

Problems and Issues in Soviet Relations with Small Socialist States in the Framework of Gorbachev's Agenda

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I. A Historical Perspective

The still relatively short history of relations between the USSR and other socialist states already reveals quite a few patterns of impact of Soviet political succession on these relations. It is therefore useful to recall what History teaches us in order to shed light on problems facing Gorbachev in handling them and to better assess what is different in the current situation and what can be expected in the near future.

Given the high degree of centralization of the Soviet system, political succession at the top unleashes important changes or partial but significant regressions in internal policies and in the Soviet approach to the global East-West relationship, that have always considerably if diversely affected relations between the USSR and other socialist states. If one considers Brezhnev's succession as a single process, initiated by Andropov, partially halted under Chernenko and strongly accelerated by Gorbachev one can then speak of three Soviet political successions since the existence of a world socialist system, that have had an important impact on its evolution and transformation.

In order to better delineate patterns and understand Gorbachev's predicament it is first necessary to establish a fundamental difference between the socialist states in terms of the accession to power of their Communist leadership. It then appears that the Communist regimes installed in power by the Red Army at the end of World War II, that is to say, most of the East European socialist states, are more affected by changes in Soviet internal policies than they are by changes in East-West relations brought about by succession in the Kremlin. On the other hand and inversely, Communist regimes that have taken or rapidly consolidated power chiefly by their own means like China, Cuba, Vietnam and North Korea, tend to be more affected by Soviet efforts to reshape relations with the West. Together with Yugoslavia

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and Albania, I propose to call this group of countries, the indigenous socialist states.

There is also a third, but less broad area of Soviet politics that is always an object of reconsideration in periods of succession, with an important impact on relations with other socialist states. It concerns attempts at reconciliation with previously excommunicated socialist states. This has been the case with Yugoslavia in 1955, with China nowadays and for a brief period after Khrushchev's downfall in 1964. To the extent of their success, these attempts had perturbing effects on Soviet relations with Albania and China at the end of the 50s as they have done over the past three years for Soviet relations with Vietnam and Outer Mongolia. They have also affected and currently do affect Soviet relations with Eastern Europe, in a more diffuse but significant way, as we shall see.

Interestingly enough, during periods of political succession, including the current one, the new Soviet leadership has not undertaken comprehensive and articulate efforts to reshape relations with the world socialist system, taken as a whole. Many empirical adjustments have been made but no coherent and all encompassing policy was designed. This was probably an impossible task and remains so today to an even higher degree. Therefore, as we shall see, the current issues in Soviet relations with other socialist states are shaped more by changes in the three afore mentioned areas of Soviet politics than they are by a specific Gorbachev agenda for the communist world.

II. The Indigenous Socialist States

It is with Stalin's succession that the current situation presents the most revealing analogies for problems and issues facing all the countries of the communist world. But let us first examine the case of the indigenous socialist states and temporarily leave aside the case of the Soviet installed communist regimes, with the useful exception of East Germany.

As we all remember, Stalin's successors rapidly made major steps to bring a significant measure of relaxation in Soviet relations with the United States and the West. An armistice was signed in Korea in July 1953. In 1954 the Geneva agreements put a temporary end to the Indochina war. If the idea of dismantling the East German regime was only briefly contemplated, the Red Army actually withdrew from Austria in 1955. Many of such Soviet steps and schemes were made in varying degrees at the expense of the interests of other socialist states and caused deep concern to the leadership of the most vulnerable and, not coincidentally, the most militant of these countries. The same can be said of the Soviet rapprochement with Yugoslavia which made the

