

SOVIET POLICY IN EASTERN EUROPE POST-1985: ‘SINATRA DOCTRINE’ OR ‘MOZART DOCTRINE’?

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In examining the events of 1989 in Eastern Europe (and indeed the few years before), the popular conception is one of Soviet disengagement and withdrawal of influence.¹ Under Gorbachev, the Brezhnev doctrine of intervention was supposedly abandoned in favour of the neutrality of what became known as the Sinatra doctrine.² This article will suggest that in effect Soviet policy of the period was much more blurred than the image portrayed by the public face of the Sinatra doctrine. It will argue that the policy was not so much based on the abandonment of the Brezhnev doctrine as on its adjustment in order to accommodate Soviet needs and interests in Eastern Europe in a new Gorbachev era. In retrospect, therefore, it may be better represented by the values of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s masked Don Giovanni than by those underpinning Frank Sinatra’s ‘My Way’. Furthermore, it will be suggested that even the public pronouncements of the Sinatra doctrine, professing the withdrawal of Soviet intervention in Eastern Europe, still constituted a Soviet influence on events in each of the states, if not always in the way envisaged, as the subsequent developments of 1989 fully illustrated.

The Brezhnev doctrine

The Soviet Union’s justification for sending its troops and tanks into Prague in August 1968 came to be known as the Brezhnev doctrine. In essence this justification, and the definition and virtual codification of the doctrine, appeared in *Pravda* on 26 September 1968. The article stated that:

“...no action should do harm either to socialism or to the fundamental interests of other socialist countries and of the entire working-class movement which is striving for socialism. This means that each Communist party is responsible not only to its own people but also to all the socialist countries and to the entire communist movement. ... Just as, in V.I. Lenin’s words, someone living in a society cannot be free of that society, so a socialist state that is in a system of other states constituting a socialist commonwealth cannot be free of the common interests of that commonwealth. ... The weakening of any link in the world socialist system has a direct effect on all the socialist countries, which cannot be indifferent to this.”

Hence, for the USSR a threat to the political system in any socialist country was a threat to the socialist commonwealth as a whole. Furthermore, the Soviet Union was to be the sole judge of when the limits of permissible autonomy in the socialist world had been exceeded, and would intervene as it saw fit to preserve socialism.

Brezhnev reinforced this message on 12 November 1968 at the Fifth Polish Communist Party Congress, by stating:

“...when internal and external forces, hostile to socialism, seek to reverse the development of any socialist country whatsoever in the direction of the restoration of the capitalist order, when a threat to the cause of socialism arises in that country, a threat to the security of the socialist commonwealth as a whole - this already becomes not only a problem of the people of the country concerned, but also a common problem and the concern of all socialist countries.”³

Although it took his name, what was labelled the Brezhnev doctrine after the crushing of the Prague Spring in 1968 was not new. The argument relating to the defence of the common interests of the working-class and the socialist commonwealth had been

employed by the Soviets on more than one occasion before; for example, in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in 1953 and in Hungary in 1956. One argument suggests it can be traced back to Bolshevik (and Lenin's) justification for Moscow's assumption of ideological dominance over the Comintern. Certainly, in *Pravda* on 13 February 1957 the Soviet Foreign Minister, Shepilov, had attempted to justify military intervention in Hungary the previous year by arguing that had that country been detached from the communist bloc others would have followed. Consequently, the sovereignties of all the communist states depended on the cohesion of the bloc as a whole. Therefore, according to Shepilov, the Soviet Union had acted in Hungary in order to fulfil its international duty, not only to Hungary, but to all socialist countries.

Brezhnev's pronouncement of the doctrine after the Prague Spring did represent a slight shift, however, as it gave a more formal representation of the rules of the relationship between the Soviet Union and the East European states. Through his words (and, tragically, Soviet actions) Brezhnev demonstrated that the USSR would not tolerate what it perceived as anti-socialist degeneration, and thereby a threat to communist rule within Eastern Europe. The crushing of the Prague Spring in the name of the doctrine illustrated that the Soviet leadership was fully prepared to use its military power to maintain its control over the region. Also, of course, by formalising the doctrine in speeches and articles after the ending of the Prague Spring the Soviet leadership developed a clear signalling device through which to warn any East European states which might consider reforms unacceptable to Moscow in future. Overall, therefore, the Brezhnev doctrine became a means by which the Soviets could instill a psychological fear effect, not just in the people of Eastern Europe, but also in the communist leaders in each of the states.

For almost twenty years after 1968 the doctrine was not merely enforced through the threat of military intervention. It was also supported economically, socially and culturally through the instruments of the communist parties and the bureaucracies of

the various states, and their links with Moscow and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). Soviet and East European party-state ties were maintained through regular bilateral and multilateral meetings of communist party and state officials to co-ordinate policies. Also, an interdependent set of economic bureaucracies were created through the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA/COMECON).

