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Gorbachev: Power, Privilege and Vision

Kremlin watchers should expect several bold new foreign policy initiatives from General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev in the next few years, according to Jan Gross, Associate Professor of Sociology at Emory University. These may include proposals for the reunification of Germany, the dismantling of the Warsaw Pact and the withdrawal of the Red Army to within Soviet borders. Gross gave a presentation at the Harriman Institute February 11 titled "Between Russia and the United States: Reflections on Gorbachev by an East European."

It is important to bear in mind that Mikhail Gorbachev acts on behalf of the ruling class in the Soviet Union, "which is the beneficiary of power and privilege." Within every ruling class, there is a division between those who primarily enjoy privilege and those who are primarily busy with the exercise of power. Gorbachev, says Gross, "belongs to the latter category." This segment believes that "power — as the capacity to get desired results accomplished — resides mainly in the mastery of effective resources such as knowledge, coercion or technological know-how."

A look into Gorbachev's political biography reveals a continuous association with the Soviet security apparatus. As evidence, Gross cited Gorbachev's responsibility for the supervision of foreign students at Moscow University in the early 1950s, former KGB chief Yuri Andropov's political patronage of Gorbachev and the fact that Eduard Shevardnadze, a former KGB operative in the Caucasus, became Gorbachev's choice for Foreign Minister and a member of the Politburo. "Gorbachev worked with and earned credentials within the segment of the Soviet ruling class responsible for security." In this group, he has learned that power is the source of privilege and not the other way around. With the backing of the security establishment, Gorbachev is powerful and has the mandate to "launch vigorous, unorthodox initiatives." His attempts to foster modernization are driven by security considerations.

Gorbachev's Strategy

In the drive for security, internal reforms must be accompanied by complementary developments on the interna-

tional scene. Gorbachev "seeks to slow down the pace with which the development of Western economies translates into armaments." It is not surprising, therefore, that he has put forth a number of disarmament initiatives. In Gross's view, these moves will be successful because they will coincide with a corollary policy, which will be enthusiastically received in the West, of decreasing the Soviet economic and military presence in Eastern Europe.

To overcome its economic problems and keep pace with the technological revolution, the Soviet Union will need to do more than disclose information about the functioning of its economic system. "To move ahead, the USSR will have to leap-frog several stages of development by a massive infusion of the most advanced technology and managerial know-how from abroad." When reaching abroad for assistance, Gorbachev is able to offer "political, as well as economic incentives to an interested party."

In the opinion of Gross, the focus of this strategy will be West Germany. He expects in the near future for Gorbachev to offer a proposal for reunification of the two Germanies. Such a development will imply a break-up of the NATO alliance; in order to make the proposal palatable to Germany and its allies, Gorbachev would simultaneously negotiate a *quid pro quo* in the form of the dismantling of the Warsaw Pact. Gross stated that "it would be a test of Mr. Gorbachev's statesmanship to show that he could execute such a policy if he found, as he might on reflection, that it is in the interest of the Soviet ruling elite to limit its responsibilities and liabilities in East Central Europe and draw Germany into a preferential relationship."

The logic of this assumption follows from the fact that the Soviet Union's commitment in Eastern Europe is burdensome. It is increasingly difficult for the Soviets to shoulder blame for their satellite regimes' inability to govern effectively. "Every strike, every independent-minded article, every affirmation of religious beliefs in these countries, is perceived in the world as a sign of Soviet inability to impose its will, and therefore an indication of a weakening of Soviet power." Moreover, these notions of freedom and liberty are capable of seeping into the USSR itself, thereby threatening the preeminence of the Soviet ruling class. Be-



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sides its instrumental role as an exchange for the dissolution of NATO, the "casting off of East Europe" would enhance stability and social order within the Soviet Union.

Implications for U.S. Policy

Gross incorporated this vision into a broader framework of the imperatives for American foreign policy vis-a-vis the Soviet Union. Unlike an authoritarian state, he said, a democratic state which sought power for its own sake and the promotion of its interests in the domain of foreign relations would undermine and ultimately destroy its domestic institutions. Consequently, "the espousal of human rights is the only realpolitik befitting a democracy." Gross pointed out that there is a pragmatic side to a foreign policy that is allied with democratic principles. "Neither security nor the elimination of nuclear war can be obtained by controlling the Soviet Union from the outside... these goals can be obtained only when the controls will be imposed on Soviet behavior from the inside, by the citizenry." The United States and its allies cannot be secure from a nuclear holocaust until all leaders, including those in the USSR, are held accountable to the citizens of their respective countries. In pursuit of such foreign policy objectives, "the West's most formidable allies are citizens of the Soviet bloc countries."

Gross concluded his talk by emphasizing that this is a critical juncture in the history of the Soviet Union. Decisions taken today will lead to either a strengthening or atrophy of Soviet power. Without the implementation of extensive reform measures, the Soviet economy will continue to decline, dragging the USSR into the class of second-rate industrial powers. In addition, the continued Soviet presence in a stagnating and discontented Eastern Europe will have deleterious repercussions for the USSR. With the sponsorship of the security apparatus and the subordination of the military behind him, Gorbachev is uniquely situated to deal with these internal and external dilemmas. Gross thinks Gorbachev will put this "freedom of action to the best possible use and seek to restore the power of the Soviet ruling elite and the international prestige of the Soviet Union" by simultaneously attempting a modernization of the Soviet economy, reductions in the level of nuclear armaments in the world, and normalization in Europe. Should he fail to do so, says Gross, then in twenty years the Soviets might still have the military capability of destroying the world but otherwise "have as much influence in the course of world affairs as South Korea."

Reported by Robert Monyak

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The Harriman Institute
Columbia University
420 West 118th Street
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