Albanian leaders fear that their country could be sacrificed to the Yugoslav federation as it had been contemplated in Belgrade and Moscow prior to their schism. After 1956 when the Soviet search for a new *modus vivendi* with the West reached the level of a full-fledged theory of peaceful coexistence with far reaching political implications, it became the cause and the main issue of the Sino-Soviet conflict. The same reason with specific implications for each of them, led North Vietnam and North Korea to lean more and more towards the Chinese side with the intensification of the Sino-Soviet conflict. Soviet relations with Cuba followed a similar if less pronounced course after the Cuban missile crisis. When Khrushchev decided at the beginning of 1964 to convene unilaterally, for the end of that year, a World Conference of the communist movement in order to expel China, he was prepared to face a split of major historical importance in its consequences. He was indeed prepared to abandon North Korea and North Vietnam to the Chinese camp in addition to Albania which had entirely espoused the Chinese cause (Zagoria, 1967: 42-43). He was confident though, that Cuba would have no other choice than rallying to the Soviet camp. The perspective of a revolutionary world communist system entirely separated from the USSR was unbearable to many Soviet leaders. That is why the World Conference to expel China never took place. Khrushchev was removed from office two months before its scheduled date. The way he had handled relations with other socialist states was one of the main reasons for Khrushchev's downfall.

His successors immediately gave the highest international priority to the repair of these relations through a series of empirical adjustments. If they were unsuccessful with China they had considerable success with North Vietnam by ceasing pressures on its leaders for a political settlement of the war in the South and by increasing their military procurements and overall support. Relations with North Korea were also dramatically improved by increasing economic and military assistance. With Cuba, a compromise was reached with Castro according to which the USSR agreed to support armed struggle in a limited number of Latin American countries. (Levesque, 1978: 101-111). To a varying extent these arrangements were made at the expense of Soviet relations with the US, and knowingly so. As a matter of fact, without returning to Stalin's dogmas, Khrushchev's successors reinterpreted peaceful coexistence in a much more restrictive manner, reemphasizing class struggle on a world scale and the Soviet commitment to proletarian internationalism. (Marantz, 1988: 48-58).

Now, let us turn to the present situation to examine similarities and differences between Khrushchev's and Gorbachev's policies and predicament. Again, we witness a major Soviet undertaking both at a theoretical and empirical level,

for reshaping East-West relations. The process is developing at a rapid pace and its limits can not yet be perceived. Maybe more than ever before, Soviet foreign policy is narrowly subordinated to the needs of internal policies oriented towards a deep, long and exacting economic and political transformation. Not only confrontation but even risks of tension with the US are systematically avoided. In order to slow down and eventually cut back the arms race to be able to divert the best material and human resources towards modernization of the economy, Gorbachev is prepared to make concessions that were unthinkable a few years ago. To be able to sign the INF Treaty with Reagan he has given up the former rigid concept of strategic parity, in accepting that the French and British nuclear forces should not be included in the strategic balance in Europe. Hence the Soviet adoption of the concept of "reasonable sufficiency". Western Europe is an area of particular Soviet attention where the intensification of good relations with West Germany is given high priority. This has encouraged further intra-German relations which have become highly prized by the East-German leaders. However, in at least four different circumstances Soviet officials have gone as far as saying that the USSR would be ready to consider the creation of a confederation of the two German states and the demolition of the Berlin wall in exchange for security guarantees from West-Germany. (Hassner, 1988). This of course has generated official irritation and protestations in East-Berlin, even though these signals never received confirmation at the highest levels in Moscow. For the time being, they are most probably no more than feelers to woo West-Germany. But at a later stage, if Gorbachev's programs are successful, the reference system and security concepts of the USSR would be sufficiently changed that this could become a credible hypothesis.

In his speech for the 70th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, Gorbachev declared that "it is not any more possible to conceive world development in the perspective of a struggle between two opposed social systems" (Pravda, 1978. 11. 5). The USSR is now trying to reduce its political and economic liabilities in the Third World. Consequently, its commitment to revolution abroad is lower than it has ever been before. Only a year ago, given its potential consequences, an unconditional Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan seemed unthinkable because it ran counter to too many firmly established parameters of Soviet foreign policy. The formula of "national reconciliation" that was used as a slogan before the announcement of the withdrawal from Afghanistan is also advocated by the USSR for Angola, Mozambique, Nicaragua and Cambodia, rather than the search for military victories against those forces that were considered class enemies. Given the constant increase of the Reagan Administration's aid to rebel forces in these countries over the last years,

current Soviet policy must be seen by quite a few orthodox Soviet leaders as a process of capitulation and liquidation of those Marxist-Leninist states that represented the conquests of socialism of the 1970s and the new fringe of the Soviet world socialist system. Such a perception is certainly shared to a considerable extent by Cuban and Vietnamese leaders. The virtual collapse of any revolutionary perspective in Gorbachev's world views and agenda, obviously means an important downgrading of the role and status of Cuba and Vietnam in the Soviet world socialist system. Having played a central role in the expansion of the system in the 70s they are now falling back on its periphery, alongside North Korea, with an increased sense of vulnerability.