Within the East European bloc reactions to the crushing of the Prague Spring, and the pronouncement of the Brezhnev doctrine, were on the whole predictably supportive. The main voice of East European opposition to the policy was Ceausescu's in Romania. He argued in *Scinteia* on 30 November 1968 that marxism could not be distorted to suit the aims of Soviet foreign policy, and at the 10th Romanian Communist Party conference in August 1969 he denied that the notion of a socialist world system implied a renunciation of sovereignty.⁴

The most enthusiastic supporters of the doctrine were the communist leaderships of Bulgaria, the GDR and Poland, while the Hungarian response was more cautious. In Poland, Gomulka stated in October 1968 that "socialist ethics and the principle of internationalism cannot be reduced to sitting back when the socialist system is being abolished in a fraternal country."⁵ In the GDR, on 10 September 1968 the *Berliner Zeitung* called for a campaign of "ideological purification", while on 13 October in *Neues Deutschland*, in a defence of the doctrine Herman Axen promoted the principles of proletarian internationalism over sovereignty.⁶

At the international meeting of communist parties in 1969 the leaders of the loyal East European parties endorsed the Brezhnev doctrine. These included, of course, the new Czechoslovak leadership under Gustav Husak, who stated that:

“...the class content of the sovereignty of a socialist state is directly linked to its international responsibility to the confederation of socialist countries and the international Communist and revolutionary movement.”⁷

With ‘normalisation’ in Czechoslovakia came the return to ideological orthodoxy, and the Brezhnev doctrine was soon being endorsed in *Rude pravo*. It was enshrined in supposed legality in the Soviet-Czechoslovak mutual assistance treaty of 1970. The Soviet treaty with the GDR in 1975 included a similar provision, although the USSR-Romania treaty, signed two months after the Czechoslovak treaty, excluded any references to ‘international duty’.

Despite periodic, and in some cases considerable challenges to it (for instance Poland between 1980 and 1982), the Brezhnev doctrine lasted almost twenty years. Its dual functions assisted its survival. Where Soviet military intervention (and consequently the rationalisation for such intervention) became more difficult internationally the alternative function of the doctrine was employed. In those situations its use as an intimidatory signalling device reminded both the populations and the East European communist leaderships of the socialist commonwealth’s supposed internationalist ideology, which would both justify and threaten intervention. This second function - what has been referred to as the ‘damocletian sword’ function of the doctrine - seems to have been the one employed in Poland in the early 1980s.⁸

According to his memoirs, Mikhail Gorbachev announced the rejection of the Brezhnev doctrine to a meeting of the leaders of the Warsaw Treaty Organisation (WTO) countries in the Kremlin after Chernenko’s funeral in March 1985.⁹ Gorbachev also states, however, that “The new policy (*to replace the Brezhnev doctrine*) towards the Socialist countries was not formulated immediately. It took shape gradually, as a component part of the new political thinking and in that general context.”¹⁰ This perhaps accounts the initial public impression given by Gorbachev

upon coming to office that there would not be any change ideologically in terms of the Soviet Union's dominant hegemonic position in Eastern Europe.

The Sinatra doctrine

The changes in the Soviet Union during the second half of the 1980s can be identified as the key causal variable in each of the 1989 revolutions in Eastern Europe.¹¹ Without those changes the revolutions would not have occurred when they did. Equally, the form of any transformations at a later or another point in time would have been somewhat different, and in all probability would have been a great deal more violent. Any attempt at social and political transformation in the East European states while they were still closely tied to a Soviet Union which had not experienced the post-1985 changes, and was thus still a repressive ally concerned for its own border security, would surely have resulted in violent confrontation. Indeed, the lessons of history; of Budapest in 1956 and Prague in 1968, sustain such an argument. Without the changes in the international arena in the second half of the 1980s (manifested in the changes in the USSR), events in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and the other East European states in late 1989, would have been very different.

The post-1985 reforms in the Soviet Union (*perestroika* and particularly *glasnost*) affected not only the relationship ***between*** the Soviet Union and its 'satellite' states, but also had a great impact on politics and society ***within*** the individual East European states. These processes overlapped and were highly interactive. The greatest impact in both these areas appears to have come from the eventual Soviet public pronouncement of the Sinatra doctrine policy, which by implication meant the end of the Brezhnev doctrine. Under the Sinatra doctrine the individual East European states were supposedly allowed to "do things their way".

