Before attempting any analysis of the various phases and features of the evolution of Soviet grand strategy, it is important to alert the reader to the fundamental difference between it and the strategies of the traditional European nations (Britain, Germany, France) that have been discussed in the preceding chapters. The difference is that Soviet strategy was from the beginning influenced by a holistic and universalist ideology, a belief system that not only viewed politics, society, economics, and warfare itself through the lenses of the class struggle, but also forecast (and strove to realize) a transcendence of existing power relationships. Like a religious crusade or, perhaps, the French revolutionary movement of the early 1790s, there existed within Marxism the hope of converting the entire world into its own image; and when that transformation had taken place, the traditional instruments of power would also fade away.

This holistic belief-system brought with it both an advantage and a disadvantage. The advantage, as I will show below, is that Soviet strategic thinking was to see no great "break" between war and peace (each was a phase in the larger process of the class struggle), nor did it assume that the military dimensions of strategy could be divorced from its critically important nonmilitary dimensions. In theory at least, this gave Soviet grand strategy a continuity and a coherence all
too often missing in the West. The disadvantage was that this Marxian belief in the inevitability of the world proletarian revolution sometimes "de-ranged" the Soviet leadership's handling of problems and crises where the actual circumstances did not accord with the theory. Unable to reject their own ideology, the Soviets had to strive to reconcile it with the often unpalatable facts of the existing situation.

This dilemma is nowhere more clearly seen than in the first stages of the Russian Revolution itself. Because of their ideological assumptions, the early Bolsheviks did not think that they would have to worry about the pursuit of political goals through military power. As good Marxists, they emphasized the coming worldwide revolution following the victory of the proletariat in Russia. Workers around the world would rise up, overthrow their rulers, and construct socialism without regard to national boundaries. The international system, with its internecine wars and balance of power, were of little interest to Bolsheviks devoted to starting a chain of revolutionary events. Regular armies, themselves being instruments of class oppression, should be disbanded immediately and replaced with a people's militia.

Once in power, the Bolsheviks saw that the world was more complicated. The workers of the world had to rise up quickly or the Germans were going to put an end to Bolshevik rule. The Bolsheviks eventually opted—temporarily, in their minds—for traditional instruments of statecraft: they quickly built a conventional army to defend themselves and, through diplomacy at Brest-Litovsk, secured peace.

This early clash between ideological predilection and realpolitik presaged a central and continuing tension in Soviet policy. The tenets of Soviet grand strategy, or the development of a blueprint for coping with questions of war and peace, are thus unique among European great powers. Soviet leaders have had to grapple with the classical problems of statecraft with one eye riveted on their legitimizing myth—pursuit of the international victory of the proletariat.

Perhaps this legacy accounts, in part, for the absence of a Soviet Liddell Hart or Clausewitz and for their discomfort with the concept of grand strategy. The term itself is clearly alien from the Soviet point of view. Soviet strategic thinkers often disparage it and always refer to grand strategy as a Western concept. As Marshal of the Soviet Union and former Minister of Defense V. D. Sokolovskii noted, "In the West a broadened understanding of military strategy is represented as a synonym of politics. They have advanced the concept of 'great' or 'grand' strategy. . . . Some even extend this to all spheres of a state's foreign activity. In our country, there is military strategy and it has never exceeded the boundaries of that which is military in its broadest
form . . . the theory of comprehensive preparation of the country for war." 

On the other hand, Soviet leaders since Lenin have been impressed with Clausewitz and his complicated explication of the relationship between war and politics. Lenin's own copy of Clausewitz is annotated, and the section on the relationship of war and politics declared "pretty clever." We know, too, that the Soviets have invested enormous resources in military power and pursue an active foreign policy drawing upon it. The Soviet Union with its great land army, led by a classically European General Staff, possesses a thoroughly traditional military instrument. Thus, as with so many things, the absence of an exact Soviet equivalent does not mean the failure to appreciate a concept. Rather, the Soviets have their own terminology that conceals their fundamental preoccupation with the classical questions of grand strategy.

Modern Soviet thought is precise in its categorization of the levels of policy that constitute "grand strategy," taken here to mean the formulation of political goals and political-military objectives, and the development of military means to carry them out. Political doctrine, which assesses the character of the international system and the Soviets' role in it, is broad and shifts in it are rare. It does provide the context, however, for military doctrine, which in turn has two sides that equate roughly with political-military objectives and military means. The political side is preoccupied first and foremost with avoiding war. But because the Soviets link the preparation of war to its avoidance, this level of doctrine also seeks to answer the questions against whom and where to fight, what resources to spend, and when to go to war. The military-technical side of doctrine is concerned with how to prepare the armed forces for war and informs military strategy or "how" to fight.

This formalized system of concepts exposes an overriding preoccupation with classical questions of grand strategy. How can war be avoided? If it cannot, what peace is desired at the end of the war? What combination of self-reliance and alliances and coalitions can be used? What resources should be devoted to the construction of military power in peacetime? Agreeing with Clausewitz, the Soviets assign these concerns to politicians. Questions of how to fight—by what means—are the prerogative of the military profession.

