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2013/03/08 : CIA-RDP90T00435R000100110008-2

Fritz - this is a very thoughtful response of the kind intended by my question - which clearly does not have a yes-no answer. I suppose the problem is in the definition of "succeed" - we know our definition but are not so sure of G's.

I may want to share this later with the V.P.

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ROUTING AND RECORD SHEET				
SUBJECT: (Optional) Do We Want Gorbachev to Succeed?				
FROM:		EXTENSION	NO.	
Fritz W. Ermarth Chairman, National Intelligence Council			NIC #03256-88	
			DATE	
			4 November 1988	
TO: (Officer designation, room number, and building)		DATE		OFFICER'S INITIALS
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The Director of Central Intelligence

Washington, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

NIC #03256-88
4 November 1988

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

FROM: Fritz W. Ermarth
Chairman, National Intelligence Council

SUBJECT: Do We Want Gorbachev to Succeed?

At the off-site, you asked whether we want Gorbachev to succeed. I wasn't quite satisfied with my response and the ensuing discussion, so I'd like to try again in this memo.

I cannot improve on Bob Gates' formulation: If success means a more effective version of the Soviet system as we know it historically and currently, the answer is "NO." We would face an intensified security challenge because of improved Soviet tactics in the international sphere and a strengthened Soviet economy; while under a revived system of one-party rule, the Soviet citizen would enjoy no guaranteed expansion of human and political rights, whatever the transient pleasures of glasnost.

On the other hand, if success means irreversible trends toward a more liberal, tolerant, decentralized, and open society--undoing many features of Russian-Soviet political culture we discussed [redacted] then the answer is "YES." As Westerners, we are inclined to believe that any reform which makes the USSR more efficient and productive must, per force, make it freer.

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The trouble and promise of the Gorbachev reform effort--for us as well as many Soviets who share our values--is that it harbors both possibilities, as well as possibilities for failure that bring out the very worst in the Russian-Soviet political tradition. Grim possibilities include a conservative reaction that could, in the extreme, be violent and repressive. Intelligent Soviets do not rule this out, and neither should we. Were we observing the lively politics and vibrant cultural life of the USSR in the 1920s, we would have found it hard to imagine a return even to the relatively mild autocracy of the tsarist era, not to mention the megadeath brutality of Stalinism.

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The possibilities of failure also include that of violent social revolution in which the nationalities as well as the haves and have-nots in the society go after each other. Such upheavals usually destroy first those fragile few who believe in law, tolerance, and the protection of the individual from the state. Social revolution seems much more likely to produce a new brand of autocracy than a more liberal, law-governed state. Moreover, a replay of the Russian Revolution and Civil War in the nuclear era could be dangerous.

Our task as intelligence officers is to track as best we can the trends which are shaping the unfolding possibilities. Many conflicting trends are at work at the same time. To track them, we must pay more attention to what leaders and audible spokesmen are saying, but also as best we can to what largely silent, fearful, and resentful masses of the population are thinking. This is not easy for the Soviet leadership; it's even harder for us. But neither the Kremlin nor the CIA can afford to be surprised on this front. To succeed at this, we must be exceptionally efficient in exploiting the outpouring of published information under glasnost.

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A second task--the one I stressed in my remarks [redacted] is managerially easier, but politically and intellectually challenging enough: that is, to keep visible events in the USSR in a historical and cultural perspective for our customers, to highlight the significance of the new and different while constantly reminding of the deep cultural obstacles to orderly liberalization. So far, I think we've fulfilled this second task pretty well because of the expertise and professionalism of the Soviet-watchers in our intelligence community. Having somewhat underestimated the pace at which Gorbachev, for his own power-political reasons, would radicalize the political agenda is a less grave sin than prematurely assuming that the reform process is already on the high road to success.

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This, then, leaves the policy question of how the United States should try to influence the form of and prospects for "success" of the Gorbachev reform era. I'll offer my personal view.

First, our main legitimate preoccupation should be to exploit the outreach of Soviet policy for our own security interests, remaining wary that the long-term effects of various deals could run against our interests, e.g., promoting "denuclearization" of Western Europe. Our biggest problem will be maintaining the integrity of the structures that keep the peace, such as NATO, the nuclear deterrent, our worldwide military capability, in the face of a seductive and soporific Soviet diplomacy. These structures cannot be rebuilt as fast as Moscow could revert to "old thinking" and threatening ways.

Second, we have to realize that our ability to influence Soviet internal evolution is marginal, but not zero. The political, moral, economic, and military health of the West is itself a powerful stimulus to liberalizing

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reform in the USSR, as it has been for Russia over several centuries. The Russians envy and fear us, as Kennan once said, for what we are, not for what we do. But the envy and fear are accompanied by a desire to emulate which is, on balance, healthy. The West must remain something to be emulated because it cannot be overcome.

Third, we must emphasize those interactions which promote the liberalizing of the society, not the strengthening of the Soviet state. For this reason, our own programs for creating subterranean tunnels to get Western information and ideas into the USSR are, if anything, more important in the era of glasnost than ever. They put pressure on the system in the right direction. They also prepare for the all-too-probable day when the conservative reaction sets in and our modest programs become, once again, the main bearers of glasnost in the USSR. Striking the right balance in our official and overt policies on behalf of freedom in the USSR is not easy. For example, bargaining with the Soviet government about freer dissemination of Western publications is a worthy effort, but it risks our admission that control of the press is a legitimate government function. Or take the example of the Moscow human rights conference: Some would expect that the West's acceptance of this idea would spur Moscow to new steps, such as releasing all political prisoners and formally abolishing politically repressive laws. But others fear that such a conference would put the stamp of Western acceptance on a system still far less free than Pinochet's Chile or Greece under the colonels.

Finally, the question of economic support. Odom's admonition to applaud but not finance perestroika is sound to a first approximation. But we need not be too dogmatic about how this works out in practice. I can imagine circumstances in which the progress of political and economic reforms has reached the point where, assuming we ourselves can afford it, we might well consider programs to help improve the lot of the Soviet consumer. We have to gauge very carefully the difference between help that spurs reform and liberalization, on the one hand, and measures that help the regime avoid reform and preserve resource allocation patterns threatening to us, on the other. Here again intelligence analysis of Soviet internal, military, and foreign policy developments will be critical; and our policy problem in practice is likely to be, not whether we should help Gorbachev, but whether we should try to stop others from doing so. Over the decades, the USSR has received a lot of help from the West, as Imperial Russia did before it. Hoover's famine relief in the 1920s saved many lives and helped to consolidate Soviet power. Lend-lease helped defeat Hitler and bring Soviet power to the heart of Europe. Western capital and technology transferred to the USSR in the 1930s helped to build the Stalinist economic order, and in the 1950s to restore it after the war. This ambiguous history is something that we should not forget.

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To understand and remember the lessons of history is, perhaps, the bottom line. Those lessons do not condemn us to a stingy, closed-minded reaction to Gorbachev. They allow us to respond positively while keeping our powder dry. Striking this balance will test our intelligence and maturity as severely and more subtly than all the challenges of the Cold War so far.



Fritz W. Ermarth

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NIC #03256-88
4 November 1988

SUBJECT: Do We Want Gorbachev to Succeed?

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