Gorbachev initially did not appear to advocate any shift ideologically from Soviet hegemony in the region. Indeed, his early meetings with East European leaders, and

his speeches, consolidated Soviet-East European links within the Warsaw Treaty Organisation (WTO) and CMEA/COMECON.¹² However, he soon began to indicate a change in policy, especially upon the introduction of the policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* within the Soviet Union following Gorbachev's identification of the need for the Soviets to address the problems of their own economy. Gorbachev clearly emphasised a new official Soviet position - that there could be no hierarchy and no system of seniority amongst the Comecon states - at the CPSU Twenty-Seventh Congress, when he stated that "unity has nothing in common with uniformity, hierarchy, interference by some parties in the affairs of others, or the striving of any party to have a monopoly over what is right".¹³ Also, speaking on the new character of Soviet and East European relations, Gorbachev said in Prague in April 1987:

"First and foremost we proceed from the premise that the entire system of the socialist countries' political relations can and must be built on the basis of equality and mutual responsibility. No one has the right to claim special status in the socialist world. We consider the independence of every party, its responsibility to the people of its own country, and its right to decide the question of the country's development to be unconditional principles."¹⁴

Probably the clearest statement of the public change in policy came at the United Nations in December 1988, when Gorbachev declared his commitment to "freedom of choice" for all nations. His emphasis on this as a principle that "knows no exceptions", and his announcement of the unilateral withdrawal of 50,000 Soviet troops and 5,000 tanks from Eastern Europe, sent a clear message to the people of Eastern Europe that the USSR would never militarily intervene in their countries while he was Soviet leader.

These statements by Gorbachev, and pronouncements by other Soviet spokesmen regarding the Sinatra doctrine, had wide-ranging effects in each of the East European states. Broadly, these can be separated into two interactive categories of

consequences. Firstly, to some extent the 'fear factor' of Soviet military intervention (such as had occurred, for example, in 1956 and 1968) against reform and reformers in the East European states was removed. Secondly, the Soviet reforms of *perestroika*, and particularly *glasnost*, together with the publicly stated change in Soviet policy in Eastern Europe, created great dilemmas and problems for the 'old guard' hardline East European communist leaderships, in terms of how they should respond to the changes.

The alleviation of fear

People in Eastern Europe were well aware of the changes occurring after 1985 in the USSR, and could see no reason why they could not experience them for themselves. Many of them received television and radio broadcasts from the Soviet Union, and those broadcasts increasingly embraced and extolled the virtues of *glasnost* and *perestroika*. At the very least there must have been some psychological impact from this, and from the enunciation by Soviet spokespersons on the 'world stage' of the Sinatra doctrine. Even if greeted with some scepticism by the citizens of Eastern Europe, the suggestion that Soviet tanks were not going to roll into Warsaw or Prague, for example, at the hint of reform in Poland or Czechoslovakia must have removed some of the fear factor from the minds of those who sought change. The fear of Soviet intervention, premised in the history of 1956 and 1968, was removed.

In 1987 Adam Michnik, the *Solidarnosc* activist, illustrated the importance of this change (and of the dilemma the communist leaders faced in each state), when he pointed out that "General Jaruzelski is being forced toward real reform by pressure from two sides. On one hand there are the activities of the opposition and the yearnings of Polish society, and on the other, there are the words and deeds of Mr. Gorbachev".¹⁵ In effect, Hungary and Poland had been practising some limited forms of *perestroika* and *glasnost* for the best part of the previous twenty years. The important point arising from the Soviet Union's embrace of *perestroika* and *glasnost*,

however, was that it gave reformers - both in the ruling communist elites and in the opposition dissident movements - encouragement. After all, if *perestroika* and *glasnost* were good enough for Soviet citizens, why were they not good enough for Czechs, Slovaks, Poles, Hungarians, Bulgarians, or ultimately, Romanians?

Practical representation of the influence within the states of the believed change in Soviet policy came through the Polish government's response to the August 1988 Gdansk shipyard strike. Despite the fact that the strike was comparatively mild compared to those of 1980, the government acceded to the strikers' demands and agreed to Round Table negotiations between the then still banned *Solidarnosc* and the Jaruzelski regime. It seems unlikely that this would have occurred without the Polish communist regime and *Solidarnosc* having concluded that the Soviets were not likely to intervene militarily. This conclusion was no doubt influenced by the fact that only a month previously, in July 1988, the Soviet Foreign Minister, Eduard Shevardnadze, had spoken of a policy reliant "on such principles as non-aggression, respect for sovereignty and national independence, non-interference in internal affairs".¹⁶

The most concrete evidence of the Soviet Union's military non-interventionist stance, and a key point in time in terms of the alleviation of the fear of Soviet invasion, was a forty minute telephone conversation between Gorbachev and the then Polish Communist Party General Secretary, Mieczyslaw Rakowski, in the midst of the Polish crisis on 22 August 1989. Following success in the recent election, the newly legalised *Solidarnosc* was attempting to form a coalition government with the communists, who held reserved positions in the Defence and Interior Ministries. The Central Committee of the Polish Communist Party was split over whether or not to join the coalition. According to the Polish Communist Party spokesman, Jan Bisztyga, in the telephone conversation with Rakowski Gorbachev encouraged communist participation in the *Solidarnosc* coalition.¹⁷ Two days after the phone call the

communists agreed to participate in the *Solidarnosc* led government, with Tadeusz Mazowiecki as the new Prime Minister.

