Council (NIC), which serves as a senior advisory panel to the Director of Central Intelligence. The NIC is an Intelligence Community organization that draws on CIA and other intelligence agencies as well as outside experts for staffing and for preparing estimates. During 1989-1991, it was composed of a chair, vice chair, 11 National Intelligence Officers responsible for a number of geographical and functional areas, and several staffs and production committees.

Estimates are issued over the signature of the DCI in his capacity as the head of the US Intelligence Community and represent the coordinated views of the Community's member agencies. The final product bears the statement: *This National Intelligence Estimate represents the views of the Director of Central Intelligence with the advice and assistance of the US Intelligence Community.*

Gorbachev and Shevardnadze knew that they could not immediately challenge the traditional Cold War advocates in Moscow, especially the powerful Soviet military-industrial establishment (the so-called "metal-eaters") that Nikita Khrushchev had tried and failed to control during the early 1960s. **24** In the short run, they maneuvered around it—as well as the hidebound Foreign Ministry—by holding foreign policy close to the vest. But they understood that the source of their domestic problems as well as their foreign policy dilemmas was the neo-Stalinist political system and its arsenal state, which had led the USSR into a dead end of low living standards and dangerous military confrontation with the West. *Perestroika, glasnost*, and "new thinking" put Gorbachev and Shevardnadze on a collision course with diehard supporters of the Soviet political-military empire.

The impact of Gorbachev's and Shevardnadze's new policies, however, was seen first in Eastern Europe. The mounting turbulence in Eastern Europe was both homegrown and imported from the USSR. As *Soviet Policy Toward Eastern Europe*, NIE 11/12-9-88, May 1988 (Document 8) noted, Gorbachev's efforts to push *perestroika* on the other communist countries had "increased the potential for instability in Eastern Europe." The Estimate envisioned three "extreme" scenarios: popular upheaval in Poland, Romania, or Hungary with challenges to party supremacy and Soviet control; sweeping reform in Hungary or Poland that might go beyond *perestroika*; and conservative backlash in the form of repudiation of Gorbachev's reform policy in East Germany and/or Romania. In fact, all three scenarios materialized, but with national variations and in more sweeping forms than NIE 11/12-9-88 had anticipated. With the exception of Romania, the transitions to post-communist governments were peaceful, largely because of an innovative power-sharing model developed in Poland and then adopted in East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary. Roundtable talks between communist leaders and the still amorphous opposition groups enabled the two sides to reach a mutual understanding: the Communists would eschew violence and relinquish their monopoly of power in return for "amnesty" and a share of political power (plus, of course, pensions and perks **25**). There would be no White terror but no Red repentance either.

The peaceful transitions rested on the fact, noted in the 1988 NIE, that Gorbachev faced

“greater constraints than did his predecessors against intervening militarily in Eastern Europe.” That judgment was tempered by the qualification that “in extremis” he would “intervene to preserve party rule and decisive Soviet influence in the region.” Former foreign policy adviser Sergei Tarasenko claims, however, that his boss, Eduard Shevardnadze, made the renunciation of force—beginning with Afghanistan—the centerpiece of Soviet foreign policy from his first day at Smolensk Square. **26** “Some people fought Gorbachev on this,” he claims, because it tied Soviet hands. “But the plight of the country meant that the use of force might have precipitated violent collapse. Far from maintaining the empire, it would have ended in blood.” **27** Gorbachev, however, seems to have believed that the question of using force to hold the “outer empire” together would not arise, since the East Europeans would embrace *perestroika*. According to Anatoly Dobrynin, Gorbachev’s former Ambassador to the US:

I believe that Gorbachev never foresaw that the whole of Eastern European would fly out of the Soviet orbit within months or that the Warsaw Pact would crumble so soon. He became the helpless witness to the consequences of his own policy. **28**

The withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan had been meant to reassure the West and the East Europeans that they “would not be sent into another country.” **29** For East Europeans, this meant that the so-called “Brezhnev doctrine” on the permanence of communist rule was a dead letter.

With the momentous events in Eastern Europe in the summer and fall and a possibility of ending the Cold War suddenly in sight, the Bush administration’s focus shifted to Gorbachev’s domestic policy and the perils of *perestroika*. For Scowcroft the key questions became:

What was the internal situation in the Soviet Union? What were his relations with the conservatives, and what was his staying power? These questions further complicated an already complex calculation, adding to the difficulty of assessing a tolerable pace of reform, and they remained at the forefront of every policy decision related to Eastern Europe. **30**

The administration was not always pleased by the answers it received from the Intelligence Community, especially on the touchy issue of Gorbachev’s prospects. **31** One of the first studies prepared for it that raised the possibility of Gorbachev’s failure was a CIA intelligence assessment written by the Office of Soviet Analysis (SOVA) in September 1989 and titled *Gorbachev’s Domestic Gambles and Instability in the USSR* (Document 2). It argued that the reform program was based on “questionable premises and wishful thinking” and that the “unrest that has punctuated Gorbachev’s rule is not a transient phenomenon. Conditions are likely to lead in the foreseeable future to continuing crises and instability on a larger scale.” Further: “By putting economic reform on hold and pursuing an inadequate financial stabilization program, Gorbachev has brought Soviet internal policy to a fateful crossroads, seriously reducing the chances that his rule—if it survives—will take a path toward long-term stability.” SOVA noted that labor unrest and food riots posed a serious challenge to the regime and its reform effort but nevertheless argued that the severest challenge to the Kremlin would come from ethnic violence or secessionist movements. The study anticipated that a Kremlin crackdown “is most

likely in the Baltic region, but could also come in the Caucasus, Moldavia, or—down the road— even in the Ukraine.”

The emphasis on national and ethnic tensions as the Achilles’ heel of the Soviet empire was prescient. Even Gorbachev, according to virtually every account by former Soviet leaders, failed to see the explosive potential of ethnic nationalism. Shevardnadze, a Georgian and therefore more attuned to the problem, repeatedly warned Secretary Baker of the danger that *perestroika* and *glasnost* might unleash nationalistic passions and tensions. He was much more concerned with nationality than economic issues; with Gorbachev it was just the opposite. **32**

The Intelligence Community as a whole did not yet share SOVA’s pessimism about Gorbachev’s chances. *The Soviet System in Crisis: Prospects for the Next Two Years*, NIE 11-18-89 (Document 3), which appeared in November 1989, was actually optimistic:

Community analysts hold the view that a *continuation and intensification of the current course is most likely* and believe that, despite the obvious difficulties, the turmoil will be manageable without the need for repressive measures so pervasive that the reform process is derailed [emphasis in original].

Whereas the earlier SOVA assessment was impressed with Gorbachev’s problems, the NIE focused on his still considerable strengths, particularly his increased “power and political room to maneuver.” The NIE did not ignore problems facing Gorbachev or their seriousness and complexity; rather it judged that, based on his track record to date, he would persevere. It also offered an alternative scenario, which it deemed “less likely,” in which Gorbachev might use force to hold the country together.

Deputy Director for Intelligence John Helgerson argued in CIA’s dissent to the NIE that, even assuming Gorbachev were able to avoid a crackdown, he would still be faced with increasing instability and unrest. Helgerson added that

... we believe there is a significant chance that Gorbachev, during the period of this Estimate, will progressively lose control of events. The personal political strength he has accumulated is likely to erode, and his political position will be severely tested.

The essence of the Soviet crisis is that neither the political system Gorbachev is attempting to change nor the emergent system he is fostering is likely to cope effectively with newly mobilized popular demands and the deepening economic crisis.

The dissent concluded that Gorbachev would have to give up his “still authoritarian vision in favor of a truly democratic one, or recognize his vision as unreachable and try to backtrack from democratization.” In contrast to the Community consensus, CIA believed that, come what may, *perestroika* was “*certain to make the next few years some of the most turbulent and destabilizing in Soviet history*” [emphasis in original].

It was not easy for CIA to take such a pessimistic view of Gorbachev’s future in late 1989. Many in the West euphorically considered him the only hope for ending the Cold War. “Gorbymania” had become a worldwide phenomenon. Polls in Europe showed that Gorbachev’s popularity

exceeded that of any Western leader of the 20th century. *Time* chose him Man of the Decade, and he received the Nobel Peace Prize for 1990—a token of the West’s gratitude for his helping to end the Cold War. Critical assessments in the media and the scholarly journals were rare.

By late 1989 the Bush administration had reached a consensus on Gorbachev and US policy goals. First, Gorbachev was for real; one could “do business with him,” as British Prime Minister Thatcher had once put it. Second, the United States should pursue two agendas—one bilateral and focused on issues of mutual concern such as arms control, regional conflicts, and economic assistance; and the other unilateral, aimed at reducing the Soviet presence in Eastern Europe and unifying the two Germanys inside NATO. The administration had doubts about Gorbachev’s staying power but saw this uncertainty as a reason to move quickly rather than to wait. The Soviet leader was seen as offering concessions (“moving in our direction” per Scowcroft) because he needed to stabilize the international sector in order to concentrate on the home front. His successor might not be so inclined. The goal of US policy therefore was to lock in as many agreements as possible that would endure even if a change of leadership occurred.

Some in the White House began to think outside the box, wrestling with the implications of Gorbachev’s paradoxical role as both the would-be savior and the potential destroyer of the Soviet system. On the one hand, Gorbachev’s determination to end the Cold War and restructure the Soviet system appeared to make possible even more dramatic progress “across the entire US-Soviet agenda.” Scowcroft credits NSC Soviet affairs director Condoleezza Rice with this idea. “It was,” he notes, “both an ambitious goal and a distinct and positive departure for US policy.” **33** On the other hand, pessimism inspired the NSC to begin considering a future without Gorbachev and the Soviet Union as it was then constituted. Thus, according to Scowcroft’s deputy, Robert M. Gates, the CIA’s and the Intelligence Community’s pessimistic assessment inspired the creation of a secret “contingency planning group,” chaired by Rice, to study the implications of a Soviet collapse. **34** Washington, it seemed, was in the advantageous position of hoping for the best while being able to prepare for the worst.

The first Bush-Gorbachev summit, held at Malta on 2-3 December 1989, permitted President Bush to use what Sir Michael Howard calls his “genius for friendship” and “most important of all his friendship with Mikhail Gorbachev” to advance US and Western interests. **35** (“I liked him,” the President later wrote of Gorbachev. **36**) At Malta, Secretary Baker noted, the “relationship became human and personal, and through the spring of 1990, as we worked to bring a unified Germany into NATO, the President’s personal relationship with Gorbachev was critical.” **37** According to Scowcroft, it was a “good start,” and President Bush noted that the summit “made me confident that Gorbachev was sincere in his efforts to match his words with actions.” **38** The so-called shipboard summit opened the way for the successful conclusion of the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty in 1990 and the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START) in 1991. Gorbachev’s press spokesman declared: “We buried the Cold War at the bottom of the Mediterranean.” Back in the USSR, however, the diehards were trying to resuscitate it.

