
The Soviet Union

Will Moscow maintain the delusion that Western collapse is to its advantage?

by Rachel Douglas

When the era of Leonid Brezhnev's rule in the U.S.S.R. came to an end in 1982, merely by comparison with the self-collapsing West, the economically faltering Soviet Union met its leadership crisis as the stronger world power, in defiance of the stubbornly maintained myth that the Soviet bloc and the Soviet Union itself would soon come tearing apart at the seams. The same world crisis that reveals the foolishness of that notion, also casts into sharp relief the most dangerous strategic miscalculation of the Soviets themselves: their conviction that such Western collapse will ultimately rebound in their favor.

The posture taken toward the crisis-ridden West will determine history's judgment on the post-Brezhnev Soviet leadership, regardless of its domestic successes or failures, because the resolution of the crisis—either into a recovery led by great development projects all over the world and in space, or into total collapse and fascism—decides whether or not there will be nuclear war. By this standard, already in the last three months of Brezhnev's rule, and with growing intensity under the new General Secretary Yuri Andropov, attitudes and actions the Soviet Union expressed in 1982 were dangerous ones.

The keynote of Soviet propaganda became, by year's end, "Us and Them"—the cold-war-style title of an October article by Brezhnev's Central Committee information chief Leonid Zamyatin, which expressed a theme struck again and again by Georgii Arbatov of the U.S.A.-Canada Institute and a host of others. Soviet diplomacy focused on securing stable conditions around the vast perimeter of the U.S.S.R. and Warsaw Pact countries. Toward the West, Moscow issued a stream of initiatives, strictly on the disengagement track on which East-West relations have been running around and around for so many years—while under conditions of collapsing civilization, the outbreak of war is hastened by the McNamaras and other "nuclear-freeze" architects in the halls of elite institutions and by the anti-technology movement that they and Moscow jointly support under the fraudulent banners of "peace."

When Dr. Edward Teller combined a call for developing directed energy beam weapons, a policy put on the Washington policy agenda by *EIR* founder Lyndon LaRouche, Jr., with a proposal to pool international efforts to solve the "common tasks of mankind," Moscow's response was a violent slander of Teller as a "cannibal" in the Dec. 1 issue of *Literaturnaya Gazeta*.

Men and institutions

The two highest-ranking members of the Communist Party Central Committee's Politburo died in 1982: Brezhnev in November, and in January, Mikhail Suslov. The departure of Suslov, known as the protector of Marxist-Leninist ideology but also a mighty power-broker, opened the gates to a rapid reapportionment of power, in which Andropov laid claim to Brezhnev's party leadership post. Long-time Brezhnev associate Andrei Kirilenko, often his stand-in on matters of economic policy, was eclipsed throughout the year and resigned from the Politburo in November. Andropov outmaneuvered Konstantin Chernenko, Brezhnev's aide, who had risen rapidly since 1978 but lacked his own base among regional party leaders. Chernenko remains on the Politburo and Central Committee Secretariat, positions of great power; but Brezhnev's old machine from the southern Ukraine is dwindling, and the hordes of officials throughout the country who owed their jobs to his patronage have no more guarantees.

When Andropov assumed the title of Central Committee Secretary on May 24, taking back a former job and finding his stepping-stone to Brezhnev's job, he was coming from 15 years at the head of the Committee for State Security, the KGB. He quickly drew on KGB colleagues to fill key positions outside the security sector proper. Of these, the most dramatic appointment was that of the Azerbaijani party chief, formerly KGB commander in that republic, G. A. Aliyev, as First Deputy Prime Minister of the U.S.S.R., in line to succeed the 77-year-old Premier Nikolai Tikhonov, member of Brezhnev's inner circle. In his first speeches to the Central Committee, Andropov spoke portentously about correct

“placement of cadres,” and swiftly replaced the Railways Minister and others who had hung on to their jobs even in the face of criticism from Brezhnev. The official press heralded a new anti-corruption campaign, a special expertise of Aliyev, for which the Interior Ministry (MVD), the national police force, had been decapitated and given KGB leadership. Andropov’s successor at the KGB in the May to December period, Vitali Fedorchuk, replaced long-time Brezhnev intimate Nikolai Shchelokov as head of the MVD. Fedorchuk’s rise in the Ukrainian KGB took place in the Andropov era and featured a shake-up of the MVD in the Ukraine.