The effort to bring political goals, political-military objectives, and military means into harmony has been, for the reasons given above, more difficult for the Soviet Union than for any other great power. The most vexing problem for Soviet leaders has been to align two some-
times conflicting political goals: protection of the Soviet state within the system of states, and pursuit of the final victory of socialism that promises to destroy the state system.³

It is fashionable to say that the first has always dominated the latter and that ideology has been nothing but post hoc justification for Soviet great power interests. This proposition is too simple and belies the tensions in Soviet grand strategy. Avoidance of war and protection of the Soviet state have most certainly been the overriding concerns. Yet great powers seek not only to avoid war but also to shape the international system without resort to war. Thus, reliance on the legitimating myth of the international proletarian order has served as a constraint on Soviet leaders in their efforts to act as a great power.

There is always a danger in any post hoc recreation of how a national strategic plan evolved, and particularly so in the Soviet case, where the usual standards of documentary evidence cannot be met. Yet we know enough to reconstruct the story of how Soviet leaders have understood the world and how they have developed a strategy to pursue their interests. The strategy has had a number of important “branch points,” each moving it closer to traditional notions of state interest. But it is critical to avoid, in retrospect, a sense that this was foreordained. Rather, at several points the Soviets faced key choices. Those choices, in turn, fundamentally shaped the options available to the Soviet leadership in dealing with the rest of the world.

The first key branch point may be subject to some debate. Clearly, Lenin’s insistence on seeking peace with Germany over the objections of those who wished to “wage a bare-handed revolutionary war” represents the first decision that the protection of the infant Soviet state was preeminent. The Soviets had pressing security concerns, not the least of which was the growing rebellion throughout the country and the establishment of “White” governments on many corners of the collapsing czarist empire. Faced with threats on all sides, the Soviets created the Red Army of Workers and Peasants in 1918, albeit as a “temporary” measure. They were simply trying to survive, but they laid the groundwork for the creation of an army that would look much like those of bourgeois powers around the world.⁴

Although the survival of the weak Soviet state was the primary reason for the creation of the army, there were in fact flirtations with the notion that it could be the armed vanguard of the proletarian revolution. Mikhail Tukhachevsky, who ironically would become the father of a very traditional military strategy, early on suggested that the Soviet Union form a “proletarian internationalists general staff” to plan the military component of the workers’ revolution.⁵ Whatever fascination the Soviets held for the export of revolution by the Red
Army was tempered greatly by the failure of the “liberation” of Warsaw in 1920. Adopting a militarily risky strategy, the Soviets found that they were unable to defeat the Polish army. Their hope for a spontaneous uprising of workers was also frustrated when the Polish workers rose up, not against their class oppressors, but against the Red Army. The Red Army was lucky to stabilize a defensive line on Russian territory, and although some continued to believe that armed might would contribute to the victory of socialism, the export of revolution at “bayonet point” lost much of its luster.\(^6\)

As the external and internal dangers to the regime passed, the fundamental question of the role of the young Soviet state surfaced again. Revolutionary tides were subsiding throughout Central Europe, and the Soviet Union found itself surrounded by hostile capitalist powers intent on isolating it from the international order, represented at the time by the League of Nations. The country, which had only begun to industrialize under the last Romanov rulers, was weakened and exhausted from the war. In these circumstances, the victory of socialism must have appeared pyrrhic at best. A great deal was now at stake because the debate about grand strategy took place in the context of a political struggle to succeed Lenin. The victory of Joseph Stalin’s “socialism in one country” over the doctrine of “permanent revolution” put an end to the notion that the defense of the Soviet revolution, at the expense of armed insurrection around the world, was a temporary compromise. As such, it provided the rationale for the defense of the Soviet state as a permanent and enduring peacetime goal.\(^7\)

Stalin believed that the revolutionary tides, which ebbed dramatically at the beginning of the twenties, were not likely to reappear soon. He argued that the Soviet Union should accept that circumstance and become as strong as possible in preparation for the next war. The only problem with the Brest-Litovsk strategy, Lenin’s idea for an immediate peace with Germany at all cost, had been that the Soviet Union was too weak and suffered needlessly in its period of retreat. Stalin declared in memorable language that the Soviet Union should not be “toothless and groveling before the West again.”\(^8\) The capitalists would at some time attack, and although world revolution eventually would come and provide the final victory of socialism, a strong Soviet Union should be the young state’s first consideration. Early Bolsheviks believed that what was good for proletariat internationalism was good for the Soviet Union; reversing these priorities, Stalin saw that proletariat internationalism could be made to serve the Soviet state.

Those who opposed Stalin, the proponents of permanent revolu-
tion led by Leon Trotsky, are sometimes glorified in the West. They would seem to have had few arguments in their favor, but had they won, the Soviet state would certainly have developed differently. Had the goal been, for instance, promotion of revolution abroad as necessary for the survival of the USSR, the Red Army might have been turned to that purpose. But they did not, and the Soviet Union's first goal became to secure its borders and prepare for the next war.  

