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GORBACHEV'S "NEW THINKING":
A CHANGE IN STYLE OR SUBSTANCE?

The first two individuals who succeeded Brezhnev as General Secretary, Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko, ruled for too short a time and were too ill to have a noticeable effect upon Soviet perspectives on East-West relations. However, in March 1985, a younger and more energetic individual, Mikhail Gorbachev, became General Secretary. His dynamism has been in sharp contrast to the slow-paced conservatism of his immediate predecessors, and his actions have provoked much speculation and controversy in the West about his objectives and the extent to which he will be able to realize them. A comprehensive examination of Gorbachev's attempt to reform the Soviet economy and society is beyond the scope of this study. However, it is necessary to examine the meaning and significance of his call for "new thinking" (*"novoe myshlenie"*) as it applies to Soviet conceptions of East-West relations.

Gorbachev has been General Secretary for three years. During this period he has not altered any of the traditional tenets of Soviet doctrine pertaining to international politics. However, he has interjected a number of new themes into Soviet discussions of East-West relations, and he has adopted a new tone of moderation and reasonableness. The crucial question is whether these changes constitute the beginning of a genuine effort to rethink traditional Soviet attitudes and policy or simply represent cosmetic alterations aimed at improving Soviet propaganda efforts.

Broadly speaking, Western analysts are divided into two schools