Before heading the KGB beginning in 1967, Andropov worked in the foreign relations apparatus of the Central Committee, a wing of the party historically descended from the Communist International—the wing most attached to a permanent adversary relationship with the United States and least involved with the attempt, under Brezhnev, to give East-West détente some underpinnings in trade and other economic projects that would help both sides. This Soviet tendency, which encompasses individuals from the KGB itself and from foreign-policy think tanks such as IMEMO and Arbatov’s U.S.A.-Canada Institute, is ideologically congenial to and historically interlocked with British intelligence—specialists in the manipulation of confrontation between Russia and America.

Because of this, and because of Andropov’s espousal of some economic reforms, quite a few London strategists and others greeted Andropov’s elevation almost euphorically, as the harbinger of the Soviet Union’s taking the road through “market socialism” to the status of post-industrial society, compatible with, and not threatening to the West as it decays.

Neither Andropov himself, nor certainly the other elements of the ruling consensus, promise to fulfill such dreams. Andropov depends on the support or tolerance of a coalition in which individuals fundamentally committed to technologically-vectored industrial growth are central. They are managers of industry and, most important, the military. Marshal Dmitrii Ustinov, the Defense Minister, is a key figure in the Politburo after Brezhnev.

Brezhnev’s next-to-the-last speech, given Oct. 27, was an address to military officers in which he spoke of technological breakthroughs at the frontiers of science, applicable in weapons as well as industry. Andropov made sure in his November Central Committee plenum speech to assure the defense sector of receiving “all its needs.”

In October and November, articles in two Soviet economics journals advanced the idea that advanced technologies—directed energy beams, in particular—can transform the productivity of entire branches of Soviet industry. These polemics underscored the potential for solutions to unlock a most crucial array of bottlenecks in the Soviet economy: the obstacles to wide proliferation of advanced technologies pioneered in the defense sector. In a February 1982 Washington seminar and subsequent *EIR* cover story on “The Hidden Strengths of

the Soviet Economy,” we developed the strategic implications of these potential solutions; that seminar was where Lyndon LaRouche first called for the parallel creation of beam weapons by the Soviet Union and the United States, as the rational course for both powers.

Fortress-building

It fell to Ustinov to reiterate the Soviet military doctrine that rejects the possibility of limited nuclear war and steadily increases the U.S.S.R.’s war-fighting preparedness. In his July 12 *Pravda* article, Ustinov indicated that the Soviet response to installation of new medium-range, nuclear-armed missiles in Europe, the Pershing IIs with their five-minute flight-time to Moscow, would consist not merely of matching the United States in weapons, but in increased readiness for total war. Elaborating a Politburo warning about “countermeasures” to the Pershings, Ustinov wrote that an attempted first strike against the U.S.S.R. would bring “an all-crushing retaliatory strike,” meaning that at the first detection of a Pershing launch from Western Europe, there would be a full-scale strike against U.S. weapons and territory.

Andropov’s first arms proposals and Arbatov’s propaganda, the latter since October focused on the possibility for Western Europe to become a disarmament-movement-dominated counterweight to the United States, signal that Soviet policy towards NATO in the next months will consist of a big push for the “nuclear freeze,” feeding tension between the United States and Europe and the growth of anti-technology agitation in both places.

For the rest of the world, the intensity of Soviet diplomacy was a function of various regions’ proximity to the U.S.S.R.

In September, Brezhnev gave a six-point Mideast peace plan, machined to dovetail with Arab League proposals, while Soviet press explanations of the plan stressed the replacement of U.S. diplomacy by multilateral responsibility for the region. During the summer war in Lebanon, the Soviets replaced Syrian weapons, but showed no inclination to get militarily involved more directly in the Mideast.

In Asia, Moscow sought alignments of stability, on which the Soviet leadership might hope to rely even as the rest of the world plunged into ruin. Andropov’s first diplomatic meetings were with Prime Minister Indira Gandhi of India and, more unusually, Pakistan’s Zia ul-Haq. But the most dramatic shift occurred in Moscow’s relations with Peking, beginning with a feeler from Tikhonov on Feb. 14, when he spoke of “concrete steps” Moscow wanted to take towards “normalization” of relations with China, and said there were “no problems in Sino-Soviet relations that could not be decided.” Brezhnev expanded the overture in an April speech in Tashkent, and by the time of his death, “normalization” talks were under way and the Chinese Foreign Minister was greeted by Andropov in Moscow for the first time since the 1960s.