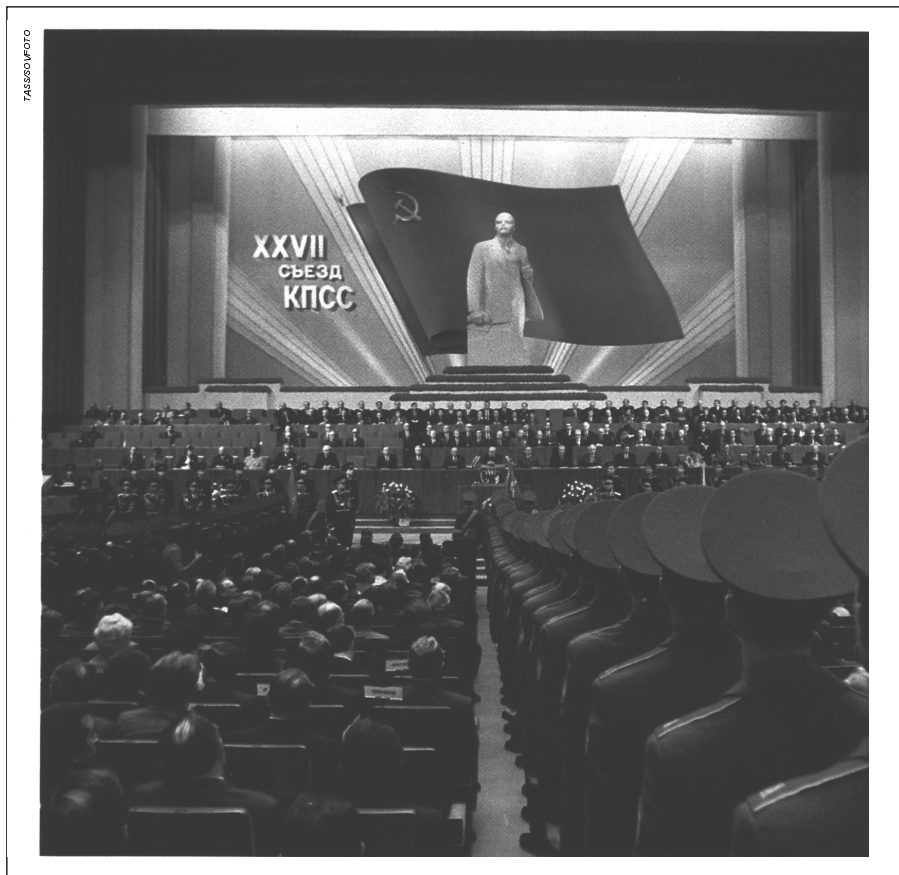


Analyzing Soviet Politics and Foreign Policy



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The documents in this section were selected to reflect different kinds of products, including analytic memoranda as well as research studies, assessments, and estimates. Unfortunately absent is any product by analysts at the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, who produced some of the finest analysis on Soviet politics and policies.

In the wake of Stalin's death in 1953, CIA sought to understand Nikita Khrushchev's rise to power and the USSR's less rigid policies. NIE 11-4-54, the first of the comprehensive annual Soviet estimates supporting the regularized NSC policy process of the Eisenhower era, was safely wary: the USSR was being conciliatory "for the time being" but remained expansionist. In 1956, a Senior Research Staff on International Communism report found much to discuss regarding the startling 20th congress of the ruling Communist Party. In late 1961, Board of National Estimates chairman Sherman Kent covered the highlights of CIA's views on Soviet matters—including the critical issue of Sino-Soviet differences—in an analytic memorandum prepared for a new Director of Central Intelligence, John McCone.

The next two documents are broad estimates of Soviet policy that captured CIA's view of the period of Brezhnev's ascendancy as East-West "détente" began to flower. NIE 11-69 was done as President Richard Nixon was taking office, and NIE 11-72 as he was about to depart for his summit meeting in Moscow at which the initial SALT accords were signed.

As America began to view détente more skeptically by the mid-1970s, CIA expended much analytic effort trying to divine Soviet intentions. One CIA study of Soviet perceptions from this period depicted a more confident and powerful USSR conflicted between simultaneous desires for stability and for change. Another political analysis written in 1978 looked at the problems that the election of a Polish pope might cause for the USSR.

With new and disturbing Soviet actions in Afghanistan and elsewhere influencing American thinking, and with the advent of the Reagan administration, a different tone entered CIA's analysis of Soviet policy. One estimate selected from the early 1980s took up concerns about Soviet support for international terrorism (a particular concern of new Director of Central Intelligence William Casey). The last two documents of CIA political analyses in this volume were efforts to interpret what Mikhail Gorbachev and his policies meant for the United States. The first was an estimate done just before President Reagan's meeting in Reykjavik with the Soviet leader, and the other tried to foresee how Gorbachev's policy initiatives would affect the Soviet system and Soviet foreign policy. They demonstrate a timeless theme of CIA's analysis of the USSR: the struggle to understand and depict change in a country whose leaders could not themselves foresee the consequences of their decisions.