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Freer Contacts Between Soviet and Westerners: Opening Up a Closed Society

An Executive Summary

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Freer Contacts Between Soviets and Westerners: Opening Up a Closed Society

An Executive Summary

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**Freer Contacts Between Soviets
and Westerners: Opening Up
a Closed Society**

Scope Note

This publication summarizes the research and findings of an in-depth analysis. []

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Freer Contacts Between Soviets and Westerners: Opening Up a Closed Society

Key Judgments

*Information available
as of 15 April 1989
was used in this report.*

Gorbachev has made Western information and ideas more accessible to the Soviet public than at any time since the early 1920s. This dramatic loosening of restrictions is being done out of a recognition that failure to do so could threaten the regime's economic security and ultimately its political legitimacy and strategic position. But controls on interchanges between Soviet citizens and the outside world have by no means been eliminated, essentially because full freedoms would be incompatible with the one-party dictatorial rule that still characterizes the Soviet Union today.

Gorbachev recognizes that if present trends continue, the USSR will fall further behind the West in the technologies critical to economic growth in the 20th century, such as advanced computers. He has said that Soviet society cannot progress if it is cut off from the rest of the world by "ideological fences," and he wants to free up channels of communication between Soviet and Western experts. (

The regime has allowed a severalfold increase in the number of private trips abroad; has loosened restrictions on contacts with Western tourists, diplomats, and journalists in the country; and has reduced the amount of Soviet territory closed to foreigners. Authorities have also ended the jamming of Western radiobroadcasts, allowed foreign officials much greater access to the Soviet public and media, and given citizens more opportunities to read foreign magazines and books and to contact Westerners on the telephone and by mail. They have even allowed scientists to communicate with Western colleagues via computer data links. (

At the same time, the regime has resorted to half measures, retaining the institutions controlling citizens' travel to the West and access to foreign information. For example, large areas of the Soviet Union remain closed to Westerners, and postal controls over material considered "anti-Soviet," albeit eased, have not been eliminated. Some foreign travel requests, especially those by political activists, are still denied, and Western journalists and diplomats sometimes are refused permission to travel, even to officially open areas.

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The remaining limits on foreign contacts have several purposes, chief among which is preventing the further political "contamination" of Soviet citizens. This is considered especially important for groups considered most vulnerable—Balts and certain religious communities with extensive links overseas (for example, Jews and Ukrainian Catholics). The leadership also wants to minimize the general public's exposure to information about political freedom, civil liberties, and standards of living in the West that could eventually erode support for Communist party hegemony. The Kremlin also tries to disrupt the symbiotic relationship between Western publicity and unofficial political activity by clamping down on some contacts between Soviet activists and Western journalists. Other limits are due to foot-dragging by the bureaucracy and local party organizations and to leadership divisions. Some Politburo members have expressed considerable concern over the risks of losing control and have played down the benefits of the opening.

Overall, the controlled opening has served regime interests, and the public response has been overwhelmingly positive, arguing for its continuation. Although the economic payoff has not yet come, the regime has largely met its objectives of improved credibility with the citizenry and a more favorable image of the Soviet state among Westerners. Gorbachev's policies have developed considerable momentum, and the longer they exist, the more difficult and costly it would be to roll back the concessions. A reversion to past repression would damage Gorbachev's personal reputation internationally and among key segments of the population whose support he has considered crucial to his overall domestic program, possibly dooming the regime to the stagnation it has sought to overcome.

But there are also risks to continuing the policies that the leadership may not have fully appreciated when it began them. The opening could whet popular appetites for increased consumer goods and political pluralism and spur separatist sentiment. In the end, lifting the iron curtain will probably remain a painful and occasionally faltering process dependent on overall political trends, the political viability of Gorbachev and his reform allies, and, most important, on the willingness of the regime to allow the creation of a truly pluralistic society.

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Freer Contacts Between Soviets and Westerners: Opening Up a Closed Society

Soviet leaders have traditionally sought to control contacts with the outside world, an impulse reinforced by the ideological precept that state interests take precedence over rights for the individual. They have strictly regulated what Soviet citizens read, see, and hear, when and where they travel, and with whom they associate—in essence, restricting fundamental rights of international movement and communication that citizens in Western democracies take for granted.

The regime's effort to insulate Soviet society as much as possible from the West has been aimed at maximizing political stability and buttressing its authority. The regime calculated that keeping the population in the dark about developments in the outside world would make it easier to mobilize the public behind its domestic and foreign policy agenda. By withholding information about political democracy, civil liberties, and the standard of living prevalent in the West, the leadership sought to legitimize party control and foster an image of the West as Moscow's enemy. Even more important, it was deemed essential to prevent the population from finding out about conditions *inside* the USSR—particularly the sort of information about human rights abuses and workers' grievances provided by Western radiobroadcasts.

