

The continued absence of any public debate about Soviet foreign policy should not come as a surprise, and unwarranted conclusions should not be drawn from this situation. Given traditional sensitivities and long-standing Bolshevik practice, Soviet officials find it far more difficult to relax controls in this area than they do in the realms of social policy, the arts or historiography. The formulation and evaluation of Soviet foreign policy has always been carefully shielded from public scrutiny. Even at the height of de-Stalinization in 1956-1957 and 1961-1962, when Stalin's domestic repression was strongly attacked, virtually nothing critical of his foreign policy was allowed to appear in print. The leadership has based its actions upon the firmly held belief that any open confession of past error in the conduct of Soviet foreign policy would play into the hands of the imperialist enemy and undermine Soviet claims that the West is totally responsible for the Cold War and the arms race. Gorbachev has yet to break with this long-standing pattern of behavior. He has bluntly criticized Soviet domestic failings and sharply attacked Brezhnev's unwillingness to deal with them, but Soviet spokesmen are able to allude to the inadequacies of Brezhnev's foreign policy only in vague and opaque terms.¹²⁶

About the only thing that has changed thus far is that, in at least one instance, a well-placed Soviet spokesman, Aleksandr Bovin, was able to criticize this lack of openness on foreign policy issues. Bovin made his remarks in the course of an interview in Budapest, and evidently said much the same in a speech to the Sixth Congress of the USSR Journalists' Union which met in Moscow in March 1987. Asked by his Hungarian interviewer about various rumours concerning what he had actually said at the Congress, Bovin replied:

¹²⁶ It should be noted that while Soviet foreign policy toward the West has generally been spared critical commentary, long-standing Soviet perspectives on the Third World are being questioned. See the remarkable article by Boris Asoian that appeared in *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 7 October 1987, p. 14. Also see, G. Mirskii, "K voprosu o vybore puti i orientatsii razvivaiushchikhsia stran," *Mirovaia ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia*, 1987, No. 5, pp. 70-81. Evgeni Primakov, the director of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations, has gone as far as is currently allowed in *implying* dissatisfaction with past Soviet policy toward the West in "Novaia filosofiia vneshnei politiki," *Pravda*, 10 July 1987, p. 4.