It is often forgotten that there was a third line of argument pursued by the far rightists like M. P. Tomsky. They also rejected the notion of permanent revolution but believed that Soviet goals could not be pursued in isolation. In particular, they were early supporters of the import of foreign capital as a central goal of Soviet policy. Thus, although the proponents of permanent revolution disagreed with Stalin on the political goal, the far rightists disagreed with him on how and how fast to meet those goals.  

When Stalin's socialism in one country triumphed in 1928, the political goal was set and the leftists defeated. Within two years, the means by which to meet those goals were also determined. The defeat of the rightists meant that the Soviet Union would go it alone in the world. It was not that the Soviet Union rejected Western help; trade and credits played their part. But the objective of industrialization under Stalin was to build a Soviet economic system so that economic "warfare" could not be waged by the West. Stalin believed that dependence on capitalism was as dangerous as premature attempts to overthrow it. This meant that industrialization was achieved at very high cost, primarily at the expense of the lives and property of the peasantry. The brutal collectivization drive was the price that the Soviet Union paid for rapid and independent industrialization.  

Stalin believed that economic strength was the first priority and that the new industrial base could then support a massive drive to build up the armed might of the state. With the Red Army's mission now clearly defined as protection of the Soviet Union, military planning became a permanent fixture of Soviet life. It is not surprising, for instance, that the first Five Year Plan was created in 1927. The Soviet Union intended to avoid war as long as possible, but in the event of war, Stalin was determined that Soviet military power would be second to none.  

Interestingly, while committed to building up Soviet military strength, Stalin was resistant to any reversal of priorities that would sacrifice overall industrial power to the interests of the army. Mikhail Tukhachevsky, who throughout his service in the Soviet army was both admired and distrusted by Stalin, was continually rebuked for
putting the interests of the armed forces above those of the economy. Tukhachevsky was fond of noting, for instance, that diplomatic and economic plans ought to have the General Staff’s approval to make certain that the goals of military power were considered. When he approached Stalin with a particularly huge request for military resources in 1927, however, he was told to revise the estimates. “The current request,” Stalin is reported to have said, constituted “Red militarism.” In 1931, with the Japanese move into Manchuria, Stalin revised his own estimates upward and accelerated the development of the army.

Permanent institutions of military planning also came into being in this period of the early thirties. The Council for Labor and Defense, a body that had formerly been charged with overall direction of the civil war, was reorganized and subsequently renamed the Defense Commission. Political leaders like V. M. Molotov, Klimenti Voroshilov, and Stalin himself were key figures on this body, entrusted with the preparation of the country for war.

Similarly, the Red Army was reorganized and professionalized. There was at first a fierce ideological debate over whether the military forces of a socialist country should be organized into a peoples’ militia or a professional army, a debate which ended with the decision to adopt a more conventional professional model. The early 1930s was also a period of rapid change on the battlefield, since Soviet strategists, like military theoreticians worldwide, were haunted by the costly trench warfare of World War I. The new technologies, with their potential for rapid advance, were thought to provide answers, but the effective use of mechanized armor was not self-evident. Soviet military thinkers eventually worked out a strategy of “deep operations” and convinced the relevant political leaders, particularly Stalin, that mechanized forces, not the cavalry, would rule the modern battlefield.

As the second European war approached, the Soviet system of planning and Soviet concerns looked very traditional indeed. Political objectives included avoiding war by diplomatic means and preparing the country for war should that fail. The Soviet military, staffed by a professional cadre, was concerned with the character of modern warfare and the incorporation of new technologies. Then, abruptly, Stalin helped to destroy that which he had been determined to create. The chaos of the blood purges of the late 1930s engulfed the Soviet army as three of five marshals of the Soviet Union, and approximately 60 percent of the High Command, were liquidated. The officer corps became understandably cowed and many of its members whose lives
The Continental Powers

had been preserved abandoned any attempt to give outspoken military advice.\textsuperscript{14}

Stalin, increasingly isolated in his personal life and overimpressed with his own diplomatic skills, miscalculated badly the situation in Europe, and as a result pursued a faulty strategy. Given his own assumption—and, indeed, the basic Bolshevik premise—that all of the other great powers were antagonistic toward the Soviet Union, it was perfectly logical to “play off” the rival capitalist states and even to sign the Nazi-Soviet pact of August 1939. But given the hostility of most of the rest of the world, it was much less logical to purge the army leadership, devastate the intelligence-gathering networks, conduct a witch-hunt against all who had experience of foreign countries, and in general set back the armed forces of the Soviet state. Stalin may have achieved his political purpose of imposing ideological orthodoxy and absolute obedience to his authority, but at the cost of weakening the military instrument of Soviet grand strategy. Compounding this larger folly by his continued refusal to accept all the 1940–1941 reports that Hitler soon would attack the Soviet Union, he was in many ways lucky that the “system” survived the ferocious Nazi onslaught, albeit at appalling cost—and with the military professionals being given a belated recognition.\textsuperscript{15}

