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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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Soviet Views on US-Soviet Relations
Since Gromyko's September Visit

Summary

Soviet leadership and media commentaries since Foreign Minister Gromyko's visit to the United States, including General Secretary Chernenko's interview with The Washington Post, have stressed that the USSR sees no indication of a "positive" change in US policy but remains open to improved dialogue if the United States backs up conciliatory words with deeds. The commentaries imply the Soviets are not yet ready to offer substantive concessions of their own although they have toned down their criticism of the United States. There are indications of a growing belief in Moscow that there are different views within the administration that might be exploited to obtain US concessions. There are also indications of some differences among the Soviet leaders themselves, although there is little political incentive for any Soviet leader to advocate a more flexible approach to US-Soviet relations than his colleagues.

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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] of the Office of Soviet Analysis. Comments may be directed to Chief, Policy Analysis Division, [redacted]

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The dominant tone of Soviet commentary has been one of skepticism. A TASS report on Gromyko's first meeting with Secretary of State Shultz and a press statement by Gromyko following his meeting with the President asserted it was not possible to conclude from these conversations that there had been any "positive changes" in US policy. Gromyko's statement said the USSR would continue to judge US intentions on the basis of "practical deeds." [redacted]

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Similarly, a Politburo communique of 4 October approving the results of Gromyko's visit to the United States stated his meetings with US officials had revealed no sign that the United States intended to adjust its policy in a "realistic" direction. The communique averred that declarations by the United States that it favors more constructive relations with the USSR were not backed by "concrete deeds." Gromyko, in a speech in Berlin on 6 October, did not refer directly to his talks in the United States, but he did reaffirm that Moscow intended to judge US policy by its deeds. The speech also accused US diplomacy of resorting to "all kinds of maneuvers." [redacted]

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Soviet commentary has not been exclusively negative. A TASS report on Gromyko's second meeting with Secretary Shultz did not repeat the criticism of the first, and it noted that agreement had been reached on the possibility of holding future bilateral talks on regional issues. A statement by a Foreign Ministry spokesman on 4 October characterized Gromyko's meetings with US officials as "important and useful" and repeated language in the Politburo communique proclaiming Soviet readiness for a "serious, businesslike dialogue." [redacted]

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General Secretary Chernenko made a similar affirmation in an interview published in The Washington Post on 17 October. He asserted that there are "considerable possibilities" for US-Soviet relations to develop positively, although he adhered to the line that it is up to the United States to make the first move and that so far the Soviets see no evidence of a shift in US policy. A Soviet diplomat has claimed that Chernenko's interview is part of a "new line" of rhetorical moderation. [redacted]

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No Soviet Concessions

While maintaining that they are ready for a constructive dialogue if the United States demonstrates its good intentions by deeds, the Soviets have given no hint that they are prepared to offer concessions of their own. In his speech to the United Nations General Assembly on 27 September, Gromyko asserted the United States must remove the "obstacles" that he

said were blocking resumption of nuclear weapons talks in Geneva. The absence of this formulation--which is an indirect reference to new US missiles deployed in Europe--from earlier statements by Soviet leaders had aroused speculation in the West that Moscow was preparing to offer more flexible terms for resuming the talks. Since Gromyko's speech, the condition has been repeated by several Soviet officials, including the deputy head of the Central Committee's International Department, Vadim Zagladin, and the head of the Foreign Ministry's International Organizations Department, Vladimir Petrovskiy. Chernenko complained in his Post interview that the United States has refused to "remove the obstacles" and instead is proceeding with deployment. A Soviet Foreign Ministry spokesman prompted renewed speculation in the Western press that Moscow might be softening its terms when he denied at a 19 October press conference that the USSR had set any "preconditions" for resuming INF negotiations. His statement, however, appears to have been merely a routine effort to absolve the Soviets of any blame for hindering resumption of talks. []