As 1990 opened, Shevardnadze’s aide, Sergei Tarasenko, said that Gorbachev and Shevardnadze felt that they had “to accomplish a huge maneuver without losing time.” The USSR was in “free fall,” and its “superpower status would go up in smoke unless it was reaffirmed by the Americans.” They hoped to reach “some kind of plateau that would give us time to catch our breath and look around.” **39**

The Bush administration was “cautiously optimistic” at first. National security adviser Scowcroft thought that 1990 might be the year in which “we could achieve a fundamental shift in the strategic balance.” ⁴⁰ (He was right.) The United States would continue to recognize the USSR as a superpower but less out of respect for its strength than for concern over the security implications of its weakness. As Secretary Baker put it, the task of US policy now was to create a “soft landing” for a collapsing empire.

1990 was the year in which the CFE Treaty, signed in November, changed the military face of the Warsaw Pact forever. ⁴¹ A series of NIEs and NIC memoranda that appeared during 1989 and early 1990 predicted the strategic implications of political and military changes in Eastern Europe—changes that transformed the geopolitics of the Cold War. ⁴² By now the implications of the 1989 Velvet Revolution in Eastern Europe were clear. In April 1990, NIE 12-90, *The Future of Eastern Europe*, (Document 9), stated flatly that “Communist rule in Eastern Europe is finished, and it will not be revived.” It added: “The Warsaw Pact as a military alliance is essentially dead, and Soviet efforts to convert it into a political alliance will ultimately fail.”

The strategic implications for the Pact as well as for NATO were profound. NIE 11-14-89, *Trends and Developments in Warsaw Pact Theater Forces and Doctrine Through the 1990s*, February 1989 (Document 16), measured the most significant change in Soviet general purpose forces since Khrushchev’s 1960 announcement of a 30-percent reduction of the Soviet army. ⁴³ Based on an assessment of planned reductions in force levels, defense spending, and military procurement, the Estimate concluded that a 25-year period of continuous growth in Soviet ground forces had ended, that reductions beyond those already announced were possible, and that a “resumption of growth ... [is] highly unlikely before the turn of the century.” The result: a “drastic alteration in our forecast of future ... forces,” since trends, including reductions in force levels and in defense spending and defense production levels, necessitated by *perestroika*, were beginning to diverge sharply from existing force development trends. Nevertheless: “For the period of this Estimate, Warsaw Pact forces ... will remain the largest aggregation of military power in the world, and the Soviets will remain committed to the offensive as the preferred form of operations in wartime.” (Billboards in Moscow still proclaimed: “The Main Goal of *Perestroika* Is To Strengthen Military Preparedness!” ⁴⁴)

But the impact of the cuts was already making itself felt. In 1985, for example, the Intelligence Community had estimated that the Pact logistic structure in Central Europe could support an offensive against NATO for 60 to 90 days. By 1989, that Estimate was reduced to 30 to 45 days, on the assumption that NATO could hold Pact forces at bay for at least two weeks. This, in turn, affected one of the most critical intelligence issues, warning of war or surprise attack by the opposing side. *Warning of War in Europe: Changing Warsaw Pact Planning and Forces*, M/H NIE 4-1-84, September 1989 (Document 17) concluded that:

The warning time we associate with possible Warsaw Pact preparations for war with NATO in Central Europe have increased significantly from those set forth in 1984 We should be able to provide about four to five weeks of warning [of the four-front attack that Warsaw Pact planners would prefer].

A NIC memorandum, NIC M 90-10002, *The Direction of Change in the Warsaw Pact*, April 1990 (Document 21) concluded that:

Recent political events in Eastern Europe will further erode Soviet confidence in their allies. Moscow can not rely upon non-Soviet Warsaw Pact forces; it must question its ability to bring Soviet reinforcements through East European countries whose hostility is no longer disguised or held in check [emphasis in original].

The NIC stated that, in light of the scheduled unilateral withdrawals, “We now believe that the capability to conduct an unreinforced conventional Pact attack on NATO would be virtually eliminated.” If pending CFE cuts were taken into account, then Pact forces would be incapable of conducting a “theater strategic offensive *even after full mobilization of reserves and deployment of standing forces within the Atlantic-to-the-Urals (ATTU) Zone*” [emphasis in original]. Eastern Europe, in effect, had been eliminated as a staging area or buffer zone in Soviet military plans.

Many consider the Soviet Union’s sudden about-face on German unification in mid-1990 a surprise, a miracle, or a mystery that still eludes a convincing explanation. ⁴⁵ An inter-agency assessment issued in February 1990, for example, did not even consider the possibility of unification, though an April 1990 Estimate anticipated the impact of a united Germany on Eastern Europe (see Document 9). When asked why Moscow surrendered its most strategically significant dependency without a fight, the Central Committee’s Valentin Falin, answered: “We are still waiting for the answer to that from Gorbachev... . He confided in no one.” ⁴⁶ Of all Gorbachev’s decisions, this was the most fateful. ⁴⁷

The decisive moment came at the White House on 31 May 1990 during the second Soviet-American summit, when Gorbachev unexpectedly agreed that in principle the Germans had the right to decide their own future. In his memoirs, Gorbachev claims credit for the idea, but it actually resulted from prodding by President Bush over the preceding months. When the President asked whether the Germans had a right to choose their own alliance, Gorbachev unexpectedly agreed. ⁴⁸ “I could scarcely believe what I was witnessing, let alone figure what to make of it,” Scowcroft wrote later. ⁴⁹ Gorbachev’s inadvertent concession—the biggest he would ever make—set off a “firestorm” within his delegation. When Gorbachev tried to pass the buck to Shevardnadze, he refused, handing it back to his boss.

It was West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, however, who finally nailed down Gorbachev’s concession. Kohl was reportedly stunned, when, during a *tête-à-tête* with Gorbachev in the Caucasian village of Arkyhz in mid-July 1990, the Soviet leader dropped all conditions on German unification and NATO membership. As Secretary Baker recalled, it was “too good to be true.” German unification was a result of *perestroika*, the collapse of the East German economy, and “George Bush’s determination to make German unity one of the crowning achievements of his presidency.” ⁵⁰ President Bush, according to Scowcroft, was the first inside the administration and the first Western leader “to back reunification unequivocally ... a point Kohl never forgot.” ⁵¹

The Empire Strikes Back

For the West, these dramatic changes signified a big reduction—if not the elimination—of the

Soviet military threat in Europe. For diehard Soviet opponents of the Gorbachev-Shevardnadze foreign policy line, however, they were disastrous. Soviet compromises, or “blunders” as the diehards called them, had destroyed the political, geostrategic, and material basis of Soviet security in Europe and altered the balance of power. “We have lost virtually all our allies. The lines of our defense have been moved directly to the lines of our state borders,” complained one critic. ⁵² In Washington, NSC staffers wondered how far Gorbachev could retreat before crossing some invisible line that would force him to turn back to the right or risk being overthrown. Now it seemed, he was close to or already over that line.

The collapse of communist power in Eastern Europe was a windfall for the United States, especially in the military-strategic area. But the consequences were also ironic. As much as the East Europeans had hated the political-military alliance system Moscow had imposed on them, it had the virtue of keeping ethnic and other destructive tendencies in check. Now things were far less certain. The withdrawal of Soviet troops placed a tremendous burden on the already strained domestic economy, where there were neither jobs nor housing for those being mustered out. The Soviet Army’s presence in Eastern Europe and especially East Germany was a symbolic and tangible reminder of its victory in World War II, and now the troops were returning home without having been defeated in battle. ⁵³ Foreign Minister Aleksandr Bessmertnykh, a former ambassador to the United States and Shevardnadze’s successor who would side with the diehards during the August 1991 coup, said simply that the decision to let Germany unite and join NATO was “one of the most hated developments in the history of Soviet foreign policy, and it will remain so for decades.” ⁵⁴

The Bush administration now had to worry about too much rather than too little success in wresting concessions from Moscow. Gorbachev needed “face and standing,” President Bush said, especially as everything around him—the empire, the economy, and the Soviet Union itself—was “falling to pieces.” ⁵⁵ Summing up the past year, NIE 11-18-90, *The Deepening Crisis in the USSR: Prospects for the Next Year*, November 1990 (Document 4), stated flatly that the “old communist order is in its death throes” and that the crisis of *perestroika* was now threatening “to tear the country apart.” Gorbachev had even become the target of popular anger and ridicule. (Even though it was still considered impermissible to attack him by name in the media, Soviet citizens in Red Square jeered him off the Lenin Mausoleum reviewing stand during the traditional May Day parade.) The NIE added: “No end to the Soviet domestic crisis is in sight, and there is a strong probability that the situation will get worse—perhaps much worse—during the next year.” The NIE overestimated the extent to which poor economic performance would result in “serious societal unrest and breakdown of political authority”—as did most of its predecessors—but it also identified Boris Yel’tsin in the Russian republic as a rising figure to watch.

NIE 11-18-90 was as remarkable for its candor as for its dire predictions:

In such a volatile atmosphere, events could go in any number of directions. Because of this, the Intelligence Community’s uncertainties about the future of the Soviet system are greater today than at any time in the 40 years we have been producing Estimates on the USSR. Accordingly, our projections for the next year will be highly tentative.

The Estimate envisioned four possible scenarios for the coming year: deterioration short of anarchy; anarchy; military intervention; and “light at the end of the tunnel.” It concluded that

the first scenario was the most likely, followed by scenario four, i.e., more muddling through without a breakdown of law and order and without resolving the crisis. Scenarios two and three, though less likely, were still possible and would pose the most problems for US-Soviet relations and US efforts to end the Cold War through negotiated compromises.

For the United States, 1990 was a spectacularly successful year. The Bush administration had accomplished most of the goals it had set for both its unilateral and bilateral agendas either through negotiations with Moscow or as a result of the collapse of the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe. For Moscow, however, it had been a disaster—“one of the most difficult years in our history,” Gorbachev lamented in the traditional New Year’s address. But 1991 would be worse—the year the USSR entered its death spiral.

