INTRODUCTION

Why was Germany divided after the Second World War? Why was the division of Germany maintained for almost half a century? Why did the Soviet Union accept German unification? And why did it consent to unified Germany as a full member in the Atlantic alliance? These questions form the subject of this book. Its main focus is the *Soviet* role in these fateful events of the second half of the twentieth century. It is therefore concerned with party and government leaders in Moscow, their political ambitions, the ideological stereotypes they shared, the institutional pressures they faced, and the systemic constraints with which they had to contend.

The context into which the examination is placed is that of the rise, decline, and fall of empires. The underlying assumption is that it is appropriate to consider the Soviet Union an imperial entity consisting of three concentric rings. The first and innermost ring is that of the USSR itself with its fifteen constituent republics. The second consists of what in the era of the Cold War was called 'Eastern Europe', that is, the non-Soviet countries of the Warsaw Pact.[1] The third and outermost ring comprises Moscow's dependencies and its friends and allies outside the Central Eurasian landmass, including at one time or another Cuba, North Vietnam, Laos, North Korea, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Egypt, Ethiopia, South Yemen, Angola, and Mozambique.

This examination deals with Eastern Europe as the ring of empire most closely linked to the centre and considered by successive Soviet leaderships as the most important staging area of their influence in Europe. This necessitates scrutiny, above all, of the Soviet-East German relationship and developments in East Germany as the most exposed and most important entity of the Soviet strategic *glacis* in Europe. Since West German - 'revisionism' was regarded in Moscow as the main challenge to the post-war order and West Berlin as a painful 'thorn in the flesh' of the East German body politic, the Soviet Union's relations with the Federal Republic

1 For the usage of the term 'Eastern Europe' see the Preface, p.13; for the attempted and (ultimately successful) revision of the term as part of the Cold War mental map see Chapter 4, pp. 301-307.

and Soviet reactions to West Germany's Ostpolitik form another major focus of this book.

No claim will be advanced here that the division of Germany was part of a blueprint drawn up by Stalin for the construction of an empire in Eastern Europe. Soviet planning and consistency in the execution of a deliberate design were much more in evidence, for instance, in the treatment of Poland. Nevertheless, the integration of the part of Germany occupied by the Red Army in the misnamed 'socialist community' followed an imperial logic and was reinforced by Soviet ideology. To that extent, it is erroneous to contend, as many Russians still do, that since there was no design in Moscow, the *West* was obviously responsible for the division.

The inexorable imperial and ideological logic also explains the tenacity with which the Soviet Union clung to its possessions for such a long time. However, it will be argued here, the attempt to incorporate the eastern part of Germany, including part of the former capital of the German *Reich,* in the empire was worse than many a crime committed in the Stalin era. It was a serious political blunder. It was a major and, in Europe, the *central* part of what in the title of this book is called 'imperial overstretch': the expansion of Soviet control to areas that initially contributed to the reconstruction of the Soviet Union but then became a serious economic liability. Politically and militarily, Moscow's attempt to hold on to the eastern part of Germany locked the Soviet Union even more firmly into competition and confrontation with the West than the ideology, under which its leadership operated, seemed to require. Furthermore, without East Germany, the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe would have looked quite different. It would have been more self-contained and hence relatively more manageable for Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Andropov and Chernenko. As a result, early in the history of the Soviet empire the attempt at incorporating the German chunk produced major symptoms of pathology. Such symptoms became clearly visible in the Berlin blockade of 1948-49 and the workers' uprising in East Germany in 1953. They remained suppressed for some time but flared up again in the protracted crisis of 1958-61 that led to the building of the Berlin wall. In the 1970s and 1980s, it appeared to many Soviet and Western observers that normalization of the difficult imperial condition had set in. But this proved to be a major misperception, as the rapidly unfolding events in 1989-90 and the collapse of empire were to prove.

