

**#239**

**Looking Back at Sovietology: An Interview  
with William Odom and Alexander Dallin  
By Daniel Abele**

Daniel Abele is a Research Associate at the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies.

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## Introduction

Sovietology has greatly matured as a social science since World War II. It has turned and shifted in its development as much as politics in the Soviet Union have. Throughout most of the past, Sovietologists had to rely on scant information on which to make inferences. Kremlinologists often based their notions and predictions about the Soviet Union on the positioning of Politburo members atop Lenin's mausoleum or on changes and omissions in party salutations. In the age of *glasnost*, that has all changed. The problem has become how to distill a deluge of information to discern directions in Soviet political and social change.

In March 1989 I sent written questions on the development of Sovietology to Lt. General William E. Odom and Professor Alexander Dallin. General Odom has responded in writing; Professor Dallin, by telephone. They evaluate the successes and shortcomings of Sovietologists in describing and predicting events. Dallin and Odom discuss the development and validity of the totalitarian model in the Soviet Union, reform and de-Stalinization in the Khrushchev period, the notion of pluralism in Soviet politics as developed in the 1960s and 1970s, and the responses of Sovietologists to the dramatic changes of the Gorbachev period.

General Odom, the director of national-security studies at the Hudson Institute and former director of the National Security Agency, has written extensively on communism and the USSR. Dr. Dallin, professor of Russian and Soviet history at Stanford University, is a senior Sovietologist who has published numerous books and articles on Soviet politics. Their views offer two diverse perspectives on how Sovietology has fared. -- Daniel Abele

**Looking back at the post-war Stalin period, what were the prevailing Western academic interpretations of the Soviet regime, its character, its economy, its international ambitions and the society it governed? From what we know now, how accurate (or inaccurate) were these perceptions of the post-war Stalin era?**

*Alexander Dallin:* Back then there was still a relatively small number of people engaged in what we now call Sovietology. Some of them were beginning to use the totalitarian model that social scientists during the 1940s had applied to the political regimes of Hitler and Mussolini. Zbigniew Brzezinski and Carl Friedrich at Harvard were among the path breakers with their book *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (1956), which delineated the basic features of totalitarian states.

Two years before that a conference at Harvard brought together many prominent social scientists and historians in the Russian-studies area. Out of that conference came both an influential collection of essays, *Totalitarianism*, and a growing theoretical consensus about what was going on in the Soviet Union.

It is ironic, though, that the first works systematically spelling out what were seen as the totalitarian features of the Soviet regime didn't come out until after Stalin's death in 1953 -- in other words, just when the model was becoming less applicable to the Russian scene. In that model central control was growing stronger and stronger. What we learned about purges during the 1930s, Stalin's intervention in the arts and sciences, and parallels in Eastern Europe only confirmed the validity of the totalitarian interpretation.

There was a small rift between scholars who thought that the Soviet leaders and the masses were divided and those who saw the population as obedient sheep. But, by and large, Sovietologists tended to agree on the question of Stalin and the leadership.

At the same time, many of the same scholars tended to exaggerate Soviet power and Moscow's international ambitions. It is now clear that the Soviet Union was exhausted from the war effort in 1945. The fairly widespread, popular fear that the Soviet Union wanted to drive to the Atlantic was a mistaken view of Stalin's intentions. Not that he wouldn't have liked to grab Western Europe. But Stalin was a master of dosage, as somebody described him. Similarly, there was a widespread belief in 1950-51 that the North Korean invasion of South Korea was part of a Soviet masterplan to seize Japan -- a notion that I find altogether nonsensical.

Finally, I should add that while there was a broad consensus among Western observers about many aspects of Soviet politics, internal and external, there was no monolithic position. I think scholars such as Stephen Cohen are wrong in charging that early postwar Sovietology was so homogeneous. For instance, Barrington Moore at Harvard, who had a tremendous influence on other Sovietologists, did not accept the totalitarian approach. In his book *Power and Politics* he stressed the reduction of the importance of ideology and suggested Soviet politics could develop in many directions.