The implications for US-Soviet relations were obvious to observers on both sides. Scowcroft observed as early as March 1991: “After so much rapid progress, the window of opportunity appeared to be closing. It was time to consolidate our gains.” ⁵⁶ Or as Baker put it, “The stock market was heading south; it was time to sell.” ⁵⁷ Pro-Gorbachev reformers in the Soviet Union took a remarkably similar view. Wrote senior *Izvestiya* commentator and pro-reformer Aleksandr Bovin:

If you look at the Soviet Union through the eyes of an “average” US observer, you get the following picture. A dangerously ailing, weakening giant. Refusal to take medicine based on democratic prescriptions is rendering the situation virtually hopeless... . Gorbachev has fallen hostage to conservatives of yesteryear who are sharply criticizing his “pan-human” approaches to foreign policy and his “pro-US” foreign policy course... . The White House in general is being advised to return to the “pre-Malta era” and play a waiting game rather than submitting new initiatives and to be more energetic, despite Moscow’s dissatisfaction, in working with the republics. [In these circumstances] the maximum we can aim for [in US-Soviet relations] is not to slide backwards and to hang on to the things we have already agreed on. ⁵⁸

Open attacks in the Soviet Union on “Shevardnadze’s foreign policy” began in October 1990—everyone understood that critics really meant Gorbachev—and continued to escalate during the next year. (Shevardnadze resigned in December, warning of an approaching dictatorship.) Spearheading the attack was a new parliamentary group called *Soyuz* (“Union”), an unlikely alliance of communists, nationalists, and even monarchists united by “Soviet patriotism” and a common desire to preserve the empire at all costs.

The two most vocal critics were Col. Nikolay Petrushensko and Lt. Col. Viktor Alksnis. They were Russian *pieds-noirs* not unlike the French Algerian settlers who brought down the French Fourth Republic and later plotted against President Charles de Gaulle. Petrushenko is a Russianized Belorussian from Kazakhstan, and Alksnis is a Russianized Latvian born in Siberia. ⁵⁹ (The reform press dubbed the duo the “black colonels” *apropos* of their nationalistic and chauvinistic views.) They spoke for the millions of ethnic Russians living outside historic Russian lands who now feared that, with rising nationalist and separatist sentiments and acts of violence directed at Russians, power would devolve from the center to the republics, leaving them to the tender mercies of national minorities who considered them alien occupiers. *Soyuz* and the colonels were given to apocalyptic visions and supported the idea of martial law—by constitutional decree if possible or by force if necessary. Thus, Alksnis in December 1990:

I would compare the present situation to October 1941 near Moscow [when the German army had reached the suburbs]. There is nowhere to retreat further. We are faced with a catastrophe—economic, political, and interethnic. And this is explained largely by the mistakes of the country's leadership. ⁶⁰

Western observers tended to dismiss *Soyuz* as a fringe group with little clout. But it wasn't. ⁶¹ It had some 560 adherents in the Supreme Soviet, and, in alliance with the Communist delegates, represented the overwhelming majority (700 plus) of members of parliament. More important, *Soyuz* was a mouthpiece for diehards in the party, the military, and the military-industrial complex. As one pro-reform journalist put it, as "amorphous though *Soyuz* is," the real power behind it was the "imperialist-militarist circles connected to the military-industrial complex, the conservative section of the party apparatus, and the national-patriots." ⁶² The "black colonels" were perfectly representative in this regard. Petrushenko was a *zampolit*, one of 80,000 political officers engaged in *agitprop* work in the armed forces, and Alksnis was an engineer assigned to an aircraft maintenance facility.

Soyuz's rise paralleled the resurgence in 1990 of the armed forces and the military-industrial complex and their increased influence on US-Soviet relations in general and arms control negotiations in particular. In 1988, when challenged from the right, Gorbachev had lurched leftward. In 1990, he moved in the opposite direction. Gavril Popov, the radical reform Mayor of Moscow, said that after Gorbachev returned from his summer home at Foros in the Crimea in August 1990, the "*apparat* resumed pressing him every day. Mainly it was the military-industrial complex, which gave him an ultimatum. Gorbachev didn't desire a confrontation." ⁶³ Gorbachev himself admitted as much in an off-the-record interview as he was preparing to resign:

[In June 1990], it would have seemed natural to conclude an alliance with the democratic forces inside and outside the party and to wage a final battle against the reactionaries. And this would have been, in fact, reasonable from a strategic point; but not from a tactical one. It was too soon. The balance of forces in the Politburo and the Central Committee was not good. The military-industrial complex was still too strong. ⁶⁴

The diehards put the brakes on arms talks, citing both political and "technical" reasons, and threatened to re-open or even unilaterally circumvent both the INF and CFE treaties. The Soviets also demanded revisions and changes in the draft version of the START agreement. US officials noted that all negotiating teams now included senior military officers and defense industry representatives, and, in Moscow, arms proposals were reviewed by committees that included members representing the corporate interests of the military-industrial complex. ⁶⁵

The diehards attacked Gorbachev's policy on both conceptual and practical grounds as a surrender to the United States and a sellout of Soviet interests. His commitment to "pan-human interests" and a "common European home," for example, were derided for undermining the *raison d'être* of the state and the military establishment—hostility toward the West and expansion of Soviet power and influence. Virtually every compromise, concession, and negotiated agreement Gorbachev and Shevardnadze had made to jump-start détente came under fire, ranging from destruction of the SS-23 missile ⁶⁶ to dismantling of the Krasnoyarsk radar ⁶⁷ to even minor accords, such as the US-Soviet Bering Strait agreement on demarcation

of national boundaries. **68**

President Bush's Open Skies proposal, made in May 1989, was condemned for allegedly permitting the United States to monitor Soviet foreign economic activity and economic "potential," i.e., weaknesses. **69**

More sinister allegations followed. *Soyuz* representatives and even KGB chief Vladimir Kryuchkov charged that the *perestroishchiki* were in fact agents of influence recruited by Western intelligence in the 1970s to destroy the USSR from within, that Shevardnadze had received subsidies disguised as royalties and speaking fees for his pro-US policy, and that the United States intended to Balkanize the Soviet Union by fomenting secession. **70**

The diehards drew several conclusions from the events of 1989-1990. They saw that *perestroika* in Eastern Europe had not led to communism's reform but its rejection, jeopardizing their own future. Then there was the boomerang effect in the USSR. Gorbachev, an ethnic Russian, seemed oblivious to it, but Shevardnadze and Tarasenko, both ethnic minorities, were not. When Solidarity defeated its Polish communist opponents at the polls in June 1989, they immediately realized

[t]hat inevitably we will lose our allies—the Warsaw Pact. These countries will go their own ways. And we even acknowledged between ourselves that the Soviet Union would not manage to survive. The logic of events would force the breakup of the Soviet Union, specifically the Baltics **71**

With the Baltic republics in ferment and civil wars being fought in the Transcaucasus, the diehards had more to worry about than just their loss of allies in Eastern Europe. This is why they eventually resorted to force in Lithuania and Latvia, a move that was intended to reassert Moscow's imperial domination while destroying *perestroika* and derailing détente with the United States. Indeed, Washington felt torn between its support for Baltic independence and the overriding objective of ending the Cold War, which now meant keeping Gorbachev in power at almost any price. Lithuania's demand in January 1990 for immediate independence briefly imperiled the second Bush-Gorbachev summit and German unification. Gorbachev's decision in April 1990 to halt oil and natural gas deliveries to the Baltic republic cost him rapid Congressional action on Most-Favored-Nation trade status and an opportunity to address Congress during the Washington summit the next month. (Lithuania and then Latvia would cast even bigger shadows over relations in January 1991, when Soviet paratroops and the elite KGB Alfa detachment—plus the so-called OMON or Black Berets **72**—assaulted and killed peaceful demonstrators.)

National Intelligence and the Soviet Economy

The US Intelligence Community and CIA in particular made a sustained effort, beginning in the

1950s, to gauge the strength and growth of the Soviet economy. CIA began reporting on declining growth rates in the 1960s and analyzing their implications in Estimates. That effort continued, with mixed but mostly positive results, until the USSR disintegrated. The Intelligence Community recorded the Soviet economy's stagnation and decline in the 1980s, and anticipated the failures of *perestroika* and the break-up of the USSR in a timely and accurate manner, even though the message was not always welcome.^a

The NIEs and SNIEs reprinted here pay heed to economic factors in the Soviet collapse without putting them at the center of the story. Most—certainly not all—Western and Russian experts agree that Gorbachev's reforms caused the economy to collapse, not the other way round.^b When Gorbachev took office, the economy was stagnant—though not in crisis—and most observers expected it to “muddle through” for at least another decade or two. As one former Soviet economist put it: “This ‘economic’ explanation [of collapse] ... is, at best, incomplete. Poor economic performance is commonplace in the world, while the peacetime collapse of a political system is quite rare.”^c

Finally, two ironies. First, in the 1970s, Soviet economists told their leadership that the final stage of the “crisis of capitalism” had begun. Leonid Brezhnev's belief that “capitalism is a society without a future” led him to step up the arms race and expand Soviet influence in the Third World—to give history a push in the direction he believed it was headed.^d That, not Gorbachev's *perestroika*, was the real beginning of the final decline. Second, the Central Committee regularly translated (and then classified) published CIA studies of the Soviet economy, especially those studies on growth rate, and defense spending^e. In one case, a CIA study on the petroleum industry may have led the Soviet leadership to change an economic policy headed for disaster. One is left wondering what would have happened if Soviet leaders had taken more CIA studies to heart.

^a Bruce D. Berkowitz and Jeffrey T. Richelson, “The CIA Vindicated,” *National Interest* 41 (Fall 1995), pp. 36-47.

^b See, for example, Myron Rush, “Fortune and Fate,” *National Interest* 31(Spring 1993), pp. 19-25; Vladimir Kantorovich, “The Economic Fallacy, in *Ibid.*, pp. 35-45; and Lilla Shestsov, “Was the Collapse of the Soviet Union Inevitable?”, in Anne de Tinguy, *The Fall of the Soviet Empire* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs/Distributed by Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 76.

^c Kantorovich, “The Economic Fallacy,” p. 36.

^d Richard B. Day, *Cold War Capitalism: The View from Moscow 1945-1975* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), p. 275.

^e Vladimir G. Treml, *Censorship, Access, and Influence: Western Sovietology in the Soviet Union* (Berkeley: The University of California at Berkeley, 1999), pp. 36-37.