The story to be told here is full of paradoxes. One of them is the incongruity of Soviet perceptions of East Germany. In the period of normaliza-

tion, the GDR came to be seen in Moscow as a successful example in the construction of socialism. Gorbachev, as will be shown in detail, very much admired the East German economic and technological achievements and for quite some time was prone to accept at face value Honecker's progress reports about the GDR's progress in microelectronics, computer technology, industrial engineering, and biotechnology. He even went as far as to concede expressly Honecker's argument that Soviet perestroika was essentially a delayed response to the challenges of the revolution in science and technology of the second half of the twentieth century which the GDR had already met. In principle at least there could also be little doubt that the political regime established by Ulbricht and maintained by Honecker rested on Marxist-Leninist foundations, and excessively so, as Gorbachev was to complain privately to his reformist colleagues in Moscow. However, in stark contrast to such perceptions of the GDR's economic resilience and political conservatism, Soviet leaders from Khrushchev to Gorbachev and their German experts repeatedly expressed the concern and even alarm, both in private conversation among themselves and in talks with the East German leaders, that East Germany was becoming ever more dependent financially and economically on West Germany, making political concessions, and permitting an erosion of its system structure. Such contradictions of perception that found their reflection in contradictory policies were never meaningfully addressed let alone resolved until the collapse of the GDR and the Soviet empire rendered any such possible efforts obsolete.

Gorbachev's eventual acceptance of German unification and his consent to unified Germany's membership in NATO as an integral part of this collapse receive major attention here. The drama and enormity of these two decisions can hardly be overestimated. They meant liquidation of four decades of time-honoured Soviet ideological and strategic precepts; abandoning what seemed to be one of the most reliable allies of the Soviet Union; relinquishing a crucial military component in the 'correlation of forces'; dispensing with what apparently was an indispensable factor in the Soviet economy; signing the death warrant of the Warsaw Pact and CMEA; and giving birth to a new Europe. Furthermore, the two decisions were taken against the background of other paradoxes of Soviet empire and the German problem. In the 1970s and 1980s, the Soviet Union had amassed tremendous military power. Its nuclear arsenal appeared to have made its imperial position unassailable for all time. The nuclear age, it seemed, had not only made Clausewitz obsolete but also all traditional

theories on the rise and fall of empires, including the idea that 'no empire is permanent'.[2] Part of the explanation of why the Soviet Union divested itself of its empire, it will be argued, lies in the discrepancy between economic stagnation and global expansion and between an apparently thriving military-industrial complex and a corroding socio-economic base – a gap correctly recognized by Sovietologists as the 'paradox of superpower'.[3]

One of the crucial factors in the rise and fall of empires is the political will of the political establishment in the centre to maintain the empire. Churchill is on record of having said that he had not become prime minister in order to preside over the dissolution of the British empire. What about Gorbachev? Had *he*, according to his self-perception, become party leader in order to give history a push and preside over the dissolution of the Soviet empire? Specifically with respect to the Soviet Union's East German imperial legacy, what were his perceptions of the problem when he took office in March 1985? Did he subscribe to the notion that in an era of nationalism and the nation state the division of Germany was unnatural and artificial, and that the division of Germany had to be ended in favor of the construction of his Common European House? There is no evidence for such an initiative, to introduce another paradox. Gorbachev's acceptance of German unification and his consent to unified Germany's membership in NATO, it will be shown, like the division of Germany under Stalin, was not part of overall foresight and planning but occurred within a new framework – the New Thinking – that left little room for alternative options.

This interpretation of history allocates a role to both objective and subjective factors in the rise, decline, and demise of the Soviet empire. As for the latter set of factors, a particularly interesting and important feature is the increasing alienation, animosity, and antipathy between Gorbachev and Honecker in the period from 1985 until 1989. Outwardly, everything looked normal in that relationship, with all the embraces, the kisses, the awarding of medals, the cordial receptions, and attendance of congresses.[4] But beneath the surface in the relationship between Gorbachev and Ho-

2 Michael W. Doyle, *Empires* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), p. 137.

3 See, for instance, Seweryn Bialer, *The Soviet Paradox: External Expansion, Internal Decline* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986).

