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## ИСТОРИЯ МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫХ ОТНОШЕНИЙ

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### Soviet-American and Soviet-Chinese Relations under Y.V. Andropov: An Analysis

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**Abstract.** In this study, the author examines the foreign policy of Y.V. Andropov and assesses the impact of his personal position on the Soviet-US and Sino-Soviet relations during his tenure as the leader of the Soviet Union. The author was guided by the principles of historicism, scientific objectivity, and reliance on sources. It is proved that Y.V. Andropov adopted the foreign policy of the USSR from the position of the “hawks” in the Soviet leadership, which were represented by D.F. Ustinov. According to such a position, foreign policy should be absolutely subordinated to the interests of national security, which can only be guaranteed by the superiority of both nuclear and conventional forces over potential adversaries. Military power should be at the forefront of foreign policy decisions. Therefore, no matter on the issue of Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) in Europe, or on the issue of the armed forces on the Sino-Soviet and Sino-Mongolian borders, regardless of the objective changes in the situation, Y.V. Andropov always maintained a tough position. Author proves that the Soviet leader persistently rejected the reasonable proposals of diplomats and was unwilling to make any concessions that contradicted the ideas of military supremacy. This primarily concerned the issue of the INF deployment on the territory of Eastern Europe, which was a key topic of discussion at the Geneva negotiations. As a result, the Soviet Union could not avoid being drawn into the new round of the arms race provoked by the U.S. President Ronald Reagan, one of the results of which was the deployment of the American INF in Western Europe. In the East, he missed the opportunity to improve relations with China, which had begun to reorient itself away from confrontation with the USSR to building a balance in relations with the United States and the Soviet Union and continued a pointless confrontation with it. The foreign policy heritage that Y.V. Andropov left to his successors was an isolated and tense external environment in which there was few freedom of action. In addition, the growth of military expenditures caused by his tough line on foreign affairs aggravated the stagnation and crisis in the social-economic development of the USSR.

**Key words:** the Cold War, foreign policy of the USSR, arms race, the U.S., People’s Republic of China, PRC, Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces, INF

**Conflicts of interest.** The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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## Советско-американские и советско-китайские отношения при Ю.В. Андропове: опыт анализа

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**Аннотация.** Рассматривается политика Ю.В. Андропова и его личная позиция в ключевых вопросах отношений СССР с США и КНР в годы руководства Советским Союзом. На этой основе оценены влияние и последствия действий Ю. В. Андропова на внешнеполитическое развитие СССР. Автор руководствовался принципами историзма, научной объективности и опоры на источники. Доказано, что Ю.В. Андропов формировал внешнюю политику страны с позиции «ястребов» в советском руководстве, представленных Д.Ф. Устиновым. Согласно этой позиции, внешняя политика абсолютно подчинена интересам национальной безопасности, предполагающей превосходство ядерных и обычных сил над силами потенциальных противников, а военная сила должна выходить на первый план при принятии внешнеполитических решений. Поэтому как по проблеме ракет средней дальности (РСД) в Европе, так и по вопросу о размещении вооруженных сил на советско-китайской и китайско-монгольской границах Ю.В. Андропов, игнорируя объективные изменения обстановки, неизменно придерживался жесткой позиции. Автор приводит свидетельства того, как советский руководитель неоднократно отвергал разумные предложения дипломатов и не желал идти на какие-либо уступки, которые противоречили идеям военного превосходства. В первую очередь это касалось вопроса размещения РСД на территории Восточной Европы, который обсуждался на переговорах в Женеве. В итоге Советскому Союзу не удалось избежать вовлечения в новый виток гонки вооружений, спровоцированный президентом США Р. Рейганом, вследствие чего американские РСД были размещены в Западной Европе. На Востоке Ю.В. Андропов упустил возможность улучшить отношения с Китаем, который начал переориентироваться от конфронтации с СССР на выстраивание баланса в отношениях с США и Советским Союзом, и продолжил бессмысленную конфронтацию с ним. Внешнеполитическое наследие Ю.В. Андропова — изолированная, напряженная внешняя обстановка, не подразумевающая свободы действий. Кроме того, увеличение военных расходов, вызванное его жесткой внешнеполитической линией, усугубило «застой» и кризис социально-экономического развития СССР.

**Ключевые слова:** холодная война, внешняя политика СССР, гонка вооружений, США, Китайская Народная Республика, КНР, ракеты средней дальности, РСД

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### Introduction

Although Y.V. Andropov's tenure as General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU CC) lasted only 15 months, his role in the Soviet history was quite significant. As Y.K. Ligachev, a member of the Politburo of the CPSU CC in 1985–1990, noted, “‘Andropov's year’ remained in the people's memory as a time of restoring order in the interests of the laboring

people ... He left such a deep mark in history that the people remember and honor him.”<sup>1</sup> The praise of Andropov's personal qualities and abilities, his loyalty to socialist principles, and his efforts to revive the country and pull it out of “stagnation” is widely reflected in the recollections of his colleagues in the Central

<sup>1</sup> Ligachev E. K. Who Betrayed the USSR? Moscow : Algorithm publ., Eksmo publ., 2010. P. 24, 26. (In Russian).

Committee, subordinates in the Committee for State Security (KGB), and comrades from the Socialist Commonwealth.<sup>2</sup> They also noted his influence on foreign affairs in the last years of the L.I. Brezhnev era.<sup>3</sup> Some even believed that Y.V. Andropov could have acted more effectively in the field of foreign policy than A.A. Gromyko.<sup>4</sup>

Andropov's leadership coincided with a period of sharp deterioration in US-Soviet relations (Medvedev, 1999, pp. 429–464). Most Russian historians defend Andropov's position in US-Soviet relations (Prozorov, 2004, pp. 27–35; Khlobustov, 2009, pp. 426–427; Kashirina, 2011; Krysenko, 2016). Moreover, A.S. Vashchuk and A.E. Savchenko believe that in the confrontation between the USSR and the U.S., Y.V. Andropov, whose election to the post of General Secretary coincided with an escalation of the international situation, was the first to look East towards China in search of possible allies (Vaschuk & Savchenko, 2016).