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The Soviets also remain obdurate in their refusal to begin bilateral negotiations on limiting space weapons, which they themselves proposed on 29 June. The Foreign Ministry spokesman on 4 October noted that US officials had expressed concern over an arms race in outer space several times during Gromyko's visit, but he asserted the US side had given no concrete indication that it intended to start talks with a view toward reaching agreement. In his Berlin speech, Gromyko repeated the familiar Soviet charge that it is the United States that refuses to negotiate on space weapons. Chernenko claimed in his interview that the USSR is waiting for the United States to "respond." []

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The only sign of a possible modification in the Soviet position has been varying formulations in recent weeks of Moscow's demand for a moratorium on space weapons tests from the outset of any talks. Gromyko in his UN speech expressed "hope" that the United States would refrain from actions that would "make irreversible" the conversion of outer space into an arena of military rivalry. In a conversation with US officials on 3 October, a deputy director of the Institute for the USA and Canada who is active in Soviet efforts to promote control of space weapons also failed to repeat the moratorium demand, although he did assert that a US test of an antisatellite weapon against a target would mean the end of the unilateral Soviet moratorium on antisatellite testing. Chernenko, on the other hand, reaffirmed in his Post interview that a mutual moratorium was part of the Soviet proposal. []

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It is unlikely that the ambiguity in these statements indicates more flexible Soviet conditions for holding space weapons talks. Rather, US statements of willingness to consider mutual restraints while talks proceed may have led the Soviets to believe there is a possibility that the United States will accommodate them somewhat on the moratorium issue, and they may be muting their references to it while awaiting further indications of the US position. [redacted]

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A further demonstration of Moscow's intention to hew to a tough line was its harsh response to charges of Soviet noncompliance with arms control agreements by the President's General Advisory Committee on Arms Control and Disarmament. A Foreign Ministry spokesman claimed on 19 October that the US charges were a "political swindle" aimed at masking US obstruction of arms control progress. The strength of his remarks, echoed in a TASS statement the next day, was underscored by the fact that they came the day after Secretary Shultz had spoken publicly about how the United States intended to pursue a closer dialogue with the USSR. Moreover, the failure of the Soviets to respond promptly to the Secretary's remarks appeared intended to underscore Moscow's insistence that US intentions be demonstrated by deeds, not words. [redacted]

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At the same time, Moscow's mixture of intransigence with muted expressions of hopefulness appears intended in part to play to elements within the United States who believe that a more flexible approach to US-Soviet relations would be to the US advantage. Chernenko's interview, for example, appeared timed in part to figure in the second debate between the President and his challenger. Although the Soviets apparently anticipate President Reagan's reelection, they may believe that by professing skepticism about US intentions while proclaiming their own readiness for dialogue if the US shows "good faith," they can contribute to electoral pressures on the administration to modify its positions in ways that would be difficult to reverse after the election. [redacted]

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Perception of Differences Within Administration

A number of recent statements suggest there may be a growing belief by Soviet leaders that significant differences of view exist within the administration regarding bilateral and arms control policies. Gromyko referred in his UN speech to a "tug-of-war" between groups shaping US policy. Although he said a "militaristically minded" group had won this contest, he also asserted that there were "realistically minded politicians and statesmen" in the United States. An arms control specialist on the General Staff referred in a

Soviet television program on 6 October to the "point of view of the Pentagon," which he called "predominant" in Washington on the issue of space weapons. Political observer Valentin Zorin said on the same program that "some circles" in Washington were seeking to learn from past failures. A number of recent Soviet commentaries have attacked members of the administration by name as proponents of a hard line on arms control. [redacted]

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Although Soviet references to alleged differences of view within the US policymaking community invariably have concluded that "extreme militarists" are dominant, the Soviets may believe that divisions exist and afford them some leverage for influencing US policy, and they may be tailoring their tactics accordingly. Their repetition of the theme that the USSR is ready for dialogue, even in speeches containing harsh criticism of the United States, may in part be an effort to appeal to what Moscow views as conciliatory elements in the administration. The concurrent professions of skepticism about US intentions may be both a reflection of doubt as to the influence and durability of the less militant view and an effort to prompt US concessions by maintaining a "show me" attitude. A perception of differences among US policymakers also may have increased the level of uncertainty in Moscow's own estimates of the prospect for making some headway with the United States on arms control and other outstanding issues. [redacted]