This was a key moment as it meant that the Soviets were prepared to see East European communists give up power, and really were not prepared to return to the past and use force (or the threat of force) to sustain communist power and Soviet influence in Eastern Europe. Crucially, the telephone call, and what occurred in Poland (with power being surrendered to a non-communist government in a Warsaw Pact country with Soviet acquiescence), had a tremendous impact on politics and society within the East European states. In the late summer of 1989 it sent a clear message of Soviet non-intervention - at least in terms of overt military intervention - to the people and the dissident movements.

The dilemma for the communist leaderships

The Soviet reforms gave the opposition dissidents, and the people in general in each of the states, hope and a greater opportunity and margin to manoeuvre. As the above examples illustrate, however, they also destabilised the rigid orthodox communist leaders as they became increasingly uncertain how to react and respond to the dilemma they faced both from the changes in the Soviet Union and in Soviet policy in Eastern Europe. One further example from the period fully illustrates their dilemma. Jan Urban, a leading Czechoslovak dissident, travelled to Moscow in December 1987 for the First International Independent Human Rights Seminar, organised by Press Club Glasnost. He met Andrei Sakharov and other prominent Soviet human rights activists. Urban suggested that "By participating together with the Soviets in such a public manner, we presented an insoluble conundrum for the Husak regime: not to arrest me for such a flagrant defiance was a mistake; but equally to arrest me for

meeting with Andrei Sakharov at a time of Gorbachev's *Glasnost*, would be an even bigger one!"¹⁸

In his memoirs Gorbachev suggests that his reforms, and the change in Soviet policy towards Eastern Europe, put the leaders of those states "in a somewhat awkward situation ... following the path of reforms begun in the Soviet Union meant the end of the system they embodied. No longer could they count on Soviet tanks to prop them up."¹⁹ Gorbachev offers an illustration of the dilemma the East European leaders faced. In fact, he suggests "I believe I can pinpoint the moment when the reaction of rejecting Soviet perestroika manifested itself in some leaders".²⁰ To substantiate this Gorbachev cites the actions of Honecker in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in January 1987. At that time the plenum of the CPSU Central Committee considered issues of democratisation and the Party's cadre policy. Honecker's response, according to Gorbachev, was to say that "the path of perestroika did not suit East Germany."²¹ He issued an unprecedented instruction that the proceedings of the plenum should not be published in the GDR press. Subsequently, however, the proceedings were published in GDR dissident literature.

Both of these strands of analysis of the effect of the changes in the Soviet Union in facilitating the events of 1989 require greater and deeper investigation than is possible here. Nevertheless, even from such a brief outline it can be argued that the reforms in the Soviet Union were a key factor in alleviating the fear of repression through Soviet military intervention. Equally, they caused great confusion and contradictions - ideological and real - within the hard-line communist leaderships, while offering new hope to the people of Eastern Europe.

Doubts about the Sinatra doctrine

It was, of course, the Soviet leadership's public pronouncements on the virtues of their reforms, and on their new policy towards Eastern Europe, which produced these

effects of new hope within the populations of the different states, as well as confusion amongst their communist leaders. It seems clear that the change meant Soviet non-intervention militarily. Whether the Soviet public embrace of the Sinatra doctrine policy really did mean complete Soviet non-intervention in the internal affairs of the East European states must, however, be open to some doubt.

In other words, it is questionable whether the Sinatra doctrine was indeed the policy employed in relations with each of the states during the Gorbachev period, or instead just a facade by which diplomatic and political pressure replaced the threat of military intervention.

Clearly the Soviet troops in the East European states were ordered to remain in their barracks rather than take the Red Army tanks on to the streets, as they had done in 1956 and 1968. Nevertheless, there is some evidence to suggest that while the Soviet leadership was espousing the Sinatra doctrine publicly, other key institutional Soviet power holders (for example, the KGB) were applying diplomatic and political pressure in order to maintain influence in Eastern Europe. This took the form of attempting to engineer the removal of the remaining hard-line Stalinist leaders in some of the East European states and facilitating their replacement with Gorbachev-type reformers.