4 Soviet foreign minister Shevardnadze used such formulations to characterize the relations among party leaders in the Soviet bloc in general; see Eduard Ambrosievich Shevardnadze, *Moi vybor. V zashchitu demokratii i svobody*, 2nd ed. (Moscow:

necker, there was smouldering suspicion, resentment, and scheming, much of it fuelled by Gorbachev's realization that the East German leader was risking serious instability by stubbornly refusing to go with the times and, conversely, by Honecker's conviction that the Soviet leader was pursuing disastrous policies that undercut the legitimacy of his rule in the GDR and the fabric of the 'socialist community'. In that context, yet another paradox is to be noted. Given the dominant position of the Soviet Union in the bloc and that of the Soviet party leader in inter-party relations, one would have expected Gorbachev to exert severe pressure on Honecker to change his policies. However, the record of private conversations between the two leaders reveals that such pressure was not exerted. Matters were left to drift and problems to accumulate until the end of the East German regime and the Soviet empire.

Such observations underline the important role of the party leader in communist systems, no matter whether it is one of omission or commission. But even in communist systems, foreign policy cannot not be formulated and carried out by one person single-handedly. What is needed for both policy making and the implementation of decisions are appropriate domestic structures, institutions, and organisations. This fact of international life raises questions at another level of analysis: Which of the established Soviet institutions played a significant role in breaking new ground on the German problem? Obvious contenders for such a role are several party institutions, such as the Politburo, the Central Committee's International Department (ID) and the CC's Department for Liaison with the Communist and Workers' Parties; government agencies, such as the foreign ministry, the KGB, and the armed forces; and the Defence Council, an institution whose membership consisted of top foreign and security policy personnel from both the party and the state.

These institutions can be regarded as having had a vested interest in adhering to imperial policies and opposing change on the German problem. This raises the question as to how Gorbachev was able to overcome bureaucratic inertia and latent opposition to his policy changes. Several hypotheses for answering this question suggest themselves. One is the seriousness of the internal crisis. It could be argued that the deterioration of economic and social conditions, the spreading of ethnic violence and se-

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Novosti, 1991), p. 199. They certainly apply to the relations between the Soviet and the East German party leader.

cessionism, and of obstructionism and opposition in the party were so severe that international affairs were simply a side-show. A second hypothesis, prevalent among analysts who are fond of easy and straightforward solutions to intricate problems, is the notion that the disastrous economic state of affairs in the Soviet Union persuaded Moscow to cut a deal with rich West Germany: the consent to unification was given in exchange for huge financial and economic benefit. A third hypothesis is the idea that the severe internal crisis interacted with an equally severe crisis of empire and that Gorbachev's consent to German unification was a rational response to overcommitment and overextension of empire.

But what approaches should be used in order to answer such questions? To what extent is it still appropriate to utilize tools developed by the now extinct field of Soviet studies? Sovietology, contrary to now popular criticism, underwent significant transformations before the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the 1940s and 1950s, the most widely accepted framework of analysis was that of totalitarianism, which posited complete state control of politics, society, and the economy; one-man and one-party dictatorship; terror as a functional element of the system; and the impossibility of reform: the system would either endure or collapse. In revised versions of the model, the 'totalitarian' was replaced by 'authoritarian'. There was also a realization that one-man dictatorship after Stalin's death had been replaced by collective leadership and terror by less bloody forms of repression. In essence, however, the proponents of the revised model still assumed that the main features of the system had remained unchanged.

The behavioural revolution in communist studies of the 1960s and 1970s took issue with this framework of reference and focused on diversity and differentiation behind the façade of monolithism. Various 'bureaucratic politics' and 'interest group' models were applied to the study of Soviet-type systems. But whereas such studies did advance the understanding of unplanned processes in communist systems, they also created some serious impediments. This applied in particular to the notion that Marxist-Leninist regimes bore many of the pluralist features characteristic of Western political systems. It was probably this perceptual lens that produced the erroneous assumption that communist systems were amenable to major structural reform. In retrospect, it appears that the revised 'totalitarian' or 'authoritarian' school was right after all in the sense that despite all the attempts at reform the communist parties and the Soviet-type system in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe proved resistant to reform. Thus, what is evidently needed and will be applied here is a combination

of traditional Kremlinological and more modern behavioural approaches to decision making.

