25. Mikhail Gorbachev's Vision for the Soviet Union

Soviet Policy, 1982-1985

Gorbachev in Power
Yuri Andropov

Andropov launched a "peace offensive" hoping to revive the stalled arms talks and head off Reagan's deployment of Pershing II missiles.

He attempted to drive a wedge between Reagan and Western Europe by appealing to the emerging Nuclear Freeze movement.

During 1983, Andropov struggled to keep the hard-liners at bay while tensions escalated. He also attempted to promote reform minded officials, including Mikhail Gorbachev to key positions as his health began to fail.
The Death of Andropov

Konstantin Chernenko replaced Andropov as Secretary General. In a compromise between the old guard and new, Gorbachev became second secretary.

Chernenko was 72 when he took power, making him the oldest Soviet leader. He was also the least capable. His rule would be marked by a return to stagnation during the last years of Brezhnev’s rule.

Chernenko was cautious and prudent when it came to relations with Washington, and he continued the conflict in Afghanistan unabated.
Chernenko's Policies

Hoping that Reagan might lose the upcoming U.S. elections, the Kremlin tried to avoid doing anything that might improve international relations and thus help Reagan's reelection bid. As such, START and INF talks remained suspended.

Chernenko insisted that unless Reagan removed the Pershing II missiles from Europe no negotiations were possible.

Chernenko also announced a boycott of the Olympic Summer Games in Los Angeles. Athletes from the Eastern bloc counties and the USSR would not attend.
Reagan's Hot Mic Moment, August 1984

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CECABnWIN8E
The 1984 Election
The Soviet Response to Reagan's Victory

Once Reagan was reelected, Chernenko moderated the Soviet's anti-American tone. In late 1984, they launched a new peace offensive, designed to mend fences with both China and the West.

First Deputy Prime Minister Arkhipov made a long-delayed trip to China in late 1984 and Chernenko sent Mikhail Gorbachev to London and West Germany to charm the West.

In January 1985, after a year of posturing, the Soviets consented to resume arms control talks and dropped their insistence that Reagan first remove the Pershing IIs. Chernenko, struggling with illness largely disappeared from public view.
Gorbachev's Peace Tour

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=378DrFY8NEg  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=akGg_WVZxpg
25. Mikhail Gorbachev's Vision for the Soviet Union

Soviet Policy, 1982-1985

Gorbachev in Power
On March 11, 1985 - a day before arms negotiations were set to begin - Chernenko died.

Mikhail Gorbachev became the General Secretary. He brought intelligence, organizational skill, strength, and most importantly vigor to the USSR. At 54, he was the first leader of the Soviet Union born after the revolution.

Gorbachev was a committed Leninist, however, he wanted to reduce military spending, ease international tensions, restructure Soviet Society, and hold talks with Reagan.
The Decaying Soviet Union

The situation Gorbachev inherited was critical. Military spending was eating up a huge share of the Soviet budget and the economic growth rate had decreased.

Productivity was low, consumer goods were in short supply and their quality was shoddy. Living standards were more like a "Third World Country" than a superpower.

In the workplace, drunkenness and absenteeism were endemic. Likewise, corruption and cynicism were rampant. Infant mortality was rising and average life span was shrinking.
Glasnost and Perestroika

Glasnost (openness) was an appeal for increased openness and transparency in government institutions and activities in the Soviet Union. It led to an influx of western culture and an increase in the number of Soviets who were willing to be critical of their own government.

Perestroika (restructuring) was an attempt to reform the Communist Party and the Soviet economy. It led to the formation of parties other than the Communist Party and allowed some markets to exist in the Soviet Union.
Superpower Summits

In March, when Vice President Bush traveled to the USSR for Chernenko's funeral, he brought with him a letter from Reagan inviting Gorbachev to the US.

In July 1985, Gorbachev arranged a promotion for Andrei Gromyko from foreign minister to the largely ceremonial post of Soviet president.

As a result, Reagan and Gorbachev agreed to meet in November 1985 at Geneva where their teams were engaged in arms control negotiations.
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Gorbachev in Power

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