Reasons for Gorbachev's Reversal of Policy

Gorbachev and his allies have opened up the Soviet system to Western influences for fundamentally utilitarian reasons. Having seen much more of the West than their predecessors, they have realized that closer contact is essential to regime vitality and for averting Brezhnev-era stagnation.

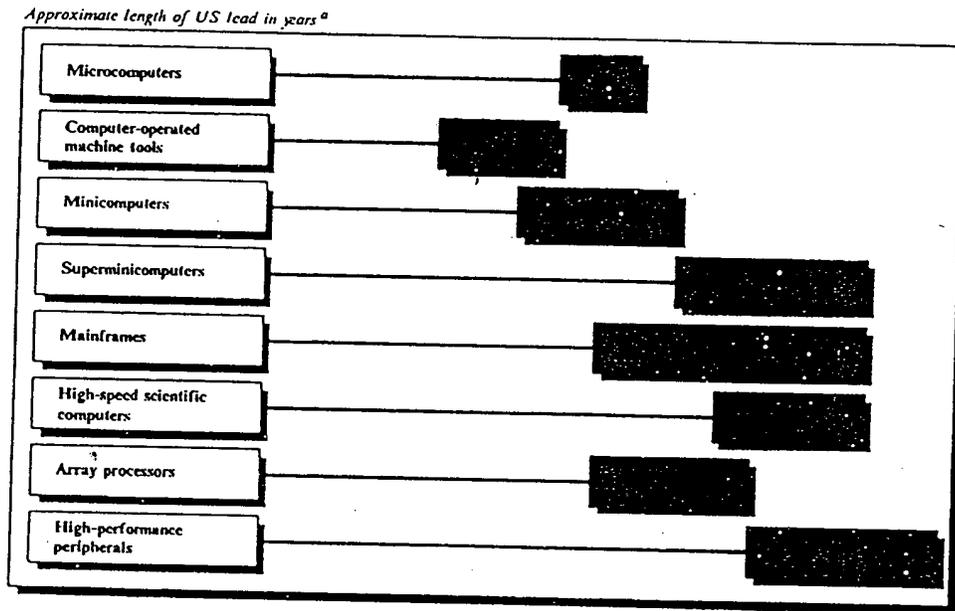
Like Peter the Great and other Russian rulers who instituted reform from above, Gorbachev has turned to the West for the technology and know-how to get the country moving again. [] and Gorbachev's own speeches suggest he recognizes that

if present trends continue, the USSR will fall further behind the West in the technologies critical to economic growth in the late 20th century, such as microprocessors and advanced computers (see figure 1).

Gorbachev believes that the solution to this lag is to break down the barriers impeding the flow of information and people, both within and without Soviet borders. In February 1989, for example, he told a party gathering in Kiev, "In the present-day world it is impossible to achieve progress in a society isolated from the rest of the world by closed frontiers and ideological fences." He recognizes that the country's economic vibrancy depends in large measure on freeing up channels of communication between Soviet and Western experts. A secondary reason for increased contacts with the West is to make it easier for Soviet intelligence agents to collect scientific and technological information. The KGB and GRU are taking advantage of the opening to carefully target Western scientists

The regime also hopes that widening the door to the West will reduce the widespread popular apathy and cynicism it inherited from the Brezhnev years and gain the population's commitment to the regime's goals. The various measures Gorbachev has taken have been part of his broader policy of helping the regime gain credit with the population at large, an objective he hopes to accomplish in large measure by relaxing repression and expanding civil liberties. Gorbachev particularly wants to reengage the intelligentsia, the repository of ideas crucial for the success of his various reforms. Many intellectuals had become politically alienated bystanders during the 1970s and early 1980s. One of their primary complaints was their inability to travel to the West and conduct business with their Western counterparts. Isolation from the mainstream of Western ideas has been a major source of irritation for the cultural elite as well.

Figure 1
The Soviet Gap in Selected Advanced Technologies



^a US lead is based on projections of time required for Soviets to achieve series production equivalent, in numbers and/or technological level, to series production in the United States.