Cuba's internal and foreign policies are entirely at odds with Gorbachev's agenda. In his brief address to the XXVIIth Soviet Party Congress in February 1986, Fidel Castro strongly insisted on the duty of the socialist countries to make sacrifices for the struggles of national liberation, notably in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Angola, Namibia, Afghanistan and Kampuchea. (McColm, 1986: 48-57). Again in his speech to the meeting of the communist parties in Moscow for the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, he stressed that if peace was not possible without disarmament "it would be unrealistic to think of peace without development". It is impossible he said, to accept "a world where dirty wars continue against sovereign states, as in Nicaragua, Angola, Mozambique and other countries" and added that "we who have gathered here cannot sit idly by". (Pravda, 1987. 11. 6). Over the past few years Cuban officials have complained that the USSR was not doing enough in its support to Nicaragua. After the invasion of Grenada, they feared that an eventual downfall of the Sandinista regime would designate Cuba as the next target of the Reagan Administration's pressure and attempts at destabilization.

Given the fact that the USSR is meeting the cost of the Cuban military contingent in Angola it obviously would like to see a Cuban withdrawal as soon as possible. Especially if one considers that given its geographical location, Afghanistan had a much greater political and potential strategic importance than Angola and that Gorbachev finally opted for a nearly unconditional withdrawal. However, Soviet pressures on Cuba to find a political settlement in Angola, even through negotiations between Luanda and UNITA, have been slight and discreet. This was enough though to prompt Cuban Vice-Premier Carlos Rafael Rodriguez to tell Professor Jorge Dominguez: "As we went to Angola on our terms, we will withdraw only on our terms."⁽¹⁾ In this respect, the recent

(1) Conversation between Carlos Rafael Rodriguez and Jorge Dominguez, Havana, April 1988. Interview with Jorge Dominguez, Montreal, July 28 1988.

agreement reached in July between Angola and South Africa, with Cuban participation can be considered as a diplomatic success by Cuba to the extent that it does not imply a recognition of UNITA and endorses the principle of the independence of Namibia.

In a context of greater Soviet concern for cutting costs and raising efficiency, current Cuban economic policies based on a revival of voluntarist methods, moral incentives and criticisms of "capitalist methods" for reforming socialist economies, obviously do not invite further increases of Soviet economic support, which has levelled off and even slightly decreased over the last year for more technical than political reasons. In these conditions, it is not surprising that an open polemic erupted last year between the Soviet journal *New Times* and Cuban Vice-Premier Carlos Rafael Rodriguez. Taking advantage of "glasnost" the journal had published an articles criticizing Cuban economic inefficiencies, misuse of Soviet aid and excessively high military expenditures. (*New Times*, 1987, No. 33). The Cubans judged the article authoritative enough to have it answered, not by a Cuban journalist, but by Vice-Premier Rodriguez who violently denounced the article as unfair and one-sided. He accused its author of thinking like "an American cubanologist". (*New Times*, 1987, No. 41)

Immediately after his visit to Moscow in November 1987, where he pleaded for greater Soviet support for Third World radical regimes under siege, Fidel Castro, not coincidentally, made a trip to Vietnam and North Korea, where both countries pledged to raise their aid to liberation movements. This trip was suggestive of previous more successful Cuban attempts in the mid 60s, to develop a special relationship or a militant "entente" between Cuba, North Vietnam and North Korea to press the USSR to take a more revolutionary stance.