Differences Among Soviet Leaders

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Although evidence of disagreement within the Soviet leadership is sparse, there are indications of differing views on how to approach relations with the United States. [redacted]

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[redacted] there are differences of view in Moscow on the value of arms control negotiations and dialogue with the United States. Public statements by Soviet officials lend some support to these reports. In recent weeks, for example, Gromyko and Politburo member Romanov have delivered speeches notably harsher in tone than the Politburo communique of 4 October and Chernenko's Post interview. [redacted]

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These differences could reflect conflicting views within the Soviet leadership over US intentions toward the USSR and the future course of US policy. Authoritative Soviet publications, including the major Central Committee journal

Kommunist, have attributed the current policies of the United States and its allies to longterm trends in the West that favor "anti-Soviet" and "militarist" forces. Other commentators, including Arbatov and members of his institute, have argued that US-Soviet relations are cyclical, with periods of tension giving way to periods of cooperation, and that US policy is subject to political and economic influences that will exert increasing pressure for "moderation." Leaders who subscribe to the former view might argue that any display of Soviet flexibility would be interpreted as weakness, would appear to reward the United States for pursuing a tough policy, and would not alter US policy. Leaders inclined toward the alternative interpretation of US policy might advocate a less militant approach in order to create an atmosphere more conducive to constructive dialogue. []

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Neither the extent of disagreement among Soviet leaders nor its potential impact on Soviet policies should be exaggerated. An established practice of Soviet spokesmen, including Arbatov and members of his institute, is to portray Kremlin politics as a contest between moderate and hardline factions in the hope of eliciting US concessions aimed at strengthening the former. Moreover, the collegial nature of Soviet decisionmaking and the requirement that all party members conform to the prevailing line place effective limits on the extent of any public airing of leadership differences. The Politburo communique of 4 October, in expressing approval of the results of Gromyko's visit to the United States, accorded the Foreign Minister unusual personal praise, implying that the policies he articulated during his US visit enjoyed full backing from the leadership. []

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Impact of Leadership Politics

There is little incentive, in terms of domestic politics, for any Soviet leader to identify himself with a significantly more flexible approach to US-Soviet relations than that of his colleagues. Since resuming public appearances in September, Chernenko has gone out of his way to stress his commitment to continue Andropov's foreign policy and to strengthen Soviet defense. He probably is making sure he stays aligned with his powerful colleagues Gromyko and Defense Minister Ustinov, leaders whose support he apparently sees as essential to his continued tenure in office. []

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Party Secretary Gorbachev, reputedly the most flexible and pragmatic Soviet leader, has little reason to break ranks with his colleagues on sensitive political issues since he no doubt wishes to remain a contender to succeed Chernenko as party leader. In fact, he echoed the Kremlin's generally

harsh rhetoric toward the United States in his September visit to Bulgaria. Secretary Romanov, his putative rival, might have an incentive to make risky political moves in an effort to improve his succession prospects. In a speech in Helsinki on 14 October, Romanov mixed harsh criticism of the United States and assertions that the danger of nuclear war is increasing with professions of Soviet willingness to pursue a serious dialogue with Washington. Romanov has historically been associated with a less flexible approach to US-Soviet relations, however, and his reference to Moscow's seriousness was probably intended to emphasize his unity with his Politburo colleagues, not to signal any real shift in his position. [redacted]

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Chernenko's political prominence at the October Central Committee plenum, coming only days after his Post interview, raises the possibility that a politically and physically healthy Chernenko may seek increasingly to impart his own personal stamp to the conduct of relations with Washington. So far, however, even his most positive statements--his election speech of 2 March and his Pravda interview of 2 September--have been limited to suggestions, like that in the Post interview, that a US move to satisfy the Soviets in one or more areas could lead to progress on other issues. At the moment, neither Chernenko nor his would-be successors seem inclined to go any further than this in signaling possible Soviet flexibility. [redacted]

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