*William Odom:* I would agree that the totalitarian model was the dominant, but by no means exclusive, model for Sovietologists during the early post-war period, particularly as it was defined by Friedrich and Brzezinski. But I also think that revisionist historians in America subsequently muddied our understanding of what the early Sovietologists were doing. Specifically, during the Vietnam War and after, many Americans, including some in academia, came to believe that American power was more of a problem for the world than Soviet power. We saw that view reflected in histories of the origins of the Cold War. The political sentiment behind such revisionism encouraged some scholars, often outside

the Soviet field, to see the totalitarian model as part of the cause of the Cold War. Had we not applied that model to the study of the Soviet Union, they say, U.S. policy makers would not have enjoyed scholarly justification for the strategy of "containing" Soviet power.

This revisionism was unfortunate. It tended to politicize the use of evidence, and in some circles the problem is still acute. Some scholars seem bent on proving that there was no "terror" under Stalin, that the number of victims during the collectivization campaign in the late 1920s and early 1930s was grossly and intentionally overestimated, and that traditional scholarship of the 1950s and 1960s was so biased as to be of little use in understanding Soviet reality. The revisionist line also had unfortunate consequences for American foreign policy, I believe. It contributed to a serious misreading of Soviet foreign policy during the 1970s and again during the first years of the Reagan administration.

**What were some of the differences among Sovietologists on the nature of Nikita Khrushchev's leadership and high-level Soviet politics during the Khrushchev era (1953-1964)? Were Sovietologists ill-equipped or ill-disposed to deal with such major changes as de-Stalinization, radical attempts at reform, the cultural thaw, and eventually Khrushchev's peaceful ouster?**

*William Odom:* Many Sovietologists were ill-equipped, but certainly not ill-disposed, to deal with de-Stalinization or to anticipate what would come in its aftermath. Looking back, much of the scholarship of the late 1950s and the 1960s looks fairly sound. Carl Linden's *Khrushchev and the Soviet Leadership: 1957-1964* (1966) focused on the nexus of power and policy, and on the combustion produced by their interaction. Linden concluded that political struggle shapes Soviet political institutions rather than the other way around. Michel Tatu's *Power in the Kremlin: From Khrushchev to Kosygin* (1969) noted that an

evolution of Soviet politics was occurring that corresponded to the overall evolution of Soviet society. He concluded that the Soviet Union during the Khrushchev era was probably moving toward a parliamentary system rather than reverting to a one-man dictatorship; liberalization would occur, but some day in the distant future. Merle Fainsod's last edition of *How Russia is Ruled* (1963) examined the instruments of rule and the impact of central control.<sup>1</sup> A number of other works tracked the developments quite accurately. Economists such as Abram Bergson, Peter Wiles, Joseph Berliner, David Granick, Alec Nove, Robert Campbell, and Gregory Grossman began to revise earlier assessments of the dynamics of the Soviet growth model. They identified the inherent inefficiencies of the Soviet planning system and organizational behavior that was increasingly dysfunctional. Bergson's calculations of trends in factory productivity, made in the early 1970s, anticipated the present Soviet economic predicament. And Brzezinski's *The Soviet Bloc* remains a classic treatment of Eastern Europe in this period.

All in all, it was a productive period for the field. Unfortunately, these efforts were not sustained as Sovietology entered a period of revisionism during the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s.

*Alexander Dallin:* The first reaction by Sovietologists was that Khrushchev would retain Stalinism without Stalin. But by 1956, or even before, it became clear that this was not the case. It took some time to adjust our vision, partly because of the characteristic skepticism of scholars when they encounter something new. But more importantly, I think, there was a specific conceptual problem. Totalitarianism, as it was defined during the

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<sup>1</sup> In some cases I have edited comments for the sake of brevity. In others, I have supplied additional information, such as summaries of books. -- Author's note.



1950s, did not allow for serious change within the political system. It was particularly difficult for the people who had been committed to earlier outlooks to assimilate and make sense of these changes.

