Eroding the Soviet "Culture of Secrecy"

By Sergo A. Mikoyan

"Censorship of foreign publications in the USSR was commonplace during centuries of monarchic and then Communist rule."

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The main purpose of this article is to examine the system that governed the flow of information to senior policymakers in the USSR. Fundamental cultural differences between the Soviet and Western worlds have impeded efforts by Westerners to fully understand this system. It is much easier for those who were born and educated in the Soviet Union, and have spent much of their lives there, to comprehend the main features that dominated the upward flow of information in that now-defunct nation.

Culture of Secrecy

The "culture of secrecy," a phrase used by former Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan in discussing US intelligence institutions, is actually what I would call a perfect characterization of the old Soviet Union's attitude toward information. As Dr. Vladimir Treml (a participant in the symposium described in the Editor's Note above) has correctly pointed out, some elements of this "system" were inherited from Tsarist Russia. In fact, censorship of foreign publications was commonplace during centuries of monarchic and then Communist rule.

The Bolshevik-led October Revolution of 1917 added ideological justifications for restricting the flow of foreign ideas and analysis into the USSR. The restrictions became especially severe during the 1930s, under Stalin's rule. Not by chance, these limitations coincided with tight restraints inside the USSR on the expression of ideas that the regime did not find agreeable. Limited freedom of cultural expression in art, sculpture, and architecture, and in science as well, came to an end when Stalin stopped disguising his quest for an absolute personal dictatorship, which he had tried to present as a working-class or Communist Party dictatorship.

The "culture of secrecy" provided advantages not only for Stalin personally but also for the Soviet regime as a whole. Although the USSR under Stalin was essentially a one-man dictatorship, the Communist Party Politburo and the broader (and therefore less useful as an instrument of power) Central Committee became Stalin-dominated institutions that helped him run the country and retain absolute power. By providing a degree of continuity in the aftermath of Stalin's death, these institutions helped account for the absence of immediate change in the Kremlin's repressive approach to domestic freedoms and to flows of information from abroad.

Even the de-Stalinization process launched in 1956 initially brought very little change in the status of those freedoms and flows. The explanation is simple: Post-Stalin leaders were not convinced of the strength and durability of their system in comparison with Western systems and institutions. Consequently, they were afraid to ease restraints on "anti-Soviet" ideology or any other deviations from officially proclaimed values.

The Kremlin authorities continued over the decades to create special mechanisms for preventing foreign or homegrown liberal ideas from permeating Soviet society. The Communist Party applied the "anti-Soviet" label more and more widely, resulting in such absurd notions as "anti-Soviet" genetics and cybernetics. Literature, art, sculpture, and even music were increasingly being evaluated in ideological terms—although no one seemed able to explain why, for instance, ideological significance should be attributed to jazz music,

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or why classical music created by major composers such as Shostakovich and Khachaturian, as well as the work of various painters and sculptors, faced official criticism for being "formalistic." Actually, there didn't seem to be anyone in the USSR or elsewhere who could explain what this term meant, except that it somehow connoted, with a negative tinge, the idea of innovation.

If we bear in mind that for many decades the Kremlin viewed fresh ideas in just about any field of endeavor as "dangerous" or "undesirable," we can easily imagine why it also considered uncontrolled flows of information from foreign countries to be impermissible. But the Soviet nation could not exist in complete isolation from the world. Soviet society faced a major self-contradiction: It provided large numbers of its citizens with a good education, all the way up to and through the university level. But its leaders feared any unchecked development of ideas—an unavoidable consequence of a strong, widely available education system.

- Eventually, this contradiction became an important factor in the Soviet system's collapse.

- China, by contrast, offered its people less education, making it much easier for the regime there

Secrecy: Going to Ridiculous Extremes

The Soviet regime developed the culture of secrecy to the point of absurdity, as illustrated by the following anecdote:

The library of the Mikoyan Design Bureau, which produced MIG fighter planes, received an American aviation magazine that all employees of the Bureau were permitted to read. One day an issue arrived carrying a story about the people who had designed the MIG aircraft. The article contained a small map that showed the area in Moscow where the Design Bureau was located. Each of the structures in this area, including all of the Bureau's buildings, were labeled, as was a photo of the Bureau's main entrance.