The leading example of this was in Czechoslovakia. A government commission investigating the activities of the Czechoslovak secret police (the StB), set up after the revolution, uncovered the involvement during the days of the November 1989 revolution of the KGB, who orchestrated the attempted replacement of the hard-line Czechoslovak communist leadership with a 'Czech Gorbachev'.²² The plan was to bring about the overthrow of the hard-line communist regime of Jakes through popular demonstrations (and specifically through the manipulation of events around a demonstration in Prague on 17th November 1989), and thereby open the way for the

installation of a moderate reform communist, Zdenek Mlynar, as president. Mlynar, who was expelled from the Czech Communist Party in March 1970 in the wake of the Prague Spring, was reportedly flown to Moscow to meet with Gorbachev during the revolutionary period of late November 1989. Gorbachev, however, with whom he had been a student and friend in the 1950s in Moscow, failed to persuade Mlynar to take office.

Similarities can be identified between this Czechoslovak experience and events in the GDR, where Erich Honecker was initially replaced during the revolutionary period of October 1989 by Egon Krenz. Honecker's removal came eleven days after Gorbachev's visit to the GDR, and his decidedly cool attitude to Honecker. Between Gorbachev's visit and Honecker's removal a leading ideologue of the GDR Communist Party, Kurt Hager, travelled to Moscow and returned calling for the "necessary renovations" to the GDR system.²³ On taking over from Honecker, the previously hard-line Krenz suddenly started firing Stalinists from the GDR Politburo. Following a visit to Moscow, two weeks after his succession, he began to attempt to follow Gorbachev's *perestroika* line.

Krenz was replaced on 8th November 1989 by the GDR's most prominent reform-minded official, the Dresden party boss, Hans Modrow. As early as 1987 Modrow had been identified by Soviet diplomats at their East Berlin Embassy as Gorbachev's favoured choice to eventually replace Honecker.²⁴ Also in 1987, Vladimir Kryuchkov, the Soviet KGB Vice-Chairman, visited Dresden in order to discuss reform proposals, and the plans of GDR reformers, at an institute for the social sciences.²⁵ As Modrow was the district's chief executive at the time it seems likely that he would have had some form of contact with such an important visitor.²⁶ Interestingly, the leader of the plot in November 1989 to replace the Czechoslovak hard-line communist leadership, the Interior Minister and head of the StB Czech security services, General Lorenc, flew to Moscow in September 1989 to meet with Kryuchkov, who by then was

Chairman of the KGB.²⁷ Although he earlier appeared to be a committed supporter of Gorbachev's reforms, Kryuchkov became increasingly hostile throughout 1989 to the changes both inside the Soviet Union and in Soviet foreign policy, and was one of the major initiators of the attempted coup in August 1991

Suspensions also linger over Moscow's role in the events in Bucharest in December 1989. Arguments concerning the involvement and active participation of a number of Soviet secret agents in Ceausescu's removal have been promoted in various texts.²⁸ Certainly, Ion Iliescu, Romania's first post-1989 revolution President, was a close friend of Gorbachev, having attended university with him in Moscow in the 1950s while studying law. Also, Silviu Brucan, a central figure in the initial post-1989 National Salvation Front government in Romania, visited Moscow in November 1988. Brucan has claimed to have had contacts "in the Kremlin" during his visit, where the talks had been of "a political nature", with an emphasis on "the resistance movement in Romania" and a conspiracy to remove Ceausescu.²⁹ He claimed to have secured reluctant Soviet agreement to the overthrow of Ceausescu. In the same interview in which Brucan made these revelations, one of his leading colleagues in the first post-revolution leadership, Nicolae Militaru, referred to Iliescu as being viewed in the 1980s by both "the generals and Brucan as the right man to replace Ceausescu as party leader".³⁰ In the period after the revolution there were many rumours that an 'inner council' of the National Salvation Front had been formed in secret six months prior to the events of December 1989 and had plotted Ceausescu's overthrow.

In Bulgaria, an emergency plenum of the Communist Party Central Committee took place on November 10th 1989, the day after the fall of the Berlin Wall. At it Bulgaria's President Todor Zhivkov's resigned, and was replaced by the reform communist Petar Mladenov. A few days before the emergency plenum Mladenov made a stop over visit to Moscow on his return journey to Bulgaria after a visit to China in his capacity as Foreign Minister.