Furthermore, certain events during the early Khrushchev era reinforced the initial caution of the Sovietologists. Infighting within the Moscow elite continued: The purge of Lavrenti Beria, the head of the secret police, and his backers in 1953 seemed to suggest that Stalinist methods were still in force. The closing down of the camps and the end of the mass terror were never explicitly announced in the Soviet Union, and if they had been we still would have been doubtful. It was impossible to think that Khrushchev had jettisoned Stalinism altogether. After all, he himself was a product of the Stalin era. And we know now that there were certain features of Stalinism that Khrushchev did not want to abandon, such as mass indoctrination, central planning, institutional controls, and the repression of "deviant" social behavior.

There were surprises, of course, such as Khrushchev's secret speech of 1956, in which he denounced Stalin's crimes as well as the cult of Stalin. We suddenly realized that there had been a change, and that central authority could be challenged in ways that had been impossible during the Stalin days. The reduction in power of the Ministry of State Security, or the secret police, suggested that the system was opening up. But it took a while for all this to sink in.

One of the first serious scholars to come up with a new formula to deal with these goings-on was Robert Tucker at Princeton. He had returned from duty at the American Embassy in Moscow in 1954, and in 1963 he published *The Soviet Political Mind*, a set of interpretations of Stalinism and the transition to the post-Stalin era, in which the basic contention is that the change in Soviet politics and the whole Russian scene caused by Stalin's death was not only real but critically significant.

Many Sovietologists during the Leonid Brezhnev period (1964-1982) told us that the Soviet system was changing and exhibiting pluralistic elements. They argued that a complex process of policy making involved factions, interest groups, and bureaucratic networks, and that party officials arbitrated bureaucratic debates. They concluded that Soviet institutions were becoming more diverse and participatory. How valid were these notions?

*Alexander Dallin:* During the Brezhnev period there was a healthy tendency by Sovietologists to bring Soviet politics into the framework of comparative government. Political scientists, such as Gordon Skilling, Jerry Hough, and later Seweryn Bialer, pointed out similarities between the Soviet system and other modern political systems: the tendency to have large bureaucracies, conflicts in civil-military relations, the problematical influence of the top leadership on lower levels of government operations, and party interference in economic management (what the Soviets sometimes call petty tutelage).

Gordon Skilling of the University of Toronto was one of the first to write on Soviet group politics in the collection that he and Frank Griffiths edited, *Interest Groups in Soviet Politics* (1971). This and a number of other studies challenged the static conception of Soviet politics, developed a broader picture of political conflict, and called for a broader comparative study of Soviet politics. They emphasized, for instance, that the Soviet Union was no exception to the fact that all modern governments have to rely heavily on experts in economics, the military, the sciences, and other areas. Policy making had been very personalistic in the Stalin days, and certainly chaotic under Khrushchev, but during Brezhnev's rule, it became clear, policy formation was routinized and institutionalized in ways that allowed the bureaucrats and bureaucratic groups to influence the governing of

the nation. Even if these were not formal interest groups as we think of them, they were incipient interest groups which had priorities and agendas.

There was also a tendency, however, to project Western concepts and Western notions onto the Soviet scene. This tendency could sometimes be quite naive, and at times it led to distortions and misunderstandings. I think it was a mistake to think of interest groups in the Soviet Union in the same terms that we think of them in the United States. But, all in all, there were more divisions, conflicts, and factions within the Soviet leadership -- and within the Communist Party -- than some of us thought at the time. The appearance of the monolithic leadership and a completely harmonious party has very often been simply a facade, behind which many fights were carried on.

*William Odom:* Much of the data reported in the studies concentrating on interest groups and policy making during the Brezhnev period was valid in a specific and qualified sense. The weakness of such analyses, however, lies in their focus on groups that are not critically important to the political life of the society, and their inattentiveness to some of the legacies of the Stalinist period, such as the concentration of power within the party elite. Another problem is terminology. "Participation" in the Soviet system strikes me as wrongly equated by Jerry Hough with "participation" in Western systems. The result was category confusion. The same name was applied to phenomena that were not precisely the same in the West and the Soviet Union. Similarly, concepts like "interest groups" were used with fairly soft evidence to support them. Roman Kolkowicz's *The Soviet Military and the Communist Party* (1967), which suggested that the role and influence of the military was likely to rise, and his other early works on military policy were not always convincing for this reason.