However, it is very doubtful that such an "entente" could now be successful in influencing Soviet foreign policy, as it was to a significant degree in the mid 60s. If it could be successful in the mid 60s it is because China was then a tremendous challenge on the left of the USSR, questioning its revolutionary credentials. This is the most fundamental difference with the situation as it is today. The current reshaping of Soviet relations with the West is consequently much easier to accomplish than it was for Khrushchev, and Gorbachev can live more easily with recriminations from the small socialist countries than could Khrushchev or Brezhnev. As a matter of fact China has gone much farther than the USSR in market oriented reforms and in relations with the US and its Asian allies.⁽²⁾ Its commitment to revolution abroad is entirely non-

(2) It is noteworthy that it is only after China's spectacular rapprochement with the US, in 1971, that Brezhnev could embark on his own detente policy with the US which led to the SALT agreement of 1972 and the Helsinki Conference of 1975.

existent, that is to say, even lower than the Soviet's. That is one of the reason for which Soviet relations with North Korea could keep improving even in the context of Gorbachev's agenda. The virtual impossibility of creating a credible international grouping to question the legitimacy of Gorbachev's policies seriously limits the leverage of small socialist states. Also, if Gorbachev stays in power, prospects for revolutionary movements in the world appear very bleak.

The normalization of Soviet relations with China has been important component of Gorbachev's agenda. It is already far advanced and has troubled Soviet relations with Vietnam as much as, if not more than, Soviet policies towards revolution in the Third World.

Even if less important, Soviet relations with Outer Mongolia have also been affected. For instance, Gorbachev's famous Vladivostok speech setting the tone of his policies towards Asia and announcing a partial withdrawal of Soviet troops from Mongolia (one of the Chinese conditions for a full normalization of Sino-Soviet relations) was not fully published in the Mongolian press. (Young, 1988: 117-339). Giving other clear signs of disquiet, the Mongolian government insisted that the presence of Soviet troops "has always been and will continue to be a reliable guarantee of the MPR'S independence and sovereignty". (Jarret, 1988: 78-85). If interesting, these and other signs of dissatisfaction are not very important, given the fact that Mongolia never had room for manoeuvre in its relations with the USSR.

This is not the case with Vietnam however. Ever since the beginning of the Sino-Soviet rapprochement, a decisive Soviet pressure on Vietnam to obtain its withdrawal from Cambodia has been the most unrelenting Chinese demand on the USSR. Many times the Chinese leaders have indicated that it was the most important of the so-called three obstacles. Therefore the very process of Sino-Soviet rapprochement has been a constant source of deep anxiety for the Vietnamese leaders who considered that it could only be made at their expense. Gorbachev however has been very careful in trying not to antagonize them, because of the strategic value of the military bases granted to the USSR as a price for its support against China. When he publicly addressed for the first time the Chinese three obstacles, in his Vladivostok speech, Vietnam was the only one on which he offered no concession at all. (Pravda, 1987. 7. 29). This should have comforted the Vietnamese leaders. However the fact that Gorbachev took a sort of neutral stance in the conflict between China and Vietnam, inviting them to negotiate their differences, caused irritation in Hanoi where a Nhan Dan editorial commenting his speech reminded him that a solution of the conflict depended exclusively on China. (Horn, 1987: 729-747). Vietnamese apprehensions can only have grown since. With a diminishing emphasis on military aspects in Soviet foreign policy and a lesser reliance on

forward naval deployments that had been the trademark of Admiral Gorshkov, the Soviet bases in Vietnam may lose some of the crucial importance they were given under Brezhnev. Moreover, while Soviet officials used to refuse to discuss publicly Vietnam's military presence in Cambodia, saying it was not Soviet business, as Gorbachev did in Vladivostok, they now say that the USSR "is ready together with other interested countries to facilitate a solution" (Izvestiya, 1987. 10. 25). As a matter of fact it is known that Moscow has not only pressed Vietnam but also directed the Cambodian regime to find a political solution allowing for a Vietnamese withdrawal.