Design Bureau employees had previously been told that the Bureau's exact location was a military secret. Many of them guffawed when they saw that this "secret" information was readily available to the American public. Senior officials ordered that this issue of the magazine be moved immediately to the Bureau library's *spetskhran* (a secure room or section with restricted access, in which designated persons could read foreign material on issues deemed "sensitive" by Soviet authorities.)

to promote economic development without compromising on political power.

Nightmare for the KGB: The Advent of Photocopy Machines

In the early 1960s the Soviet ruling elite—in this case, the KGB's Fifth Directorate, responsible for ideology and counter-subversion, and the Agitprop Department, the party's main watchdog over "ideological" matters—imposed special procedures for introducing newly invented photocopying machines. The procedures were designed to prevent the use of photocopying machines for producing copies of materials viewed as undesirable by the authorities.

Decades earlier, a similar approach was used for typewriters. Proprietors of offices and stores had to provide local KGB branches with sheets of paper showing examples of the font of every typewriter they had. These sheets enabled the KGB, using technical procedures, to determine the origin of any typed text.

In one case that occurred at my present place of employment—the Institute of World Economy and International Relations—the KGB traced an "illegal" social-democratic-oriented journal advocating "socialism with a human face" to a typewriter belonging to the secretary of the Institute's director. Only a few dozen copies of the journal had been produced, but this proved to be enough to put five or six young people in jail for a year. The Institute's director fired his secretary, who had permitted her son-in-law to use her typewriter to produce the illegal copies.

> **"When our Institute's Director heard about some harmless instances of illegal printing or photocopying, he was enraged, expecting to be [blamed]... His orders not to let this [recur] only raised the size of the bribes paid for such illicit services."**

The only typewriter I knew of that could not be traced by the KGB was one I had in my home. It had been presented as a gift to my father, Soviet statesman Anastas Mikoyan, when he made an official trip to East Germany and visited a factory there that produced typewriters.

The development of high-speed photocopying machines was a nightmare for the KGB. The intelligence service was unable to block importation of the machines by state and other organizations—including institutes of the Academy of Sciences, one of which was my place of work. When I needed to make copies of articles for the magazine *Latin America*, of which I was editor-in-chief, I had to obtain signed permission from the director of the Institute of Latin America or his deputy. After a while I was allowed to sign these authorization documents for myself.

People working in the Latin American Studies Institute's printing section were not as vigilant as they were supposed to be. Someone bribed individuals in that section to reproduce essentially innocent material such as philosophical writings by Berdiayev, a well-known Russian writer at the beginning of the 20th century, and poetry by Vladimir Vysotsky, a contemporary guitar bard. There were no cases in our printing section of reproducing texts that were politically dangerous. Still, when our Institute's Director heard about some harmless instances of illegal printing or copying, he was enraged; he expected to be held responsible for all such cases. His strict orders not to let this occur again only raised the size of the bribes paid for such illicit services.

The absence of freedom to use photocopying machines without going through a process for obtaining formal permission was a hindrance to research fellows and to many others in the Soviet bureaucracy. A standard of "not allowed but possible" was often applied, however, enabling people to use a photocopy machine even though full compliance with the laws and rules would have blocked this practice. Strict discipline in this regard may have been maintained inside the KGB itself and in the Central Committee's offices, but in most other institutions the restrictions almost always could be circumvented.

The KGB periodically tested printing offices' compliance by having its operatives seek illegal access to such establishments without obtaining any pass or permission. In many of these instances, the

operatives were able to illicitly use printing machines of various types. Subsequently, the agents' bosses would visit the offices in question and reproach them for lack of vigilance.

Access to Foreign Publications

The question of access to foreign literature—books, journals, and other writings—was a complex one during the Communist era. First of all, an applicant had to be able to read one or more foreign languages. Then he or she was required to obtain a pass to a *spetskhran*, a secured, restricted-access library room or section that carried foreign literature connected with politics, ideology, or news of the day.

In contrast, journals in non-political fields were open to everybody. Anyone could go to a library and read specialized magazines—*Popular Mechanics* was one notable example—that had been published in the West. Such publications were available elsewhere as well. *Haute couture* journals, for example, would be lying on tables in shops where dresses and suits were custom-tailored.