The Persian Gulf crisis was the last straw for the diehards. US-Soviet joint opposition to Iraq's occupation of Kuwait was heralded in Washington as the first test of a new post-Cold War

relationship (the so-called “new world order”). Secretary Baker visited Moscow after the 1991 war specifically to salute Gorbachev and the Soviet government for their support, but Soviet policy was anathema to the diehards and many Soviet citizens. **73** (It is not accidental that Shevardnadze had resigned in December 1990 just three weeks after endorsing UN Resolution 678, which called for using “all necessary measures” to force Iraq out of Kuwait.) *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, one of *Soyuz*’s favorite press outlets, asserted that cooperation with the United States “had ended the USSR’s existence as superpower.” **74** According to the diehards, the Kremlin had betrayed the USSR’s traditional Arab allies, insulted its 50 million Muslim citizens in Central Asia, allowed the United States to deploy substantial military forces within 700 miles of the USSR’s southern borders, and served US oil companies while ignoring Soviet state interests. **75**

The Soviet military establishment was even more disturbed. The US-led war had destroyed much of the Soviet advanced weaponry sold to Saddam Husayn over the previous decade, making Moscow a silent partner in Baghdad’s humiliation. As the chief of the Soviet General Staff noted, the Gulf campaign was in effect a US testing ground for weapons that would eventually be aimed at the Soviet Union. **76** The Soviet military withdrawal from Eastern Europe and the CFE Treaty had added insult to injury moreover, by making it possible for the United States to redeploy troops, armor, and matériel from Germany to the Middle East for Operation Desert Storm. Most important, as Defense Minister Dmitri Yazov concluded, the Gulf war and the CFE Treaty taken together signified a basic shift in the “correlation of forces” between the NATO and the USSR in the West’s favor—a dangerous situation if Gorbachev’s revised threat assessment of Western intentions was wrong (something of which Yazov was firmly convinced. **77**) The “new world order” Washington was talking about was really “American command in the world arena,” in the diehards’ eyes.

Even professional diplomats, who had supported *perestroika* at first, turned on Gorbachev, suggesting that by 1991 a broad section of the Soviet establishment—those who were oriented toward saving the USSR and its superpower status without sharing more extreme views—no longer supported official policy. Some of the bitterest attacks on Gorbachev appear in memoirs written later by Georgy Kornienko, formerly number two in the Foreign Ministry, who considered Soviet cooperation with the United States during the Gulf crisis “craven.” **78** Even former Ambassador Dobrynin, whom Gorbachev used as a special envoy to President Bush on several occasions, was angry and resentful:

The Soviet Union that Gorbachev inherited in 1985 was a global power, perhaps somewhat tarnished in that image, but still strong and united and one of the world’s two superpowers. But in just three years, from 1989 to 1991, the political frontiers of the European continent were effectively rolled eastward to the Russian borders of 1653, which were those before Russia’s union with the Ukraine. **79**

The Soviet diehards blamed the loss of superpower status on Gorbachev’s and Shevardnadze’s “blunders” and give-away foreign policy. The *perestroishchiki* countered that it was not foreign policy but the “universal crisis of socialism” that had undermined the USSR. Tempers flared as the domestic situation worsened in the Soviet Union.

The Empire Collapses

The most prescient assessment of the late Gorbachev period was a CIA/SOVA “typescript,” an informal rather than fully coordinated assessment prepared at the request of the National Security Council (Document 5). “The Soviet Cauldron,” completed on 25 April 1991, anticipated that “anti-Communist forces are breaking down the Soviet empire and system of governance” and laid out conditions in which diehards would move to reassert control “with or without Gorbachev.” It predicted, accurately, that a coup probably would fail. The authors analyzed the significance of Boris Yel’tsin’s rise, predicting that he was about to become the first popularly elected leader in Russian history and would challenge the old order. This assessment was especially forward-leaning on the nationality question, seeing the drive for independence and separatism as the most immediate threat to the Union, especially in the Ukrainian, Belorussian, Georgian, and Baltic Republics. It played down the economic crisis as a determining factor, although it noted that the centrally planned economic system had broken down and was being replaced by a mixture of republic and local barter arrangements—adding to already strong centrifugal forces. **80**

The United States watched the summer’s events with increasing concern. *Implications of Alternative Soviet Futures*, NIE 11-18-91, July 1991 (Document 6), the last in the series before the coup, began: “The USSR is in the midst of a revolution that probably will sweep the Communist Party from power and reshape the country within the five-year time frame of this Estimate.” In fact, this would happen within the next six months—an incredible period that witnessed the outlawing of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), the break-up of the Soviet Union, the formation of the Commonwealth of Independent States, Gorbachev’s resignation, and the triumph of Boris Yel’tsin. As in other cases, the tough part was not anticipating what would happen but when.

NIE 11-18-91 outlined four possible scenarios—chronic crisis; system change (with Gorbachev holding power in a more pluralistic and voluntary union of the republics); “chaotic and violent” fragmentation into many separate states; and regression (a coup)—without assigning probabilities. The authors did, however, agree that scenarios two and three were the most likely and that most propitious scenario for the West would be “system change.” Fragmentation and repression would pose challenges to efforts to the end the Cold War, either because the United States would have to deal with several new states and a new kind of nuclear proliferation or because the ascendancy of hard-liners who would put the brakes on arms control and negotiations.

The August coup in the Soviet Union and the disintegration of the center posed new problems for the US Intelligence Community. **81** The first post-coup assessment was SNIE 11-18.2-91, *The Republics of the Former USSR: The Outlook for the Next Year*, September 1991 (Document 10). It concluded that the “USSR and its communist system are dead. What *ultimately* replaces them will not be known within the next year, but several trends are evident” [emphasis in original]. The SNIE then spelled out three possible scenarios for the post-Soviet future, including:

- One: Political and economic “confederation” in which the republics would coordinate economic, defense, and foreign policies, while continuing to pursue economic reform. Control over nuclear weapons would remain centralized, and the West could continue pursuing improved relations and arms control with the successor republics.
- Two: A “loose association” in which several key republics would break away but maintain a common market. Russia and several others would attempt to coordinate foreign and military policies, although a tendency to go it alone and pursue independent policies would prevail.

- Three: “Disintegration” and collapse of the center. Rising nationalism and continuing economic problems would pave the way for authoritarian governments in some republics. Republics would fight over operational control of nuclear weapons, and the threat of such weapons falling into terrorist hands would increase.

The SNIE concluded that the second scenario was the most likely and the third the least likely over the coming year—three months before the final breakup. It was right and wrong at the same time. Its authors did not envision the death of the USSR and the birth of 15 new countries, although it did project that Russia would play the leading role in whatever happened next and that—if Ukraine went its own way—it would change the equation even more. One reason the drafters may not have seen what was coming was their tendency to overestimate the impact of economic problems and underestimate the impact of resurgent nationalism. It also overlooked the Yel'tsin-Gorbachev duel as a factor motivating the Russian leader to finish off his rival by finishing off the USSR, Gorbachev's last power base.

“A Battle to the Death”

When Gorbachev finally lashed out at *Soyuz* and, by name, Alksnis and Petrushenko in mid-1991, he was really engaging proxies rather than principals. The “power ministers,” Dmitri Yazov (defense), Boris Pugo (interior), and Vladimir Kryuchkov (KGB) as well as Gennadi Yanaev, his vice president, were the real threat, as became clear when they emerged as the ringleaders of the August coup. Gorbachev was not able to attack them openly not only because the ministers were his appointees but also because they were “his last remaining power base.” ⁸² Avoiding a political shakeup on the eve of the G-7 summit in Paris, where Gorbachev hoped to obtain Western economic aid, was another consideration. In Moscow, Gorbachev had been their political hostage, but at Foros in August 1991 he became a real hostage. The coup plotters hoped to prevent the break-up of the Soviet empire by putting an end to the Novo-Ogarevo agreements for a new Union of Soviet Sovereign Republics, Gorbachev's last-ditch effort to keep the Soviet state intact as a confederation. (They also knew that Gorbachev was planning to replace them and hoped to keep their positions. ⁸³)

Time was running out. The coup not only failed but produced the opposite of its intended effect, setting the stage for Yel'tsin's final blow of 8 December 1991 (the Minsk agreement), which finished off the USSR and created the Commonwealth of Independent States. The failure of the August coup decided the fate of the CPSU, the USSR, and, of course, Gorbachev and Yel'tsin. But the coup itself was not only about who would rule the USSR but it was also about the fate of the revolution and the empire. At stake was whether *perestroika* would succeed in creating a civil society, one that would live in peace with its own citizens and the rest of the world, or return to authoritarianism at home and Cold War abroad. The situation was, if anything, more polarized than most Western observers realized. As Bovin wrote: “All crucial fronts are now within the country. Either *perestroika* triumphs—and we create a democratic, open, economically efficient society—or we have the inevitable return to the ‘cold war’ and the arms race.” ⁸⁴ Gorbachev saw the situation in the same terms, describing his struggle with the anti-reform forces as a “battle to the death.” ⁸⁵ It was, but no one expected it to end in mutual annihilation.

Ironically, the arms control momentum continued even after the August coup. The Intelligence Community published the latest version of NIE 11-3/8, *Soviet Forces and Capabilities for Strategic Nuclear Conflict Through the Year 2000* (Document 23) in August 1991. NIE 11-3/8-91 noted that Soviet superpower status was more dependent than ever on nuclear weapons. (Even “liberal” commentator Bovin admitted that the “fact we can destroy the United States is kind of comforting and encouraging in the wake of the Gulf war.” **86**) The Estimate predicted that that the USSR would retain and modernize “powerful, survivable forces through the next decade.” For example, there were five strategic ballistic missiles in development as well as two land- and three sea-based missiles. Although the Soviet economy would be unable to support a sustained, across-the-board buildup comparable to the 1980s, even for strategic forces, there would be no appreciable impact on the production or deployment of such forces.

The good news, according to the Estimate drafters, was still the CFE Treaty, which, by reducing the risk of war in Europe, reduced the risk of nuclear war growing out of a conflict between the United States and the USSR. The Estimate nonetheless took a clear-eyed view of the new and disturbing nuclear realities in an empire facing implosion. The wild card was separatism. The center might lose control over nuclear-weapons production, R&D facilities, and test sites. The rebellious republics were withholding or reducing payments to Moscow, which portended problems affecting deployment and operation of strategic forces. Ballistic missile early warning was another issue: five of the eight early-warning radar sites were located outside the Russian Republic—one of the most important was in Latvia. Then there was the looming problem of central civilian control to prevent unauthorized use by renegade military officers or nationalists. NIE 11-3/8-91 gave Soviet security measures high marks, while adding that, in the event of a military coup, collapse of the central government, or civil war, all bets were off.

In September, President Bush announced his decision to remove or destroy all tactical nuclear weapons deployed in Europe and Asia and on US warships. He also canceled plans to deploy the mobile MX and Midgetman missiles. US bombers and missiles that were scheduled for destruction under START were taken off 24-hour alert status. **87** The President also called on the USSR to adopt additional arms control measures, including elimination of all land-based ICBMs with multiple warheads.