The design to tackle the theoretical and empirical problems as outlined above is as follows: Chapter 1 establishes conceptual foundations by looking at such theories on the rise, decline, and fall of empires as may be useful for analysis. The theories examined will be called metrocentric, pericentric, international systemic, transnational, and integrative. Although several of the approaches shed some light on the Soviet problem, one of the most useful designs applied here can be found in Paul Kennedy's book, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*. This includes in particular his argument that economic potential is required to underpin military power, and military power is usually needed to acquire and protect wealth. If, however, too large a proportion of the state's resources is diverted from the creation of wealth and allocated instead to military purposes, then this will lead to a weakening of national power, to overcommitment and overextension. As the subsequent chapters of the present book will show, this became an important political problem once the Soviet Union had entered a period of economic decline.

Chapter 2 features a discussion of Soviet perceptions and policies on the German problem from the division of Germany under Stalin through Khrushchev's tenure in office to Brezhnev's 'era of stagnation'. The analytical thread that will help the reader through the maze of Soviet policies on Germany in this period from the 1940s to the late 1970s will be called the Ideological and Imperial paradigm. Its constituent elements can be said to have been competitive and confrontational, with ideological, geopolitical, and military-strategic factors playing a dominant role and providing the rationale and conceptual basis for the Soviet policy of imperial control – notably in Central and Eastern Europe – and global expansion. Power and ideology in this paradigm are regarded as having reinforced each other.

Chapter 3 demonstrates how this framework of analysis and policy underwent a serious crisis in the last years of the Brezhnev era and during the Andropov and Chernenko 'interregnum' from the late 1970s to the mid-1980s. One of the major research questions in this period concerns the role of military and economic power in the management of the Soviet empire. The thread of Ariadne running through the analytical labyrinth indicates that an increasing number of policy-makers and academic analysts in Moscow had begun to doubt the political utility of Soviet military power, to express concern about the country's ability to keep up with the Unit-

ed States in the military-technological competition, and to appreciate the importance of economic and technological factors as a source of global influence. A politically significant part of the Soviet political establishment also began to recognize the stark fact of imperial decay and the necessity of comprehensive reform if damaging trends were to be arrested and reversed. Such realization, however, remained politically irrelevant until the very end of the interregnum. Practical policies continued to be mired in bureaucratic inertia. They took a particularly vicious form in the severe pressure that was exerted on West Germany to desist from consenting to the stationing of intermediate-range nuclear missiles on its territory and on East Germany to cease making political concessions to Bonn for allegedly short-term and short-sighted economic and financial benefit and to submit to bloc discipline.

Chapter 4 portrays the Gorbachev leadership's recognition of the comprehensive crisis in domestic and international affairs and the lessons it derived from that crisis. Since the role of statesmen in history and the role of the party leader in communist systems are important issues to consider, the chapter contains a political profile of Gorbachev. Under his leadership, a new paradigm was constructed, tentatively and hesitatingly at first, but then in a more determined, consistent, and comprehensive fashion. The new philosophical and practical approach – the New Thinking – put the emphasis on internal political, economic, and social development and international cooperation. In domestic affairs, the new paradigm provided for policies of democratization, federalism, and market-oriented reform. In foreign policy, it emphasized devolution of empire; eradication of regional military preponderance; abandonment of military-strategic parity; membership in international economic institutions, such as the GATT, IMF, and the G-7; and cooperation within the framework of the United Nations.

The chapter then deals in detail with Gorbachev's perceptions and policies on Germany in the period from his assumption of power in March 1985 until his visit to West Germany in June 1989. The new Soviet leader, it will be argued, had no intention to liquidate the empire but wanted to reform it and make it more cost effective. East Germany was meant to help in this endeavour. Since he considered that country as advanced in the production of high technology, he even thought that it could make an appreciable contribution to the modernization of the Soviet economy and to undercutting President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI). The impact of Western policies on both the demise of the Soviet empire and the changes in Gorbachev's policies will also be examined in this chapter.

Evidence will be presented concerning the question as to whether the decline of empire was accelerated by the Reagan administration's policy of forcing the pace of the military-technological competition and deepening the 'fault lines of the Soviet empire', or whether such attempts were essentially counterproductive, delaying the fundamental changes that were bound to come anyway, given the deep internal contradictions of the Soviet empire.