The validity of these analyses is best judged by recalling what they encouraged us to expect: liberalization and evolution toward a "pluralist" system. But the Brezhnev period, as described today by Soviet intelligentsia -- who, thanks to *glasnost*, can now speak more freely -- looks quite different from the reality painted by several Western analysts. Gordon Skilling, Philip Stewart, Jerry Hough, Stephen Cohen, and George Breslauer strike me as having pressed the evidence a bit too far in this regard.

Hough's claim that Brezhnev had achieved a great re-distribution of the wealth based on greater social justice would be hard to defend in retrospect. Yet this claim was made in the early 1970s. While "pluralism and interest groups" were supposedly proliferating, the KGB was, in fact, methodically destroying the dissident movement, which included the Human Rights Committee, founded by Sakharov in 1970; Amnesty International, USSR Section, founded in 1973; the Helsinki Monitoring Groups that began in 1976; and other groups of the democratic movement of the Soviet Union.

Economic allocations to the military grew, corruption and the "second economy" flourished, and Soviet consumers fared poorly. Social ills such as infant mortality, poor housing standards, and health problems created a sense of resignation and low morale in society. These were facts that Western analytical perspectives did not interpret well and most often ignored. However, there were exceptions, notably Vladimir Treml, an economist, and Murray Feshbach, a demographer, who were looking at some of these disturbing social trends. Walter Connor's occasional essays also emphasized several of these factors.

**Soviet military involvement in Afghanistan, Angola, and Ethiopia during the 1970s and '80s prompted a discussion in America about the Soviet challenge, expansion, and threat. We now see that a host of problems has plagued the Soviet Union for some time: imperial overstretch, an assortment of economic difficulties, the burden of a vast military budget. Has an awareness of these realities changed the way Sovietologists view the Soviet threat?**

*William Odom:* I don't believe that Sovietologists have yet taken the Soviet military expansion and threat into serious analytical account. There are now more scholars working on the military sector (David Holloway, Stephen Meyer, Timothy Colton, and Condoleezza Rice, for example) and some of the results are good. But some serious preconceptions limit our ability to deal with these conclusions. Western detente policy under President Nixon, and particularly under President Carter, focused on arms control and economic assistance, while ignoring competition in the Third World. This policy was based on the assumption that more economic interaction and arms control would moderate Soviet behavior in foreign and military policy, while encouraging a liberal evolution on the Soviet domestic scene. But, in fact, things did not work out that way. The Soviets under Brezhnev grew more aggressive abroad and less tolerant of dissent at home.

President Reagan's strategy of military competition, economic denial, regional competition, and ideological struggle (characterized by his use of the "evil empire" epithet) did not enjoy popularity among many Sovietologists, though, to be sure, there were notable exceptions, such as Richard Pipes, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Thomas Hammond, and Jiri Valenta, among others. Yet the results of the Reagan approach have been precisely the opposite of what the majority of Sovietologists expected. It is hard to imagine that *glasnost*'

and *perestroika* would have developed had U.S. policy not pushed the Soviet Union to the limits of its resources, leaving it, as Gorbachev has often said, with "no other way."

*Alexander Dallin:* Headlines in the media that talked about Soviet aggression, Soviet expansion, and the Soviet threat tended to be exaggerated ten to 15 years ago. Now judgments go in the opposite direction. Brzezinski's new book *The Grand Failure*, for example, in effect predicts the burial of Communism altogether. There is now a widespread view not only of the failure of Communism as an ideology and the disintegration of the Soviet state, but also of the gradual transformation or disappearance of Communism as a body of ideas, as a political movement. Well, I think both are probably exaggerations--the threat was exaggerated and the collapse has been exaggerated.