The anti-Soviet and militaristic nature of the US President Ronald Reagan's administration's foreign policy is beyond doubt. Nevertheless, the question of whether the decisions made during Andropov's leadership in the context of confrontation with the U.S. on the international stage were optimal remains open. Y.V. Andropov played an important role in shaping Soviet foreign policy since the mid-1970s,<sup>5</sup> and from May 1982, when he once

again became the Secretary of the CPSU CC, his focus was mainly put on international issues (Boldovskiy, Jalilov & Pivovarov, 2018, p. 233).

Given this fact, this article examines Andropov's personal position on the deployment of Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) in Europe as a key factor in US-Soviet relations, as well as the deployment of armed forces on the borders between the USSR and the People's Republic of China (PRC) and in Mongolia as a major factor in Sino-Soviet relations from the early 1980s to 1984. In light of these considerations, an attempt is made to assess the impact and consequences of his foreign policy against the backdrop of the Cold War.

### **Andropov's Stance on the Deployment of INF in Europe**

In November 1982, there was a further round of tension in Europe caused by the issue of Soviet and American INF deployment.

Since 1976–1977, the Soviet Union had been secretly and gradually replacing outdated liquid-fuel medium-range ballistic missiles (MRBMs), the R-12 and the R-14, with two-stage solid-fuel MRBMs, the RSD-10, in the European part of its territory. In addition to greater accuracy and range, the new type of missiles had three independently targetable warheads. Therefore, it posed a significant threat to the West.<sup>6</sup>

In response, NATO adopted the so-called "dual-track decision" in December 1979, according to which, if by the end of 1983, an agreement with Moscow on the deployment of INF in Europe was not reached, then 572 American missiles, including 108 Pershing II MRBMs and 464 ground-launched cruise missiles were to be deployed in Western Europe (Haslam, 1989, pp. 104–105).

On November 18, 1981, shortly before negotiations on the limitation of nuclear weapons

<sup>2</sup> See for example: Kirpichenko V. A. *Intelligence: Faces and Personalities*. Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya publ., 2017. P. 156–164. (In Russian); Andropov in the Memories and Assessments of Comrades and Colleagues / ed. by A. G. Sidorenko. Moscow: Artstil-Polygraphiya publ., 2011. P. 10–246. (In Russian); Bobkov F. D. *Last Twenty Years: Notes of the Chief of Political Counterintelligence*. Moscow: Russkoye Slovo publ., 2006. P. 153–154. (In Russian); Gromyko A. A. *Memorable*. Book 2. Moscow: Politizdat publ., 1990. P. 531. (In Russian); Wolf M. *Memoirs of a Spymaster*. London: Pimlico, 1998. P. 213–214. See also: (Kurylev et al., 2022, p. 758).

<sup>3</sup> Grinevsky O. A. *Secrets of Soviet Diplomacy*. Moscow: Vagrius publ., 2000. P. 332–334. (In Russian).

<sup>4</sup> Kevorkov V. E. *The Secret Channel*. Moscow: Gaia publ., 1997. P. 297. (In Russian).

<sup>5</sup> Akhromeev S. F., Kornienko G. M. *By the Eyes of a Marshal and a Diplomat: A Critical Look at the Foreign*

*Policy of the USSR Before and After 1985*. Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya publ., 1992. P. 15. (In Russian).

<sup>6</sup> Grinevsky O. A. *Perelom: From Brezhnev to Gorbachev*. Moscow: Olma Press Obrazovanie publ., 2004. P. 14–15. (In Russian). See also: (Haslam, 1989, p. 103).

in Europe began in Geneva, the US President R. Reagan proposed the “zero option” in a public speech, whereby the U.S. would be willing to cease deployment of its missiles if the USSR dismantled its R-12, R-14, and RSD-10.<sup>7</sup> Despite some nuances that emerged in 1983, the “zero option” was advantageous for the Reagan administration as part of a “deal” with Moscow, as it concerned Soviet missiles already deployed in Europe, unlike the American ones.

On the other hand, since the beginning of the INF talks, Moscow repeatedly made various proposals. After the election of Y.V. Andropov as the General Secretary of the CPSU CC in November 1982, new relevant initiatives were put forward more frequently. At the ceremonial meeting dedicated to the 60th anniversary of the USSR’s creation on December 21, 1982, Y.V. Andropov presented the core idea of these proposals — the Soviet Union is ready to reduce the number of its MRBM launchers in Europe to the level of the UK and France in exchange for the cancellation of the deployment of American missiles.<sup>8</sup> The essence of this position was that Moscow intended to maintain its existing advantage in MRBMs, as with an equal number of launchers, the Soviet Union had far more nuclear warheads than the UK and France. Moreover, the RSD-10 deployed east of the Urals had sufficient range to strike targets in Western Europe.

Y.V. Andropov always regarded R. Reagan with distrust.<sup>9</sup> He was convinced that as long as R. Reagan continued to occupy the White House, reaching a consensus with the Americans was impossible (Zubok, 2011, pp. 391–396;

<sup>7</sup> Reagan R. Remarks to Members of the National Press Club on Arms Reduction and Nuclear Weapons // Ronald Reagan Presidential Library & Museum. November 18, 1981. URL: <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/remarks-members-national-press-club-arms-reduction-and-nuclear-weapons> (accessed: 15.06.2023).

<sup>8</sup> Report of Comrade Y.V. Andropov // Pravda. December 22, 1982. P. 2. (In Russian).

<sup>9</sup> Aleksandrov-Agentov A. M. From Kollontai to Gorbachev: Memoirs of a Diplomat, Advisor to A. A. Gromyko, Assistant to L. I. Brezhnev, Y. V. Andropov, K. U. Chernenko and M. S. Gorbachev. Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya publ., 1994. P. 282–283. (In Russian).

