

The skeptics acknowledge that the men around Gorbachev are more sophisticated than their predecessors and more knowledgeable about the West, but in their view this means primarily that Gorbachev's advisers have a greater understanding of public relations and an enhanced ability to play upon the hopes and wishes of Western publics. They have learned from past Soviet mistakes, when the Soviet Union was its own worst enemy due, in part, to ill-conceived and clumsily executed propaganda efforts (such as the escalation of tensions in 1983-1984 in a vain attempt to block the installation of US intermediate-range missiles in Europe).

Rather than attacking S.D.I. frontally, Soviet policy-makers have decided upon a more indirect approach. Instead of just denouncing S.D.I. — though this is done as well — Soviet spokesmen are attempting to take the high road by proclaiming that all nations, the Soviet Union and the United States alike, should recognize that the true path to enhanced security can be found only through negotiation and self-restraint. Soviet pronouncements proclaim that no nation, even the most powerful, can achieve security through a unilateral buildup of its defensive or offensive forces. This, it is claimed, is an inescapable reality of the nuclear age which the Soviet leadership fully recognizes. The United States is called upon to acknowledge this situation so that a new era of international co-operation and harmony can begin.

In the eyes of the skeptics, this is a potent appeal which may well achieve the Soviet objective of hobbling Western military efforts while imposing only the most minimal constraints upon Moscow. The Soviet Union still remains a highly authoritarian political system, one in which the actual military budget is not even published much less defended from public criticism, whereas Western governments must continually protect their military expenditures from the assaults of vocal and powerful constituencies that are eager to put this money to other uses. The obvious tactical advantages that accrue to the Soviet Union from adopting an appearance of moderation thus constitutes a second major reason for Western skepticism about Soviet championship of "new thinking" in international politics.