On the other hand, Stalin’s concern that even in peacetime all sectors of Soviet society and economy—industry, agriculture, the Party, the youth organizations, the press—should be prepared for a desperate fight against jealous, powerful foreign enemies did assist the overall grand strategy. In so many ways the Soviet Union’s victory in World War II was a victory for his concept of a whole country mobilized for war. The civilian population, once the attitude of the Nazis toward Slavs was made clear, contributed to the efforts of the Soviet forces at the front through both partisan warfare and their willingness to endure economic hardship. Massive industrial relocations, using to its fullest extent the Soviet Union’s advantage in land area, placed key industries beyond the reach of the Germans. The use of scorched-earth tactics further demonstrated the Soviets’ determination to do everything possible to ensure success. Stalin was even willing to forgo certain ideological considerations and appeal to both proletarian and peasant, Communist and nationalist to defend Mother Russia. When the Soviet Union finally emerged victorious from the ashes of World War II, it did so politically stronger than ever before.

Whether Stalin’s exploitation of the victory in World War II should be considered shrewd grand strategy or not is open to question. Obviously, he was constantly aware of the peace that he sought. The wartime period is one in which Stalin used every victory of the Red
Army to exact a political price, not from the enemy, but from his temporary allies. Already at the Tehran Conference, by which time the Soviet army had turned the tide on the battlefield, the outlines of Stalin's peace were becoming clear.

Paradoxically, the Soviet Union emerged from World War II simultaneously devastated and more powerful than at any other time in its history. With its new opportunities to negotiate as an equal, the period from the end of the war until 1948 might have brought a shift in Soviet grand strategy from one of isolation from and hostility toward the West to one of greater participation in the international system. Ultimately, it did not.

One of the greatest questions of history has always been whether the wartime alliance against Hitler was doomed to break down in conditions of peace. The assessments usually focus on the series of events that gradually led from collective management of the postwar world to the development of two, hostile camps. Debates on the causes of and blame for the Cold War abound, and there is a sense that if only one side or the other had understood better the fears and concerns of the adversary, the Cold War might have been avoided. Others argue that misperception and miscalculation were as much to blame for the breakdown of the alliance as real events.\textsuperscript{16}

But, looking at this issue from the perspective of Soviet grand strategy, the incompatibility of Soviet and Western views of the international system, and of the role of great powers in it, is thrown into sharp relief. Stalin believed that the capitalist powers, given a chance, would seek to destroy the Soviet Union. The “international system” was not the guardian of Soviet interests, it was a threat to them. For Stalin, any cooperation with the West had to be tactical; integration into the international system was suicidal, as this would bring about dependence upon those whose primary goal was the destruction of socialism. There is absolutely no evidence that the alliance experience in World War II had mitigated that view.

Thus, when the Soviets signed the United Nations Charter, which laid out principles of international conduct, and acceded to membership in the Security Council, they did not assume that security interests were to be served by those bodies. Rather, the Soviet Union began building an alternative to the international system dominated by an economically and militarily powerful United States. On the military front, Stalin prepared the Soviet army to fight a great land war, supported by a massive heavy industrial base. The economies of Eastern Europe were forcibly exploited to assist the reconstruction of the Soviet economy, thus extending “fortress Soviet Union” to Berlin.

In spite of the advent of nuclear weapons, Stalin thought that World
War III would be fought just as the previous war had. Nonetheless, he did apparently understand the potential of nuclear weapons, and ordered L. P. Beria, the head of the Commissariat for Internal Affairs, to mobilize the Soviet scientific community into a successful effort to discover the secret of the bomb. It took Stalin’s successors to recognize, however, that the nuclear revolution demanded a new strategy. Malenkov and later Khrushchev renounced the “inevitability of war” between the two social systems, and from the mid-1950s there began a new era in Soviet grand strategy; the last major shift until Gorbachev. It freed the Soviet Union to think about a world in which a decisive armed clash between capitalism and socialism might never come.\textsuperscript{17}

Even under this new doctrine, known as “peaceful coexistence,” the Soviet Union continued to see the international system—dominated by Western capitalism—as fundamentally hostile. Yet there were also new opportunities, for example, to forge alliances with an emerging third world. Soviet strategic thought therefore turned increasingly away from concepts of direct confrontation with the West and emphasized more and more the exploitation of the new nationalism in the developing world. It is often noted that peaceful coexistence was a retreat from the active defeat of capitalism. But this concept had another side; capitalism could also no longer hope to overthrow socialism by military or other “counterrevolutionary” means. Thus, peaceful coexistence, while forgoing war as an instrument of choice, still had at its core a struggle to the finish between two inherently hostile systems.

Khrushchev’s third world strategy was attractive for another reason: it allowed the Soviets to extend their power as cheaply as possible, picking up crumbs of support where Western policies had failed. The primary example of this policy was in Egypt. Here, after the United States angered Nasser with the refusal to build the Aswan Dam, the Soviet Union picked up that task and, using Czechoslovakia as a surrogate, began to sell arms to Egypt. A few years later, the first military tutors arrived from the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Poland.\textsuperscript{18} Slowly, the Soviet Union gained a huge foothold in the Middle East, eventually breaking diplomatic relations with Israel and casting its lot with the Arab world. But there is little doubt that the Soviets were, in the first instance, responding to an opportunity, rather than creating their own.