Censorship: The Role of the *Glavlit*

The main watchdog within the party's *Agitprop* Department (later renamed the Ideological Department) for dealing with censorship of foreign literature was the Chief Agency for Protection of Military and State Secrets, generally known as the *Glavlit*, its Russian acronym. The *Glavlit* also handled censorship matters arising from domestic writings of just about any kind—even beer and vodka labels. *Glavlit* censorship personnel were present in every large Soviet publishing house or newspaper.

> **"Editors of journals and other publications had the legal right to appeal officially to *Agitprop* if they disagreed with *Glavlit* censorship decisions. But as far as I am aware, nobody ever actually dared to do this."**

In contrast, smaller literary enterprises, including magazine publishers, usually did not have a *Glavlit* representative working in-house. Instead, they had to provide their manuscripts to a censor of their own. If an editor did not agree with the censor's corrections, deletions, or other alterations, the enterprise could appeal to the *Glavlit* hierarchy. But it was risky to do that very often. If someone did so, the *Glavlit's* chief almost certainly would have informed the *Agitprop*. Editors of journals and other publications, moreover, had the legal right to appeal officially to *Agitprop* if they disagreed with *Glavlit* censorship decisions, but as far as I am aware, nobody ever actually dared to do this.

One man, however, was notorious for making appeals to an even higher level—specifically, to party boss and Premier Nikita Khrushchev. The appellant was Alexandr Tvardovsky, the editor-in-chief of *Novy Mir*, a respected literary magazine published by the Union of Writers. Tvardovsky contacted Khrushchev after being denied permission to publish Alexandr Solzhenitsin's now-famous book about life in the Gulag system, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. Khrushchev supported him and asked his fellow Politburo members for their opinions. Once they understood that Khrushchev supported publication of the book, his Politburo colleagues took the same position.

How Censorship Entities Really Worked

Pre-packaged lists seem to have been a central element in the *modus operandi* of the *Glavlit* and the *Spetskhrans*:

Glavlit: The censors in the *Glavlit* generally did not in fact read books, magazines, or newspapers very thoroughly—if they read them at all. Together with the *Agitprop* Department, the *Glavlit* simply maintained lists of foreign periodicals and book topics. The lists would determine whether a publication would be sent to a *spetskhran*.

Spetskhran: If a library housing a *spetskhran* was part of an academic institution, it had a list of scholars who were permitted to read the literature in that room. If a scholar was employed somewhere else, he had to bring a letter signed by his superior to the director of the institute to which the *spetskhran* belonged. The letter was supposed to specify exactly what topic the researcher planned to explore. But in reality, such rules

did not mean much. Librarians generally restricted few if any researchers. There were two reasons for this:

- The librarians were not qualified to argue about what a researcher really needed.
- They did not care.

The main preoccupation of most of the librarians was to be sure not to let any book or magazine be carried out of the room. But the director of the Institute and his deputies—usually three or four people—were empowered to order that a particular book or books be brought to their offices. They could also take books and magazines home, and/or use them together with other researchers from their own or some other institute. This meant that more people interested in a topic could look at and use the publication. They could also make citations from a book, thus enabling other scholars to learn of its existence.

The Suslov Factor

Mikhail Suslov, the Politburo member who served as the party's top watchdog over ideological matters, was a typical Stalinist. He managed to retain his position and his restrictive influence over information flows, both during and after the de-Stalinization campaign of 1956-1962. Khrushchev evidently thought Suslov would generally follow his (Khrushchev's) lead. He was mistaken; Suslov showed himself to be a tough and resourceful character. After Khrushchev's fall from power

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in 1964, Suslov gained almost total domination over *Agitprop*. The next party chief, Leonid Brezhnev, was too lazy and too submissive to others' opinions to make a serious effort to curb Suslov.

Temporary Reversal

Suslov suffered a political setback in the late 1960s when he prepared official documents rehabilitating Stalin. About a hundred personalities from the Soviet cultural elite learned of this development from knowledgeable consultants and Central Committee members who did not like the idea. Writers, actors, artists, musicians, journalists, and other representatives of the *intelligentsia*, traditionally influential in Russian society, signed a letter to Brezhnev and the Central Committee.

Brezhnev, who did not like sharp political movements in any direction, overruled Suslov. Despite this setback, Suslov retained his Politburo seat and remained influential into the 1970s as an advocate for ideological orthodoxy. He died in 1982.

