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CONSERVATISM AND CONSOLIDATION UNDER BREZHNEV

Brezhnev ruled the Soviet Union for far longer than Lenin or Khrushchev. Yet during his eighteen years as Party leader, Soviet conceptions of East-West relations remained fixed and immobile. There was little significant forward movement. Even Gorbachev, who has been General Secretary for only three years, has had a greater impact on Soviet perspectives on international politics. Why is this the case? How is this inertia and stagnation to be explained? What impact did it have upon Soviet foreign policy?

For all their considerable differences, Stalin and Khrushchev shared an important characteristic. They both took the official foreign policy doctrine very seriously. Stalin spent his last years rigidly refusing to modify it, while Khrushchev made a determined effort to reform it. In contrast, Brezhnev largely ignored it. He did not build upon and extend the doctrinal innovations pioneered by Khrushchev, but he did not attempt to undo them either. Khrushchev's expanded conception of peaceful coexistence was not repudiated when Soviet-American relations cooled in the 1960s (though its prominence was greatly reduced), and it was not enlarged when they thawed again in the 1970s. By comparing Brezhnev's approach to doctrine with that of Khrushchev, we can gain a better sense of the distinctive characteristics of each of these leaders and of the pronounced differences between them.

In the West, Khrushchev's endorsement of peaceful coexistence was generally regarded with skepticism and suspicion. Many people