The policy in Africa and Southeast Asia seems to have been little better formulated. African socialism was in its heyday during Khrushchev’s reign, in response to the breakup of Western colonial rule. During these years, the Soviet Union enjoyed a considerable reservoir
of goodwill as an “alternative” to the West. Again, the Soviets tried to exploit these opportunities cheaply, through military aid and high-visibility economic assistance programs that were often disastrous for the indigenous economies. Little of this accorded with classical Marxist assumptions, but Khrushchev did try his hand at a tortured ideological rationale for supporting these third world revolutions, most of which were headed by personalistic dictators. They were said to be either “socialist leaning” or “on the road to socialism” or “nationalist in character,” suggesting that although they might never be real socialist states, they were at least anti-Western.  

This policy grew in importance for Khrushchev as the ideological challenge from China intensified during the early 1960s. Determined to show that the Soviet Union was the real leader of the world revolution, Khrushchev supported a variety of questionable clients, many of whom ended up out of power altogether. With the possible exception of Egypt, however, the Soviets seemed to have no long-term plan for stabilizing Soviet influence in these countries. More important, when these clients could not keep themselves in power, as was the case in Khrumah’s Ghana, the Soviet Union lacked the military power to do anything about it. That fact would be the key difference between these early attempts to exploit “peaceful coexistence” and the third world policy of Leonid Brezhnev.

But the Soviet Union’s military weakness in the third world was not Khrushchev’s primary problem. The Soviet Union was hardly in a position to secure itself in the mid-1950s. By 1957, when Khrushchev had stabilized his internal political position, the Soviet Union’s most urgent task was obtaining a viable nuclear deterrent. Stalin had bequeathed the atomic bomb to his successors, and in 1948 the Soviets managed to explode an atomic device some five years ahead of schedule (according to Western estimates) by mobilizing the scientific talent of the country and giving it all resources necessary. The development of the A-bomb, placed under Beria’s supervision, was, interestingly, removed from the purview of the professional military. Then, six years after their first atomic bomb, the Soviets exploded a thermonuclear device, but throughout the 1950s they were in the untenable position of complete vulnerability to an American attack. Moreover, American doctrine recognized this condition with a strategy of “massive retaliation” that threatened the Soviet Union with extinction should Soviet military power be used.

Khrushchev, exaggerating Soviet nuclear might on the heels of the success of Sputnik and launching the Soviet Union headlong into several European crises, hardly behaved like the leader of a vulnera-
ble power. Underneath, however, the Soviets were in a furious race to acquire the means to deliver nuclear weapons and hold the United States at risk. The Soviets needed to develop a means of delivery fast and they used an old strategy to do this—mobilizing the resources of the country for a quick, in this case asymmetrical, response to American nuclear might. The Soviets decided that their geographic and technological situation dictated the all-out pursuit of the missile as the means of delivery. They severely curtailed their strategic aviation program after 1959 and, similarly, cut back on the development of both surface ships and submarines. Increasingly, it was the intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) program that received the lion's share of resources. This is an instructive episode in understanding Soviet strategic planning. In a centrally directed system, the one real advantage is the ability to mobilize resources and talent to achieve a well-defined goal. The Soviets did precisely this, with the goal of acquiring the most rapidly available means of nuclear delivery, wiping away in about ten years their vulnerability to a preemptive American attack.

The system worked well in giving the Soviet Union the means of delivery that it needed. There were, however, extraordinary strains between the professional military and Khrushchev over the link between the sociopolitical side of doctrine and its military-technical side. From 1954 forward, the Soviet military engaged in a furious debate about the character of war in the nuclear age. There were those who argued that nuclear weapons would not be decisive and thought of ICBMs as ever-larger artillery pieces with longer range and greater yields. Others argued that nuclear war would be unlike any previous armed conflict, obviating the need for ground forces and reducing warfare to one huge exchange at the outset of the war that would be the decisive clash between the two great social systems. Obviously, the implications of the outcome of this debate were enormous. Were one to accept the latter tenets, large cuts in the size of the conventional defense forces could be tolerated and the concerns about command and control and/or war plans would be anachronistic.

Khrushchev interjected himself into the midst of this furious debate, cutting off, prematurely from the point of view of the General Staff, the military's consideration of the nuclear battlefield. Khrushchev fancied himself as something of a military genius, or rather he insisted that nuclear weapons made military genius unnecessary. Unilaterally, he declared missiles to be the decisive element of military power, recommended massive cuts in the size of the armed forces, and abolished the Ground Forces Command. He clearly had his supporters in the military, men like General A. I. Gastilovich, who
believed that any war would begin with nuclear strikes and be a very short one indeed. These views, known as "one-variant war," envisioned one massive nuclear blow against enemy territory at the beginning of the war which would decide the outcome.  