Although the opening to the West probably was motivated primarily by domestic considerations, the regime is also using it to achieve foreign policy objectives. The various policies help Moscow counter its traditional militarist image in the West and replace the commonly held view of Soviet bellicosity with one of trustworthiness. By opening Soviet society and applying greater *glasnost* to Moscow's actions, current Soviet leaders hope to erase this "enemy image" that they believe has provided some of the glue for the Western alliance and facilitated calls for a stronger NATO defense posture. This has especially been the view of Gorbachev ally Aleksandr Yakovlev, who has been a principal architect of "new thinking" both in domestic and foreign policy.

Younger Soviet leaders, typified by Gorbachev and Yakovlev, seem less fearful than their predecessors of the public's susceptibility to Western subversion and more confident that they can successfully manage the process of lifting the "iron curtain." In doing so, they are to some extent making a virtue of necessity. In recent years there has been an enormous expansion in the exposure of Soviet citizens to information from abroad, making for a porous "iron curtain." Social and technological forces largely beyond the regime's control—such as improvements in modern communications—have made it increasingly difficult to control the flow of information and insulate citizens from

external sources of information. As the Soviet economy developed, for example, interaction with the world economy deepened. Urbanization and the spread of education broadened the horizons of many people, making them more interested in the outside world, and Western radiobroadcasting made increasing inroads among the well-educated and urban parts of the population. Soviet people also gained increasing contact with external sources of information from the growing number of Western tourists, their own trips abroad, and the internationalization of taste in music, fashion, and art. The dismantling of Stalinist repression, however faltering, also made people less afraid to maintain contacts with the outside world. In short, the freer atmosphere that had developed in the years since Stalin's death made it increasingly difficult for the regime to closely regulate autonomous efforts by the public to reach out to the West

Steps Taken So Far

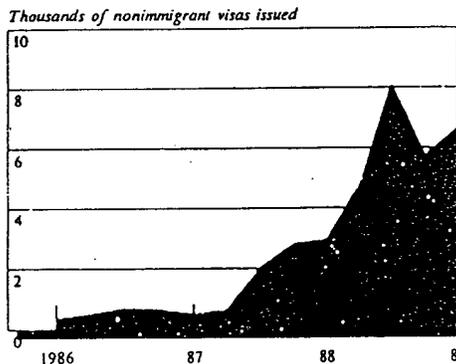
Measures to expose the USSR to the outside world began in earnest in late 1986 and early 1987 when the state announced several unusual openings in a broad range of areas covering travel, telephone and mail links, personal contacts between private citizens and Westerners, and access to several types of Western information, including publications and radiobroadcasts. Since that time, the opening has been gaining ground at a rapid pace, expanding, for example, to the sanctioning of computer data links between Soviet and Western citizens

Foreign Travel

Perhaps the most significant step the regime has taken relates to the reduction of the red tape that has restricted travel abroad. New regulations for trips that took effect in 1987 and 1988¹ have resulted in flows of Soviet tourists to the West several times larger than in previous years. In May 1988 the head of the agency in charge of emigration and travel said that trips abroad by Soviets doubled between 1986

¹ For example, citizens were allowed to travel as frequently as their personal time and finances permitted; deadlines were placed on how long officials could take to respond to travel applications; citizens could appeal rejections of applications for overseas trips, and invitations required for travel applications could come from friends or acquaintances rather than close relatives.

Figure 2
Private Soviet Visitors to the United States, 1986-89^a



^a This figure shows the number of "nonimmigrant visas" issued by the US Embassy in Moscow to private visitors, excluding those issued to Soviet citizens sponsored by the Foreign Ministry. The data are from various US Embassy reports. Visas from the US Consulate in Leningrad were excluded because data for some months were not available. From October 1988 through February 1989, the Leningrad Consulate issued about 18 percent of the total issued by the Embassy and Consulate.

and 1987. (Presumably, the majority traveled to Eastern Europe.) In subsequent interviews, Soviet officials put the number of private trips at about 250,000 in 1987; one suggested it would exceed 330,000 in 1988. Corroborating this trend are figures from the US Embassy in Moscow showing an almost tenfold increase in the number of Soviets allowed to travel to the United States on personal visits between 1986 and 1988 (see figure 2).

Other changes, in train or already instituted, are boosting the number of applications for private trips abroad. For instance, Soviet authorities are considering significant changes on issuing foreign passports.

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Participants at a consular conference held in December 1988 discussed a five-year passport to replace the current system restricting people to one travel document for a specific journey. Since January 1989 citizens have been able to travel to several East European countries with only a special "insert" in their internal passports, without either an external passport or a visa. The Soviets claim the insert contains a minimum of information. The situation has been simplified considerably for Soviet citizens visiting relatives just across the border. In September 1988 the Soviet media announced that cross-border tourist exchanges have been arranged between regions on the border in Lithuania, Belorussia, the Ukraine, and the RSFSR, and towns in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and, notably, neutral Finland. According to previous Soviet press reports, residents of more than 160 frontier villages need only a letter of invitation and their internal passports for stays up to one week.