Atmosphere of Intimidation

Under Suslov's overall direction, an editor-in-chief who argued with a *Glavlit* decision was likely to be fired in order to show others that the *Glavlit* was an instrument of the Party Secretariat and that it was unwise to argue with *Glavlit* decisions. I risked such a fate myself. When I was editor-in-chief of *Latin America* magazine, I was often able to get our censor overruled by talking directly with the *Glavlit's* Deputy Chief, a man named Zorin. He respected my family name and permitted me to do things that he clearly did not allow others to do. Specifically, he allowed me to call him, set up appointments, and discuss changes ordered by the censor that I did not want to make.

In one instance in the late 1970s, Zorin and I became deadlocked. He wanted to delete a paragraph in the transcript of a presentation by a writer from Belorus, Ales Adamovich, on comparative literary traditions of the Soviet Union and Latin America. I insisted on retaining the paragraph. Zorin replied, 'If you insist, I can report this to the Central Committee and ask for a decision." This meant that the Department of Ideology and Suslov himself would be informed. I was aware of unfriendly past relations between Suslov and my late father. I asked for a half-hour break in our discussion.

During the break I visited the office of my brother-in-law, Valery Kuznetsov, who was then an assistant to Pavel Romanov, the chief of the *Glavlit*. I told Kuznetsov the whole story. He advised me not to push Zorin into reporting this matter to the Central Committee. He told me that he knew of no case in which an editor won in such a standoff. He added that the powers-that-be would draw conclusions as to the

immaturity of an editor who did not understand that arguing with the *Glavlit* would be futile and self-destructive.

Self-Censorship

The episode with Zorin illustrates how self-censorship was encouraged and imposed. My personal position, stemming in part from family ties, was more favorable than that of most others. But I recognized that it would be better to find a compromise with Zorin than to compel him to appeal to the Central Committee. When I came back to his office, we found a phrase that we both regarded as most inadmissible. I agreed to eliminate the phrase, but the censors wanted to delete two full paragraphs. Zorin stated that if some other person were in my place, he (Zorin) would have eliminated Adamovich's presentation entirely.

Self-censorship was pervasive in the party and government bureaucracies. In addition, so much data was marked "secret" that high officials often were not distinguishing between classified and unclassified information. I once asked the senior assistant to then–Prime Minister Kosygin to be interviewed by *Latin America* magazine on Soviet economic cooperation with Latin America. The senior aide declined the proposal with regret, observing, "I deal with so many classified facts and figures, as well as open and well-known data, that I am afraid I won't be able to determine the difference. As a result I may give an interview with classified data."

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- Although foreign writers on Soviet matters for the most part were not susceptible to self-censorship, there were exceptions, mainly among writers who had been invited to the USSR and did not want to antagonize Soviet officials who had sponsored their visits and had long been among their valued contacts.

Limited Liberalization

The Soviet authorities' attitudes toward foreign publications were microcosms of the overall political situation inside the USSR. The 20th Soviet Communist Party Congress in 1956, and the process of de-Stalinization ultimately resulted in some liberalization of ideological control. But the changes mostly proved to be temporary and limited. By the early 1960s, Khrushchev was declaring that Stalin's repressive policies on creative activity among the *intelligentsia* had been correct.

More Chances to Travel...

One type of liberalization that did take root after the 20th Party Congress was growth in opportunities to travel to the West. And those who were lucky enough to take such trips had ample chances to read foreign newspapers and magazines—if they could read in the language of the country they were visiting. Theoretically, they could buy and bring home books in which they were interested, but in fact they often did not have enough hard currency to buy many books.

...but Restrictive Practices Did Not Disappear

Soviet tourists were permitted to buy and carry abroad only a minimal amount of hard currency. And they were aware that when they returned to the USSR, Customs officers would see what books they were carrying, and could temporarily confiscate books that seemed to require scrutiny and possible censorship.

Constraint on Foreign Books: The Customs Hurdle

Books of fiction did not present any problems at Soviet Customs. But Customs officers could seize non-fiction political and economic books to have their content checked. The tourists would have to come back to Customs several days later to retrieve their books. The authorities, in the meantime, would determine whether any of the seized books or their authors were on any lists of forbidden publications. And they would decide whether the content of a suspect book was "undesirable." I doubt that many tourists or others returning from abroad were inclined to take risks in their dealings with Soviet Customs.