People are always attracted to simplicities. The television networks prefer to feature specialists who offer one-liners that are simple to understand, rather than people who try to strike a more moderate or nuanced note. Many observers saw the entry of the Red Army into Afghanistan in 1979, for instance, as the beginning of a new phase of Soviet expansion. Well in retrospect clearly that was a mistake. Internal conflicts threatened the survival of the pro-Soviet leadership of Afghanistan, a country which borders the Soviet Union. The Soviet decision to enter Afghanistan can be better explained by these unique conditions rather than any plan for global expansion. Today it is clear to us, and to the Soviets, that the USSR overextended itself. Soviet writers now describe the Ethiopian or the Afghan operations as originally being based on Soviet misperceptions about the prospects for developing socialism in these countries. Today they recognize very frankly that a lot of Soviet military and economic assistance went down the drain. There is learning on the Soviet side, and on our side as well as we observe this.

I would be the first one to say the Soviet system has turned out to be much more fragile than I or most of us imagined. During the Brezhnev period there was simply a lot of slippage, a failure of the center to enforce control, and that permitted the rise of corrupt, feudal empires all around the country, from Uzbekistan to Belorussia. We failed to understand the grave socio-economic transformation that the country underwent as the economy slowed to a crawl "while Brezhnev slept."

Some scholars, such as Seweryn Bialer in his book *Stalin's Successors* (1980), and Robert Byrnes in *After Brezhnev* (1983) did speak of a crisis in the Soviet system, but they failed to define what they meant by crisis. Certainly, we lacked the clear data on the economy and on public morale that we now have.

**Is there an emerging consensus now about the Gorbachev period? Some say this is a historical blip, a reform period that ultimately will be followed by a period of reaction. Others say that this is part of an evolutionary process that may lead to democratization and a market economy. Still others say that the basic economic and political principles of the Soviet system are untenable and what we are seeing now is the system's collapse. Is there evidence to support any of these claims, or is there another explanation?**

*Alexander Dallin:* I don't think there is a consensus about the Gorbachev period. It has shocked some scholars who had not previously believed that change in the Soviet Union was possible. On the other hand, some of us, who had perhaps exaggerated both the stability and the governability of the Soviet system, now have to recognize that the whole thing is much more fragile than we had thought. In part, the mistaken impressions were due to inadequate information about the real state of the economy, or public morale. So the surprise was partly the result of the previous secretiveness and falsification of data. But,

in the last analysis, that is no excuse -- some of our estimates were just wrong.

The big question mark is the economy, and so far there seems to be no evidence of significant improvement under the present leadership. Essentially, it is not clear where they should go, and it is partly this uncertainty that has stimulated the discussion of new ideas. The leaders no longer assert that they have all the solutions. They claim to be searching for new and diverse answers. This in itself is a healthy thing, but the result is a floundering about among different kinds of economic and political advice. I think the leadership does not dare take some steps in the economic reform -- in the area of price reform, for example -- which specialists have advised them to take. The leaders are reluctant because they fear the political consequences. This is a recipe for a new kind of stagnation and paralysis, if they do not break out of it.

Of course, it is not a foregone conclusion that the system will survive. But I think one would have to be a little foolhardy in predicting which way it will go.

*William Odom:* I do not yet see a consensus emerging about the Gorbachev period, but that is not surprising. Gorbachev, in trying to revitalize the Soviet system, has unleashed many pent up forces. Where this will lead is beyond anyone's ability to predict. Some contemporary "guesses" may prove close to the truth, but they will remain just that, guesses.

It is possible, however, to anticipate some general developments. It was easy to predict that *glasnost*' would unleash national minority political sentiment. We are seeing that now and will probably continue to see it. Some other social and political repercussions of this loosening up may be anticipated. Gorbachev may be able to contain them, use them, or he may fail to control them. I do not see how we can predict any outcome with confidence.



Two dangers confront our analysis. On the one hand, we may overlook the element of voluntarism on the part of Soviet leaders and see political change in the Soviet Union in the context of a rigid system guided by a strict ideology. That was the case when Khrushchev surprised us in 1956. On the other hand, we may become so charmed by a leader that we base our analysis too much on the leader's personality and fail to remember the structural features of the system that constrain his choices and freedom of action. Gorbachev accentuates this problem for Western Sovietologists today.