To be sure, the Vietnamese leaders seem to be now genuinely interested in finding a way to withdraw, and this is due to only to Soviet more or less discreet pressures but also to the catastrophic economic situation of their country. This has led them to embark on a path of economic reform and liberalization. To encourage this process, the USSR has recently agreed to raise the level of its economic aid, with the expectation, that reforms will make it more efficient. At the same time however, it has set more direct controls and verifications on the use of its aid, something that is certainly felt as humiliating by the Vietnamese side. As Gerald Segal noted, economic reforms may have similar effects to those they had in China and in the USSR, in leading Vietnam to turn inwards and seek compromise in order to reduce areas of external conflict. This is certainly what is hoped for in Moscow. If Vietnam seem interested in finding a way out of Cambodia, however, its terms for this are much higher than the Soviets'. In spite of the official façade of very good relations on both sides, tension shows more and more openly. When the Soviet press writes that the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan has set an example for Cambodia, Vietnamese officials invariable answer to Western observers that the Cambodian situation is entirely different, because of the genocide that must be prevented from happening again. In a recent conference in Australia, a public clash occurred for perhaps the first time, between a Soviet and a Vietnamese delegate, when the first insisted that Vietnam should withdraw from Cambodia. The USSR has not much at stake in Cambodia and a Vietnamese withdrawal would help to improve its relations not only with China, but also with the ASEAN countries where Gorbachev hopes for a breakthrough.

Given the acuteness of its conflict with China, Vietnam has not little room for manoeuvre in the communist world, with regard to its frustrations with Soviet foreign policy. An option that it has been exploring, and is still almost desperately trying to bring about, is an accommodation with the US and Japan. However, for years, the US and Japan have completely aligned with China in their policy towards Vietnam, leaving it to become more and more dependant

on the USSR, to a large extent against its will. This perhaps beginning to change now, with recent US diplomatic efforts to isolate the Red Khmers and preventing them from playing a major role in a political settlement in Cambodia. Needless to say, a significant improvement of its relations with the US would help Vietnam out of his predicament and could change the international game in Asia. The option on accomodation with the US is also open to Cuba but easier to exercise for Vietnam, given the new generation in power there and its internal policy. To use Kenneth Jowitt's terms (Jowitt, 1985) Cuba is not yet out of its consolidation phase and an important rapprochement with Washington would be seen by Castro as destroying his image as a revolutionary anti-imperialist hero. Reaching accomodation with the US would also be easier for Vietnam than it would be for North Korea which would have less to offer and more to lose in the process.

III. The East European Socialist States

History shows that political or economic reforms that accompany political successions in the USSR, tend to be destabilizing for the Eastern European socialist states. This, for the very simple reason that the political regimes of these countries, having been imposed from outside, have problems of legitimacy and have in most cases remained fragile. Therefore, much more easily than in the USSR, reforms there can get out of control and generate social and political crises with enormous consequences for both these countries and the USSR itself. In 1956, Khrushchev's destalinization led to ideological disarray and conflict in the communist leadership of Poland and Hungary which allowed for the eruption of insurrectional situations that led to the Soviet military intervention in Hungary. Again, the economic reform introduced in the USSR by Kosygin in 1965, soon after Khrushchev's downfall, served to legitimize the movement of the Czechoslovak economists which opened the way to the Prague Spring of 1968 that was ultimately suppressed by a Soviet led military intervention.

When Gorbachev arrived in power in 1985, many in the West and in Eastern Europe expected that his forceful dynamism would lead him to press for change in Eastern Europe, where Soviet leverage has generally remained more important than it is with the indigenous socialist states. First of all they expected him to encourage a generational change in the leadership of the area, since Honecker, Kadar, Jivkov and Husak were in their mid-seventies and Ceausescu was 69. He did nothing of the sort, showing that he understood a certain number of lessons from history. He could indeed remember that Soviet interference to impose leadership changes in Hungary had contributed to des-

tabilizing the situation. He knows also from history that a crisis threatening the existence of an East European regime and compelling a Soviet military intervention to save it, could be fatal to his political agenda, if not his career. Seven months after the suppression of the Hungarian insurrection, Khrushchev and his policies were held responsible and the Soviet Politburo demanded his resignation. It is only in extremis that he could save his job. The Prague Spring and its tragic fate contributed to kill Kosygin's economic reform. For Gorbachev, its not only his internal agenda that would be jeopardized in similar circumstances. The very top priorities of his foreign policy, relations with the West and arms control could receive a fatal blows.

