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The Burden of the Brezhnev Doctrine: New Perspectives on the Collapse

Even before the inception of the Soviet Union, debate raged about how best to achieve socialism in the ailing Romanov empire. The extreme left, Leon Trotsky in particular, advocated for global communism achieved by international revolution. His successor, and later murderer, Joseph Stalin, co-opted Lenin's policy of "Socialism in one country;" the Soviet Union would be the world's paragon in the ascent to socialism. Once it achieved it, the workers of the world would unite and build communism globally, and the borders between nations would wither away in accordance with Marxism-Leninism. However, at the end of World War II, the Red Army found itself occupying eight quasi-sovereign states in Eastern and Central Europe.

The relationship between the Soviet Union and the subjugated states shifted soon after their integration into the Warsaw Pact (formerly known as the Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation, and Mutual Assistance). During the Soviets' march to Berlin and the early post-war years, the Red Army carried out a massive transfer of wealth and assets from the peripheries of occupied territory to Moscow. (Applebaum, 2012) Nonetheless, in financially supporting these nations and their leading communist parties, the Soviet empire gradually overextended itself from the inside outward. The relationship between Moscow and its European satellites proved tenuous and politically unviable as early as 1956, when what would become known as the Brezhnev Doctrine was used to retroactively justify the invasion of Hungary. Meanwhile, Nikita Khrushchev wielded the policy of nuclear brinkmanship in order to scare the United States out of initiating nuclear war. Unopposed by the other superpower, the Soviet Union could continue expanding the greater Socialist Fatherland (*sotsial'isticheskoe otechestvo*) by installing or supporting communist-friendly leaders in every corner of the globe. When the Soviet Union determined one of its allies to be pursuing a path toward its capitalist past, its legal and ideological framework justified military intervention. Indeed, while the Warsaw Pact was established as counterpoint to NATO in 1955, its membership had more reason to fear invasion from Moscow than from Washington. From the Brezhnev period and onward, the Warsaw Pact states were given a hollow promise: the right to self-determination. In reality, the satellite states were free to pursue any political system they wished – as long as it was communist and governed by Moscow-approved communist parties.

Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone (1990) illustrates the dynamic between the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) and its subsidiaries: in theory, socialist internationalism (also referred to in this essay as the greater Socialist Fatherland) was a means to unite the proletariat across state lines.¹ Class interests would trump national interests. In practice, it was up to the CPSU to determine the “class” interests in its junior partners. Hence, socialist internationalism “expresses the primacy of the center over the periphery,” empowering Moscow to run the republics.)

Throughout this post-war period, Moscow resorted to invasion in order to exert control over the periphery. The crushing of the Prague Spring and the disastrous, decade-long campaign in Afghanistan were the most notorious examples of this. In attempting to reign in forces resistant to Moscow communism and broaden the empire’s borders, the Soviet Union accrued monstrous debts, triggered popular dissent, and severely complicated the détente process with the West. The immense blowback tempered Soviet foreign policy during the Polish crisis in 1980-81, which spelled the end for the Brezhnev doctrine. However, it wouldn’t be until 1989, during a turning point in Berlin, when this glaring gap in policy logic causes the Socialist Fatherland to collapse.

Part I: The Post-War Era

In only four short years since the United States’ bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, the Soviet Union had developed similar nuclear weapons, ensuring that it would remain a great power during the post-war period. Under Khrushchev, who wielded nuclear brinkmanship as foreign policy, the United States and the Soviet Union came closer than ever to actually fighting a nuclear war. Despite these geopolitical conundrums, the Soviet nuclear strategy established during the period of 1959-61 remained in place until nearly the end of Gorbachev’s leadership. (Pipes, 1981)

After Stalin’s death in 1953, the struggle for power between Malenkov, Khrushchev, and Beria left the fate of the Soviet Union’s nuclear policy uncertain. Georgii Malenkov, Stalin’s immediate successor, echoed Eisenhower’s comments that nuclear warfare could spell “the destruction of world civilization.” Such fresh ideas were shunned by Khrushchev and the Soviet Ministry of Defense in favor of pursuing technical equivalence with the United States. Malenkov was dismissed as Soviet Premier in 1955, and it is likely that his comments on the unfeasibility of nuclear war, which would later be expressed by activists like Sakharov, were a significant factor.

¹ Again, Marxism expects states to become obsolete and wither away once socialism is realized worldwide.