This interference from the very top also figured heavily in the organizational forms adopted by the Soviet Union to accommodate nuclear weapons. According to the former chief of the Strategic Rocket Forces, V. F. Tolubko, several organizational forms, including a special branch of the air forces (not unlike the U.S. Strategic Air Command solution) and the division of nuclear weapons among the existing services, were considered. But Khrushchev clearly preferred creating a separate service, and it was this option that was chosen. 

These decisions then drove other major ones. Khrushchev ordered a cut of two million men from the armed forces, a corresponding cut in the defense budget, and the reduction of all major staffs by one-quarter. Because the chief of the General Staff, Marshal M. V. Zakharov, disagreed with him, Khrushchev fired him. At the same time, Khrushchev was given to quick solutions to exploit the diplomatic potential of nuclear weapons. The most infamous and, ultimately for Khrushchev, the most disastrous of these was the decision to place nuclear weapons on Cuban soil to give the Soviet Union a "quick-fix" deterrent. 

On the heels of that debacle, criticism of the general secretary, which had been only thinly veiled in the professional military, started to surface. Two years later, when Khrushchev was ousted for having supported a variety of "hare-brained schemes," that criticism was used by the Soviet military to make an argument for a more systematic means of strategic planning. At the center was the General Staff, determined to return the Soviet Union to a system more like the one that had produced the mechanization of forces in the early 1930s, before Stalin's purge decimated the officer corps. 

By 1965, then, the conditions were propitious for the General Staff's bid to "rationalize" military planning in the Soviet Union. Though we do not have access to the high-level decisions that led to the extraordinary Soviet military buildup between the fall of Khrushchev and, roughly, 1976, it is possible to reconstruct a kind of "strategic plan" or at least "strategic philosophy" that supported it. Post hoc creation is always dangerous, but for purposes of illustration, let us attempt to reconstruct what the Soviet political leaders tried to do in those post-Khrushchev years. 

We have some evidence that the catalyst for the buildup was the Cuban missile crisis, an embarrassment of some depth for the Soviet
Union, poised on the threshold of superpower status. There is, of course, the famous statement by Soviet negotiator V. V. Kuznetsov that the West would never be able to put the Soviet Union in that position again. The other evidence is more circumstantial. The decisions taken after the removal of Khrushchev would suggest that his successors understood that the fallacy of “nuclear diplomacy,” especially based on meager capability, was its lack of credibility. Khrushchev had gone to all measures of absurdity to convince the West that the Soviet Union was stronger than it was, at one time actually changing the markings on bombers during the May Day parade to give the appearance of a huge bomber fleet when in fact there were only a few aircraft. Satellite imagery would soon render this practice unworkable anyway. But it was less this kind of tomfoolery and more Khrushchev’s willingness to take the Soviet Union to the brink of war in this condition of inferiority that worried the Soviet leadership, both political and military.

Brezhnev, the direct beneficiary of Khrushchev’s fall, would have none of his dangerous strategy of high-risk foreign policy and meager military power. In many ways, Brezhnev was the most Clausewitzian of Soviet leaders. For him, avoidance of war and preparation for it were inextricably linked. His approach to the international system was to try to reshape it where war was not likely, for instance in the third world, and to engage in cooperation with the powerful states of the system when and where it served Soviet interests.

The twin themes of avoiding war while extending power cautiously were captured in the Soviet version of detente. The Soviets believed that détente was not a Western policy choice but an “objective condition” in which the West recognized that the correlation of forces, a kind of measurement of how history is progressing, was turning in the Soviet Union’s favor. It followed that the stronger the Soviet Union was, the more cooperative other states would be. This was an interesting change from Stalin, who had viewed the international system with dread and tried to create a fortress, first in the Soviet Union and then in Eastern Europe, and from Khrushchev, who sought to develop an active foreign policy and to shield the Soviet Union by blustery and largely empty nuclear threats. Brezhnev understood that the protection of the homeland and the projection of power were necessarily linked.

Brezhnev believed that proper preparation of the country for war, a prerequisite for the avoidance of war, should give the Soviet Union a range of military forces, both nuclear and conventional. Those forces could, in turn, be used to give the Soviet Union equal status with the
United States, to exploit weakening capitalism, and to give the Soviet Union a broad role in the world that it once, because of its dire vulnerability, pathologically feared.

The philosophy underlying the defense buildup is perhaps best understood as having two dimensions. On the first dimension, preparing the country for wary, Brezhnev once declared, “Let no one, for his part, try to talk to us in terms of ultimatums and strength. . . . We have everything necessary—a genuine peace policy, military might and the unity of Soviet people—to ensure the inviolability of our borders against any encroachments, and to defend the gains of socialism.” In short, under Brezhnev the Soviet Union would achieve Stalin’s dream of territorial invulnerability. There was also, however, a diplomatic dimension, since Brezhnev’s view of detente with the West contained an active foreign policy. In his view, Soviet military power was now so great that the West had to accept the Soviet Union as an equal. Because of that, it was entitled to a role in all parts of the world.