Given the circumstances it is not easy to uncover any concrete evidence of the Soviet Union's (or Gorbachev's personal) involvement in these cases, even if any exists. Indeed, in the Romanian case Michael Shafir has cast doubt over both Brucan and Militaru's revelations, although he does appear to accept that the Soviet authorities knew of the plan to remove Ceausescu by stating that "apparently all the Soviet authorities did for the conspiracy was to refrain from warning Ceausescu".³¹

In the Czechoslovak case there is some evidence that Gorbachev specifically refrained from becoming personally involved in the events of late 1989. Oskar Krejci, political adviser to the last communist leader, Ladislav Adamec, recalls how three times during November 1989 Moscow was asked to assist the Czechoslovak reform communists in removing the dogmatic hard-liners in the party from power, or at least in shifting their approach to one more in line with Gorbachev's reforms.³² These pleas for help, which according to Krejci Gorbachev refused, included sending the Speaker of the Czechoslovak parliament to Moscow, and attempting to arrange a meeting between Adamec and Gorbachev (which Gorbachev also refused). Although, Gorbachev's reluctance in the Czechoslovak case differs from his seemingly central involvement in the Polish crisis period in August 1989 and in the East German crisis period in November 1989 (referred to later).

Within the labyrinth of the Soviet power structure it is possible that other forces, such as the KGB, were acting without Gorbachev's knowledge, and were instrumental in attempting forms of pressure other than military to effect change in the East European states without losing Soviet influence. Although the supposed meeting between Mlynar and Gorbachev in Moscow during the November days of 1989 would seem to cast doubts over this scenario. Clearly the Soviet military-industrial complex and the KGB viewed with alarm Gorbachev's intended withdrawal of Soviet troops from the whole of Eastern Europe. In particular, the KGB must have been concerned about

their loss of influence on their client organisations in Eastern Europe if there was a strict adherence to the Sinatra doctrine. It appears, therefore, that publicly an image of a Soviet 'hands-off' approach was being conveyed, while privately the Soviet political apparatus and security forces were very much involved in an attempt to place new 'Gorbachev' puppets in power in Eastern Europe and replace their old Stalinist marionettes.

Further confirmation of the public face of the Soviet non-intervention policy came with the breaching of the Berlin Wall on November 9th 1989. According to several members of the then GDR Communist Party Central Committee, during the build up of demonstrations in the days preceding the fall of the wall the new communist leader, Egon Krenz, telephoned Gorbachev for advice on how to deal with the crisis. Gorbachev is said to have advised that the border between East and West Germany should be opened to provide an escape valve and stop any unrest that threatened to see the communists removed from power.³³

Although the fall of the Berlin Wall publicly confirmed the Soviet non-intervention policy, the communication with Krenz also suggests that even at that late stage Gorbachev wanted to see communist control continuing in at least the GDR, and probably other parts of Eastern Europe. The Soviet leadership apparently believed that events in the GDR "would lead to the setup of a truly democratic socialist state in Germany".³⁴ Indeed, together with the KGB involvement in events in Prague a week after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the telephone communications Gorbachev had with Krenz and with Mieczyslaw Rakowski (in August 1989 regarding the Polish Communist Party's participation in a *Solidarnosc* led government - referred to earlier), illustrate that despite the public face of the 'Sinatra doctrine' the policy may not have been all it seemed, and the Soviet Union was still attempting to exert influence in Eastern Europe, even if not overtly.

Conclusion

Although its public face clearly had an effect on the people and leaders in Eastern Europe pre-1989, some doubts must remain over the real validity of the Sinatra doctrine. Just how clear any evidence is of Soviet involvement (or intentions) in the events of late 1989 cannot be, and quite possibly never will be, ascertained.

It seems clear that the Soviets desired and needed change in Eastern Europe just as surely as it was required in the USSR, not least because within the Soviet bloc each country was tied to the USSR. Prior to the events of 1989 Moscow had great influence and leverage within Eastern Europe, and could set in motion and promote change if it chose so to do. In the words of the programme of the CPSU approved at the 27th Congress in 1986, the Soviet Union was part of a community of “fraternal peoples” in Eastern Europe, who shared “common historical destinies”.³⁵ Even as late as September 1989 an official communique from an Eastern bloc meeting in Bulgaria called for greater “interaction, solidarity, and unanimity of the Central Committees in the socialist countries”.³⁶ The Soviet leadership had a vision of the type of regimes they wished to see emerge from changes in the East European states. However, the key questions are firstly, in order to attain that vision how much covert influence did the Soviet Union exert during the revolutionary period, and secondly, how aware was Gorbachev of that influence?

Gorbachev's memoirs sustain the Sinatra doctrine, although he does appear to have believed that the promotion of reforms, similar to those in the USSR., would have automatically made the communist reformers popular in their individual states.³⁷ This was predicated on the assumption that the reform communists in each of the states could play a leading role in establishing a revolutionary new 'third way' between western democratic capitalism and Soviet-style communism. In effect, the policy had similarities with Alexander Dubcek's 'socialism with a human face' of the Prague Spring of 1968, and it reinforces the suggestion that the Soviet desire was to see the

removal of the hard-line communist leaders and their replacement by reform communists.