Following the first successful test of the Soviet hydrogen bomb on August 12th, 1953, thermonuclear power dominated Kremlin discussion. Khrushchev began to form a new military doctrine for fighting and winning a nuclear war. (Zubok, 2007) Despite his personal apprehension to the use of nuclear weapons, Khrushchev sought parity with the United States via a mutual balance of fear. He posited that the Eisenhower administration would refrain from using these weapons if it feared Soviet retaliation. And a massive supply of them would deter any potential encroachment of Western imperialism onto the Socialist Fatherland.

Marshal Zhukov was instrumental in the removal of Khrushchev's other competitor for power, Lavrentiy Beria. It must be noted that Beria oversaw the Special Atomic Committee and First Chief Directorate, the primary structures overseeing nuclear development. After Beria's arrest, these programs were merged into the Ministry of Medium Machine-Building Industry, and headed by Vyacheslav Malyshev. For Zhukov's support, he was promoted to Minister of Defense, replacing Bulganin, and contributed to Khrushchev's nuclear strategy. (Zubok, 2007)

Once he consolidated power, Khrushchev made significant cuts to the Soviet navy and army in favor of nuclear power, which stewed mistrust in the upper echelons of the Soviet military and was a contributing factor in his ousting in 1964. Khrushchev solidified his nuclear policy in writing when he approved an unclassified publication of *Military Strategy*, which stated that the principle reason the Soviet Union possessed nuclear weapons was to deter a nuclear strike, not to wage a nuclear war. Thus, the policy of nuclear brinksmanship, which remained in place until the late 1980s, was born. (Pipes, 1981)

Ultimately, Khrushchev's nuclear doctrine was applied to protect the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, as well as other communist parties around the world. It did not, however, lead to improved relations with Mao's China. (Jones, Soviet Empire, 2016)(10/8)

In the post-Stalin era, Mao exhibited a passionate self-reliant and Sinocentric approach toward foreign policy. Indeed, Henry Kissinger is keen to note that, "ideology had brought Beijing and Moscow together, and ideology drove them apart again." In 1955, when the Warsaw Pact of Communist countries was created in opposition to NATO, Mao refused to join. The People's Republic of China would not subordinate its national interests to become a satellite of Moscow. Mao viewed China's place in history, the challenges it faced, and its path to socialism to be unique and was uninterested in Stalin's suggestion to take a more balanced approach to his planned economy. "Our population is very numerous, and our position is excellent," Mao retorted, "[Our people] work industriously and bear much hardship....Consequently, we can reach socialism

more, better, and faster.” (Kissinger, 2011)

Khrushchev’s ‘secret speech’ of 1956, which denounced Stalin’s cult of personality and his systematic use of terror, was a political bomb. Mao took the criticism of Stalin personally, having spent decades establishing a similar system in China himself. He used the term “revisionism” to refer to Khrushchev’s new policies of de-Stalinization, implying that the Soviet Union was regressing toward its bourgeois past.” (Kissinger, 2011)

At both the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and a conference of socialist countries held in Moscow in 1957, Khrushchev called for “peaceful coexistence” with the West. Mao challenged this notion; as he saw it, strict adherence to Marxist-Leninist doctrine necessitated hostility toward the capitalist-imperialist nations. He declared that, “if the imperialists unleash war, we may lose more than three hundred million people. So what? War is war.” While the Soviets provided the Chinese the technology to assemble medium-range missiles as well as the schematics to produce an atomic bomb from 1957-1959, the PRC’s shelling of Quemoy deeply frustrated Khrushchev, and the Presidium canceled further atomic cooperation between the powers. This led to an unprecedented cleavage between the Communist party-driven states. (Kissinger, 2011)

In the meantime, the physicist and human rights pioneer, Andrei Sakharov, continued to work on the design of Soviet nuclear weapons while hoping testing would end. Sakharov pleaded Khrushchev not to resume testing but was shut down; “leave politics to us – we’re the specialists,” shot back the First Secretary. However, one of Sakharov’s colleagues, Viktor Adamskii, was more successful in advocating for testing restrictions. Adamskii drafted a letter to Khrushchev, who in turn put forth the idea as a Soviet proposal. The Soviet Union, the United States, and Great Britain signed the Limited Test Ban Treaty in August of 1967. (Holloway, 1980)