Gorbachev responded by announcing his intention to dismantle all tactical nuclear weapons. (See *Soviet Tactical Nuclear Forces and Gorbachev's Nuclear Pledges: Impact, Motivations, and Next Steps*, November 1991 (Document 15.) He described this as “racing downhill” with the United States in arms control. But it also was a race against time. As President Bush noted, the international security situation had changed for the better—especially with the elimination of the threat of surprise attack in Europe—and it was time to “seize the opportunity” to reduce nuclear weapons further and stabilize US and Soviet forces at lower levels. **88** But the subtext, on both sides, was the looming possibility of Soviet imperial implosion and the chance that terrorists or renegade military officers might seize nuclear, particularly tactical nuclear, weapons for use in local conflicts or civil wars. (The administration’s worst fear was “Yugoslavia with nukes,” a Soviet empire torn apart by civil war and descending into regionalism and warlordism. **89**) The United States (and Gorbachev and his supporters in the USSR) wanted to reach binding agreements while there was still a central political authority in the Kremlin.

The fate of the Soviet Union can be traced out in the title and content of NIE 11-18.3-91, November 1991 (Document 7), *Civil Disorder in the Former USSR: Can It Be Managed This Winter?* Some of the dire predictions had come true, and now the US Intelligence Community was rushing to assess the consequences—rather than the causes—of *perestroika*’s failure. The impending death of the Soviet empire was raising a host of problems that exceeded the old

imperial arrangements in their capacity for threatening to disrupt regional and international stability. Those problems—fragmentation of the armed forces, control over nuclear weapons and technology, ethnic tensions and open conflicts, food and fuel shortages, economic stagnation, and the high potential for domestic strife and even civil war—made some nostalgic for the empire. Nightmare scenarios, such as a clash between Russia and Ukraine, were considered. The pessimistic prediction of the “most significant civil disorder in the former USSR since the Bolsheviks consolidated power” fortunately did not happen. For once it was good to be wrong.

The Cold War Ends

American statesmanship, aided at times by perceptive Estimates, was instrumental in identifying and seizing an opportunity to end the Cold War and the arms race. Presidents Bush and Gorbachev grappled with the enormous issues of the day as well as the legacy of the past in an effort to change US-Soviet relations and, in the process, the postwar international system. They met three times at bilateral summits and twice at multilateral sessions.⁹⁰ In between, they kept up contact through correspondence and phone calls. Secretary Baker met more than 20 times with Foreign Minister Shevardnadze and worked closely with his successor. This intensively personal diplomatic activity produced numerous formal agreements and informal understandings that, in effect, led to the end of the Cold War. Most important, perhaps, was the tacit US-Soviet partnership that helped Gorbachev and Shevardnadze in downsizing the overly militarized Soviet state. Some have attributed the end of the Cold War to impersonal forces rather than skillful diplomacy or to luck rather than judgment, but the historical record reveals the main factor to have been a giant effort involving a handful of statesmen on both sides of the US-Soviet relationship and recorded in the agreements they reached.

Did the end of the Cold War entail the end of the Soviet system?⁹¹ Or was it the other way around? It is possible to imagine a cold war without the USSR, but it is difficult to imagine a Soviet Union without the Cold War. “The Soviet empire was created and built for the arms race, confrontation, and even war with the rest of the world,” according to civilian defense expert and Duma deputy Aleksey Arbatov.⁹² As long as it existed, a return to the Cold War was still possible and perhaps inevitable.

The ultimate paradox was that détente rather than confrontation led to the collapse of Soviet power and the breakup of the Soviet Union. As soon as Gorbachev succeeded in gaining the West’s trust in the later 1980s, he began undermining the Soviet system. That system, noted Gen. Dmitri Volkogonov, a reform-minded military officer and historian, “could exist only by watching its opponents through the cross hairs of a gunsight, only by digging deeper and stronger defenses, only by feverishly competing for military superiority.”⁹³ Once the perceived Western military threat to Russia was eliminated or was redefined out of existence, the USSR’s last remaining state purpose disappeared with it. The Cold War ended when the diehards finally realized that they could not revive it, and it became irreversible sometime between the August ‘91 coup and the December collapse. If the coup had not failed, or if a subsequent coup—better planned and better executed than the first—had succeeded, the diehards might well have been able to torpedo the new détente and restart the Cold War, as they almost

succeeded in doing.

The Estimates and the End of the Cold War

An objective reading of the NIEs and other documents reprinted below refutes the allegation that readers of the intelligence assessments at the time of their publication would have come away misinformed about the direction of events and shape of policies in the Soviet Union. They also reject the idea that the Intelligence Community ignored the impending collapse of communism and breakup of the Soviet Union. In fact, the community was probably ahead of most analysis on this issue. The Estimates' focus on *perestroika* and *glasnost* as forces that would probably destroy rather than save the Soviet Union system tracks well with today's emerging scholarly consensus on the causes of the Soviet collapse.⁹⁴ While most of the world was still seeing Gorbachev as a miracle worker, the Estimates portrayed him more as a sorcerer's apprentice.

The Estimates clarified the debate on Soviet intentions that was ongoing early in the Bush administration, and they made the appropriate connection between Gorbachev's need for stability on the international front and the opportunity for the United States to negotiate favorable arms reduction agreements. The Estimates, like many other commentaries, may have assigned too much weight to economic factors as a cause of the Soviet crisis. On the other hand, they perceived earlier than Gorbachev himself the essence of the nationality problem as a critical factor as well as portraying Eastern Europe as the soft underbelly of the Soviet empire. The military Estimates also documented and anticipated the profound changes occurring in Eastern Europe as a result of arms control and political disintegration, giving American policymakers the confidence they needed to bring the Gulf crisis to a successful conclusion and reach new agreements with Moscow. The strategic Estimates provided vital information on the absence of basic change in Soviet strategic programs despite *perestroika* and, later, on the fundamental changes resulting from the START Treaty and the host of new problems raised by the Soviet collapse. All in all, the Estimates stand up well in the light of what we now know.

Chronology

1989

10 January

Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CC/CPSU) nominates candidates for the Congress of People's Deputies (CPD).

18 January

Estonia adopts law requiring minorities (i.e., Russians) to learn its native language within four years. [Lithuania, Latvia, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldavia, Uzbekistan, and Ukraine later follow suit.]

20 January

George Bush inaugurated as 41st President of the United States.

3 February

Soviet troop withdrawals from Czechoslovakia begin.

6 February

Solidarity and Polish Government start roundtable talks.

15 February

Last Soviet troops leave Afghanistan. [Najibullah regime survives until 1992.]

18 February

Polish Government declares USSR, not Nazi Germany, was responsible for 1940 Katyn Forest massacre.

9 March

Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) talks begin.

26 March

National elections for CPD; many communist candidates are defeated; Baltic popular fronts sweep elections; Boris Yel'tsin wins 90 percent of vote in Moscow.

29 March

Gorbachev claims that defeat of CPSU candidates shows USSR does not need multiparty system.

7 April

Solidarity legalized, signs agreement on elections in which it can contest 35 percent of seats in Sejm, all in Senat.

9 April

Soviet forces attack nationalist demonstrators in Tbilisi, Georgia.

25 April

Soviet forces begin leaving Hungary.

2 May

Hungarian Government lifts "iron curtain" along border with Austria.

15-19 May

Gorbachev is first Soviet leader in 30 years to visit China.

18 May

Lithuania and Estonia declare sovereignty; Latvia follows on 29 July.

25 May

First session of CPD carried live on television; elects Gorbachev chairman; next day elects Supreme Soviet (standing parliament) from among members.

3 June

Chinese Army suppresses dissidents in Tiananmen Square.

4 June

Interior Ministry (MVD) troops dispatched to quell clashes between Uzbeks and Meskhetian Turks in Fergana Oblast, Uzbekistan; Solidarity wins landslide victory, communists are defeated.

10 June

First session of Supreme Soviet opens; Gorbachev visits West Germany, says of Berlin Wall "Nothing is eternal in this world."

4 July

Gorbachev visits France.

6 July

Gorbachev tells Council of Europe (Strasbourg) that USSR will not block East European reform.

7 July

Gorbachev tells Warsaw Pact leaders they can choose own road to socialism.

10 July

Coal miners strike in Kuzbass (Siberia), then later in Donbass (Ukraine).

23 July

Aleksandr Yakovlev, chairman of CPD commission investigating Soviet-German agreements of 1939, acknowledges that secret protocols divided Poland and ceded Baltic states to USSR.

22 August

Gorbachev urges Polish communists to join coalition government with Solidarity.

23 August

Two million Balts form human chain linking Vilnius, Riga, and Tallin to protest Soviet occupation.

24 August

First non-communist government in Eastern Europe since 1948 elected in Poland.

September

More than 17,000 East Germans flee to Austria via Czechoslovakia and Poland.

10 September

Hungary opens border with Austria, allowing East Germans to flee.

22-23 September

Secretary of State Baker, Foreign Minister Shevardnadze meet at Jackson Hole, Wyoming.

7 October

Gorbachev visits East Germany, urges Erich Honecker to adopt reforms.

7 October

Hungarian Communist Party becomes a socialist party.

9 October

100,000 East Germans march in Leipzig, demand democracy.

18 October

Egon Krenz replaces Honecker as East German leader.

27 October

Warsaw Pact members endorse right of self-determination, renounce Brezhnev doctrine.

9 November

Berlin Wall opens.

19 November

Georgian Supreme Soviet declares sovereignty; 10,000 attend Civic Forum rally in Czechoslovakia.

27 November

Supreme Soviet bans censorship of press.

28 November

Czechoslovakia abandons leading role of party.

2-3 December

Bush and Gorbachev meet at Malta.

3 December

East German government resigns.

4 December

Warsaw Pact condemns 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia.

10 December

Non-communist government elected in Czechoslovakia.

20 December

Lithuanian Communist Party declares independence from CPSU.

24 December

USSR Supreme Soviet declares secret protocol to Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact invalid but does not comment on Stalin's 1940 incorporation of Baltic states.

25 December

Nicolae Ceausescu, wife executed in Romania.

29 December

Vaclav Havel becomes first democratic president of Czechoslovakia.

1990

11-13 January

Gorbachev visits Vilnius, Lithuania, in attempt to halt independence movement, says "Our security lies here."

19 January

Soviet troops enter Baku, Azerbaijan, to quell anti-Armenian riots.

4 February

Moscow demonstrators demand acceleration of reforms.

5-7 February

Central Committee plenum approves Gorbachev's proposal to create USSR presidency.

9 February

Secretary Baker, in Moscow, proposes "Two plus Four" talks on German unification to Gorbachev.

13 February

Four powers agree on "Two plus Four" arrangement.

25 February

Demonstrators across USSR attack Gorbachev by name; in Moscow troops and KGB units stand by as 50,000 to 100,000 march through streets.