Whether Gorbachev was prepared to sanction continuing covert Soviet involvement in such a process is a key question. According to Ivan Frolov, a past editor of *Pravda* and one of Gorbachev's key associates during his period in office, Gorbachev and his close advisers firmly believed that the East European states could be liberalised, in a form similar to Dubcek's Prague Spring ideals.³⁸ Contrary to Gorbachev's memoirs, which stress the idealism of Soviet non-interventionism, Frolov here suggests that Gorbachev and the Soviet Union retained a keen interest, and some involvement, in events inside the East European states. Given the collapse of the Soviet Union's influence in Eastern Europe, however - something Gorbachev clearly did not foresee - it is not surprising that his memoirs suggest absolute Soviet non-intervention in 1989.

The danger in analysing only the public pronouncements of the Sinatra doctrine is that the policy can be accepted as the withdrawal of Soviet influence in Eastern Europe. Whichever way one evaluates the policy, however, it still constituted a Soviet influence on events in each of the states. Even the public withdrawal of the threat of Soviet intervention constituted Soviet influence (through the signals it sent to the people of Eastern Europe and the dilemmas it raised for the hard-line communist leaderships), if not always in the way the Soviet Union hoped, as the subsequent developments of 1989 fully illustrated.

It may well be that rather than fully embracing the Sinatra doctrine, and abandoning the Brezhnev doctrine, between 1986 and 1989 the Soviets were in reality seeking an adjustment to 'Brezhnev' in order to accommodate their own needs in the new Gorbachev era, especially economically. It seems that the Soviet change in policy after 1986 was still based on Soviet and collective security. This, however, was not to be produced through enforcement by military means. Instead, it was to be achieved

through what Gorbachev clearly saw as the more philosophical embracing of the establishment of a revolutionary 'third way' between western capitalism and old style Soviet communism - through the embracing of (somewhat tragically ironically for the Czechs and Slovaks) 'socialism with a human face'. How much this change was born out of Soviet economic necessity, especially in terms of their economic support for the East European states, is no doubt relevant. In his memoirs Gorbachev puts strong emphasis on this factor.³⁹

As Zdenek Mlynar illustrated in his recount of the Prague Spring and Moscow's eventual reaction, there was a disparity between the public pronouncements of the Soviets (which conformed to, and fostered, the Soviet Union's self-image) and the crude language of power employed by the Soviet leadership during their meetings with the Prague Spring leaders following the Soviet military intervention in 1968.⁴⁰ Given Mlynar's observations and experience, and the Soviet's past record, perhaps it should not seem so surprising if the public pronouncements on the Sinatra doctrine were not all they seemed, and did not match some of the activities of institutional elements of the Soviet system.

Consequently, the publicly stated Sinatra doctrine may well have been merely a mask, produced in an effort to hide the identity of those really attempting to manipulate change in the East European states. In this respect, it may well have been a policy that owed more to Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's 'Don Giovanni' than to Frank Sinatra's 'My Way'. Ironically, whichever analysis attracts more validity, just like Don Giovanni, the manipulators (and their schemes) were overtaken by events beyond their control.

¹ Whilst I am sympathetic to the argument that many Hungarians, Czechs, Slovaks, Poles and others make that their countries should be seen as part of Central rather than Eastern Europe, the latter term has been chosen primarily because it is more readily understood than the terms 'Central Europe' or 'East/Central Europe', and is still in much wider usage

² The phrase "Sinatra doctrine" was first used by the Soviet government spokesman, Genadii Gerasimov, in 1987. It signalled the abandonment of the Brezhnev doctrine by the Soviet leadership, and a supposed willingness to allow the East European states to do things their way. As such it was a reference by Gerasimov to the popular song 'My Way', made famous by the American singer Frank Sinatra.

³ *Pravda*, 13 November 1968

⁴ Radio Bucharest, 6 August 1969, *Radio Free Europe Research Romania (RFER.R)*, no.17, 8 August 1969, p.2

⁵ W. Gomulka, 'O sobytiakh v Chekoslovakii', in *Novoe vremia*, no.42, 1968, pp.10-11.

⁶ *RFER. GDR*, no.15, 17 September 1968, pp.2-3, and Herman Axen, *Neues Deutschland*, 13 October 1968, in *RFER. GDR*, no.17, 25 October 1968, pp.2-3.

⁷ *Mezhdunarodnoe soveshchanie kommunisticheskikh i rabochikh partii: dokumenty i materialy* (International meeting of the Communist and Workers' parties: documents and materials), Moscow, Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1969, quoted in C.D. Jones, *Soviet Influence in Eastern Europe*, New York, Praeger, 1981, p.11 and p.238.

⁸ See, for example, R. Jones, *The Soviet Concept of 'Limited Sovereignty' from Lenin to Gorbachev*, London, Macmillan, 1988, p.193.