Khrushchev’s decision to invade Hungary in 1956 was complex, and it occurred as a result of painstaking debate in the Presidium. The first secretary of the Polish United Workers’ Party, Władysław Gomułka, feared that, if communism collapsed in Hungary, it would lead to the same in Poland. Khrushchev was personally conflicted; his de-Stalinization mindset yearned for a departure from Central Europe, but the Leninist within him wanted to advocate for the success of communism wherever the Soviets had influence. He justified it from a defensive perspective, “If we depart from Hungary, it will give a great boost to the Americans, English, and French – the imperialists.” (Zubok, p. 117) This is reminiscent of the “defensive war” logic behind the concurrent arms race – if Soviets simply ceased building nuclear weapons and missile defense systems,

the Americans would gain a strategic advantage, seize the moment, and destroy them.

Indeed, throughout the period leading up to the Cuban missile crisis, the West and the Soviet Union engaged in nuclear brinkmanship to gain strategic leverage over the other. Although, part of the blame lies with the West. Eisenhower frequently clashed with the more hawkish Dulles, and routinely deferred meetings with Khrushchev. As they saw it, meeting with the Soviet Premier would grant them a degree of parity to the United States. One might conjecture that, had they met earlier, the tension leading up to the Cuban missile crisis might have eased. But Khrushchev lacked Brezhnev's personality and charm that made "high" détente possible in the mid-1970s.

Some scholars assert that the Cold War ended in the late 60s as talks broke down between the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. The US was aware of the ideological disputes between the two powers and tried to play China against the Soviet Union. (Kissinger, 2011) Despite diplomatic foibles with China in the late 1950s, the 1959 revolution in Cuba fuelled hopes that the Socialist Fatherland could expand into American-dominated territory. Hope could also be found in radical Arab regimes in the Middle East and postcolonial Africa. Indeed, Khrushchev dreamed of "windows of socialism" in newly-freed colonies. And some of these colonies viewed the Soviet Union as a beacon of progress, ready to offer support. Unfortunately for Khrushchev, the Soviets lost a battle over the Congo, and were effectively kicked out of Ghana and Guinea. The Soviets soon found themselves entangled in a proxy war over Angola, where President Ford had issued a secret CIA order to prop up the ailing regime. The war ultimately complicated the Soviet Union's attempts at détente with the West. (Zubok, 2007)

Part II: The Brezhnev Doctrine

The Brezhnev doctrine established a unique relationship between ruling communist parties. If the Soviet Union determined a threat to a communist party's monopoly on power in the Eastern Bloc or beyond, it had the authority to invade other countries.

The roots of the Brezhnev doctrine begin with Lenin. During the Russian Civil War, the nascent Soviet of People's Commissars released a proclamation titled "The Socialist Fatherland is in Danger!" After an introductory paragraph asserting the "sacred duty" of workers and peasants of Russia to defend the Republic of the Soviets "against the hordes of the bourgeois-imperialistic Germany", the Soviet of People's Commissars lists eight degrees. The two most pertinent to the Cold War period state:

“1. All the forces and resources of the country shall be devoted wholly to the revolutionary defense.

2. All Soviets and revolutionary organizations shall defend every position to the last drop of blood.”²

Language referring to the greater Socialist Fatherland as a term in Soviet military policy began to be used at the 1959 21st Party Congress. Similar language would later be codified in the 1977 Soviet constitution. Christopher Jones is keen to point out that the concept of the greater Socialist Fatherland was used as a means to reject alternative party programs in China, Yugoslavia, Albania, and Romania that appeared during the Sino-Soviet dispute and the nascence of the Non-Aligned Movement. (Jones, n.d.)³ Eventually, with China’s support, Albania and Romania would secede from the Warsaw Pact.

Not unlike the United States’ Monroe Doctrine, which has been used to justify intervention in Latin America to protect shifting U.S. interests, the Brezhnev doctrine aimed to fulfill an internationalist duty. In practice, it allowed the Soviet Union to invade its own Warsaw pact allies in order to prop up communist parties as it saw fit. Questions about the doctrine’s sustainability arose in the late 1970s. If Moscow sought relative political stability for communist parties in Eastern Europe (the greater Socialist Fatherland), it would risk entangling itself in a plethora of economic and political conundrums.