Downing, 2020, pp. 193–195). Hence, Moscow mainly placed its hopes on Western European countries, especially the West Germany.<sup>10</sup> It attempted to initiate a “peaceful offensive” there to divide the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member states, their peoples and governments, in order to prevent the deployment of US missiles (Mehrotra, 1983; Wettig, 2009, pp. 90–101). For example, in 1982, in accordance with a directive from Y.V. Andropov, the Committee for State Security (KGB) systematically conducted activities aimed at stimulating and further developing the peace movement in Western European countries and the U.S., involving broad segments of the public.<sup>11</sup> However, since Moscow insisted on comparing the number of NATO, rather than American, missiles with Soviet ones, the cohesion of the U.S. and its European allies was indirectly strengthened.

On April 7, 1983, at a rally in the East Germany, Soviet Minister of Defense D.F. Ustinov declared that the U.S. is actually placing its NATO allies under the threat of a retaliatory nuclear strike from the USSR, while the strike “could be the last one for most Western European countries where American nuclear weapons would be deployed.”<sup>12</sup> Ustinov’s speeches in the East Germany indicated that Moscow’s patience and confidence were waning, and it was gradually turning from “persuading” the West into “intimidating” it. At the Warsaw Pact Summit on June 28, 1983, Y.V. Andropov

<sup>10</sup> N.N. Detinov’s Speech at the Memorial Evening of Y. A. Kvitsinsky at the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs // Diplomat Yuli Kvitsinsky: A Collection of Memoirs / ed. by V. N. Kazimirov, V. M. Rodin. Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya publ., 2013. P. 39. (In Russian).

<sup>11</sup> Note No. 547-Ch/OV of the Chairman of the USSR KGB V.M. Chebrikov to the CPSU Central Committee and the General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee Y.V. Andropov ‘Report on the Work of the USSR State Security Committee for 1982’. March 15, 1983 // Power and dissidents: From the documents of the KGB and the CPSU Central Committee. Moscow: Moskovskaya Khel’sinskaya Gruppya publ., 2006. P. 253. (In Russian).

<sup>12</sup> Friendship Meeting // Pravda. April 7, 1983. P. 4. (In Russian).

made a statement for the first time, indicating that in response to the deployment of new American missiles in Europe, the Soviet Union would have to lift the moratorium on further deployment of the RSD-10 and consider installing its own long-range cruise missiles. In addition, he warned of the possible approach of Soviet operational tactical missile systems (OTRK) to the borders of those NATO countries where the US nuclear weapons would be deployed (referring to the deployment of Soviet missiles on the territory of Warsaw Pact countries).<sup>13</sup>

The hardening of the position was unlikely to change the opinions of the US and Western European leaders, but it did indeed cause concern among the people of Eastern European countries, especially in the East Germany, and even resistance from its leadership (Haslam, 1989, pp. 131–140). Similarly, the anti-nuclear movement in Western Europe fostered pacifist-dissident sentiments in the Warsaw Pact countries.<sup>14</sup>

On September 19, 1983, at a meeting with the Deputy Chairman of the KGB V.A. Kryuchkov, a member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, the head of the Ministry of State Security, E. Mielke, frankly stated that about 150 pacifists were being arrested every week in East Germany.<sup>15</sup> After V.A. Kryuchkov, a close comrade-in-arms of Y.V. Andropov, hinted that “Some comrades say: Does it really make sense to continue negotiations?”, E. Mielke immediately responded: “One has to continue the negotiations.”<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (RGANI). Fund 82. Reg. 1. File 4. P. 43. Text of the Speech of Y. V. Andropov at the Meeting of the Leaders of the Warsaw Pact Countries. June 28, 1983. (In Russian).

<sup>14</sup> English R. *Eastern Europe's Doves // Foreign Policy*. 1984. No. 56. P. 44–60. See also: (Tismaneanu, 1990, pp. 10–11).

<sup>15</sup> Note About the Talks of Comrade Minister [Erich Mielke] with the Deputy Chairman of the KGB, Comrade V. A. Kryuchkov, on 19 September 1983 in Berlin // Wilson Center Digital Archive. P. 10. URL: <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115718> (accessed: 05.02.2022).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* P. 8.

However, the confrontation inevitably intensified. On October 24, 1983, the Soviet Ministry of Defense announced the deployment of OTRKs in the GDR and Czechoslovakia.<sup>17</sup> On November 23, immediately after the arrival of the first batch of American missiles in Europe, the Soviet side unilaterally withdrew from the negotiations on limiting nuclear weapons in Europe.<sup>18</sup> Half a month later, to the shock of the Soviet delegation, Moscow additionally announced the suspension of the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks, which were simultaneously taking place in Geneva, though the Soviet negotiators suggested to their leadership to suspend talks only on the INF for “assessing the current situation.”<sup>19</sup> This, as noted by Soviet ambassador to the U.S. A.F. Dobrynin, essentially meant the end of Andropov’s hopes to reach any agreement with Reagan.<sup>20</sup>

Perhaps Y.V. Andropov had been waiting for a turning point, which could arise during the 1984 US presidential elections.<sup>21</sup> However, time and reality did not allow him to realize his fantasy: he died in February 1984. Nine months later R. Reagan was re-elected president with an overwhelming majority of votes.

Overall, because of the struggle with the US over the INF issue from 1982 to 1983, the Soviet Union suffered a significant defeat, as the President of the Socialist Republic of Romania, N. Ceaușescu, openly stated during talks with the Soviet leadership in June 1984: the deployment

<sup>17</sup> English R. *Eastern Europe's Doves // Foreign Policy*. 1984. No. 56. P. 46.

<sup>18</sup> Statement on Soviet Union Withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force Negotiations // Ronald Reagan Presidential Library & Museum. November 23, 1983. URL: <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/statement-soviet-union-withdrawal-intermediate-range-nuclear-force-negotiations> (accessed: 05.02.2022).

<sup>19</sup> Palazhchenko P. P. *Summit Diplomacy: Geneva and Reykjavik Through the Eyes of a Translator // Security Index*. 2015. Vol. 21, no. 4. P. 194.

<sup>20</sup> Dobrynin A. F. *In Confidence: Ambassador to Washington under Six U.S. Presidents (1962–1986)*. Moscow : Avtor publ., 1996. P. 498. (In Russian).

