

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to enhance our understanding of how the Soviet leadership has perceived and conceptualized East-West relations.¹ It examines the key elements in the official Soviet view of the capitalist world and discusses the extent to which these were, or were not, modified at different points in the history of the Soviet regime in the period from 1917 to the present. This study is based upon the premise that we cannot deal effectively with the Soviet Union unless we have a clear understanding of how its leaders perceive the outside world. Whether our objective is to improve the prospects for greater East-West cooperation or simply to contain Soviet expansionism more effectively, we must know how the world looks from Moscow.

This is especially important at the present time. Mikhail Gorbachev, who became General Secretary in March 1985, has made the call for "new thinking" about international politics one of the central planks in his political platform. He has decried traditional ways of thinking as being dangerously inappropriate for the complex realities of the nuclear age. Gorbachev's statements have kindled a sharp debate among Western analysts. Some argue that a genuine process of ferment and change is underway in the Soviet Union.

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