This then was grand strategy as understood by the Soviet leadership under Brezhnev. The Soviet Union was willing to devote extraordinary resources to fulfilling its tenets. “Military influence” is often an explanation given for huge defense budgets. But in the Soviet Union, where just a few years before the military institution had been powerless to stop Khrushchev’s reckless slashing of their resources, it is hard to posit institutional power as the reason for Soviet defense spending. The alternative explanation is that the political leadership saw military power as the most important objective of the state and undertook to build those forces.

The “golden age” of Soviet strategic thought, with its twin aims of securing the homeland and extending power abroad, did not last long. The Soviet Union did achieve recognition as a superpower and found and supported clients from the Horn of Africa to Central America. On the other hand, events such as the Camp David Accords called into question the bold statement that the Soviet Union would always have to be consulted in all important diplomatic efforts. But, on balance, had Brezhnev’s reign ended in 1979, when a victorious outcome of the invasion of Afghanistan seemed foreordained, his foreign policy would most likely have been judged a spectacular success.

By the time of his death in 1982, though, Soviet grand strategy had run aground. The Soviet Union faced challenges on all fronts. More than one hundred thousand Soviet soldiers were mired in a hopeless war in Afghanistan. That war and the perception of the unchecked growth of Soviet influence helped to bring Ronald Reagan to power. In
Reagan, the Soviets confronted a leader dedicated to an enormous buildup of American military force and willing to reassert American power.

The Soviets, on the other hand, possessed an economy in crisis, stagnant and structured for the demands of the 1930s, when production of steel was the measure of economic might. Moreover, the Soviets found that the revolutionary movements that they had helped to bring to power had simply become weak, anti-Western states that needed economic assistance which the Soviets could not afford to give. There was, in some sense, a socialist alternative to the international system led by the West, but it was populated by states whose economies were worse off than that of the Soviet Union itself. The drain on Soviet economic resources and the political costs were mounting. Brezhnev had been wrong: an increasingly strong Soviet Union, determined to extend its power at the expense of the West, could not simultaneously count on the cooperation of the United States and its allies. It was possible to be too powerful militarily and for that very condition to weaken one's strategical and political objectives.

Thus, when Mikhail Gorbachev took power in March 1985, he confronted a failing foreign policy just as surely as he faced a failed economy. The two were also linked because it was clear to Soviet reformers that the economy would never recover in isolation from the trade, credits, and technological know-how that the international system could provide. Yet a Soviet foreign policy that so clearly challenged the interests of economic giants like Japan, the United States, and China only deepened that isolation. Gorbachev, in his first major address to the Party Congress in February 1986, called for "new thinking" in foreign policy to parallel perestroika at home. Although the tenets of the policy were slow to take shape and seemed at the time hollow rhetoric, in later speeches he talked of "mutual security" replacing unilateral means; of interdependence, not isolation; and of humankind, not class interests. As the policy has been played out, it can be argued that the "new thinking" is, in fact, an important shift in Soviet thinking about the international system.

The core belief in the protection of the Soviet Union as the key has not changed since the days of Stalin. But, under Gorbachev, a sense that security need not be bought by military power alone has begun to emerge. Gorbachev's situation is fundamentally different than that of his predecessors, and for that he can thank Brezhnev. It is really true that the Soviet Union is so strong, militarily, that exploitation, blackmail, or direct attack by any hostile power seems remote.
On the other hand, the paradoxes of the military buildup, the paradoxes lost on Brezhnev, inform the "new thinking." First, the economic costs of the buildup are clear and are increasingly coming under fire. Much has been written in the West about the economic logic of the new thinking. But it is vital not to lose sight of the political logic of the new thinking, and it is in understanding that logic that the key to the important departure from the past can be found. The primacy of politics has always been a phrase in Soviet lexicon, but according to Soviet critics of Brezhnev, the phrase was never fully understood.

Numerous examples are now cited: the failure to see that the decision to deploy the SS-20 intermediate-range nuclear missile would provoke NATO's counterdeployment; the inability to see that military power was unlikely to bring political victory in Afghanistan; the mistaken notion in the 1970s that there would be no backlash to the buildup of Soviet military power.

The Soviets are searching to understand how politics and military power became divorced. Some point to the now discredited Brezhnev as one who revered military power. Pictures of "Marshal of the Soviet Union" Brezhnev, bedecked in military medals that he did not earn, are now sources of ridicule. Others point to the decision-making system. They argue that foreign policy was made by a small clique with a militarized view of the world. This view was supposedly reinforced by a system that valued narrowly military advice in isolation from political common sense.

But increasingly the debate has revealed interest in more fundamental and fascinating questions. For the first time, the Soviet Union seems ready to link its fate permanently to that of the international system that it has continually denounced as exploitative. One could argue that, in the military sphere, the advent of nuclear weapons makes such linkages a fact of life, not a policy choice. "Mutual security" is a phrase that resonates, but the Soviets are still determined to build the very best military forces that they can, within budgetary limitations. Soviet calls for complete disarmament belie the tough negotiating positions that seek to protect Soviet advantages while diminishing the threat from the West. Yet offers to unilaterally reduce their military forces seem to suggest tacit acceptance of what the West has said all along: Soviet military power is in excess of what is needed to legitimately defend the Soviet Union.