<sup>21</sup> See: Report of Comrade Y. V. Andropov // *Pravda*. December 22, 1982. P. 2. (In Russian); Dobrynin A. F. *In Confidence: Ambassador to Washington under Six U.S. Presidents (1962–1986)*. Moscow : Avtor publ., 1996. P. 498. (In Russian).

of American INF gave the US advantages that it did not have before. It forced the Soviet Union to adopt countermeasures that would not improve the situation: from the territory of Western European countries, the U.S. could strike the territory of the USSR, while the Soviet OTRK in the GDR and Czechoslovakia lacked the capacity to reach the continental United States. In conclusion N. Ceaușescu said: “So even from a purely military point of view, it is necessary that the Americans do not have their missiles in Europe.”<sup>22</sup>

G.A. Arbatov, director of the Institute for USA and Canada of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, recalled that as soon as the secret deployment of RSD-10 missiles in Eastern Europe became known, many Soviet diplomats and specialists already considered it a mistake.<sup>23</sup> Once he managed to discuss this with Andropov, trying to convince him that the deployment of new missiles without notifying the West was inconsistent with détente, the Helsinki Accords, arms limitation talks, etc. But from Y.V. Andropov he received only a sharp objection. After the conversation, G.A. Arbatov concluded that Y.V. Andropov was angry precisely because he had no convincing answers and probably did not want to spoil his relations with D.F. Ustinov.<sup>24</sup> In the opinion of K.N. Brutents, former First Deputy Head of the International Department of the CPSU, during the Brezhnev era Ustinov practically monopolized decision-making on military issues.<sup>25</sup>

First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the USSR G.M. Kornienko believed that the main mistake in the deployment of RSD-10 was that the Soviet leadership did not use the “window of opportunity” in 1977–1979 to find a

compromise solution that could have avoided the deployment of the US missiles in Western Europe due to the objections of the marshals (primarily D.F. Ustinov). At that time the Western Europeans proposed a compromise approach — they were not against the deployment of new RSD-10 missiles on the condition that the total number of Soviet launchers would not increase.<sup>26</sup> This perspective was shared by A.F. Dobrynin.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, there is no evidence to suggest that Andropov opposed the marshals’ opinion on the issue of using the “window of opportunity.”

It is worth mentioning another well-known episode. On July 16, 1982, during a break in the INF talks in Geneva, the head of the US delegation P. Nitze had an unofficial conversation with the head of the Soviet delegation, Y.A. Kvitsinsky, during a walk in the woods. To break the deadlock, Nitze personally presented an initiative and asked his counterpart to convey it to the Soviet leadership. According to the idea of the chief negotiator of the American side, in Europe the Soviet side could have 75 RSD-10, while the Americans could have 75 cruise missiles, and east of the Urals the USSR could retain 90 RSD-10. This project was “profitable” for Moscow as it allowed it to keep a certain number of its own MRBMs while excluding the deployment of the most dangerous Pershing II. Moreover, according to this initiative, even considering the nuclear forces of the UK and France, the Soviet Union could still maintain a relative advantage over NATO in the number of nuclear warheads — 495 (from 75 European and 90 Asian RSD-10 launchers) versus 462 (162 British and French plus 300 American ones) (Weickhardt, 1984, p. 58).

However, the so-called “walk in the woods” proposal was fiercely opposed by the marshals and the head of the Soviet military-industrial complex. It was not even touched on at the

<sup>22</sup> RGANI. Fund 83. Reg. 1. File 187. P. 8–9. Record of Speeches by K. U. Chernenko and N. Ceaușescu at the Soviet-Romanian Negotiations. June 4, 1984. (In Russian).

<sup>23</sup> Arbatov G. A. *Protracted Recovery (1953–1985): Testimony of a Contemporary*. Moscow : Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya publ., 1991. P. 236. (In Russian).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* P. 236–237.

<sup>25</sup> Brutents K. N. *Unfulfilled: Unequal Notes on Perestroika*. Moscow : Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya publ., 2005. P. 27. (In Russian).

<sup>26</sup> Kornienko G. M. *Cold War: Testimony of Its Participant*. Moscow : Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya publ., 1994. P. 241–242. (In Russian).

<sup>27</sup> Dobrynin A. *In Confidence: Moscow’s Ambassador to America’s Six Cold War Presidents*. New York : Times Books, Random House, 1995. P. 549.

Politburo meetings. This led Y.A. Kvitsinsky to the disappointing conclusion — as he wrote in his memoirs — that his superiors would rather agree to the deployment of American missiles to continue the production and deployment of RSD-10 missiles at any cost. In fact, he personally reported Nitze's initiative to Y.V. Andropov and sparked his interest. And Y.V. Andropov instructed to study the relevant reply. But after communicating with military representatives who opposed the proposal, he began to criticize Y.A. Kvitsinsky as “naïve.”<sup>28</sup>

Indeed, the “hawks” had considerable influence within the Soviet leadership. In the early 1980s, the fundamental principle guiding the Soviet military buildup was simple: not to fall behind, but to achieve and then maintain military superiority over the enemy (Zolotarev, 2000, p. 417). This was perfectly reflected in the statement of the First Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Soviet Armed Forces in 1979–1984, Marshal S.F. Akhromeyev to A.F. Dobrynin about the Soviet military doctrine in a personal conversation in 1983: after the USSR reached nuclear parity with the U.S., its leadership still adhered to the opinion that Soviet conventional armed forces in Central Europe should maintain an advantage over the U.S. as well, so that, in the event of war, they would be capable of delivering a lightning blow crushing America's European allies and occupying their territory all the way to the English Channel and the Atlantic coast of Western Europe.<sup>29</sup>

In this regard, there was also an unknown episode: having a conversation with Y.V. Andropov during the meeting of the Political Consultative Committee of the Warsaw Pact on January 4, 1983, N. Ceaușescu tried to convince the Soviet leader that freezing (not reducing, as he emphasized) the military expenditures of the Warsaw Pact countries for the next two years and a slight reduction of the conventional forces of the Soviet Union and

other socialist countries located in Central Europe would find resonance in the West and, accordingly, strengthen the positions of the forces there that oppose the arms race. But in response, Y.V. Andropov announced that he was “categorically against” the proposal of the Romanian leader. He said rather emotionally: “The U.S. wants to leave us defenseless... Reagan is calling for a crusade against us. He would like to destroy the socialist system in our countries. How can we explain to our people a unilateral refusal to enhance the combat readiness of our armed forces in the face of US and NATO's military buildup?”<sup>30</sup>

It can be concluded that when it came to key foreign policy decisions related to arms control, Y.V. Andropov never opposed the position of the “hawks.” However, the issue was not the need to maintain military parity or even superiority, but whether the country's economic situation allowed for increased involvement in the arms race.