Chapter 5 examines the institutional and domestic political setting of the imperial collapse. In particular, it dwells on two internal Soviet paradoxes. The first concerns the role of the German experts, or *germanisty*, in policy-making on the German problem. On the basis of observations derived from Western systems of government to the effect that the regional experts' detailed knowledge of and empathy with developments in their area of specialization often predisposes them to become advocates of the viewpoints and even interests of 'their' countries, one would have assumed that the Soviet experts on Germany were instrumental in developing, advocating, and helping to implement fundamental policy changes. Such assumptions do not apply in the Soviet case. Almost at every stage in the rapid evolution of events, the German experts in both party and government institutions remained wedded to traditional views and policies and engaged in procrastination and delay. The second paradox relates to the role of the power institutions in the Soviet system. The comparative history of the rise and fall of empires knows of many examples when the mainstays of the system actively resisted imperial devolution and decline and deposed those at the top who either looked with equanimity at that process or even promoted it. A revolt of Soviet 'Young Turks', however, failed to occur in the Soviet Union, and the old guard staged an ineffective coup only in August 1991, when the external empire had already disappeared. The two paradoxes can be linked to each other: If the *germanisty* in the party and the foreign ministry had a vested interest in the continuation of the conceptual and practical approaches they had developed over several decades of policy, why did they not conspire with officials and officers in the defence ministry, the armed forces, the military-industrial complex, and the KGB – institutions opposed to German unification and unified Germany's membership in NATO – to bring down the whole edifice of the New Thinking and the devolution of empire? Part of the answer provided in this chapter is the shift in decision-making authority to a small circle of leaders and their advisers and personal assistants; an extraordinary improvement in the academic institutes' access to and involvement in

policy-making; effective cooperation of these institutes with the top echelon of the foreign ministry; and the traditional organizational culture of the armed forces that mitigated against their taking an active role in politics.

Chapter 6 covers the period from the fall of 1989 until the fall of 1990. The argument will be developed here that the parameters of the New Thinking did *not* extend to relinquishing Soviet control over the GDR and that Gorbachev continued to cling to the idea that it would be possible to have the cake and eat it, too: to retain East Germany in a Soviet sphere of influence *and* to improve economic cooperation with West Germany. This notion, furthermore, would still have been in accordance with his idea of preserving the empire and making imperial rule more humane and cost-effective. This period also reveals one of the major dynamics leading to the collapse of empire: unintended consequences of conceptual change, the occurrence of unplanned and unforeseen events, and loss of control. The force of events, as will be demonstrated, began to reveal its decisive impact with the dismantling of the iron curtain by Hungary in May 1990. It continued with the exodus of East Germans in the summer. And it culminated in the unintended and, from Moscow's perspective, unauthorized opening of the Berlin wall on 9 November. But Soviet loss of control over events in the GDR also combined with Gorbachev's *loss of will* to maintain the Soviet imperial position in Central and Eastern Europe – an important fact that is evidenced most of all by his refusal in principle to use force in order to arrest the fundamental processes of change taking place there.

The chapter differentiates between Gorbachev's *acceptance* of the reality of German unification in January 1990 and his *consent* to unified Germany's membership in NATO, which occurred officially at the Soviet-West German talks in Moscow and Arkhyz in July 1990. The driving forces behind both the passive acceptance and the more active consent were basically the same as in the previous phase. *Faits accomplis* were incessantly being created and ratified by the Soviet leadership. As Gorbachev was to acknowledge at a meeting with East German prime minister Hans Modrow in Moscow on 30 January 1990, time was exerting an impact on the process and lending dynamism to it.

Acceptance of German unification was facilitated by changes in Soviet perceptions concerning the importance of the GDR as an economic asset and, as Gorbachev still was to say at the Malta summit in December 1989, its function as a 'strategic ally' of the Soviet Union. By that time, however, the Soviet leadership had already come to realize that both the inter-

nal political stability and the economic and technological advances of the GDR had been exaggerated; that, relatively, a unified Germany and the other Western industrialized countries had more to offer to the Soviet Union than the GDR and the Council on Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA); that a unified Germany would be willing and able to make a significant contribution to the modernization of the Soviet economy; and that for all of these reasons leaving the GDR to its fate could be reinterpreted as a logical and consistent application of the new paradigm.