The 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia, which put an end to Dubček’s liberalization reforms, signaled that Khrushchev’s “separate paths to socialism” from the Belgrade Declaration were no longer permissible under the Brezhnev doctrine. But that was not all that was lost. Andrei Sakharov noted that “the hopes [for reform] inspired by the Prague Spring collapsed.” So did relations with Albania, which left the Warsaw pact the following month. Relations soured with Yugoslavia, Romania, and China as well, to the point where chief ideologist Mikhail Suslov sought to isolate the Chinese at an international communist meeting the following year. The following year, violent outbreaks began along the Sino-Soviet border. In fact, China’s preemptive clashes with Soviet troops along the border brought about a “revolutionary moment” in American foreign policy. Henry Kissinger (2011) writes that, from that point, the United States had a vested interest in the preservation of a Communist nation “with which we had had

² (Commissars 1918)“The Socialist Fatherland is in Danger!” Pravda, No. 32, 22 February 1918, p. 1 <http://soviethistory.msu.edu/1917-2/treaty-of-brest-litovsk/treaty-of-brest-litovsk-texts/the-socialist-fatherland-is-in-danger/>

³ *Masquerade*, Chapter 2.

no meaningful contact for twenty years.” (p. 218) Brezhnev’s Central Committee sought to dominate Czechoslovakia in particular due to its geographical location in Central Europe, its key armament industry, and uranium mines. But Moscow paid an unprecedented geopolitical price for the invasion. It would remain a painful lesson in Soviet foreign policy and later separate the “old guard” from Gorbachev’s “new thinkers” during the Polish crisis and onward. (Ouimet, 2003)

A month following the invasion of Czechoslovakia, an article written by Sergey Kovalev appeared in Pravda detailing the political logic behind the Brezhnev doctrine, although the very existence of any new doctrine informing Soviet foreign policy was denied. This doctrine can be reduced to one sentence in Kovalev’s (1968) article: “The weakening of any link in the world socialist system has a direct effect on all the socialist countries, which cannot be indifferent.” To any contemporary Western scholar, this position may seem reminiscent of the so-called Domino theory, which justified the need for American intervention around the world and particularly in the Asian sphere.⁴ This was the realization of the Soviet struggle against the “free world,” a term often wielded by American politicians during the Cold War. The Soviets referred to their “free world” as the Socialist Fatherland. Both entities were amorphous and never clearly defined. Georgy Shakhnazarov, a member of the Suslov commission, incorporated this into articles 31 and 32 of the 1977 Soviet Constitution.

The constitution adopted on October 7th, 1977, also known as the Brezhnev constitution, states that “Defense of the Socialist Fatherland is one of the most important functions of the state, and is the concern of the whole people....The duty of the Armed Forces of the USSR to the people is to provide reliable defense of the Socialist Fatherland and to be in constant combat readiness, guaranteeing that any aggressor is instantly repulsed.” (Jones, n.d.)⁵

The intentional vagueness of this entity implies that the Soviet Union was ready to fight either a nuclear or conventional war in order to protect this amorphous area. Whether it extended further than the border of Warsaw Pact allies is unclear, and it set precedent for invasion of the Soviet Union’s own Warsaw Pact allies in order to provide military support to other communist parties.

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The breakout of violence in 1973, the Yom Kippur War, demolished hopes that peace in the Middle East could be built on US-Soviet actions and intentions. Egypt’s third president, Anwar Sadat, kept Brezhnev in the dark when he

⁵ *Masquerade*, Chapter 2.

launched a surprise attack to regain lost territory. It was a reminder to the Soviets that, no matter how many billions of rubles they invested in radical leaders, they ultimately couldn't control them. However, Brezhnev didn't let the Yom Kippur War tarnish his ties with Nixon. Unfortunately for him, both of Brezhnev's détente partners, Nixon and West German chancellor Willy Brandt, resigned the following year due to their own respective scandals. This, coupled with proxy wars in Angola (1975-6) and Ethiopia (1977-78) to establish the greater Socialist Fatherland in Africa spelled the end for "high détente."