In the early 1970s, Washington officially acknowledged that the USSR had reached parity in missile-nuclear armaments with the USA (Musatov, 2019, p. 182). Y.A. Kvitsinsky proudly recalled that thanks to this, Soviet diplomats gained full confidence when sitting at the negotiating table with the Americans. At the same time, he confirmed that on the eve of “perestroika,” from an economic point of view, it was quite possible to withstand competition with the US in the military and military-industrial sphere.<sup>31</sup> But is this true?

During the ninth five-year plan of the USSR (1971–1975), the economy of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) member countries developed twice as fast as that of the West. This was precisely what provided the economic guarantee for reaching and maintaining military parity between the Warsaw Pact and NATO. By the early 1980s, the advantage of the socialist countries in economic

<sup>28</sup> Kvitsinsky Y. A. *Time and Case: Notes of a Professional*. Moscow: Olma-Press publ., 1999. P. 358–371. (In Russian).

<sup>29</sup> Dobrynin A. F. *In Confidence: Ambassador to Washington under Six U.S. Presidents (1962–1986)*. Moscow: Avtor publ., 1996. 552–553. (In Russian).

<sup>30</sup> RGANI. Fund 82. Reg. 1. File 36. L. 16–18. Recording of a Conversation Between Y. V. Andropov and N. Ceaușescu. January 4, 1983. (In Russian).

<sup>31</sup> Kvitsinsky Y. A. *Foreign Policy of the USSR in the Years of Perestroika* // *Nash Sovremennik*. 2005. No. 1. P. 186–187. (In Russian).

growth rates had completely disappeared. In 1984, there was even a lag: the CMEA countries increased their national income by 3.7%, while the Western countries — by 4.5%.<sup>32</sup>

In June 1984, at a meeting of the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR, the Politburo member, the future head of the USSR M.S. Gorbachev stated: “A comprehensive study of the prospects for the country’s economic development shows that to ensure the simultaneous resolution of economic and social tasks, as well as tasks for the further strengthening of our defense, our economy needs to move forward at a rate of no less than 4% per year.”<sup>33</sup>

In other words, to sustain the ongoing arms race with NATO, which was expanding into new areas and reaching unprecedented levels, while simultaneously raising the living standards of the Soviet people, or at least maintaining it at the current level, the USSR’s economy had to grow by at least 4% per year. This crucial figure must have been known to Y.V. Andropov, as he was the one who tasked M.S. Gorbachev and Secretary of the CPSU CC N.I. Ryzhkov with objectively analyzing the state of the national economy with the involvement of leading scientists and specialists.<sup>34</sup>

But even according to official statistics, the growth rates of the USSR’s national income averaged 3.6% in 1981–1982, and 3.9% in 1983.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, in 1982, for the first time since World War II, the growth of the population’s real income fell to zero.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, the intensification of the arms race with the U.S. would undoubtedly lead to a decline in the living standards and welfare of the Soviet people. It is quite ironic that in his speech

<sup>32</sup> RGANI. Fund 84. Reg. 1. File 314. L. 53. Materials for the Speech at a Working Meeting of Leaders of Fraternal Countries. (In Russian).

<sup>33</sup> RGANI. Fund 84. Reg. 1. File 11. L. 16. Speech at a Meeting of the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR. June 21, 1984. (In Russian).

<sup>34</sup> Gorbachev M. S. *Life and Reforms*. Book 1. Moscow : Novosti publ, 1995. P. 334. (In Russian).

<sup>35</sup> *USSR in Figures in 1983: A Brief Statistical Collection*. Moscow : Finansy i statistika publ., 1984. P. 23. (In Russian).

<sup>36</sup> Ryzhkov N. I. *Perestroika: The History of Betrayals*. Moscow : Novosti publ., 1992. P. 42. (In Russian).

to the last plenum of the CPSU CC before his death, Andropov stated that “All our efforts in the economy are ultimately aimed at improving the living standards of the people. This is the main socio-political goal of our plans.”<sup>37</sup>

The final chord of the game on the INF during the Cold War is known: the INF Treaty was signed in 1987. As academician A.G. Arbatov noted, from the strategic perspective, the USSR remained the winner: for the USSR, an element of the strategic nuclear threat was essentially eliminated, while the Treaty did not remove any threats directly to the American territory (Arbatov, 2017, p. 6). In this case, wouldn’t it have been wiser to accept Reagan’s “zero option” back in 1982–1983? Unfortunately, the rejection of it at that time led to disastrous consequences for the USSR: military parity was achieved at a higher level (in fact, it was never achieved in the context of the INF issue) amid declining economic growth rates. In US-Soviet relations, Y.V. Andropov left his successors with a more serious threat of war, greater tension, less freedom of action, and a heavier economic burden.

### **Andropov’s Attitude Towards Military Superiority over China**

When Y.V. Andropov came to power, the difficulties and adversaries that the Soviet Union had to face in the realm of foreign policy were not only in Europe but also in the Far East. For example, according to a Central Intelligence Agency report, in November 1982, the Soviet ground forces in the Western Theater of Military Operations consisted of 62 divisions.<sup>38</sup> While in the Far East, there were 56 Soviet divisions.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Text of the Speech of the General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee Comrade Y. V. Andropov // *Pravda*. December 27, 1983. P. 1. (In Russian).