In addition, travelers learned that strict censorship inside the USSR usually meant that comparable censorship was being applied to ideas and analysis of non-Soviet origin. But the value to the USSR of Western political and economic analysis was not totally disregarded. The regime's Publishing House of Foreign Literature (later renamed "*Progress*") continued to translate and publish limited quantities of copies of important books by Western academics. It also translated many unclassified CIA publications.

During most of the Soviet era, the number of people who could acquire such books tended to fluctuate from about 20 to as many as 500 persons. When the number was near the low end, it meant that *Progress*, after consulting with *Agitprop*, had determined that a particular book or books was/were too dangerous and that copies therefore would be provided only to party Politburo and Secretariat members. When the figure was close to the higher number (500), this signaled that the authorities considered the book to be useful for some purpose and had allowed copies to be distributed not only to the Politburo and Secretariat, but also to cabinet (Council of Ministers) members, selected bureaucrats, and *spetskhrans* at some research institutes.

Near-Addiction to Western Reporting and Analysis...

Under the last few Soviet party chiefs, the Kremlin authorities found themselves relying more and more on Western information and analysis in a variety of fields.

> **"A book by Herman Kahn about the stages of conflict impressed some Soviet leaders almost as much as it was said to have impressed President Kennedy."**

...On Agricultural Performance

I remember very well that documents of general interest included CIA prognoses for Soviet grain crops. The reason for this interest was that the Agency used satellite photos and therefore was able to publish its findings before Soviet authorities could even inform their leaders.

Wishful thinking and a desire to favorably impress Kremlin authorities frequently influenced expectations. Regional leaders often did not understand that overly optimistic, inflated grain crop or cattle reports would only bring higher demands from the Kremlin later on. In one such case, a regional Communist Party First Secretary committed suicide after pledging to produce an unrealistically large quantity of meat, and then, to make good on his promise, had carried out a mass slaughter of cattle for meat, leaving an entire *oblast* (province) without cattle for reproduction and/or milk.

- In light of such experiences, the Kremlin, the Council of Ministers, and the *Gosplan* (State Planning Committee) between the 1960s and the 1980s relied increasingly on CIA data for such important matters as the grain crop, rather than on reports from local Communist Party bosses.

...On Other Economic and Political Topics

In addition to keeping an eye out for Western books on the Soviet economy, as well as studies comparing Western economies with those of Warsaw Pact countries or with the USSR alone, publishers at *Progress* issued a monthly bulletin, *New Books Abroad*, which carried short reviews of Western books. The authors of the reviews were mostly people from outside the publishing house—post-graduates, doctoral candidates, and junior scholars—who wanted to earn some money and were able to read and understand such books and to write summaries of the contents. Occasionally *Progress* also organized groups of people for political research projects or for reviewing Western books on inter-related topics. It coordinated such undertakings with *Agitprop*.

...on Foreign Policy

The same points were generally true about books on Soviet foreign policy and international relations. In addition to those mentioned by Professor Treml, I recall a book by Herman Kahn about the stages of conflict. It impressed some Soviet leaders almost as strongly as it was said to have impressed President Kennedy. But the evidence is inconclusive as to whether this book influenced the USSR toward moderation whenever East-West confrontations were brewing.

...and on Nuclear Weapons

Western information about nuclear weapons and possible consequences of their use may have played a role in Soviet proposals for mutual East-West rejection of the use of such armaments. A

special film shot during nuclear testing in the south Siberian and Central Asian areas also impressed the Kremlin. I learned about this because my father, Anastas Mikoyan, told our family about the film and about the feelings of those present during the viewing. The Kremlin elite also saw and energetically discussed the US fiction film "Dr. Strangelove."

Attitudes Toward Western Media

Growing Kremlin interest in the foreign media, especially the American press, was evident. After World War II, every Politburo member was authorized to subscribe to two or three foreign periodicals. It was my understanding that American magazines were the favorites. My father, for instance, received *Life*, *National Geographic*, and *Popular Mechanics* (the last, I believe, because of my elder brothers' interest in all kinds of technical information).