Similar observations are warranted regarding the decision on unified Germany's membership in NATO. The thought of the inevitability of taking this domestically highly sensitive step ripened in the minds of a top circle of policy-makers in the period from the end of January to May 1990. The institutions that would ordinarily have been involved in preparing such a momentous decision were simply confronted with the outcome of largely confidential deliberations. Analysis of decision-making, based on the background provided in the preceding chapter on the institutional setting reveals that these institutions, notably the party apparatus, including the Central Committee's International Department, but also the defence ministry and the general staff, the KGB, and the foreign ministry bureaucracy, were deliberately shunted aside. The same tactics of exclusion governed the top decision makers' treatment of the *germanisty*, the German experts, who almost across the board either opposed or attempted to put the brakes on German unification and, even more vehemently, on unified Germany's membership in NATO.

The consent to unified Germany's membership in NATO, the argument continues in that chapter, had not only domestic but also international dimensions. The small circle of decision-makers around Gorbachev ultimately realized that, as his foreign policy adviser put it, the West had the better arguments.[5] Another lay in the absence of viable alternative options: the Soviet Union was internationally isolated on the issue of German neutrality and on Gorbachev's idea of dual membership of unified Germany in both military alliances. There was simply no support for it in Western and Eastern Europe, let alone from across the Atlantic. There was also concern among the top decision-makers in Moscow that a non-aligned Germany might one day seek access to nuclear weapons in order to safeguard its security. A contributory factor to the consent was their illusion that the War-

5 Interview with Chernyaev.

saw Pact could be reformed and would continue to play a role in European security. The chapter concludes with an examination of the role of economic factors in the Soviet consent to unified Germany's membership in NATO.

Sources of Evidence

The validity of answers to the questions set forth in the introduction depends of course on the availability and effective utilization of different sets of sources. This author adopted the following procedure for the establishment of evidence. On the most basic and conventional level, he used treaties and agreements on Soviet foreign policy commitments and statistical data on Soviet military and economic power and potential, the strategic and conventional military balance, and demographic and social developments in order to reconstruct objective trends and the substantive context in which decisions were made.

In addition, four types of sources were consulted: (1) the *public record*, consisting of published diplomatic correspondence, government statements, memoranda and notes, documentary materials of CPSU congresses and Central Committee meetings and speeches, and articles and interviews by government officials and party leaders; (2) the *archives* of the East German communist party – the *Zentrale Parteiarchiv des Instituts für Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung* (Institute for the History of the Workers' Movement, Central Party Archives), now under the administration of the German federal government; (3) *interviews* conducted by this author with past Soviet government and party officials and their Western counterparts; and (4) the *memoirs* of these officials.

In order to get a reliable picture, the author checked and cross-checked all four types of sources. Thus, the circumstances of particular Politburo sessions and bilateral Soviet-East German and multilateral Warsaw Pact or CMEA meetings, as reflected in the published materials and unpublished documents, were verified in interviews with the government and party officials privy to concomitant information. Inconsistencies or contradictions in the memoir literature were taken up with the interview partners. Especially valuable were the perspectives received in interviews with the personal assistants on foreign policy to Gorbachev, Soviet foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze, (West) German chancellor Helmut Kohl, and East German prime minister Lothar de Maizière.

Paraphrasing Mark Twain, one might be inclined to think that there are lies, damned lies, and archives. This adage does not, however, apply to the SED archives. The 'Red Prussians', like their predecessors, faithfully practiced *Deutsche Ordnung und Gründlichkeit*, decreeing that their activities be neatly recorded for posterity. Presumably not in their worst nightmares did the Soviet and East German leaders suspect that the record of their private conversations, secret Warsaw Pact meetings, and talks behind closed doors of that organization's ordinary conferences would someday be accessible to Western scholars. Their erroneous notion about the confidentiality of the talks is one of the reasons why this author assumes that there was no deliberate attempt at falsification of the record. Another reason is the importance of the Soviet connection for the survival of the regime. The members of the SED Politburo wanted to have reports, as complete and accurate as possible, on every nuance and shading of what the Soviet comrades thought, said, and did. Given this circumstance, it is difficult to imagine scribes putting gloss, negative or positive, on the Soviet position in secret, confidential, or open meetings.[6] For further information on sources the reader may want to refer to the Bibliographical and Biographical Note.

6 Interview with Krenz.