**Among Sovietologists is the concept of totalitarianism useful for understanding the Soviet political system today?**

*William Odom:* The concept of totalitarianism is still useful today. When we speak of how the system is changing, what is our reference point for change? Several of the six characteristics of the totalitarian model<sup>2</sup> provide those reference points. The centrally-planned economy is the most obvious one. Monopoly of communications and censorship is another. The official ideology is one more. We see some movement away from those features, and so the old totalitarian model offers a basis for measuring the changes today.

Let us reflect for a moment on the view held by many Sovietologists: that totalitarianism perished long ago in the Soviet Union, if, indeed, it ever existed there. If this view were sound, over the past three or four decades we should have seen pluralism, liberalizing, and democracy developing. And if those things did happen, Gorbachev today

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<sup>2</sup> Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, in their book *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, cite these six points: "The 'syndrome,' or pattern of interrelated traits, of the totalitarian dictatorship consists of an ideology, a single party typically led by one man, a terroristic police, a communications monopoly, a weapons monopoly, and a centrally directed economy."

ought to be able to move easily to formalize democracy, a market economy, and a liberal legal system. But he isn't able to. So the striking thing about Gorbachev's undertaking is that it reveals how deeply rooted much of the old totalitarian structure still is, and how difficult it is to change that legacy.

We might have taken another approach rather than abandoning the totalitarian model. We might have asked: "What will be the political dynamics of the remaining five features of the system if 'terrorism' is eliminated?" Had we asked that question, the kinds of developments that occurred under Brezhnev would have been expected: localism, corruption, abuse of party power, mafia-like political cliques, the "second economy," and so on. We wouldn't have anticipated pluralism and interest groups but, instead, small-clique deviant behavior at the expense of central control. We would have seen "participation" in another light, namely as a mix of social mobilization and deception. Participation in influencing allocations of resources did occur, but mainly to the benefit of corrupt officials and regional party bosses. Moreover, factory managers and ministerial officials often faked economic performances. This was not a development that led to pluralism but one that increased the dangers of fragmentation and a loss of vitality in the political system.

To point out, as many Sovietologist do, that the Soviet system was never "monolithic" is to set up a straw man and fail to see that totalitarianism is not the absence of politics. Rather, it is politics at the extreme, a virtual civil war between the central leaders and the lower bureaucratic strata and the society as a whole. Blood purges are an index of the intensity of politics, not evidence of its absence. No, it is impossible to grasp the dynamics of Soviet politics since World War II without using the totalitarian model. Its legacy is Gorbachev's central problem today.

*Alexander Dallin:* That depends on your definition of totalitarianism. Perhaps some of the scholars who advocate the continuing utility of the notion have in their own minds redefined it to mean something quite different from what Friedrich and Brzezinski meant in 1956. We see no "terror" today in the Soviet Union and no individual dictator. The fact that the economy is being somewhat decentralized undermines one of the other points of the model. That there is an army and that the state holds a monopoly of the means of violence are hardly exclusively totalitarian; both are true of virtually all modern states.

The Orwellian image of totalitarianism and the stereotypes that go with it applied most accurately to the period of high Stalinism. Even then, reality didn't completely conform with what the model suggested, but it was pretty close. In practical terms, I think that the Soviet system has moved so far away from that set of institutions, controls, and outlook that the only utility of the concept is as a historical reference point for measuring the changes that have occurred since the early 1950s. In describing the system today, it's more misleading than helpful.

**What effect has the flood of new information as a result of *glasnost*' had on Sovietology? Has it created new problems? What are some of the pitfalls of Sovietology today?**

*Alexander Dallin:* Huge gaps in information still distort our perceptions. Soviet studies in this country, for instance, have really neglected Soviet society. I would agree with scholars such as Steve Cohen that we have concentrated excessively at the very top of the political pyramid, partly because it was easier to study the political leaders rather than the rest of the country. But today, of course, when it becomes crucial to understand what people think and how people behave across the whole land, we know frightfully little. I

think one of the priorities in Sovietology today should be to have students work in the Soviet Union, to go out in the provinces, to work with Soviet institutes, and to conduct public opinion research, especially among the non-Russian nationalities.