Soviet scientists and students, in particular, have benefited from the regime's easing of travel to the West, and members of the cultural elite are beginning to see changes as well:

- Over the last two years, scientists from a wide range of disciplines—including the social sciences as well as the natural sciences—have found it much easier to obtain permission to go to the West for professional meetings. A Soviet researcher claimed that almost twice as many academicians visited foreign countries in 1987 as in 1986.
- According to a Western news report, shortly after Guriy Marchuk became head of the USSR Academy of Sciences in October 1986, he allowed Academy institutes to make their own foreign contacts instead of channeling them through the Academy's foreign relations department.
- Many more Soviet academics and young people have started coming to the United States. Moscow for the first time permitted about 50 Soviet undergraduates to study—unchaperoned—on US campuses for the 1988-89 school year. In the past, the Soviets allowed only older, graduate-level students, primarily scientists, who were considered more resistant to Western consumerism and ideology, to study in the United States.

- In another reversal, the Soviets may soon start to allow artists, dancers, musicians, and other members of the cultural elite to take trips abroad with their families and to travel freely between the USSR and the West. Previously, the regime forbade such privileges to prevent defections.

Moscow has also granted former Soviet citizens more freedom to return to the USSR on trips, primarily to visit relatives. With this policy, authorities hope, in part, to lure back members of the cultural elite who emigrated from the country and thereby generate more credibility with members of the intelligentsia. The regime also hopes that a more nuanced policy toward cultural figures will help reduce emigration to the West by allowing reunification with family and friends by means short of emigration.

But even as the regime has liberalized foreign travel for ordinary citizens and members of the Soviet elite, it has not shelved the system of requiring exit visas for travel. The office in charge of issuing exit permits for emigration and travel retains its authority to veto private citizens' trips and often applies the new rules in an inconsistent, arbitrary, and even contrary fashion. It also frequently denies requests by dissidents and activists to go abroad for human rights conferences and other political gatherings. The Soviets have tried to restrict the large flow of travelers to the West, where they spend hard currency converted from rubles at an inflated rate. Authorities allow ordinary tourists to exchange only 7 rubles for each day they are overseas, and Aeroflot gives preference to those seeking to buy tickets abroad with hard currency instead of rubles. (This does not appear to have significantly affected private overseas travel, however, as many citizens have found ways around the restrictions.)

Looser Restrictions on Contacts With Foreigners Inside the USSR

Increased visits by foreigners to the USSR and more relaxed controls on resident foreigners are contributing to more frequent contacts with Soviets. In March 1988 the Soviet Foreign Ministry circulated a diplomatic note announcing revisions in the closed-area regime that removed about 1.5 million square kilometers of the USSR from the list of territory formally

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Figure 3
Changes in Areas Closed to Foreigners, 1988



closed to travel by foreigners (see figure 3).² The note reduced the proportion of Soviet territory officially closed to foreigners from 20 percent to about 13 percent.

² The Soviets apparently had several objectives in mind. In general, the changes were probably meant to reinforce Moscow's image of openness and strengthen the impression of Western diplomats that Gorbachev's reforms are real. At the same time, Moscow has been seeking reciprocal reductions from Washington in the rules governing Soviet officials' travel in the United States. The Kremlin also wants to promote investment by Western business concerns in remote or formerly closed areas. The Soviets have expressed particular interest in attracting funds for projects in the Soviet Far East from Japanese, West European, US, and ASEAN investors. The changes may also indirectly facilitate contact between Western scientists and institutes in regions that have been closed to foreigners.

The effectiveness of the 1988 diplomatic note in actually opening the country to foreigners will depend on whether the Foreign Ministry strictly abides by it or continues unofficially to restrict travel to officially open areas. Although 80 percent of the USSR has, in theory, been open since travel restrictions were revised in 1978, foreigners have actually been permitted to visit only about 1 to 2 percent of the country because land travel has been restricted to specific roads or rail routes, air travel has been restricted to selected cities within "open" areas, and even travel to officially open areas and cities has been denied for "reasons of a

temporary nature." Significantly, the Kremlin did not abolish the system of keeping some parts of Soviet territory off limits to foreigners. Furthermore, some elements in the government and bureaucracy apparently stonewalled the March 1988 initiative to loosen the closed area regime. Most notably, the city of Vladivostok has not yet formally been opened to foreigners despite Gorbachev's announcement in July 1986 that it would be, although the city was temporarily opened in September 1988 for an international conference. Resistance from the Soviet Navy has contributed to the delay