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- ⁹ M. Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, London, Doubleday, 1996, p.465.
- ¹⁰ M. Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, London, Doubleday, 1996, p.466.
- ¹¹ For a fuller examination of this and other variables see J.Wilton, *The 1989 East European Revolutions: A Comparative Political and Historical Analysis*, Longman, Harlow, forthcoming.
- ¹² See, for example, V. Kusin, 'Gorbachev and Eastern Europe', in *Problems of Communism*, Jan-Feb. 1986, pp.39-53.
- ¹³ M. Gorbachev, 'Political Report of the CPSU Central Committee to the 27th Congress', in *The Challenges of Our Time: Disarmament and Social Progress: Highlights, 27th Congress, CPSU*, New York, International Publishers, 1986, p.85.
- ¹⁴ M. Gorbachev, *For a 'Common European Home', for a New Way of Thinking*, Moscow, Novosti, April 10th, 1987, p.10.
- ¹⁵ M. Kaufman, 'Gorbachev Draws a Mixed Reaction from Soviet Bloc', in *New York Times*, 12th February, 1987.
- ¹⁶ 19th All-Union Conference of the CPSU: Foreign Politics and Diplomacy', *Pravda*, 26th July, 1988.
- ¹⁷ A.D. Horne, 'Gorbachev Urges Communists to Join Solidarity Government', *Washington Post*, 23rd August, 1989, p.A1, and F.X. Clines, 'Gorbachev Calls, Then Polish Party Drops Its Demands', *New York Times*, 23rd August, 1989, p.A1.
- ¹⁸ J. Urban, 'Czechoslovakia: the power and politics of humiliation', in G. Prins, (ed.) *Spring in Winter. The 1989 revolutions*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, p.114.
- ¹⁹ M. Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, London, Doubleday, 1996, p.483-4.
- ²⁰ M. Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, London, Doubleday, 1996, p.484.
- ²¹ M. Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, London, Doubleday, 1996, p.484.

²² See the Hulik Commission preliminary findings. See also report in *The Independent*, 15th May, 1990, and BBC2 television programme 'Czech Mate', broadcast on 30th May 1990, written by John Simpson. An outline of these events can also be found in J.Urban, 'Czechoslovakia: the power and politics of humiliation', in G.Prins, (ed.) *Spring in Winter*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1990, pp.116-117.

²³ *Pravda*, 14th October, 1989, and *Moscow News*, (in English), 15th October, 1989.

²⁴ 'Parteiliches Handeln', *Der Spiegel*, 3rd July, 1989, and 'Vierter Mann', *Der Spiegel*, 17th September, 1988.

²⁵ F. Oldenburg, 'Sowjetische Deutschland-Politik nach der Oktober Revolution in der DDR', *Deutschland Archiv*, January 1990, p.69.

²⁶ G.Schabowski, *Der Absturz*, Berlin, Rowohlt, 1991, p.286.

²⁷ BBC2 television programme 'Czech Mate', broadcast on 30th May 1990, written by John Simpson.

²⁸ See, for example, M.Castex, *Un Mensonage Gros Comme Le Siecle: Roumanie, Histoire d'une Manipulation*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1990; and A.U. Gabanyi, *Die Unvollendete Revolution: Rumaenien zwischen Diktatur und Demokratie*, Munich, Piper, 1990.

²⁹ Interview with Silviu Brucan and Nicolae Militaru in *Adevarul*, 23rd August, 1990.

³⁰ Interview with Silviu Brucan and Nicolae Militaru in *Adevarul*, 23rd August, 1990.

³¹ M.Shafir, 'Preparing for the Future by Revising the Past', *Radio Free Europe/Report on Eastern Europe*, 12th October, 1990.

³² Interview with Oskar Krejci (by John Wilton), Prague, 24th October, 1994.

³³ M.Fisher, 'One Year Later, World Is Learning How Berlin Wall Opened', *Washington Post*, 10th November, 1990, p.A23.

³⁴ Interview with CPSU Central Committee staff member, Aleksandr Tsipko, 16th November 1990, quoted in D.Oberdorfer, *The Turn. From the Cold War to a New Era*. New York: Poseidon Press, 1991, p.364.

³⁵ Programme of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. A New Edition, Approved by Twenty-Seventh Party Congress', *Information Bulletin*, vol..24, no.9, 1986, Moscow, Novosti Press, p.72.

³⁶ *Bulgarian Telegraphic Agency*, 30th September, 1989.

³⁷ M. Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, London, Doubleday, 1996, p.486.

³⁸ D. Oberdorfer, *The Turn. From the Cold War to a New Era*, New York: Poseidon Press, 1991, p.355.

³⁹ M. Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, London, Doubleday, 1996, p.464-486.

⁴⁰ Z. Mlynar, *Night Frost in Prague*, London, Hurst, 1980, pp.239-241.