11 March

Lithuania declares independence; Gorbachev brands move illegal.

13 March

Article 6 of Soviet Constitution is amended, eliminating CPSU monopoly on power.

14 March

CPD elects Gorbachev president.

24-26 March

Gorbachev chooses new 15-member presidential cabinet with representatives from right and left.

25 March

Estonian Communist Party declares independence of CPSU.

9 April

Gorbachev announces he will use new powers to institute economic reform.

13 April

Gorbachev embargoes oil and natural gas for Lithuania; government acknowledges that NKVD, not Nazis, murdered Polish officers at Katyn, other sites in 1940.

1 May

Demonstrators jeer Gorbachev at May Day celebration.

4 May

Latvia declares independence; Gorbachev declares act illegal.

29 May

Boris Yel'tsin elected chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Republic.

30 May

Bush and Gorbachev open their second summit in Washington; Gorbachev agrees that "Germans should decide whether or not they're in NATO."

8 June

Russian parliament declares sovereignty over USSR laws.

12 June

Russian republic declares sovereignty.

30 June

Gorbachev lifts embargo against Lithuania.

2-13 July

28th CPSU Congress meets, re-elects Gorbachev general secretary.

12 July

Yel'tsin resigns from CPSU.

15 July

Gorbachev and West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl meet at Arkhyz (Caucasus); Gorbachev gives final agreement to unified German state in NATO.

16 July

Ukraine declares sovereignty.

20 July

500-Day economic reform plan to create market economy in 17 months published; Gorbachev rejects it.

27 July

Belorussia declares sovereignty.

1 August

Gorbachev and Yel'tsin agree to work on economic reform.

2 August

Iraq invades Kuwait.

3 August

Secretary Baker, Foreign Minister Shevardnadze issue joint statement condemning Iraqi invasion.

8 August

CPSU issues new program that concedes the failures and mistakes of Soviet socialism.

23 August

Turkmenistan, Armenia declare sovereignty.

25 August

Tajikistan declares sovereignty.

9 September

Presidents Bush and Gorbachev meet in Helsinki to discuss Gulf crisis, agree to try to get Saddam Husayn to withdraw; US privately agrees to Soviet proposal for a Middle East conference on the Arab-Israeli peace process.

12 September

Treaty on German unification signed; four-power control ends, and German sovereignty begins.

24 September

Gorbachev granted power to govern by decree.

3 October

German unification.

15 October

Soyuz parliamentary group attacks Shevardnadze's foreign policy record as a sellout to Washington.

25 October

Kazakhstan declares sovereignty.

30 October

Kirghizia declares sovereignty.

7 November

Shots fired at Gorbachev during national day celebrations.

17 November

Supreme Soviet accepts Gorbachev's proposal for a Soviet of the Federation, a new government structure with representatives from all 15 republics.

19 November

CFE Treaty signed.

23 November

Gorbachev issues draft of treaty for a new Union of Sovereign States; most republic leaders criticize it.

27 November

UN Resolution 678 authorizes use of force against Iraq to liberate Kuwait.

1 December

Gorbachev replaces a reformer with a diehard as interior minister; offers Shevardnadze position as vice president.

20 December

Shevardnadze resigns as foreign minister, warns of impending dictatorship.

22 December

KGB chief Kryuchkov claims US is masterminding breakup of USSR.

1991

2 January

OMON forces (a.k.a. the Black Berets) seize public buildings in Vilnius, Riga.

7 January

Paratroop units sent to 7 republics to enforce draft law, round up deserters.

9 January

OMON troops surround Vilnius television tower.

11 January

OMON, KGB Alpha group, paratroops, and tanks surround main printing plant, close airport and train station in Vilnius; pro-Soviet "national salvation committee" formed.

13 January

Bloody Sunday I: Army troops seize Vilnius television station, beat and fire on demonstrators, killing at least 15; MVD minister Pugo blames Lithuanians for violence.

14 January

Gorbachev denies ordering use of force in Vilnius, claims local "national salvation committee" requested assistance. V. Pavlov, former finance minister and opponent of reform, appointed chairman, USSR Cabinet of Ministers (premier) in new presidential government.

15 January

A. Bessmertnykh appointed foreign minister. [He would be fired in August for siding with coup plotters.]

17 January

Coalition air war against Iraq (Desert Storm) begins.

19 January

Pro-Soviet "national salvation committee" formed in Riga; top economic adviser to Gorbachev resigns, claiming reform is not possible in current situation.

18 January

Gorbachev demands US halt bombing of Iraq.

20 January

Bloody Sunday II: in Riga, Black Berets attack demonstrators and seize Latvian MVD headquarters, killing four; 300,000 in Moscow demonstrate in solidarity with Balts.

22 January

Gorbachev blames violence in Lithuania, Latvia on parliaments; presidential decrees order confiscation of 50- and 100-ruble notes, undermining entrepreneurs and discouraging free market.

25 January

Moscow city soviet rations meat, grain, and vodka; Defense Ministry, MVD begin joint patrols in 7 cities.

6 February

Six republics boycott referendum on Union treaty.

9 February

Lithuanians (90%) vote for independence.

18 February

Gorbachev meets Iraqi foreign minister, offers to broker agreement to avoid ground war in Kuwait.

19 February

Yel'tsin calls for Gorbachev's resignation.

24 February

US-led ground war against Iraq begins; hardliners demonstrate in Moscow.

25 February

Warsaw Pact members abrogate all military agreements, retain political ties; pro-reform demonstrators march in Moscow.

26 February

Gorbachev denounces "pseudo-democrats" for bringing country to "brink of war."

27 February

US-led coalition force liberates Kuwait, halts ground offensive.

3 March

Estonians, Latvians vote for independence.

10 March

300,000 demonstrate for Yel'tsin, who denounces Gorbachev's "constant lies and deceptions" and calls for "declaration of war against Soviet leadership."

14-16 March

Secretary Baker, in Moscow, meets Baltic, other republic leaders.

17 March

Large majority votes for Union treaty (to preserve USSR) and for executive presidency.

28 March

100,000 pro-Yel'tsin demonstrators defy Gorbachev's ban, march in Moscow.

31 March

Warsaw Pact officially dissolves.

9 April

Georgia declares independence.

23 April

Gorbachev shifts toward reformers, holds talks with 9 republic leaders at Novo-Ogarevo to speed up Union agreement, stabilize situation, and accelerate market reforms.

12 June

Yel'tsin elected president of RSFSR.

17 June

Vice President Pavlov asks Supreme Soviet to grant him special powers; with Gorbachev absent, Yazov, Pugo, and Kryuchkov secretly support attempted "constitutional coup."

20 June

Moscow Mayor Popov warns US ambassador of impending coup; President Bush passes message to Gorbachev, who dismisses it.

30 June

Last Soviet soldiers leave Czechoslovakia.

17 July

Presidents Bush and Gorbachev complete Strategic Arms Reduction (START) Treaty at London G-7 meeting; Gorbachev asks for but does not receive economic aid.

25-26 July

CPSU adopts "social democratic" program.

29 July

US-USSR sign START Treaty during Moscow summit; announce co-sponsorship of Middle East peace conference.

1 August

President Bush visits Kiev, meets independence leader Kravchuk.

18-21 August

“State Committee for the State of Emergency” attempts coup against Gorbachev, Soviet government; Yel'tsin denounces coup as illegal, organizes resistance; Gorbachev is held in seclusion at home in Foros.

20 August

Mass demonstrations in Moscow and Leningrad against coup.

22 August

Gorbachev returns to Moscow from Foros and resumes duties as head of state.

24 August

Gorbachev resigns as head of CPSU, suspends its activities; Ukraine declares independence.

25 August

Belorussian Supreme Soviet declares political and economic independence.

27 August

Moldova (former Moldavia) declares independence.

29 August

USSR Supreme Soviet bans CPSU.

30 August

Azerbaijan declares independence.

31 August

Kyrgyzstan (formerly Kirghizia), Uzbekistan declare independence.

2 September

US recognizes independent Baltic countries.

2-6 September

Fifth extraordinary session of CPD calls for new treaty on Union of Soviet Sovereign States.

6 September

Georgia severs all ties to USSR; Leningrad renamed St. Petersburg.

9 September

Tajikistan declares independence.

21 September

Armenia declares independence.

11 October

USSR State Council breaks up KGB into 5 separate organizations.

19 October

Gorbachev, eight republic leaders sign treaty on economic union.

30 October

Presidents Bush, Gorbachev meet at Madrid Middle East peace conference.

4 November

Republic leaders meet with USSR State Council, abolish all USSR ministries except defense, foreign affairs, railways, electric power, and nuclear power.

6 November

Yel'tsin abolishes Russian Communist Party, confiscates assets.

19 November

Gorbachev reappoints Shevardnadze foreign minister.

1 December

Ukraine votes for independence.

3 December

Gorbachev calls for preservation of USSR; Yel'tsin recognizes Ukraine.

7-8 December

Presidents of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus meet secretly at Belovezhskaya Pushcha (Belorussia), sign Minsk agreement abolishing USSR and forming Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS); Gorbachev brands it "dangerous and illegal."

15 December

Baker in Moscow, meets Gorbachev, Yel'tsin.

16 December

Kazakhstan declares independence.

17 December

Gorbachev, Yel'tsin agree USSR will cease to exist by 1 January 1992.

21-22 December

Eleven former republic leaders meet at Alma Ata (Almaty), agree to expand CIS.

25 December

Gorbachev resigns; Russian flag replaces Soviet over Kremlin.

31 December

USSR officially ceases to exist under international law.

Appendix

National Intelligence Estimates and Intelligence Assessments at the National Archives and Records Administration

The following declassified estimates, assessments, and memoranda may be of interest to readers. They are available from the National Archives and Records Administration, Records Group 263 (Records of the Central Intelligence Agency). Much of this material is also available on the Internet at www.foia.cia.gov. Click on Historical Review Program.