The easing of East-West relations and Western public interest in Gorbachev's reforms have encouraged many more Western tourists to visit the USSR. Over 5 million foreign tourists came in 1987, a 16-percent increase over 1986. Visits by US tourists increased from 46,000 in 1986 to 64,000 in 1987 and probably reached 80,000 in 1988, according to Soviet news reports. Moreover, the regime has become more relaxed about uncontrolled contacts between Soviets and Western tourists. Authorities appear to be abandoning the practice of assigning floor monitors to keep track of guests in some hotels, at least for tourists. Some sources report that visitors with ethnic ties to some Western areas of the country have been given more leeway while visiting towns where their parents grew up.

The Soviet public, apparently taking its cue from the official relaxation in attitude, has become much less fearful about talking to diplomats and foreign officials. In May 1988 some [] passing through several Russian towns heard citizens express amazingly frank views, seemingly undaunted by the prospect of later questioning by the security apparatus [] said that, on occasion, Soviets would even question the wisdom of Lenin and the one-party system

The easing in contacts with foreigners has been extended to Western businessmen, diplomats, and journalists:

- Moscow has simplified entry procedures for Western businessmen, apparently to encourage them to participate in projects useful to Gorbachev's pro-

gram of economic restructuring. In May 1988 foreign businessmen and scientists were permitted multiple entry-exit visas so they would not have to apply for visas for each trip. Businessmen were allowed to use easier-to-obtain tourist visas to enter the USSR for exploratory discussions on potential trade deals.

- For American and other diplomats stationed in the USSR, in-country travel and other conditions have been eased. Since about 1987, US Embassy officials in Moscow have been given greater access to Soviet government officials and institutes, with virtually all their requests for appointments accepted. Embassy officials have also noticed that many more lower- and middle-level Soviet officials are showing up at receptions.
- Reporters now have access to an increasing number of Soviet sources, including highly placed officials. Western reporters had an unprecedented opportunity to visit Armenia after the December 1988 earthquake. In May 1987 the Soviets simplified the accreditation process for correspondents, shortened the time for considering foreign journalists' visa requests, and allowed visas for multiple visits. The same month Moscow established a permanent international press center at the Foreign Ministry

Despite this relaxed attitude, the regime continues to view Westerners as a conduit of ideological "contamination" and keeps its extensive surveillance network active against journalists and diplomats. For instance:

- The new US Embassy was riddled with electronic bugs, and hostile Soviet intelligence activities have been exposed in recent years in several other diplomatic missions. The KGB continues to conduct surveillance against Western diplomatic, agricultural, and military attaches traveling through the countryside, blackmail them with prostitutes on its payroll, and plant bugs in their hotel rooms.
- The Kremlin also tries to disrupt the symbiotic relationship between Western publicity and unofficial political activity by clamping down on some

contacts between Soviet activists and Western journalists. Foreign correspondents' freedom of movement has been severely hampered during nationalist unrest, as demonstrated by the prohibition on travel to the Caucasus during the 1988 disturbances.

- A heavy barrage of propaganda geared to the more unsophisticated members of the public still warns Soviet citizens against contacting Western journalists and diplomats, many of whom are depicted as spies or "professional anti-Sovieters."

Freer Information Exchanges With the West

In the area of increasing the Soviet public's access to Western information and culture, perhaps the most significant move has been the leadership's decision to stop jamming most of the major Western radios, in keeping with Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost*. Jamming ended for BBC's Russian-language radio service in December 1986, for Voice of America in May 1987, and for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty—a station the Soviets consistently have denounced as hostile and jammed since its formation in 1953—in November 1988. In November Estonia's weekly TV guide for the first time began to carry the programming schedule of Finnish television. In the fall of 1988 a Swedish company reportedly was negotiating for an AM radio station inside the USSR to broadcast into Scandinavia radio programming, including advertising, that the Soviet audience would also hear

The regime has granted Western heads of state and foreign policy experts considerable play in the Soviet media, both printed and broadcast. Initially, press articles were invariably rebutted by a Soviet commentator so as to provide an ideologically "correct" view; more recently, this has not always been done. The regime has even gone further, allowing Westerners—including some Sovietologists who earlier had been sharply criticized as anti-Soviet—to comment on Soviet domestic affairs, including sensitive events of current interest. In November 1988, for example, a Soviet industry newspaper published remarks by a prominent US scholar and a former journalist in Moscow on opposition to political reform inside the USSR.