Another point that the Gorbachev era underlines is the need for multidisciplinary training which prepares scholars to look at the interdependence of political and economic influences, domestic and foreign concerns, and the politics of culture. We need Sovietologists who understand the connections among the different aspects of Soviet politics, history, and society.

**William Odom:** The short-term effect of the flood of new information has been too overwhelming for many scholars. At the same time, analysis has become more complicated because one cannot be sure which article or author is providing the "party line" and which is not. Previously that had been fairly easy. At times now it seems there is no party line on many issues, or else that there are several competing lines. Sorting all this out is a new kind of challenge for many scholars.

In the long run, the effect should be a much more textured understanding of many aspects of the Soviet policy process, of personalities in the leadership, of the nationalities issue, and of many other topics.

**How would you rate the record of Sovietologists in predicting major developments in the Soviet Union? Did Gorbachev's *glasnost* and *perestroika*, in particular, come as a complete surprise? If so, why?**

**William Odom:** A number of Sovietologists, particularly Bialer and Hough, emphasized the backlog of problems that the Soviet leadership would face in the 1980s. That inclined

them to expect great change. They deserve credit for anticipating a dramatic shift in Soviet policy. I believe, however, that they only partially grasped the causes of Gorbachev's policies. They tended to emphasize domestic factors. Certainly those factors have been critical. As a rule, domestic factors predominate in forcing change, but they do not tell the whole story. Externals also play a role.

Some Sovietologists have underestimated the impact of external factors in producing the present Soviet phenomenon. The last couple of years of the Carter administration and the first six years of the Reagan administration mark the largest U.S. defense build-up since World War II. Those same years saw East-West economic interaction and technology transfers at a new low. Finally, sustained U.S. support to the Afghan insurgents and to anti-Soviet forces elsewhere dealt Moscow a major defeat. Few observers, I among them, believed that the United States would or could sustain this kind of competitive policy for a decade. Many of them thought it would have had a quite different effect on Soviet policy. But we were wrong; American policy intensified the sense of crisis and the need for sweeping change in the Soviet Union.

Finally, Gorbachev's personality, the factor of leadership and voluntarism in politics was a wholly unpredictable factor. It has surprised many scholars, just as Khrushchev did. I personally have been surprised by several of Gorbachev's initiatives. What he tolerates in some national minority areas and some of the ideological revisions continue to astound me.

But Sovietologists should not be judged mainly for predicting major developments. Rather, they should be judged by their hypotheses about the Soviet system's logic. We shall never be able to anticipate precisely what policy choices leaders will make in the Soviet system or elsewhere; we should, however, be able to understand the structure that

constrains those choices, rules out some policies, and makes others more or less probable. On the whole, Sovietologists have not done badly in this regard.

*Alexander Dallin:* I'm not sure that the ability to predict is really a fair test of being a good or a bad Sovietologist. Scholars in this country have much better access to information and yet were unable to predict anything from the civil rights movement to the reaction to the Vietnam War. Khrushchev himself was unable to predict his own ouster despite having rather good intelligence at his disposal. So I think as far as discrete events are concerned, prediction is not a good test of the soundness of analysis. On the other hand, it is true that what happens should fall at least within the range of what an analyst perceives as possible.

Very few people predicted the magnitude of recent developments in the Soviet Union. Jerry Hough was one of the few people who anticipated both Gorbachev's rise to power and a strongly reformist orientation in Soviet politics. His book *Leadership in Transition* (1980) as well as Bialer's *Stalin's Successors* (1980) described the change of generation in the leadership that would bring into office people of a different orientation from that of an earlier generation. What many of us had not foreseen is the extent to which these particular individual leaders were able to emancipate themselves from some of the Marxist-Leninist thinking, such as the notion of central control of the economy or the suspicion of autonomous groups.