USSR *Energy Atlas* (January 1985)

SOV 85-10141, *Gorbachev's Approach to Societal Malaise: A Managed Revitalization* (August 1985)

SOV 85-10165, *Gorbachev's Economic Agenda, Promises, Potentials, and Pitfalls* (September 1985)

SOV 86-10015, *Gorbachev's Modernization Program: Implications for Defense* (March 1986)

The Soviet Economy Under a New Leader (March 1986)

SOV 86-10023, *The 27th CPSU Congress: Gorbachev's Unfinished Business* (April 1986)

SOV 86-10011X, *Defense's Claim on Soviet Resources* (February 1987)

SOV 87-10011X, *Gorbachev's Domestic Challenge: The Looming Problems* (February 1987)

SOV 87-10033, *The Kazakh Riots: Lessons for the Soviet Leadership* (June 1987)

SOV 87-10036, *Gorbachev: Steering the USSR Into the 1990s* (July 1987)

SOV DDB-1900-140, *Gorbachev's Modernization Program: A Status Report* (August 1987)

SOV 88-10040, *Soviet National Security Policy: Responses to the Changing Military and Economic Environment* (June 1988)

SOV M88-2005, *The 19th All-Union Party Conference: Restructuring the Soviet Political System* (June 1988)

DDB-1900-187, *Gorbachev's Economic Program: Problems Emerge* (June 1988)

SOV 88-10049, *The Impact of Gorbachev's Policies on Soviet Economic Statistics* (July 1988)

NIE 11-22-88, *The Prospects for Change in Sino-Soviet Relations* (August 1988)

Leadership Situation in the USSR: Prospects for a Leadership Crisis (September 1988)

SOV 88-1004U, *USSR: Sharply Higher Deficits Threaten Perestroyka* (September 1988)

SOV 88-10079, *Gorbachev's September Housecleaning: An Early Evaluation* (December 1988)

SOV 89-10017, *The Soviet Economy in Global Perspective* (March 1989)

SOV 89-10035, *USSR: Estimates of Personal Incomes and Savings* (April 1989)

SOV 8-10035, *Modeling Soviet Agriculture: Isolating the Effects of Weather* (August 1988)

SOV 89-10040, *Rising Political Instability Under Gorbachev: Understanding the Problem and Prospects for Resolution* (April 1989)

The Soviet Economy in 1988: Gorbachev Changes Course (April 1989)

NIC 0060-89, *Executive Brief: How Vulnerable Is Gorbachev?* (May 1989)

SOV 89-10020, *A Comparison of the US and Soviet Industrial Bases* (May 1989)

NIE 11-15-89, *Soviet Naval Strategy and Programs Toward the 21st Century (Key Judgments)* (June 1989)

SOV 89-10059, *Gorbachev's Assault on the Social Contract: Can He Build a New Basis for Regime Legitimacy?* (July 1989)

NIE 11/30-89, *Soviet Policy Toward the Middle East* (December 1989)

NI IIM 90-10001, *Outlook for Eastern Europe in 1990* (February 1989)

LDA 90-12598, *The USSR Presidency* (April 1990)

GI 90-10013U, *USSR: Demographic Trends and Ethnic Balance in the Non-Russian Republics* (April 1990)

DDB-1900-161, *The Soviet Economy Stumbles Badly in 1989* (May 1990)

SOV 90-10021, *Soviet Energy Data Resource Handbook* (May 1990)

LDA 90-13125, *The Soviet Banking Industry: Blueprint for Change* (May 1990)

NIC M 90-10009, *The Readiness of Soviet General Purpose Forces Through the Year 2000* (June 1990)

The USSR: Approaching Turning Point (June 1990)

IR 90-10008, *Selected Countries' Trade With the USSR and Eastern Europe* (July 1990)

SOV 90-10038, *Measuring Soviet GNP: Problems and Solutions* (September 1990)

Measures of Soviet Gross National Product in 1982 Prices (November 1990)

Gorbachev's Future (May 1991)

SOV 91-10018, *Soviet Economic Futures: The Outlook for 1991* (May 1991)

SOV 91-10026, *Yeltsin's Political Objectives* (June 1991)

DDB-190-164, *Beyond Perestroika: The Soviet Economy in Crisis* (June 1991)

LDA 91-13194, *A Guide to Soviet Institutions of Power* (July 1991)

LDA 91-16344, *USSR and the Baltic States: Leading Economic Players* (December 1991)

OSE 92-10001, *The Republics of the Former Soviet Union and the Baltic States: An Overview* (January 1992)

Moscow's Defense Spending Cuts Accelerate (May 1992)

Economic Survey of Russia (March 1993)

Footnotes

¹ For a review of previous CSI publications on national intelligence topics and their tie-in with conferences sponsored by CIA, see Benjamin Franklin Cooling, "The Central Intelligence Agency and the Policy of Openness," *The Public Historian* 20:4 (Fall 1998), pp. 60-66.

² See "Declassified National Intelligence Estimates on the Soviet Union and International Communism, 1946-1984," (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 1996). This is a list of all NIEs and SNIIEs declassified and released to date to NARA.

³ See Robert M. Gates, *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), pp. 514, 520; Michael R. Beschloss and Strobe Talbott, *At the Highest Levels: The Inside Story of the End of the Cold War* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1993), p. 360; Kirsten Lundberg, "CIA and the Fall of the Soviet Empire: The Politics of 'Getting It Right,'" Case Study C16-94-1251.0, Harvard University, 1994, pp. 36-37; Don Oberdorfer, *From the Cold War to a New Era: The United States and the Soviet Union, 1983-1991* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1998), pp. 450-451; and Bruce D. Berkowitz and Jeffrey T. Richelson, "The CIA Vindicated," *National Interest* 41 (Fall 1995), pp. 41-42. Lundberg's case study was written for the Harvard Intelligence and Policy Project of the John F. Kennedy School of Government and was funded by CIA.

⁴ See George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Knopf/Distributed by Random House, 1998), pp. 15-16; and James A. Baker III, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War, and Peace, 1989-1992* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1995), p. 68.

⁵ Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, p. 40; and Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, p. 68.

- 6** For a discussion of the range of views among the “core group” of policymakers, see Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, pp. 41-44; and Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, pp. 68-70.
- 7** To get the INF agreement, Gorbachev had made major concessions that Brezhnev and his two successors had flatly rejected, including asymmetrical reductions and intrusive on-site inspections.
- 8** The Red Army had about 5.2 million men under arms at the time, and the withdrawal from Eastern Europe represented about ten percent of the total stationed there. The USSR also had about 53,000 tanks, 29,000 artillery systems, and 4,880 combat aircraft. Gorbachev’s reductions and withdrawals were significant, since the INF Treaty could have been fully implemented without affecting the overall Soviet force structure poised toward Europe. See William E. Odom, *The Collapse of the Soviet Military* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 147. Poland, Hungary, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia later gave Gorbachev’s declaration an added boost by announcing a reduction of 56,000 troops, 2,000 tanks, 130 aircraft, and thousands of artillery pieces and mortars as well as a “13.6 percent” reduction in defense spending. (Defense budget data were still classified, so the figure was meaningless.) See Vladislav Andreyevich Drobkov, *Kommunist* 6 (April 1989), p. 125.
- 9** “Gamble, Showman, Statesman,” *New York Times*, 8 December 1988, p. 34.
- 10** Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, p. 134.
- 11** *Ibid.*, p. 13.
- 12** Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, p. 70.
- 13** Cited in Kirsten Lundberg, “CIA and the Fall of the Soviet Empire: The Politics of ‘Getting It Right,’” Case Study C16-94-1251.0, Harvard University, 1994, pp. 30-31.
- 14** The full text of the speech is in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: George Bush 1989*, Book I: January 20-June 30, 1989 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1990), pp. 540-543.
- 15** Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, p. 14.
- 16** *Ibid.*, p. 134.
- 17** SNIE 11/37-88, *USSR: Withdrawal from Afghanistan*, March 1988, (Document 11), correctly assessed the Kremlin’s domestic and foreign policy reasons for quitting Afghanistan, noting that withdrawal would be seen both as a defeat for the “Brezhnev doctrine” and a “triumph for Western policy.” The Estimate also stated confidently that Najibullah’s regime “will not survive the completion of Soviet withdrawal even with continued Soviet assistance.” But it did not collapse, partly because the USSR began pouring in aid in the summer of 1989. The next Estimate, *Afghanistan: The War in Perspective*, SNIE 11/37-38, November 1989 (Document 14), came to a different conclusion, asserting that the Kabul regime, though “weak, unpopular, and factionalized,” would “probably remain in power over the next 12 months.” The SNIE included an unusual *mea culpa* in a page-one footnote, stating that the previous SNIE, 11/37-88, had “incorrectly forecast that the Najibullah government would not long survive the completion the Soviet withdrawal and that the regime might even fall before the withdrawal was completed.”

- 18** Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Restored*, p. 155.
- 19** In his 1988 UN address, Gorbachev had used the term “defensive sufficiency” to describe the proper goal of the Soviet military posture.
- 20** Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, p. 46.
- 21** In the first rough draft of “new political thinking” (his attempt to revise the precepts of the Soviet foreign and defense policy), Gorbachev told the 27th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in 1986: “Never, perhaps in the postwar decades, was the situation in the world as explosive and hence, more difficult and unfavorable, as in the first half of the 1980s.” See “The Political Report of the Central Committee of the CPSU to the Party Congress of the CPSU, Moscow, February 25, 1986,” in Mikhail S. Gorbachev, *Toward a Better World* (New York: Richardson & Steirman, 1987), pp. 158-159.
- 22** See Dmitri Volkogonov, *Autopsy for Empire: The Seven Leaders Who Built the Soviet Regime* (New York: The Free Press, 1988), p. 491.
- 23** Adam Michnik, “Why Has Our Relationship to Other Nations Changed?—Because Our Relationship to Our Own People Has Changed,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 27-29 October 1989, p. 4.
- 24** After the Soviet collapse, Shevardnadze told Secretary of State Baker that he and Gorbachev realised when *perestroika* began that sooner or later they would have change the Soviet state but claimed they had no schedule for doing so. See Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, p. 568.
- 25** See Charles S. Maier, *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 182-183.
- 26** Smolensk Square is the site of the former Soviet (now Russian) Foreign Ministry.
- 27** David Pryce-Jones, *The Strange Death of the Soviet Empire* (New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt and Company, 1995), p. 115.
- 28** Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow’s Ambassador to Six Cold War Presidents* (New York: Times Books/Random House, 1995), p. 632.
- 29** Stanislav Kondrashov, “Turbulent End to the Year Heralding the Start of a New Era,” *Izvestiya*, 31 December 1989, p. 5.
- 30** Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, p. 39.
- 31** Bruce D. Berkowitz and Jeffrey T. Richelson, “The CIA Vindicated,” *National Interest* 41 (Fall 1995), pp. 36-47.
- 32** Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, p. 78.
- 33** Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, p. 41.
- 34** “CIA and the Cold War,” an address by DCI Robert M. Gates at the University of Oklahoma, International Program Center, 12 September 1997.

35 Michael Howard, "The Prudence Thing: George Bush's Class Act," *Foreign Affairs* 77:6 (November/December 1998), p. 131.

36 Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, p. iv.

37 Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, p. 170.

38 Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, pp. 205, 207.

39 Michael R. Beschloss and Strobe Talbott, *At the Highest Levels: The Inside Story of the End of the Cold War* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1993), p. 152.