The regime has also given Soviet citizens other opportunities to obtain information from the West:

- It has expanded access to Western publications, including official ones like the US Government magazine *Amerika*, nongovernmental publications such as *The International Herald Tribune*, and Western books. In the spring of 1989 two Leningrad journals reportedly were planning to serialize Robert Conquest's *The Great Terror and Harvest of Sorrow*.
- In October 1987 the Soviets reestablished direct dialing between the USSR and seven West European countries, and they appear to have made similar moves with regard to the United States and Israel.
- Censorship of personal letters coming into and out of the USSR also appears to have been eased

Moscow has also opened up to Western cultural offerings. In 1988 a large number of US-Soviet cultural exchange agreements began to bear fruit, including reciprocal visits by museum, musical, dance, and theatrical groups. Popular culture has also made inroads, with Western advertising appearing in *Izvestiya* and on Soviet television. In recent years, several American musicians—including some well-known rock stars—have visited Moscow, Leningrad, and other Soviet cities

The Soviets have nonetheless kept some restrictions over private citizens' access to Western literature and other information sources. Despite the end of radio jamming, the network of jammers remains in place and can be reactivated quickly should the regime so decide. Border guards are still posted and have the authority to seize contraband. The Soviets themselves have admitted that the 350 to 400 issues of each foreign newspaper for sale at kiosks in the major cities are grossly insufficient to meet public demand

In perhaps one of the most dramatic moves, party leaders and scientific officials are now encouraging Soviet scientists to maintain ties to their Western

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colleagues via computer data links. In the past this was never sanctioned, presumably because of the danger of political "infection" from direct and uncontrolled communication with Western scientists. In January 1989 a San Francisco company established electronic mail links to the Soviet Institute for Automated Systems via a US satellite. The system is meant to facilitate exchanges of information between the two countries on publishing, journalism, scientific work, and business.

The regime, however, views the expansion of data links to the West as a double-edged sword, fearing that the expansion of Soviet citizens' access to computers and other information technologies could affect its control. An April 1989 Supreme Soviet decree mandated prison sentences up to 10 years for so-called anti-Soviet agitation committed with printing equipment procured from foreign sources.

Reasons for Remaining Limits

Despite considerable progress in opening the USSR to the outside world, Soviet citizens still face a number of formidable restrictions. The regime has temporized and resorted to half measures in all facets of the opening to the West. Essentially, full political freedoms in the Western sense are incompatible with the one-party dictatorship that still prevails in the USSR. The various restrictions reflect the regime's agreement that certain boundaries need to be maintained for security and internal stability reasons; the disagreements within the leadership over how far to move forward; and the active or passive resistance by working levels of the party and state bureaucracies responsible for implementing the policies.

Leadership Concern About Ideological Contamination
Members of the Soviet leadership no doubt share the view that some limits on foreign contacts must remain. To varying degrees, they probably all fear the political "contamination" of large numbers of citizens over the long run—in particular, from exposure to information about political freedom and civil liberties in the West that could build inexorable pressure for political reforms beyond those Gorbachev is promoting, erode support for Communist party hegemony, and eventually lead to a crisis.

The leadership no doubt also agrees that those contacts with the outside world that afford Soviet citizens a clearer view of how Westerners live—particularly in terms of their access to material goods—may lower popular morale, create a certain dispiritedness, and encourage emulation. Various evidence suggests that this is occurring after trips by Soviet citizens abroad, especially to Western Europe and the United States but even to socialist countries.

There probably is also agreement that some limits on foreign contacts are needed to discourage dissidents from obtaining technical and moral support in the West. Human rights activists traditionally have relied on contacts with foreign visitors and mail and telephone contact to generate publicity that helps shield them from the full force of official repression and publicize their activities. In the case of dissidents and refuseniks, the KGB probably will not lift surveillance over international mail and telephone calls or physical surveillance of dissidents themselves, especially with civil unrest on the rise.

The regime has already taken several measures to draw the line and proscribe "dangerous" contacts between Soviet activists and their Western sympathizers. Aside from the previously mentioned decree providing stiff penalties against those using computers and printing equipment acquired from abroad, the regime has put controls on imports of computer media and copying and duplicating equipment—presumably to impede the dissemination of internally produced samizdat.

