

formed an impression of the U.S.S.R. as being a country that seeks to conquer the world.... In order to change people's opinion about us we must change ourselves.

In the same vein, the Soviet Foreign Minister, Eduard Shevardnadze, bluntly advised his colleagues: "We should not pretend, Comrades, that norms and notions of what is proper, of what is called civilized conduct in the world community do not concern us. If you want to be accepted in it you must observe them."

A SECOND IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENT IS THE unprecedented nature of the self-criticism concerning the errors and mistakes of past Soviet foreign policy that is now being publicly aired. Prior to Gorbachev, Soviet foreign policy was virtually immune to criticism. Even at the height of Khrushchev's de-Stalinization campaigns in 1956, 1961 and 1962 virtually nothing of a critical nature was published concerning Stalin's conduct of East-West relations.

Since the latter part of 1987, Soviet foreign policy has been subjected to a searching re-examination totally unlike anything seen in the past sixty years. Stalin has been condemned not just for his hostile stance toward the German Social Democrats in the 1930s, his handling of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of 1939, and his later rejection of Soviet participation in the Marshall Plan, but also for following a "hegemonic, great power" policy of expansionism into Eastern Europe which was perceived in the West as a grave threat to the existing international balance of power.

Khrushchev has been publicly criticized for his mishandling of the Cuban missile crisis, his exaggerated optimism about Soviet economic prospects compared to those of the West, and his propagandistic championing of "General and Complete Disarmament" instead of a more realistic policy of gradual arms control coupled with international inspection and verification.

Brezhnev's foreign policy has been condemned for its exaggerated preoccupation with military strength, its fueling of the arms race, and the blunder of Afghanistan. In a particularly noteworthy reassessment of Soviet foreign policy, an influential scholar, Vyacheslav Dashichev, sharply criticized Brezhnev's neglect of the inter-connection between the Soviet Union's single-minded pursuit of gains in the Third World in the 1970s and the ensuing decline of East-West detente:

Though we were politically, militarily (via weapons supplies and advisers), and diplomatically involved in regional conflicts, we disregarded their influence on the relaxation of tension between the USSR and the West and on their entire system of relationships. There were no clear ideas of the Soviet Union's true national state interests. These interests lay by no means in chasing petty and essentially formal gains associated with leadership coups in certain developing countries.

A third important development is the waning of the sense of mission. Past Soviet leaders all believed that capitalism was doomed, that time was on the side of the Soviet Union, and that the international balance of power was steadily and inevitably tipping in Moscow's favour. Khrushchev and Brezhnev were particularly active in attempting to promote this process by probing for weak spots in the Western alliance. While there were occasionally brief periods of retrenchment under past leaders, these were viewed as just a temporary pause in the ongoing class struggle. It was firmly believed that a quick fix of the Soviet Union's temporary economic or political difficulties would allow the speedy resumption of the onward march of Soviet world power.

UNDER GORBACHEV, THIS OPTIMISM IS vanishing. The strength and resilience of the capitalist system are recognized. Increasingly it is acknowledged that there is no quick fix for the Soviet economy and that it will take decades for the Soviet Union to get its house in order. The Soviet sense of international mission is declining. Moscow's perception of itself as the centre of world revolution is diminishing. Increasingly, Soviet policy-makers define their goal not as promoting the demise of capitalism, but as avoiding nuclear war, lowering international tension, and creating a

benign international climate so that the Soviet Union can peacefully pursue the urgent task of domestic restructuring.

A fourth and final development of major significance in reshaping Soviet foreign policy is the process of change affecting some of the basic attitudes that have long influenced Moscow's approach to the West. The combined impact of the authoritarian Tsarist legacy, the conspiratorial origins of the Bolshevik Party, and the long nightmare of Stalinism produced a political climate which bred deep feelings of insecurity and vulnerability, a fear of foreign penetration, dogmatic self-righteousness, and the intolerance of diversity and different points of view.

ALL THIS IS BEGINNING TO CHANGE. THE reformers associated with Gorbachev are aiming at nothing less than the creation of a new political culture, a political culture which accepts the legitimacy of diversity, rejects any notion of infallibility, is less dogmatic, and does not feel threatened by controversy and debate. While the creation of a fundamentally new political culture is a daunting task, the past few years have seen remarkable progress. If this process continues, it will have a major impact on the way in which Soviet foreign policy is debated, formulated, and executed. A greater toleration for diversity at home goes hand in hand with the acceptance of different economic and political systems abroad.

What are the policy implications of this analysis? Paradoxically, it appears that the West needs to be both cautious and bold in framing an appropriate response. Caution is necessary because the process of liberalization and reform is only beginning; it remains vulnerable to disruption. Such potential developments as the continued stagnation of the Soviet economy, the intensification of nationalism within the Soviet republics, a popular uprising in Eastern Europe, or a conservative revolt against Gorbachev within the Communist Party all threaten the current trend toward moderation. The recent tragic events in China are a vivid reminder of just how quickly an authoritarian regime can intensify repression if the ruling elite fears that disorder is undermining its power.

Nonetheless, the opportunities are too great, the stakes are too high, and public opinion in the West is too impatient for us to be able to adopt a cautious wait-and-see attitude. Only by recognizing that the Soviet Union's overtures to the West are the product of a far-reaching and revolutionary process of change – not just another replay of past peace campaigns – will Western policy-makers be able to formulate an appropriate response to the historic opportunities that loom before us. □