Part III: Gorbachev and the End

When Kabul seemed poised to favor allegiance with the West at the end of the 1970s, the Soviet Union begrudgingly began its largest military operation since World War II. Suslov and Ponomarev, Moscow's party ideologues, came to regard Afghanistan as a crucial pillar of the Socialist Fatherland. Once the fate of communism in Afghanistan seemed to solely depend on the outcome of an ongoing battle in Herat, the Soviet-backed communist leader, Taraki sought Soviet military intervention. The Foreign Minister, Andrei Gromyko, agreed. "Under no circumstances," he urged the Politburo, "can we lose Afghanistan." Eventually, in December 1979, the Soviets launched its invasion, intending to crush US-backed Mujahedeen guerillas and reestablish communist control of the country. Only two years later, first deputy foreign minister Georgy Kornienko, one of the few Soviet leaders who initially opposed the war, noted that, "it had become clear that there could not be a military resolution of the problem in Afghanistan." The ministry of defense's failure to restructure the army (well-adapted to fight a European war) into a counter-insurgency force was one major lesson of Afghanistan. They also underestimated the Mujahedeen's staying power and resourcefulness, not to mention the determination of Pakistan's General Zia-ul Haq as well as the United States to support them.

Finally, when considering damage to political and economic stability the Soviet-Afghan war brought, the Soviets learned that socialist internationalism and their national interests were not always consistent with one another. Détente with America was significantly weakened, the fate of the SALT II arms control agreement was uncertain, and the Carter administration's grain embargo caused substantial economic difficulties for the Soviet Union. (Roy, 2006)

Even by 1987, Gorbachev was insistent on procuring some sort of benefit from this failed venture. He argued that the Soviets should establish a moderate, communist-friendly in Afghanistan in order to ward off both the United States and fundamentalists. Vladislav Zubok (p. 297) refers to this as a "chimerical idea," due to the alliance between Pakistan, the United States, and fundamentalist Islamic forces. Furthermore, the Minister of Defense Sergei Sokolov, Marshal

Akhromeev, and the very commander of Soviet troops in Afghanistan, General Valentin Varennikov, pushed for immediate withdrawal of troops. This would be another scenario in which Zubok's assertion that Gorbachev lived in "a world of illusions" is apt.

Ouimet suggests that, if Andropov hadn't died, the Soviet Union might have withdrawn from Afghanistan considerably earlier. Zubok would probably agree. He describes Gorbachev as an incessant procrastinator living "in a world of illusions" who allowed crises to erupt before he could pass meaningful reform. Yegor Ligachyov remembered that, "being too late, reacting too slowly to events was one of the most characteristic traits of Gorbachev's policies."

When Gorbachev claimed that he was ready to withdraw all Soviet forces from Central Europe, although gradually, Zubok comments that this was due to "domestic constraints, not geopolitical realities." The Bush administration and West Germany didn't necessarily see this as a shift in policy. "Instead of changing, Soviet priorities seemed only to narrow," noted Brent Scowcroft.

Gorbachev's conundrum and the increasing tension between his "new thinkers" and the Soviet General Staff are well illustrated in Svetlana Alexievich's book, *Secondhand Time*. Marshal Sergey Akhromeev, who grew increasingly dissatisfied with Gorbachev's performance during Soviet-American disarmament talks, suggested "and while we're at it, maybe we should ask for political asylum in Switzerland and never come home?" (Alexievich, 2016 Pg 131.)(Zubok 314, 324)

The Polish crisis in 1980 was viewed as a "challenge to the very foundations of Communist rule in Eastern Europe." (Ouimet, 2003) Moscow and the Suslov Commission hastily worked to ensure that the Brezhnev Doctrine was active and ready to be applied to the Polish situation. Ouimet is correct to assert that, when the Soviet Union decided not to invade Poland, it signaled the end of the Brezhnev doctrine.

The 1982 book *The Fate of the Earth*, written by Jonathan Schell, is regarded as one of the most influential texts in the nuclear disarmament movement. Two years later, Georgy Shakhnazarov, Gorbachev's leading advisor, published an article in *Problems of Philosophy* noting that there was no political justification in fighting a nuclear war. Shakhnazarov was trusted by Gorbachev on the highest level of military issues, so he ultimately played an integral role in the renunciation of the Brezhnev doctrine in '89. Another important contribution by Shakhnazarov was the incorporation of the right to secede in the other Soviet Republics' constitutions. (Articles 77-78) (Jones, Soviet Empire, 2016)(11/15, 11/22)

On October 26th, 1989, at a meeting in Helsinki, Gorbachev was reported to say that the upheavals in the Eastern bloc countries would run their course without Soviet intervention. This spelled the end of the Brezhnev doctrine and the beginning of the “Sinatra Doctrine,” a tongue-in-cheek reference by Foreign Ministry spokesman Gennadi Gerasimov to the song “My Way,” which implied that the Soviet Union would allow its Warsaw Pact neighbors self-determination and freedom from Soviet invasion. “We have no right, moral or political right, to interfere in events happening there. We assume others will not interfere either.”⁶