The Soviet leadership is probably most concerned about the impact of the opening to the West on nationalist ferment, especially in the Baltics, the western Ukraine, and the Caucasus, where there is already a high degree of alienation from the regime. Soviet leaders, even those inclined to give some leeway to the various people's fronts, almost certainly view the political links between Baltic nationalists and their overseas supporters as potentially threatening. Activists have sought support from their diaspora, from foreign governments judged to be sympathetic, and from political groups abroad that the regime considers subversive and anti-Soviet. Soviet leaders

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continue to caution the West against engaging in "anti-Soviet" activities. Although radio jamming has ended, statements by top leaders, including Gorbachev, reflect a persistent fear that Western broadcasts may aggravate already high levels of ethnic tension.

The links that some religious believers maintain to the outside world also concern the Soviet leadership, especially when they overlap with nationalism. The regime is particularly anxious about religious groups in the USSR already closely tied to a foreign constituency, such as Jews, Muslims, and Ukrainian Catholics (the so-called "Uniates"). Muslims, for instance, did not receive a significant amount of religious literature during 1988, in contrast to Baptists and members of the Russian Orthodox Church, who benefited from the celebration of the Millennium of Christianity. A rule that religious literature can be mailed to any Soviet citizen except members of unregistered sects is no doubt directed in part against Ukrainian Catholics, who have been officially banned since 1946.

Divisions Over Drawing Limits

Beyond a probable consensus in the Politburo about the general risks of the opening, not all members appear to accept the rationale that the benefits of opening the USSR to the outside world outweigh the risks, judging from [] and Soviet leaders' speeches. Gorbachev and some of his closest supporters are clearly aware of the risks of allowing individual Soviet citizens greater access to Westerners, yet believe the gains outweigh them. Even more orthodox leaders like Politburo member Yegor Ligachev recognize the need to open the country up more to the West, if only to achieve economic modernization, but focus more attention on the need for control.

Several leaders have counseled greater caution in considering which steps to sanction to open the USSR to the outside world. Foremost among them is Ligachev, still a powerful force in the Politburo, despite having lost his status as unofficial "second secretary." Judging from the puritanical tone of his speeches, he seems especially concerned about Western consumerism, pornography, videotapes, and even milder elements of Western culture like rock music. At the root

of this concern is probably a fear that familiarity with Western cultural, political, and economic alternatives to Soviet socialism will undermine popular acceptance of the Soviet system. He has attacked the efforts of the "class enemy" to wrench the USSR from socialism and toward a market economy, ideological pluralism, and Western-style democracy.

Politburo member Viktor Chebrikov's speeches indicate that he shares many of Ligachev's concerns. In a speech he gave in September 1987 while still chief of the KGB, he noted that "imperialism's special services are trying to find new loopholes through which to penetrate our society," and acknowledged that "we have people who hold ideas and views that are alien and even frankly hostile to socialism." In addition, Ukrainian party boss Vladimir Shcherbitskiy has expressed concern over the activities of nationalist and human rights activists in his republic; in September 1988 he sanctioned a media campaign against a purported plot by a nationalist organization, aided by Western intelligence agencies, to alienate the public from Soviet authorities.

Many KGB officials, especially those responsible for internal security, apparently harbor considerable reservations about the new policies. Regional security officers—whose main concern is to keep the lid on civil unrest in the provinces—seek to cap the growing level of unrest in the USSR by cutting the ties to overseas supporters maintained by activists and nationalists in the Soviet Union. Echoing his former boss Chebrikov, a senior KGB official in Leningrad warned in December 1988 that the CIA and Western "ideological centers" are taking advantage of "democratization" and Moscow's new openness to Western tourism by employing many visitors as spies. On the other hand, many KGB officers involved in foreign intelligence and active measures are more cognizant of the opportunities provided for influencing foreign public opinion and facilitating intelligence operations by increasing access and providing better cover. In a recent article in *Kommunist*, a senior KGB official from the First Chief Directorate decried excessive secrecy in official activity. These divergent attitudes can probably be explained by different perspectives

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and responsibilities within the KGB. In contrast, the Foreign Ministry—whose job it is to manage contacts abroad—seems unreservedly behind the opening to the West.

Foot-dragging by the party and security apparatus probably accounts for many of the inconsistencies and delays noted in implementing the new rules. According to officials in various localities have taken steps to block overseas travel by private individuals, impede the delivery of mail from the West, or prevent the transfer of foreign publications from closed to open stacks in public libraries.

Prospects and Implications

Gorbachev is taking a calculated gamble that opening the Soviet Union to the West creates more opportunities than risks. Moscow's final judgment will hinge to a large extent on how it calculates the costs and benefits.