I don't think Stalin himself often read translations of foreign publications. He preferred to get information from Soviet embassies and intelligence services. Still, he received briefings on foreign publications about people or problems in which he was particularly interested. On these occasions he often insisted on seeing translations of such articles or books.

Khrushchev showed much more interest than Stalin did in what was written or discussed abroad, especially in the United States. His leading source of information about contemporary Western thought was his son-in-law, Alexey Adjubey, who was the editor of *Komsomolskaya Pravda* in the late 1950s and subsequently held a similar post at *Izvestia*.

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TASS and *Pravda* Roles in Keeping Leaders Informed

TASS

During the Stalin and Khrushchev eras, each Central Committee member received daily reviews of the foreign press, compiled by the TASS news agency and typed and reproduced by "Rotaprint"— a pre-Xerox copying system. There were several types of TASS reports, which drew to varying degrees on Western press, books, and other foreign publications.

So-called "white TASS" compilations were non-secret, marked "For Administrative Use." Politburo members were expected to read these compilations every day. Because they were quite thick—sometimes exceeding 200 pages—the members' assistants would read them first and underline or mark with a red pencil the parts that deserved the member's attention. My father, a fast reader, would look through all the pages. "White TASS" also was widely read in the offices of newspapers and radio and television stations. Other TASS compilations, such as those containing the latest scientific and technological information, were distributed to persons and institutions on special lists.

TASS journalists abroad were required to prepare "Letters of TASS Correspondents" and send them to Moscow on a monthly basis. The correspondents were relatively free to choose what to include in these "letters." They often cited material from the host-country press and from books on politics and economics. The letters were not marked "secret" except when they were sensitive or special and therefore were going only to people high in the Soviet hierarchy.

Pravda

Pravda newspaper correspondents abroad had similar obligations, although their letters were not necessarily monthly. These journalists based their letters on publications that focused on foreign political parties, parliamentary elections, and various problems of foreign societies. They undoubtedly also drew on leading Western books and other publications.

Soviet Embassy Reporting

Politburo members also received daily coded cables from Soviet Embassies, usually signed by an ambassador. These reports included information based on local newspapers and other publications. The Foreign Affairs Ministry had them retyped in a way that made them easier to read, and Politburo members tended to read them carefully. The cables were marked "Absolute Secret" and were typed in quantities of not more than 17 copies.

Like Embassy reporting from just about anywhere, the cables included—in addition to information from local publications and media—Embassy officers' reports on talks with diplomats, officials, and others in the host country, as well as questions, requests, recommendations, and suggestions on assorted matters.

Influence of Western Ideas on Soviet Decisionmaking

To what extent did Western publications and analysis influence Soviet policymaking? This is not an easy question. It is tempting to say, as has Mr. Oleg Kalugin (a former senior KGB officer and a fellow participant in the Princeton symposium), that no such influence existed. During the last years of Khrushchev's rule and continuing through all of the Brezhnev era and perhaps beyond, Politburo members were not, for the most part, highly educated people. They did not know foreign languages and did not seem to appreciate scholars' works.

Politburo Members' Advisers and Consultants

Still, a number of factors existed that at least partially offset such shortcomings. Even uneducated and unintelligent leaders usually had well-educated assistants and consultants, most of whom, I believe, were as bright and professionally competent as the leading American professors in corresponding fields. In fact, they had an advantage over their American counterparts: they read both Western and Russian-language books and magazines. This enhanced their ability to do comparative analysis. Consultants and assistants to the Politburo members could in most cases serve as a channel to their superiors—the members of the ruling Politburo—for the most relevant and important material contained in Western publications.

"Khrushchev showed much more interest than Stalin did in what was being written or talked about overseas...But Khrushchev was highly unpredictable. His reactions to ideas often seemed excessive... Even high-ranking officials were wary about talking to him frankly."

Not all of the consultants and assistants were of such high caliber. For instance, the chief assistant to Konstantin Chernenko, the General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party for just over a year (1984-1985), was poorly educated. But Chernenko had another assistant who was much brighter than the chief aide. In any case, a majority of the Central Committee's consultants and at least some of the assistants serving the Politburo were highly professional.

Starting in the late 1950s, some academicians and directors of various institutes also served as consultants to the Politburo. They were authorized to subscribe to foreign publications and to receive them at home. Other subscribers could read their newspapers and magazines only in a *spetskhran*.