When did the Brezhnev doctrine die? Apparently, it was “buried even before Chernenko [was],” in March of 1985, roughly four and a half years before the talks at Helsinki. (Ouimet 2003) However, General Gribkov, the former chief of staff of the Soviet armed forces claims that the Brezhnev Doctrine died even earlier. “The fact that we didn’t send troops into Poland shows that the Brezhnev Doctrine – that is, the resolving of problems by force – was dead.” (Pg. 242)

The renunciation of this doctrine is linked to three factors: 1) The massive financial strain accrued by dominance over Eastern Europe, which became more of a burden than an asset during the mid-to-late 1980s⁷ 2) the unilateral withdrawal of 50,000 troops from Eastern Europe and demobilization of 500,000 Soviet troops in accordance with the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE), and 3) Gorbachev’s personality. The leader, according to historian Vladislav Zubok, simply allowed the collapse of the Socialist Fatherland to happen. (Zubok 334) Shakhnazarov, who echoed Sakharov and his contemporaries, also played a dramatic role in Gorbachev’s policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost*.

In many ways, these two policies were created to prolong the life of the ailing Soviet Union. Gorbachev, like Khrushchev, was an incredibly conflicted leader. He deeply wanted the Soviet Union to have a place in the “first world” and absolve Khrushchev’s failures of de-Stalinization. That is why he was a firm proponent of non-violence. Gorbachev’s zeal and enthusiasm remarkably reduced Cold War tension, but he had not real direction or plan when it came to the Warsaw pact nations.

The overextension of the Socialist Fatherland put the Soviet Union in the mid-to-late eighties in a deep economic slump. The Soviet military, the conservatives, and the moderates understood that Soviet commitments in Eastern and Central Europe, Afghanistan, and elsewhere were simply unsustainable. The Council for

⁶ <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/10/26/world/gorbachev-in-finland-disavows-any-right-of-regional-intervention.html>

⁷ Bunce, “The Empire Strikes Back” pg 45.

Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) set up a “moral hazard” situation in which the poorly performing communist parties received significantly more financial aid than the better performing ones. The debts of Poland and East Germany spiraled out of control. Blame for this lies in economic mismanagement before Gorbachev’s tenure, and his failure to pass meaningful financial reform during it. Zubok (p. 299) goes as far to argue that the “Politburo lacked even basic knowledge of macroeconomics.” However, in his desire for the Soviet Union to join the “common European home” and the living standards that entailed, Gorbachev may have intentionally delayed passing price reforms that would lead to Soviet solvency while raising food prices for Soviet citizens.

The image of protests over bread prices would have been irreconcilable with the “Gorbymania” he inspired in the West. In Russian culture, the phrase *polozhit’sya na avoc’* can be translated as “to depend on chance”, but this is not entirely accurate. It describes an individual leaving certain scenarios up to chance, hoping that they will resolve themselves on their own. It is a behavior and even a mindset that Westerners, anxious to act in the face of peril, can only describe as completely irrational, but it is deeply rooted in the Russian and Orthodox culture. For all the criticism Gorbachev receives for allowing the economic situation in the late eighties to worsen while allowing the German crisis to resolve itself, he may have been yielding to this centuries-old tradition. History will respect Gorbachev for his unyielding commitment to nonviolence in the former Socialist Fatherland. It is difficult to say whether the singing revolution in the Baltic states would have proceeded without bloodshed had Gorbachev and his “new thinkers” like Marshal Akhromeev not been in power.

In the end, under the guidance of the Brezhnev doctrine, the Soviets wanted to simultaneously prevent upheaval of Communist parties within the greater Socialist Fatherland while avoiding the blowback of military intervention. This proved to be impossible, as the invasions of Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan proved. Each time the Soviets resorted to violence in order to bolster or establish ruling communist parties, it led to numerous levels of conflict. From a perspective of international relations, Soviet invasions inspired fear and dissent within the other Warsaw pact nations, what many refer to as the “spillover” effect. The Brezhnev doctrine continually frustrated and complicated the détente process with the West. If there is something to be learned from the Cold War era, the renowned diplomat Jack Matlock (p. 328) suggests that a “country cannot for long guarantee its own safety by the military domination of others.”

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