40 Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, p. 205.

41 The CFE talks began on 9 March 1989; an agreement was signed in Paris on 19 November 1990. The talks, which included all 23 members of the two alliances, were held under the auspices of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe. The treaty set limits on five categories of weapons, including tanks, armored combat vehicles, artillery pieces, combat aircraft, and helicopters. In May 1989, the USSR accepted NATO's proposal for equal force ceilings, which meant that the Warsaw Pact would have to destroy far more weapons than NATO.

42 NIC M 89-10002, *The Post-CFE Environment in Europe*, September 1989 (Document 18); NIC M 89-10003, *Status of Soviet Unilateral Withdrawals*, October 1989 (Document 19); and NIC M 89-10005, *Soviet Theater Forces in 1991: The Impact of the Unilateral Withdrawals on Structure and Capabilities*, November 1989 (Document 20).

43 As one reason for doing so, Khrushchev cited the USSR's increasing reliance on strategic nuclear weapons, in particular on intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). At the time, the USSR had only four operational ICBMs.

44 Stephan Sestanovich, "Did the West Undo the East?" *National Interest* 31 (Spring 1993), p. 29.

45 Wisla Suraska, *How the Soviet Union Disappeared: An Essay on the Causes of Dissolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), p. 83.

46 Pryce-Jones, *The Strange Death of the Soviet Empire*, p. 292.

47 According to Suraska:

The unification of the two Germanies was the most important event shaping international relations in the second half of the twentieth century. The Soviet Union's dissolution can be considered its most immediate geopolitical consequence; the Soviet loss of a key strategic position in Europe triggered the process of territorial retrenchment, pushing the range of Moscow's domination back to the East. Suraska, *How the Soviet Union Disappeared*, p. 83.

48 For accounts of the White House session, see Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, p. 282; and Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, pp. 252-253.

49 Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, p. 282.

- 50** Martin McCauley, *Gorbachev* (London: Longman, 1998), p. 197.
- 51** Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, p. 188.
- 52** USSR People's Deputies N. S. Petrushenko, V. I. Alksnis, and Ye. V. Kogan, "We Cannot Interpret This as an Accomplishment of Our Foreign Policy," *Literaturnaya Rossiya*, 12 November 1990, pp. 18-19.
- 53** See Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, pp. 626-627.
- 54** Beschloss and Talbott, *At the Highest Levels*, p. 240.
- 55** Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, p. 276.
- 56** *Ibid.*, p. 500.
- 57** Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, p. 478.
- 58** Aleksandr Bovin, "Political Observer's Opinion: Time Out?", *Izvestiya*, 28 March 1991, p. 4. In late 1991 Gorbachev appointed Bovin ambassador to Israel, after restoring diplomatic ties that had been severed in 1967. As the USSR began disintegrating, the United States expanded its political contacts, both with "opposition" leaders such as Yelt'sin in Moscow and with republic officials. By late 1992, it was clear that Gorbachev's days were over, and power had devolved to the republic and local level. See Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, pp. 472, 531.
- 59** Alksnis's uncle was commander of the Red Air Force in 1938, when Stalin ordered his execution as part of the purge of the Soviet military establishment on the eve of World War II.
- 60** Yemelin, "The Army and Politics," *Literaturnaya Rossiya*, 14 December 1990, p. 8
- 61** Gorbachev took Alksnis seriously enough to order a KGB tap on his office phone. See "Direct Line: Deputy's Request by Viktor Alksnis," in *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 27 December 1992, p. 3.
- 62** A. Kiva, "'Union' of Obsessives: Political Portrait of a Deputies Group Aspiring to a Serious Social Role," *Izvestiya*, 12 May 1991, p. 3.
- 63** Interview with Moscow City Soviet Chairman Gavril Popov by Yegor Yakovlev, "The Times are Getting Tougher," *Moscow News*, 28 October-4 November, 1991, p.7.
- 64** Andrei S. Grachev, *Final Days: The Inside Story of the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press/A Division of HarperCollins Publishers, 1995), p. 170.
- 65** *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.
- 66** Gorbachev and Shevardnadze agreed to destroy all SS-23 short-range missiles—even though the terms of the INF Treaty did not require them to do so—without consulting with the Ministry of Defense.
- 67** In 1988, when the Reagan administration complained that a large, phased-array radar located near Krasnoyarsk (Siberia) violated the 1972 US-Soviet ABM Treaty, the Soviet military denied the US charge, falsely claiming that the radar's sole purpose was to track artificial Earth

satellites and other space objects. Shevardnadze's 1989 decision to admit the truth made him an enemy of the military establishment, which considered the decision to dismantle the radar as capitulation to the United States and a threat to Soviet security.

68 Diehards claimed that the Kremlin had made unacceptable territorial and economic concessions by accepting the new demarcation line.

69 President Dwight Eisenhower made the original proposal in 1955; Khrushchev rejected it. President Bush revived Open Skies in his 1989 Texas A&M speech. His plan called for surveillance overflights of unarmed aircraft over the United States and the USSR to monitor compliance with arms control treaties and military developments. In 1992, the sixteen NATO countries, all members of the former Warsaw Pact, and Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus signed an agreement permitting 42 surveillance overflights per year by aircraft equipped with photographic and electronic intelligence collection gear.

70 Kryuchkov made his allegations about agents of influence during a closed session of the Supreme Soviet, but the KGB leaked a tape of his remarks to the Leningrad television program "600 Seconds." See Sergei Roy, "The Crash of an Empire," *Moscow News*, 7 April 1999, p. 4.

71 William C. Wohlforth, ed., *Witnesses to the End of the Cold War* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1996), p. 113.

72 Special detachment militia units of the Interior Ministry. In this case, the OMON squads were composed of renegade ethnic Russians and Poles from the Latvian Interior Ministry.

73 In his memoirs, however, the former Secretary of State noted that "once the air war began in January 1991, Soviet efforts to avoid a ground war became without question our greatest political impediment." Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, p. 396.

74 Cited in Beschloss and Talbot, *At the Highest Levels*, p. 334.

75 Teresa Cherfas, "Iron Man," *New Statesman* (London), 5 April 1991, p. 12.

76 For more than a decade, some senior military officers had been warning of the need to develop new hi-tech conventional weapons in emulation of the US before it was too late. Now, their worst nightmare had come true, since the Gulf war had been a one-on-one engagement of US and Soviet weaponry, and it was clear who had won.

77 USSR Defense Minister Marshal of the Soviet Union D. Yazov, "Greatness of the People's Feat: Victory, Memory and Truth," *Pravda*, 9 May 1991, p. 3.

78 See G. M. Kornienko, *Kholodnaia voina: svidetel'stvo ee uchastnika* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyee Otnosehniya, 1995), especially Chapter x.

79 Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, p. 615. The loss of empire had a profound effect on the diehards and many Soviet citizens of diverse political views. One experienced observer recently noted that during a 1994 symposium Russian participants tried to explain how:

their deep sense of national pride in the Soviet Union as a superpower, equal in terms of military potential to the United States, served as psychological compensation for their material shortages and very low standard of living. Jan Nowak, "Russia: Isolation or Co-operation?,"

unpublished paper delivered to The Jamestown Foundation Conference, Washington, DC, 9-10 June 1999, p. 4.

80 According to one account, even though the NSC had requested the paper, it dismissed its conclusions as having a pro-Yel'tsin bias. Beschloss and Talbott, *At the Highest Levels*, p. 360. See also Berkowitz and Richelson, "The CIA Vindicated," p. 43. Gates notes that the paper clearly warned the White House that serious trouble was brewing but does not comment on its final impact. See Robert M. Gates, *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), p. 520.

81 John M. Broder, "CIA Scrambles to Evaluate Breakaway Soviet Republics," *Los Angeles Times*, 12 December 1991, p. 14.

82 See Roy, "The Crash of an Empire," p. 4.

83 In April 1991, Gorbachev met with the leaders of nine Soviet republics and Boris Yel'tsin at Novo-Ogarevo, the Soviet version of Camp David, to draft a new treaty for a Union of Soviet Sovereign Republics. Gorbachev was forced to agree to the removal of the "power ministers" as the price of support from Boris Yel'tsin and the Kazakh republic leader for the Union treaty. The KGB head of his security detail had bugged the presidential dacha at Novo-Ogarevo and given the tapes to Kryuchkov. It was the impending approval of this treaty that prompted the hardliners to attempt to seize power and maintain the Soviet empire. See Boris Yel'tsin, *The Struggle for Russia* (New York: Random House, 1994), p. 39.

84 Bovin, "Political Observer's Opinion: Time Out?"

85 Grachev, *Final Days*, p. 170.

86 Bovin, "Political Observer's Opinion: Time Out?"

87 Presidents Bush and Gorbachev signed the START I Treaty during the Moscow summit of 29-31 July 1991. Gorbachev and Shevardnadze made three major concessions (over the objections of the military, the military-industrial complex, and some top diplomatic officials) to get an agreement. They agreed to complete a treaty without insisting on restrictions on the US anti-missile-defense program (Strategic Defense Initiative or SDI); they agreed to dismantle the Krasnoyarsk radar; and they accepted a 50-percent reduction in "heavy" SS-18 missiles—the backbone of the Soviet nuclear deterrent. The two sides agreed to reduce deployed strategic warheads to no more than 6,000 and launchers (missiles and bombers) to maximum of 1,600. The USSR also accepted a 50-percent reduction in throw weight for its intercontinental and sea-launched ballistic missiles.

88 The US and USSR agreed to even deeper reductions in their nuclear arsenals in the START II Treaty, which was signed with Russia in January 1993 but to date has not been ratified by the Duma.

89 Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, p. 562.

90 US and Soviet leaders held 16 bilateral summits from 1961 to 1991.

91 Historian Eric Hobsbawm poses this question in *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991* (New York: Pantheon, 1994), p. 250.

92 Aleksey Arbatov, "The National Idea and National Security," *Mirovaya Ekonomika i Mezhdunarodnyye Otnosheniya*, 5 (May 1998), p. 8.

93 Dmitri Volkogonov, *Lenin: A New Biography* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), p. 484.

94 See Robert Strayer, *Why Did the Soviet Union Collapse? Understanding Historical Change* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1998), p. 83, which argues that Gorbachev's reform program was the "primary and independent cause" of the Soviet collapse. Other historians have argued, however, that the Soviet system contained "fatal flaws" that doomed it from the outset. See, for example, Martin Malia, *Russia Under Western Eyes: From the Bronze Horseman to the Lenin Mausoleum* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 406-407.

* Adobe® Reader® is needed to view Adobe PDF files. If you don't already have Adobe Reader installed, you may download the current version at www.adobe.com (opens in a new window).
[external link disclaimer]