Advisers' and Consultants' Influence

A good question to address would be: Did the advisers and consultants use their opportunities to influence Politburo decisionmaking? My answer would be a qualified "yes"—they at least tried to do so. Success in any particular instance depended largely on the intelligence of the person briefed and on his ability to absorb new information and grasp unconventional points of view. A related challenge for each consultant was in developing an understanding as to which aspects of new ideas from abroad he could recommend to his boss without risking his own status and perhaps his career. In other words, a crucial question was: What were the limits on frankness in talking to a Politburo member? On this point, much depended on the member's personality.

For instance, from what I knew of Yuri Andropov, Andrei Gromyko, Anastas Mikoyan, Otto Kuusinen, and Dmitri Ustinov (during his first years in the Politburo), I concluded that they all were open to advice or briefings by their assistants or by Central Committee consultants. They might disagree with something, or only partly agree—or agree completely and already be thinking about how they could use the new idea when working with other Politburo members. In any case, they did not disparage or challenge the qualifications or the position of the adviser who gave a piece of advice

that was rejected. As a result, people who briefed them on Western analysis did not have to fear that being frank with these particular leaders could jeopardize the briefer's career.

Khrushchev, on the other hand, was often difficult to talk with. He was highly unpredictable. His reactions to ideas often seemed excessive. He could voice great enthusiasm when talking about a new idea or vision that had captured his attention. Or he could be indignantly negative, asking (rhetorically) how anyone could even think of such a thing. As a result, even high-ranking party officials were wary about talking to him frankly; they preferred to find out beforehand what he thought about the matter at hand.

Some assistants could get away with showing more audacity with Khrushchev than high-ranking officials could, because of the assistants' closer proximity to the boss and their more frequent contact with him. But even for family members, it was often risky to raise issues when Khrushchev was being stubbornly deaf to any argument. Alexey Adjubey has said that when discussing any controversial matter with his father-in-law, he had found that the best way to start the discussion was to say something like "You were absolutely right about (the subject). In addition, I'd like to say that..."

Some Politburo members were not tremendously intelligent, nor were they particularly passionate about "searching for the truth" or about innovative ideas. But a number of them did show some interest in receiving briefings on fresh or groundbreaking Western approaches to various problems. Three not-particularly-enlightened Politburo members—Alexey Kosygin (who served as Premier in the 1960s and 1970s), Kyrill Mazurov, and Dmitry Poliansky—recognized that consultants and specialists could give them meaningful advice and feedback even if it was often based on material from foreign publications. Even these three, however, had too much dogmatism embedded in their minds to fully embrace serious new analysis. They also seemed to have only limited understanding of the phenomenon of "group-think" as it applies to foreign affairs.

“Any qualified observer could see the influence of Western economics in the [1979] reform program...yet in the years that followed, very little changed in Soviet economic practices... The Politburo did not grasp the need for radical changes.”

1965: Economic Reforms Launched...

Kosygin received much credit and praise for a major economic reform program he introduced in 1965. In fact, however, that plan had originated with a Professor Lieberman from Kharkov in 1963, with assistance from academician Trapeznikov. In 1964, the reform program was proposed to Khrushchev, who evidently liked it and took some preliminary steps to implement it. After Khrushchev was ousted from office later that year, Brezhnev and Kosygin allowed the reform plan to proceed, mainly because the Soviet economy seemed to be entering a period of low growth and stagnation.

...But Kosygin Dilutes Them

Lieberman and Trapeznikov almost certainly used American data and analysis to assemble the reform program. But Kosygin, who had always overestimated the efficacy of administrative ways to develop the economy, made so many "corrections" in favor of administrative measures that the reform program was stymied. As Trapeznikov wrote in *Pravda*, if you take apart a watch mechanism, put aside some small parts, then add some, and reassemble the watch properly, it probably will not function. He concluded that this was exactly what had been done to the Kremlin's economic reform effort.

1979: Reformers Try Again...