Therefore he has moved extremely cautiously with regard to Eastern Europe. He has shown there a prudence that contrasts with the boldness of his policies in other areas. In a first period that goes to the beginning of 1987 Gorbachev seemed to have no other policy for Eastern Europe than favoring the political status quo. He endorsed Janos Kadar and his reformist policies in Hungary unreservedly, something that his predecessors had never done so clearly. However he carefully avoided saying that Hungary should be emulated by the other East European States. While under Brezhnev and Chernenko, Poland's General Jaruzelski had been under frequent Soviet pressure for failing to break the backbone of the Solidarnosc movement and "normalize" the Polish situation, he was given full support by Gorbachev. Some of the least reformist East European leaders, like Czechoslovakia's Husak and East Germany's Honecker were also praised by Gorbachev, who did not voice any reservation concerning their policies. (Kusin, 1986: 39-53). If during that period, Gorbachev's policy towards Eastern Europe could appear as differentiated, this was a reflection of the diversity of the area.

Since 1987, his handling of Eastern Europe has changed, but very slightly. He knew that the status quo was largely incompatible with many of his goals. For instance he wants to reduce the economic drain that Eastern Europe represents on the USSR. Given his top priority of modernizing the Soviet economy, he wants these countries to raise the quality of their industrial exports to the USSR, which is often extremely low. This requires raising the effectiveness of the majority of the East European economies, something which in current Soviet perspective can only be achieved through reform. Gorbachev has also made clear that he wants to improve the working of COMECON, increase economic integration among its members, notably through the establishment of direct links between the enterprises of different countries. Progress along these lines requires "harmonizing the economic policies" of COMECON members as it is widely recognized in COMECON documents. Therefore with the growing assertiveness of his internal policies in

1987, Gorbachev began, not really to press, but to encourage mildly, East European leaders to reform. To avoid destabilizing effects he expressed confidence that the current leaders would initiate economic reforms, being much less explicit about political reform.

One notable exception to this pattern has been Gorbachev's behavior during his visit to Rumania, in May 1987, where he was much more forceful. It must be said that Ceausescu had been the most outspoken East-European leader in criticizing and even questioning the orthodoxy of his policies. Given Ceausescu's iron grip on the Rumanian Party and society, there was little chance that Gorbachev's strong defence and advocacy of Soviet democratization could be destabilizing. He even went as far as criticizing nepotism and pleading for a fair treatment of national minorities. (*Pravda*, 1987. 5. 27). In doing so, he had of course no hope of influencing Ceausescu's policies. He wanted to differentiate himself in front of the Rumanian population and Party and to take stock for the future. At the same, he has been careful not to allow Soviet-Rumanian relations to deteriorate. Last May, chief of State A. Gromyko paid an official visit to Rumania that was widely covered in the Soviet. In all his speeches he mentioned only areas of agreement between the two countries, not even alluding to anything else. (*Izvestiya*, 1988. 5. 11).

The real tone of Gorbachev's approach to the least reformist East European countries had been set one month prior to his visit to Rumania, when he had visited Czechoslovakia in April 1987. There, he had expressed hope that other socialist countries would find something useful in the current Soviet experience. He had qualified this however, in stating that "no Party has the monopoly of truth and the experience of the different countries have all the same value." (*Kulesza*, 1987: 619-630).

Even if Gorbachev is extremely careful in his handling of Eastern Europe, the very fact of what he does in the USSR is in itself potentially destabilizing for these countries. It legitimizes and emboldens reformist elements who exist in every communist party and it raises expectations in the population. As soon as 1985 and 1986, the conservative leaders of Eastern Europe were thrown on the defensive. Honecker and Husak invoked the "national particularities" of their country to justify their course of action and avoid embarking on the Soviet path. The irony here is that, historically, "national particularities" had always been invoked by reformist East European leaders to move away from the Soviet model, which now becomes an East European peculiarity...

In early 1987, prior to Gorbachev's visit, an open debate erupted in Czechoslovakia, between communist leaders. Premier Lubomir Strougal insisted that time was ripe to introduce reforms in Czechoslovakia. Vasil Bilak a Politburo member who was among those who had called for the Soviet military

intervention against the Prague Spring, insisted on his side that this would only lead to a reedition of the drama of 1968. Finally, while graffiti were appearing at night on the walls of Prague, saying "We want Gorbachev in Prague", Husak had to intervene with a public call for Party unity. This of course, did not stop frictions in the leadership. At the end of 1987 Husak resigned the Party leadership and a patched up compromise was reached. He was replaced by Milos Jakes who is over 60 and who was identified as a conservative. He has embraced a program of economic reform, bearing affinities with the Soviet one while paying lip service to democratization. Jakes however lacks leadership credibility for presiding over his program and the Czechoslovak situation will remain unstable.