<sup>38</sup> *The Readiness of Soviet Ground Forces*. November 1, 1982. Secret // CIA FOIA Electronic Reading Room. P. 23–24. URL: <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP85T00176R001600060007-7.pdf> (accessed: 05.02.2023).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*. P. 25–27.



At the time, Beijing accused Moscow of deploying 1 million troops in Mongolia and along its border. The Soviet side, in turn, stated that China had increased its troops around the Sino-Soviet border to more than 2.5 million.<sup>40</sup> Although the number of Soviet troops near the border was smaller than that of China, the quantity and quality of their military equipment had an undeniable advantage. For example, in tanks, the Soviet side took a lead by almost 3 to 1 (14 thousand versus 5 thousand).<sup>41</sup> This situation was a historical legacy of the 1969 Sino-Soviet border conflict.

G.M. Kornienko once remarked: “We cannot ignore the fact that there are not two, but five nuclear powers ... It is quite realistic that a situation could arise in which the Soviet arsenal would have to confront all four others — not only the U.S. and NATO, but also China at the same time. In total, this is about 10 million people under arms.”<sup>42</sup>

It is also worth noting Arbatov’s comment: “One of the major political miscalculations regarding the defense in key regions was the incorrect, overestimated assessment of the threat from China. It forced us to concentrate very large forces in the Far East, which in turn created the impression in China that the threat came from us. Naturally, this forced them to take countermeasures — the buildup of nuclear and conventional forces, as well as political and military cooperation with the West.”<sup>43</sup>

In 1982, the Soviet Union and China resumed political dialogue, which had been interrupted in 1979, in the form of consultations at the level of deputy foreign ministers

<sup>40</sup> Galenovich Yu. M. *50 Years with China*. Moscow : Vagrius publ., Izograf publ., 2011. P. 309. (In Russian).

<sup>41</sup> China’s Defenses Against the USSR: Shifting Priorities and Implications for US Arms Sales. March 1, 1984. Secret // CIA FOIA Electronic Reading Room. P. 5. URL: <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP84S00928R000200170004-0.pdf> (accessed: 05.02.2023).

<sup>42</sup> Adamishin A. L. In *Different Years: Foreign Policy Sketches*. Moscow : Ves’ mir publ., 2016. P. 68–69. (In Russian).

<sup>43</sup> Arbatov G. A. *Protracted Recovery (1953–1985): Testimony of a Contemporary*. Moscow : Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya publ., 1991. P. 236. (In Russian).

(Radchenko, 2014, pp. 35–36). This provided Moscow with an excellent opportunity to improve relations with Beijing, as Sino-US relations were in crisis at the time due to the Taiwan issue. According to the observations of the Soviet embassy in China, at the beginning of the same year, Beijing began to adjust its foreign policy (Bazhanov, 2007, p. 109). Its priority shifted from confronting the Soviet Union on the international stage to “maintaining an adequate balance” between Washington and Moscow.<sup>44</sup> In the report at the 12th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, which ended a month before the start of the Sino-Soviet consultations, a new “independent foreign policy” was asserted; the possibility of normalizing Sino-Soviet relations was noted, and overall, the tone of statements regarding the USSR changed.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, almost simultaneously, Beijing changed its pro-Western stance on the INF issue (Malik, 1989, pp. 238–239). Despite concerns that some of the RSD-10s, initially deployed in Europe, might be transferred to the Far East after the USSR and the U.S. reach some agreement on the INF, representative of the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs publicly stated that the Chinese side would not consider the deployment of Soviet missiles in Asia as a “fourth obstacle” in Sino-Soviet relations.<sup>46</sup> All this was undoubtedly a positive factor for Moscow.

For Beijing, the most important thing was to eliminate the direct threat to its national security. In September 1982, in a conversation with North Korean leader Kim Il Sung Deng Xiaoping noted that “The main issue now is to remove obstacles to the normalization of Sino-Soviet relations, mainly in three aspects: first, to solve the

<sup>44</sup> Huang Hua. *Qin li yu jian wen: huang hua hui yi lu* [Huang Hua. *Life Experience: Memoirs of Huang Hua*]. Beijing : World Affairs Press, 2007. P. 358. (In Chinese).

<sup>45</sup> Kireev G. V. *Russia — China: Unknown Pages of Border Negotiations*. Moscow : ROSSPEN publ., 2006. P. 167–171. (In Russian).

<sup>46</sup> *Zai xin wen fa bu hui shang qi huai yuan tan wu xue qian chu fang tu er qi he a man deng shi xiang* [Qi Huaiyuan Spoke About Wu Xueqian’s Visit to Turkey and Oman at a Press Conference] // *Renmin Ribao*. October 6, 1983. P. 2. (In Chinese).

problem of one million troops deployed on the Sino-Soviet border, including Soviet troops in Mongolia; second, to solve the problem of Vietnam's invasion of Kampuchea; third, to resolve the problem of the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan." Apparently, Deng Xiaoping wanted to pass information through Pyongyang before starting a direct dialogue with Moscow.<sup>47</sup>

At the formal meetings of the first round of Sino-Soviet consultations held in October 1982, the Chinese side officially put forward a proposal to eliminate the "three obstacles" (Vámos, 2010, p. 88). In an informal conversation, the head of the Chinese delegation specifically reminded the head of the Soviet delegation that he hoped Moscow would be able to correctly understand the "novelties" in his speeches. For example, on the issue of reducing armed forces in the areas of the Sino-Soviet border, "both sides undertake the obligation." On the question of the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Mongolia, it was proposed to "find a solution acceptable to all sides." This gesture, however, elicited no response.<sup>48</sup> Moscow's position was a complete denial of the existence of the so-called "obstacles" put forward by Beijing, defining their removal as "preconditions." It opposed the inclusion of issues that went beyond the bilateral relations between the USSR and the PRC and related to third countries within the framework of consultations.<sup>49</sup>