In 1979, Moscow announced another economic reform program, detailed in a document titled *The Decision of the Soviet Government and the Central Committee* and published in all national Soviet newspapers. Any qualified observer could see the influence of Western-style economics in the new program. The unnamed authors clearly relied heavily on Western diagnoses of the economy; there were many detailed sections that could only have come from careful studies of Western economic theory and practice. On a more general level,

the program called for using the level of profit, rather than the fulfillment of numerical output targets, as the key criteria for judging economic performance

...But Falter

Yet in the months and years that followed, very little changed in Soviet economic practices. When I asked a knowledgeable individual from industrial circles why the decision for reform did not work, he replied:

> *All this is so uncommon, so difficult to realize—[that is,] that the commanding elite of industry must change almost everything in their approach and in demands on their personnel. And, how would we coordinate new approaches with obligatory production for the military sector? It is much simpler not to do anything. And the Party organs responsible for industry understand our position. Nobody is pushing the decision forward; it is much more comfortable for everybody, except the authors of the text, to pay lip service to the decision but in practice just to ignore it.*

In short, the fate of the 1965 and 1979 reform experiences showed that the Politburo had failed to grasp the necessity of radical changes in the Soviet economy in order to avoid or halt the stagnation of the Soviet economy predicted by some Western analysts.

Enter Gorbachev

It is indisputably true that Western analysis played an important role after Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in March 1985. Gorbachev, of course, was far more open to Western ideas than were any of his Communist predecessors. He understood the urgent need for change in the Soviet approach to economics—that is, the need for real economic reform. Although he received basic economic information from domestic entities such as *Gosplan*, the KGB, and other sources, he was also familiar with foreign appraisals of the Soviet economy. He began to talk in private with some able Soviet economists who had been underestimated by previous political leaders or had been written off as people with dubious theories.

Gorbachev arranged meetings and discussions among Soviet scholars on all sides of the economic reform question. These people were well acquainted with Western analysis, Western economic literature, Western evaluations of the Soviet economy, and material on "economic wonders" including Germany, Japan, and the so-called East Asian "tigers". They recognized the importance of cybernetic sciences, and they knew how far behind the USSR was in obtaining and using computers.

Gorbachev's first slogan—*uskorenive* ("speeding up")—reflected his understanding of how far the US and other Western countries had advanced in comparison with the USSR. He also paid considerable attention to the experiences of Scandinavian/Nordic countries. He sent delegations to Sweden, Norway, and Finland to study social democracy at work.

Politically, in fact, Gorbachev was more a social democrat than a Communist. He had an unshakable belief in the all-salvaging role of democracy. His super-belief in democracy as the key to solving all problems in countries undergoing major transitions was naive. This idea was imposed by Western nations' heavy accent on democracy as the almighty and foremost value.

Although Gorbachev thus came to be seen as an inspired fighter for a democratic society, he and his supporters at home and abroad ignored the fact that it was not possible for democracy to lift all sectors of society in the economic transition process. Perhaps Mrs. Thatcher did not tell him how skeptical Winston Churchill had been about democracy but didn't know of a better system. (According to Churchill, democracy is the worst form of government—except for all the others.)

A Mixed Picture

In conclusion, I want to stress that we should not overestimate the influence of Western analysis on Soviet policymaking. On the other hand, to reject altogether the existence and the rise of this influence would also be incorrect. Even in the Stalin years, channels existed that provided some information to the Soviet Communist Party leadership concerning Western evaluations of Soviet society.

The extent to which Kremlin leaders were influenced by such information varied in different periods. It was minimal, of course, in Stalin's time. Subsequently, greater openness gradually brought a larger, faster flow of information to the USSR as a whole and to its ruling elite in particular.

The Soviet *intelligentsia* and part of the ruling elite increasingly came under the influence of Western ideas and analysis. This trend accelerated after the end of what came to be known in Russia as the *zastoy* ("stagnation") era—which roughly coincided with, and lingered somewhat beyond, Brezhnev's tenure as party chief and President (1964-1982).

After Gorbachev became the top Soviet leader in 1985, Western ideas came to play a major role in Soviet society and governance. At senior levels in the Soviet regime, Western concepts became key factors in the planning of economic, other domestic, and foreign policies. But in the implementation phase, the ideas for the most part were not correctly interpreted and applied, and the economy suffered accordingly. After a decade of fitful Western-oriented reform, Russia, in the words of an American observer, had become not a reform success story but rather a gigantic land of natural resources exploited by an authoritarian elite, while much of the citizenry sank into poverty, disease, and despair.