In East Germany, Honecker is now facing similar pressures from within Party and society. (Donavan, 1988). However, given the economic performance of his country, which is by far the best in Eastern Europe, his position appears stronger. In this respect he can continue to state, more or less diplomatically that his country has no lesson to receive from the USSR. In a recent article written for *pravda* on the occasion of the 43rd anniversary of allied victory against Hitler's Germany, he used terms similar to those of Gorbachev's Soviet opponents when he praised the merits of central planning and reminded his readers that if socialism was superior to capitalism it was because it could prevent unemployment and bankruptcy of firms. (*Pravda*, 1988. 5. 7). (As we know both of these features will be allowed to appear as a result of Gorbachev's reforms.) He also stated: "No one has a recipe that is good for all and such a recipe does not exist".

In an interesting apparent paradox, Bulgaria's Todor Jivkov begun to initiate reforms as early as 1986, without Soviet invitation. This accelerated in 1987 with a wholesale shake up of economic ministries and organizations. It was made with a rapidity that worried even sympathetic Soviet observers. At the same time, a measure of *glasnost* was introduced. Many in the West saw there another sign of a traditional Bulgarian subservience to the USSR. It would be however appropriate to add to this that Bulgaria is the only Eastern European country not to have experienced social crises or upheavals since the existence of the Communist regime. Therefore Jivkov could feel more secure in trying to follow Gorbachev's path.

In Hungary, where Kadar could rightly consider that his country was more advanced than the USSR both in terms of *perestroika* and *glasnost*, we face another apparent paradox. Even if Kadar was warmly endorsed by Gorbachev, he was ultimately thrown off balance by the Soviet adoption of Hungarian-like policies. Over the past few years Kadar's reformist policies had exhausted their capacities for coping with an increasingly difficult economic situation. A

faction of the leadership, emboldened by the movement in the USSR and the right feeling that Hungary was not anymore on the threshold of Soviet tolerance, called for more radical reforms than Kadar was prepared to accept. Reluctantly, he finally had to step down as Party chief, earlier this year and to leave the job to Karoly Grosz, a representative of that faction. Considering foreign Communist Parties better judges of the amount of changes their country can afford, Gorbachev did nothing to prevent that from happening. In doing so, he showed that he is now prepared to take some risks in Eastern Europe.

What is the extent and the nature of the changes that Gorbachev would ultimately be prepared to accept in Eastern Europe? This is the big unknown. He and closest associates have repudiated the notorious Brezhnev doctrine.⁽³⁾ This remains however to be tested. It is quite sure that a Soviet military intervention would not take place in circumstances comparable to those of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 when Dubcek and his Party still had a relatively good control of the situation. If however a Communist Party was on the verge of completely losing power, as in Hungary in 1956, the situation would be entirely different. Even if Gorbachev's political inclinations could be against intervention, the Soviet system is most probably not prepared to accept the end of Communist rule in an Eastern European country and he would have to go along.

The Soviet political scene is still in flux. Many features of the so called New Thinking (*novoe myshlenie*) in the USSR point to very fundamental reassessments concerning the international system, problems of security and the nature of socialism. If they prevail and become dominant, finlandization, the advisers of Solidarnosc prematurely contemplated for Poland in 1981, could become a possibility for Eastern European countries. This is a best case hypothesis for the future...

At the onset of Gorbachev's reign, Seweryn Bialer wrote that the existence of the Soviet Empire in Eastern Europe placed severe limits on the possibilities of reform in the USSR, precisely because of their potential consequences there. (Bialer, 1986: 255-256). This has proved to be wrong to a large extent. In spite of the risks, Gorbachev has surprised most Western analysts by the quantity, the rapidity and importance of the changes he has introduced in the

(3) See Gorbachev's speech for the 70th anniversary of the October Revolution, *Pravda*, November 3 1987.