Immediately after the end of the first round of consultations, L.I. Brezhnev died. To demonstrate sincerity in improving relations, Deng Xiaoping sent Minister of Foreign Affairs Huang Hua to Moscow to attend Brezhnev's funeral and congratulate Y.V. Andropov. The new Soviet leader paid due attention to this. The Chinese delegation was given special treatment,

and its request to arrange a meeting between Huang Hua and A.A. Gromyko was granted.<sup>50</sup>

The meeting was the first between the foreign ministers of the USSR and China in almost 20 years. Huang Hua confirmed Beijing's position on removing "obstacles," emphasizing that "currently there is tension in relations between the countries, as troops stand against each other on the border." He particularly expressed the hope that the Soviet Foreign Minister could agree to reduce Soviet troops on the border. However, A.A. Gromyko avoided him, claiming that "China does not need to fear the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union will not threaten China in any way." Meanwhile, he proposed to postpone the discussion of disagreements regarding the so-called "obstacles," but to start with the development of trade and economic cooperation and cultural exchanges, in order to "refresh" bilateral relations and "warm them up." Gromyko's words fully reflected Andropov's stance. Since at the very beginning of the meeting, the Soviet Foreign Minister made it clear to his counterpart that he could fully represent Y.V. Andropov — "before meeting with you, I approached the General Secretary, talked to him, and listened to his instructions for the meeting."<sup>51</sup>

Indeed, thanks to the efforts of both sides, cooperation between the USSR and China in trade, economic, and cultural fields was somewhat renewed in 1983.<sup>52</sup> It should be acknowledged that Y.V. Andropov played a role in this by demonstrating tactical flexibility. For example, he specifically ordered to delete a text containing sharp criticism of the Chinese leadership from the published volume of selected speeches and articles of M.A. Suslov.<sup>53</sup> However, in strategic terms, Y.V. Andropov was

<sup>47</sup> Deng Xiaoping nian pu (1975–1997) [Biographical Chronicle of Deng Xiaoping (1975–1997)]. Beijing: Central Literature Press, 2004. P. 851. (In Chinese).

<sup>48</sup> Qian Qichen. Wai jiao shi ji [Qian Qichen. Ten Memoirs of Diplomatic Work]. Beijing: World Affairs Press, 2003. P. 11–16. (In Chinese).

<sup>49</sup> The People's Republic of China in 1982: Politics, Economy, Ideology / ed. by M. I. Sladkovsky. Moscow: Nauka publ., 1986. P. 162–165. (In Russian).

<sup>50</sup> Huang Hua. Qin li yu jian wen: huang hua hui yi lu [Huang Hua. Life Experience: Memoirs of Huang Hua]. Beijing: World Affairs Press, 2007. P. 361–366. (In Chinese).

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. P. 366–368.

<sup>52</sup> The People's Republic of China in 1983: Politics, Economy, Ideology / ed. by M. I. Sladkovsky. Moscow: Nauka publ., 1986. P. 172–174. (In Russian).

<sup>53</sup> RGANI. Fund 4. Reg. 44. File 30. L. 37. Meeting of the Secretariat of the CPSU Central Committee. August 31, 1982. (In Russian).

unwilling to make even minor concessions (Zubok, 2017, p. 125).

At a Politburo meeting in late May 1983 dedicated to discussing the international situation, A.A. Gromyko cautiously proposed the withdrawal of troops from Sino-Soviet border. But it was immediately rejected by Y.V. Andropov. Following this, A.A. Gromyko made another proposal — to withdraw part of the Soviet troops from the Sino-Mongolian border. This time, he met opposition of D.F. Ustinov — “if we relocate Soviet troops from there to our territory, we will lose a good foothold.” Here, “a good foothold” obviously implied the relatively short distance between Soviet troops in Mongolia and the capital of China. Y.V. Andropov himself didn’t touch upon this issue afterwards. It is quite clear that he supported Ustinov’s opinion, that is, not to change the status quo and not to withdraw a single soldier from Mongolia.<sup>54</sup>

In fact, a partial or even complete withdrawal of troops from Mongolia would not have jeopardized the security of the USSR in the Far East since the Soviet troops in Mongolia were not tasked with preventing a landing operation by US and Japanese forces. The main purpose of stationing large tank forces there since the end of the 1960s was to maintain intimidation and pressure on Beijing (Radchenko, 2012, p. 186). But by 1983 such intimidation had already become meaningless and inappropriate. As later noted by M.S. Gorbachev, it portrayed China as an enemy alongside the US and Japan, “pushing them to one side.”<sup>55</sup>

Contrary to the expectations of Beijing, from 1982 onwards, the Soviet Union continued to build up its ground forces and deploy nuclear missiles in the Far East.<sup>56</sup> The number of

RSD-10s in Asia increased from 108 in 1983 to 135 in the spring of 1984.<sup>57</sup>

In the case of Mongolia, 100,000 troops of the Transbaikalian Military District, consisting of five divisions, including two tank divisions, were stationed on its territory.<sup>58</sup> The number of military personnel was so huge that, taking into account civilian specialists and officers’ families, in such a country with sparse population, there was approximately one Soviet citizen for every ten Mongols, and in major population centers, two or three, or even five Soviet citizens.<sup>59</sup> It should be noted that at the same time, the Soviet troops in Afghanistan, which were engaged in intensive combat operations, consisted of only 100 thousand soldiers.<sup>60</sup>

As reported to the Soviet leadership by V.P. Lukin, head of the Department of Far Eastern Policy of the Institute of USA and Canada of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, the Soviet military presence in Mongolia appeared as an offensive force. Military maneuvers of Soviet and Mongolian troops held in Mongolia raised concerns among the Chinese, which might cause serious political consequences.<sup>61</sup> Beijing’s concern about Soviet troops in Mongolia was fully reflected in Deng Xiaoping’s words in his conversation with Japanese Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone in March 1984: “The deployment of Soviet troops in Mongolia poses a threat to China ... The deployment of Soviet and

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CIA-RDP84S00928R000100150003-4.pdf (accessed: 05.02.2022). See also: (Wishnick, 2001, p. 79).

<sup>57</sup> The Changing Sino-Soviet Relationship. April 5, 1984. Top Secret // CIA FOIA Electronic Reading Room. P. 20–21. URL: <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP87T00495R000900940001-8.pdf> (accessed: 05.02.2022).