The Impact So Far

Gorbachev has had only limited success in achieving demonstrable results so far in his primary objective—to energize the economy by facilitating the introduction of Western science and technology and ultimately prevent the country's decline into a second-rate world power. The Soviet economy has not taken off and, in fact, some politically sensitive economic indicators such as the supply of consumer goods have deteriorated.

Ending the USSR's backwardness, however, is a difficult process. Although it cannot be accomplished without creating links to the outside world, other measures are also necessary. Most leaders now seem to recognize that they cannot achieve the desired result with a quick transfusion of Western technology without solving the problems that made Brezhnev's earlier attempt to do so ineffective. In several public speeches in 1988 and this year, Gorbachev has suggested that technological backwardness is a long-term problem that must be solved with several interrelated policies. Key among these is economic reform and the freeing up of internal lines of communication, particularly among Soviet scientists. Therefore, while facilitating the import of Western expertise and technology, Gorbachev is also pushing forward a program

tantamount to a domestic information revolution—of which *glasnost* is a part—to help diffuse new technologies and methods of economic organization.

Gorbachev has enjoyed much greater success in meeting his foreign policy objectives.

Soviets to a remarkable degree have erased the "enemy image" of the Soviet Union among the general public and elites in the West. Over time, this could be an important factor eroding public support in European countries for maintaining a strong NATO defense posture.

Soviet leaders have also enjoyed considerable success in using the opening to reduce the widespread popular apathy and cynicism they inherited from the Brezhnev years and to gain some credit with the better educated members of the population. Several sources attest to the popularity of the various measures with these groups, particularly among the intelligentsia. For example, urban residents have flocked to buy the limited numbers of Western magazines on sale. For most citizens, however, "intangibles" like greater access to information from abroad do not compensate for shortages and other economic privations.

The various measures opening the country to the West also carry some risks that the leadership may not have fully appreciated when it began them. The opening could feed popular desires for change beyond what Soviet leaders have in mind, whetting popular appetites for increased consumer goods and political pluralism and acting as a spur to non-Russian separatist sentiment. Although the opening has not been responsible for creating these desires, it allows a greater number of citizens to see firsthand the relative abundance and political freedom that exists in the West. Thus, it has probably exacerbated the recent wave of political and nationalist activism and the public souring over continuing consumer goods shortages. Moreover, freer contacts between Soviets and Westerners could eventually reduce the Soviet public's paranoia about the West so much that it blurs the public's "enemy image" of the United States. This would

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make it difficult for the present leadership or any future one to mobilize public support for increased defense outlays

Can the Iron Curtzin Be Lowered Again?

The Soviet regime has by no means surrendered its authority to control citizens' travel or restrict the entry of Western information. Despite having allowed more contacts, the systems and institutions for regulating foreign travel, movements by foreigners inside the USSR, and incoming information remain in place.

Policies opening up the USSR to the outside world have developed considerable momentum, however, and the longer they exist, the more difficult and costly it would be to roll the concessions back. Reimposing controls would require the regime to forgo all of the actual and potential benefits that gave impetus to Gorbachev's initiatives in the first place—an improved Soviet image abroad, greater access to ideas and technology critical to economic modernization, a climate more conducive to innovation at home, and a less apathetic and more supportive population. A reversion to past repression would give the lie to the promises Gorbachev has made and dash the hopes he has encouraged. His personal reputation would suffer internationally and among key segments of the Soviet public whose support he has considered crucial to his overall domestic program

At the same time, managing the process of opening up may become increasingly difficult. In fact, over the next few years, the regime is likely to be even more

concerned about the impact of foreign contacts on domestic dissent and informal groups, the popular front movements (especially in the Baltics), and religious groups that maintain extensive ties abroad. With ethnic tension on the rise, the regime probably will be loath to permit an unchecked flow of books and publications to enter the country—especially those containing themes "encouraging national strife."

In the end the Kremlin may confront a painful dilemma. Increasing foreign contacts has become crucial for economic dynamism and for satisfying a more demanding public, but this policy can also stimulate discontent, provide succor to antiregime forces, and erode control. The loss of control is particularly worrisome at this crucial juncture of Soviet history—as *glasnost* and "democratization" are quickening the tempo of public demands, nationalist fervor, and human rights activism. Thus, lifting the iron curtain—like many other controversial and possibly destabilizing changes—will probably remain a painful and occasionally faltering process dependent on overall political trends, the political viability of Gorbachev and his reform allies, and, most important, the regime's willingness to allow the creation of a truly pluralistic society.