See also the terms of the Soviet-Yugoslav joint declaration issued at the end of Gorbachev's visit to Yugoslavia, *Pravda*, March 19, 1988.

For Soviet debates concerning the Brezhnev doctrine, see: Dawisha, Karen, and Valdz, Jonathan, "Socialist Internationalism in Eastern Europe" *Problems of Communism*, March-April 1987, pp. 1-14.

political life and the foreign policy of the USSR. He might however have to pay the price of his boldness, in Eastern Europe.

IV. Conclusion: The World Socialist System as a Whole

If Khrushchev showed a general propensity for risk taking, so does Gorbachev even if he tries to limit them as far as Eastern Europe is concerned. When Khrushchev normalized relations with Yugoslavia, he introduced an element of heterogeneity in the socialist camp which helped to legitimize demands for national paths to socialism in Eastern Europe. Even if a large degree of heterogeneity is now an accepted fact of life in the world socialist system, Gorbachev also took a calculated risk of a similar nature in his handling of relations with China.

As we know the process of normalization of Sino-Soviet relations had started before Gorbachev's accession to power. However it was then essentially due to a Chinese unilateral deescalation of the conflict and disengagement from the East-West confrontation; not to Soviet concessions. In 1983 and 1984, Chinese leaders had tried to bypass the USSR and fully normalize relations with many East European countries. The Soviet leaders did not allow the East European leaders to answer Chinese overtures. At the same time the Soviets claimed that relations between socialist states had to be based on "anti-imperialist cooperation" and not simply on "peaceful coexistence" as the Chinese side claimed. For the Soviets, peaceful coexistence was a rule for governing relations between countries with different social systems not for relations with socialist countries. In other words they were not prepared to allow China to come back to the socialist community without having first reached an minimal understanding with the USSR on a few basic foreign policy orientations.

Gorbachev has taken an entirely different approach. He has allowed the East European leaders to travel to China, to meet with Deng Xiaoping and fully restore party to party relations with the Chinese Party, even if China still refuses a summit meeting and party to party relations with the USSR. In other words, he has allowed China to reintegrate the socialist community on its own terms and to play its own game in Eastern Europe. He is taking the risk of introducing more fluidity in the area. Of course such strong institutions as the Warsaw Pact and COMECON are instruments that can help limiting potential centrifugal consequences and Gorbachev's calculation is that Soviet acceptance of Chinese total independence will help further Sino-Soviet rapprochement in a context of growing internal convergencies between the two countries. It shows however that he is ready to accept and cope with a much greater degree of diversity than his predecessors were prepared to face. This has also

been confirmed during his visit to Yugoslavia in March 1988. For the first time a Soviet leader, including Khrushchev, so unreservedly recognized the legitimacy of Yugoslavia's complete independence in foreign policy. (*Pravda*, 1988. 3. 19).

If one still can speak of a world socialist system, it is necessary to distinguish three concentric layers within that world, as far as relationships with the USSR are concerned. The first layer is composed of the countries that belong to both the Warsaw Pact and COMECON. If diversity within that layer has kept increasing with the years it is there that Soviet capacity for exercising leadership remain the strongest because it can ultimately be based on coercion. The second layer is composed of countries that belong only to COMECON and not the Warsaw Pact. This is the case with Cuba and Vietnam. (Even if Mongolia is not a Warsaw Pact member, its close military integration to the USSR puts it in the first layer.). There the USSR has very considerable economic leverage but no possibility for coercing. The third layer is composed of socialist countries that belong to none of the international integrative institutions dominated by the USSR, like Yugoslavia, China and North Korea. With these countries Soviet leverage is more limited. Relations with the USSR are more than circumstantial. They remain based on a still deep sense of regime identity.⁽⁴⁾ China for instance, without recognizing any Soviet authority, acknowledges the existence of a communist world and the belonging of the USSR to that world. This sense of a very specific political identity is the smallest common denominator of relations between all the socialist countries. Small as it can appear it will probably continue, for years to come, to give a special character to their relations.

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(4) For an illuminating analysis of the depth and significance of that sense of Leninist identity, see Jowitt, Kenneth,

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