<sup>58</sup> Postnikov S. I. In *Distant Garrisons*. Moscow : Polygon-Press publ., 2004. P. 353–354. (In Russian).

<sup>59</sup> Medvedev V. A. *Collapse: How It Was Brewing in the ‘World System of Socialism’*. Moscow : Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya publ., 1994. P. 347. (In Russian).

<sup>60</sup> Gromov B. V. *Limited Contingent*. Moscow : Progress publ., 1994. P. 133. (In Russian).

<sup>61</sup> Lukin V. P. *About Chinese Affairs // ‘I Am Not the First Warrior, Not the Last...’: To the 80th Anniversary of V. P. Lukin*. Book Two / ed. by A. D. Dikarev, A. V. Lukin. Moscow : Ves’ mir publ., 2018. P. 335. (In Russian).

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<sup>54</sup> RGANI. Fund 89. Reg. 42. File 53. L. 7–8. Meeting of the Politburo of the CPSU Central Committee. May 31, 1983. (In Russian).

<sup>55</sup> Gorbachev M. S. *From Speeches at a Meeting of the Politburo of the CPSU Central Committee*. July 24, 1986 // *Collected Works*. Vol. 4. April–October 1986. Moscow : Ves’ mir publ., 2008. P. 341. (In Russian).

<sup>56</sup> China: Managing the Soviet Threat. November 1, 1983. Secret // CIA FOIA Electronic Reading Room. P. 1–4. URL: <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/>

Mongolian troops is intended to isolate China from two lines — from Vladivostok in the east and from Mongolia in the west. This is the same tactic that was used when the Soviets fought the Kwantung Army.”<sup>62</sup>

It is difficult to assess the extent to which the deterioration of U.S.-Soviet relations influenced Andropov’s decision to increase the military buildup in the Far East, since there were many US military bases in the Asia-Pacific region, including nuclear-missile ones. Y.V. Andropov himself noted at a meeting with the leaders of the Warsaw Pact countries: “I’d like to point out that Soviet troops are stationed in the Far East not least because of the growing military readiness of the US and Japan near our Pacific borders.”<sup>63</sup> But after all, Beijing was the one who felt a direct threat first.<sup>64</sup> As Deng Xiaoping noted at the Sino-Soviet summit in 1989, in the area of the Sino-Soviet border the Soviet side “increased its military contingent to one million people. The number of missiles there increased, reaching 1/3 of the Soviet Union’s missile arsenal. Under these conditions, we, naturally, made the corresponding conclusion about where the main threat to China comes from.”<sup>65</sup>

As a matter of fact, from late 1981 to autumn 1983, political and military cooperation between Beijing and Washington was frozen (Li, 2021, pp. 32–34). Unfortunately, Moscow once again missed the “window of opportunity.” When R. Reagan declared an anti-communist “crusade,” Y.V. Andropov did not take

appropriate actions to promote rapprochement of the two largest socialist countries and further alienation of the Chinese and Americans. Incredibly, he went in the opposite direction, that is, continued to strengthen military buildup against China, despite Beijing’s willing for détente and the vulnerability of the Soviet economy. Thus, in addition to escalating military confrontation with the USA and a deadlock in relations with the West, Y.V. Andropov left his successors with tension and impasse in Sino-Soviet relations, which entailed an additional economic burden on the Soviet Union.

### Conclusion

During the Brezhnev era, the USSR faced an extremely unfavorable geopolitical environment — it was engaged in military confrontation on two fronts and had hostile relations with all the nuclear powers. By 1984, when Y.V. Andropov died, such an environment remained completely unchanged, and perhaps even worsened.

The inflexible stance on INF in Europe ultimately led to strengthened control of the USA over Western Europe. Moreover, the western part of the Soviet Union was directly threatened by the American INF. The stubborn position on the deployment of large troops on the Sino-Soviet border and in Mongolia led Moscow to miss a great opportunity to improve relations with Beijing and contribute to its rapprochement with the socialist camp. Under Andropov’s leadership, the Soviet Union was drawn into a spiral of a new arms race with the United States and continued to increase its military buildup in the Far East, considering China an enemy. The price of all this was a decline in the living standards of the Soviet people.

Andropov’s foreign policy was essentially and solely aimed at guaranteeing security, which he believed could only be achieved by military superiority over other powers. In this regard, his position completely coincided with the “hawks” in the Soviet leadership represented by Ustinov. It is fair to characterize Andropov himself as one of the “hawks.” He repeatedly rejected rational

<sup>62</sup> Cable from Ambassador Katori to the Foreign Minister, ‘Prime Minister Visit to China (Conversation with Chairman Deng Xiaoping)’. March 25, 1984 // Wilson Center Digital Archive. P. 2. URL: <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/119551> (accessed: 05.02.2022).

<sup>63</sup> RGANI. Fund 82. Reg. 1. File 4. L. 24. Speech by the Head of the Delegation of the USSR, General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee Y. V. Andropov at a Meeting of the Political Consultative Committee of the Warsaw Pact. January 4, 1983. (In Russian).

<sup>64</sup> Grinevsky O. A. Perelom: From Brezhnev to Gorbachev. Moscow: Olma Press Obrazovanie publ., 2004. P. 14. (In Russian).

<sup>65</sup> Gorbachev M. S. Life and Reforms. Book 1. Moscow: Novosti publ, 1995. P. 438–439. (In Russian).

proposals from diplomats and was unwilling to make even minor concessions that contradicted the ideas of military superiority.

Y.V. Andropov obviously understood that a new round of the arms race was unacceptable if the country's economic growth rate was reduced, but he did not stop, but even accelerated the further "militarization" of the Soviet Union. Outwardly, he managed to maintain a positive

image as an uncompromising defender of national security interests. However, the national security of the Soviet state was not strengthened but jeopardized. As a result, Andropov left such a legacy, that is, a more tense and isolated external environment in all strategic directions, as well as a national economy "suffocated" by military expenditures.

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