It is possible to argue that mutual security is nothing more than another tactical retreat from the ultimate goal of military superiority. The Soviet economic and technological base is too weak at present to
sustain another prolonged military buildup. There is plenty of evidence to support this position. Elements of the Soviet military, long before Gorbachev, were vocal about the need to restructure the technological and economic base in order to meet the demands of the battlefield of the twenty-first century.\textsuperscript{33}

On the other hand, this may be a very long tactical retreat in any case. The Soviet economy will not be reformed quickly, and the accumulating evidence is that the goal now is to build a stronger civilian base for the economy. That base can in turn serve military goals, but the priority that the military has had over skilled labor and scarce resources is being curtailed.\textsuperscript{34}

That realization is made more interesting by the emphasis in the Soviet debate on the growth of interdependence among states. The Soviets are beginning to ask whether their own fear of, and isolation from, the international system is responsible in large part for the tensions that the Soviet Union faces with the rest of the world. They may be ready to admit that the belief in the international system's desire to destroy socialism took on the character of self-fulfilling prophecy. The "go it alone" strategy, which always saw cooperation with the great powers as tactical, was most certainly costly. But some Soviets now argue that, whatever its costs in the past, it is simply suicidal in the modern era.

If the fact of interdependence is carried to its logical conclusion, the Soviet Union would have no choice but to abandon economic isolation. The Soviets have made known their desire to join the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and their future interest in the International Monetary Fund, institutions that they once called tools of capitalist exploitation.\textsuperscript{35} Moscow must know that the structure of its economy is far from compatible with these international institutions. But the desire to join them speaks volumes if one compares this to the immediate postwar period, when fear of Western exploitation through economic assistance led the Soviets to reject the Marshall Plan. The exchange of economic information and the role that the IMF would play in the Soviet domestic economy are far greater than the Marshall Plan demanded.

Finally, there is the matter of the primacy of humankind interests over class interest. At the core of the Soviet isolation from the international system has been the belief that the Soviet Union is different from the capitalist states that dominate that system. Although ideology has not governed Soviet international behavior, it has provided a framework, a way of viewing the world. Thus, when the Soviet Union sought friends, it looked to those states that were disaffected
with the international system. The Soviet Union proclaimed itself to be in favor of the disenfranchised nations and peoples of the world and, when it could do so without fear of war, acted on their behalf.

This fundamental concept survived Lenin, Stalin, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev. Cooperation with powerful states of the international system was never ruled out. In fact, it was pursued when it served Soviet interests and abandoned when it did not. But if the final victory of the proletariat often became a distant echo, it was at least audible. Slowly, most notably in the speeches of Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, the defense of class interests and the victory of the proletariat has disappeared. Replacing it are concepts of national interest that reflect no tension at all between the interests of the proletariat and those of the extant international order. Perhaps it was this that led Yegor Ligachev to say that all of the talk about "humankind interest" was "confusing our friends."36 In fact, the Soviets may finally be on the verge of resolving the confusion in their policies toward the outside world that they inherited when the worldwide victory of socialism did not obtain in 1917. Indeed, its more radical internal reforms (abandoning the Soviet Communist party's monopoly of political power, encouraging moves toward a "market" economy) suggest that the time may soon come when even that most basic assumption of the Marxist-Leninist philosophy—that the "socialist" Soviet Union was locked into an unending battle with the "capitalist" outside world—might also be cast aside. In that case, it would become a "normal" great power (unless it disintegrates internally), with a "normal" sort of grand strategy.

But the resolution of the "dual identity" of Soviet grand strategy—if that is what it is—is not cost-free. The Soviet Union's great influence in the world has been based on opposition to the interests of the powerful and support of the weak. Military power gave the Soviet Union a special function to play in the grand drama of decolonization and brought a few new socialist states into existence. Gorbachev has yet to articulate an organizing myth for Soviet foreign policy to replace the victory of the proletariat.

If the Soviet Union is to become, instead, a "normal" state, seeking to wield its influence among the powerful, it will need to find new instruments, because those states will not be easily intimidated. In this regard, the emphasis on political means may take on a life of its own and the role of military power may never be quite the same. This is not to say that military power will have no part to play; it is to say that the primacy that it has had in support of the Soviet Union’s goals will have to change.
The greatest lesson of the Brezhnev period was not that military forces cost money; it was that threatening other powerful states with military extinction is not credible, and is also counterproductive. The Soviet Union was respected and feared in the international system; it was also ruled out as a suitable long-term partner for cooperation.

But it will undoubtedly be easier to abandon the old policy than to make the new endure. Facile diplomacy, an enormous strength of Gorbachev era, will not suffice alone. The Soviet Union needs the other traditional elements of power, most importantly economic strength, in order to play this new game. The Soviet Union has very few cards to play. The new foreign policy was, in large part, born to support perestroika at home. Ultimately, though, the relationship may be reversed; the new foreign policy cannot survive long unless perestroika gives the Soviet Union the economic clout to make it a success.