Ideas do not float freely: transnational coalitions, domestic structures, and the end of the cold war

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Efforts to explain the "end of the cold war," that is, the systemic transformation of world politics that started with the turnaround in Soviet foreign policy in the late 1980s, have to find answers to at least two sets of questions. First, why did Soviet foreign policy change as it did rather than in other conceivable ways, thereby setting in motion a process leading to the cold war's end? How can it be explained that a great power dramatically shifted its course toward accommodationist policies, withdrew from its (informal) empire, and then even collapsed in a comparatively peaceful way? Why did the Soviet Union in retreat never try to forcefully stem the tide?

Second, how can it be explained that Western powers, that is, the alleged winners of the cold war, never attempted to exploit the situation, thereby accelerating their opponent's collapse? What accounts for the specific Western response to the changes in the Soviet Union? Why did both the United States and its Western European allies contribute to end the cold war in a comparatively smooth way?

I argue in this article that structural or functional explanations for the end of the cold war—whether realist or liberal—are underdetermining and cannot account for both the specific content of the change in Soviet foreign policy and the particular Western response to it. These theories need to be complemented

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by approaches that emphasize the interaction of international and domestic influences on state behavior and take the role of ideas—knowledge, values, and strategic concepts—seriously. Ideas intervene between material power-related factors on the one hand and state interests and preferences on the other.¹

In response to the first set of questions, I argue that some of the ideas that informed the reconceptualization of Soviet security interests and centered around notions of “common security” and “reasonable sufficiency” originated in the Western liberal internationalist community comprising arms control supporters in the United States as well as peace researchers and left-of-center political parties in Western Europe.² This community formed transnational networks with “new thinkers” in the foreign policy institutes and elsewhere in the former Soviet Union. Mikhail Gorbachev, as a domestic reformer and uncommitted thinker in foreign policy, was open to these ideas because they satisfied his needs for coherent and consistent policy concepts. As a result, the


². I use the term “common security” (in Russian, vseobshhaia bezopasnost’) throughout the article, even though Soviet/Russian and American authors frequently speak of “mutual security” (vzaimnaia bezopasnost’l or “equal security” (bezopasnost dlia vsekh). I do this for two reasons. First, each term refers to the same concept. Second, common security is the generic term for the concept as it was originally used in the German security debate (gemeinsame Sicherheit) and later in the Palme commission’s report. See Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues, Common Security: A Blueprint for Survival (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982). On the various Russian terms, see Georgii Arbatov, Zaitianuvsheesia vysodorovlenie (1953–1988 gg.), Svidetel’tvo sovremennika (Moscow: Mezdunarodnye onesheniia, 1991), pp. 240–41 (This appeared in English as: The System: An Insider’s Life in Soviet Politics [New York: Random House, 1992]). I thank Matt Evangelista for clarifying the Russian terms for me and for alerting me to Arbatov’s book.
new ideas became causally consequential for the turnaround in Soviet foreign policy.

In response to the second set, I claim that these very ideas also had an impact on the Western reactions to the new Soviet policies, albeit to different degrees. I illustrate this point with regard to the cautious American and the enthusiastic (West) German responses to the revolution in Soviet foreign policy.

Ideas, however, do not float freely. Decision makers are always exposed to several and often contradictory policy concepts. Research on transnational relations and, most recently, on “epistemic communities” of knowledge-based transnational networks has failed so far to specify the conditions under which specific ideas are selected and influence policies while others fall by the wayside. The transnational promoters of foreign policy change must align with domestic coalitions supporting their cause in the “target state” to make an impact. I argue that access to the political system as well as the ability to build winning coalitions are determined by the domestic structure of the target state, that is, the nature of its political institutions, state–society relations, and the values and norms embedded in its political culture.

In the former Soviet Union with its state-controlled structure, the transnational actors needed to gain access to the very top of the decision-making hierarchy to have an impact. Their specific ideas and concepts also had to be compatible with the beliefs and goals of the top decision makers.

Access to the U.S. political system, with its society-dominated structure, is comparatively easy, while the requirements for building winning coalitions are profound. Moreover, concepts such as common security were rather alien to a political culture emphasizing pluralist individualism at home and sharp zero-sum conflicts with ideological opponents abroad. As a result, the liberal arms controllers and their societal supporters together with their European allies succeeded in moving the Reagan and Bush administrations toward cautious support for Gorbachev’s policies, but not much further.

As to the German “democratic corporatist” structure, access to political institutions is more difficult than in the U.S. case, but strong policy networks such as the party system ensure profound influence once access is achieved. Common security resonated well with a political culture emphasizing consensus-building and compromise among competing interests at home and abroad. The concept was embedded in the German foreign policy consensus even before Gorbachev embraced it. This explains the enthusiastic German response to the new Soviet foreign policy years before the Berlin Wall came down.

In sum, I argue that the transnational networks of liberal internationalists promoting common security, vigorous arms control efforts, and a restructuring of defense postures were active in all three countries but succeeded to very

different degrees. The difference in impact can largely be explained by the variation in domestic structures of the three countries.

**Deficiencies of prevailing theories**

There is no need to engage in rather complex arguments about domestic–international linkages and the transnational diffusion of ideas if it can be shown that more parsimonious theories are sufficient in accounting for the dramatic turnaround in Soviet foreign policy and the accommodating Western response. But the prevailing structural approaches in international relations theory are mostly indeterminate and thus cannot adequately answer the two sets of questions raised above. They are not wrong, but they need to be supplemented by more complex approaches to explain the dramatic changes in world politics.4

Sophisticated realism goes a long way toward showing how the interaction between international systemic and domestic economic factors created a set of conditions that permitted the accommodationist foreign policies pursued by the Gorbachev coalition. Kenneth Oye, for example, argues that the long-term decline of the Soviet economy and the decreasing growth rates of the Eastern European states led to a growing burden on the Soviet Union during the early 1980s that required a fundamental policy change.5 At the same time, nuclear deterrence as a systemic condition in East–West relations precluded the resort to adventurous foreign policies which might otherwise have been the response of a declining great power.6 One might add that the nuclear deterrence system could also explain the cautious U.S. response to the change in Soviet foreign policy. Bullying Gorbachev into speeding up the retrenchment from Third World conflicts and from Eastern Europe was too risky, given that even a Soviet Union in retreat possessed enough nuclear missiles to annihilate the United States.

One can agree with this analysis and still remain puzzled by the Gorbachev revolution and by at least part of the Western response. The Soviet economic crisis and the nuclear deterrence system would have permitted a variety of state responses of which the new Soviet foreign policy was only one. Why did the reformers in the Politburo embark upon perestroika and glasnost instead of

technocratic economic reforms that would have kept the repressive state apparatus intact? The Chinese leadership pursued just such a path under roughly similar domestic conditions. With regard to foreign policy, Gorbachev could have continued or rather returned to the détente and arms control of the 1970s, which would have allowed him a similar international breathing space to promote internal reforms. Instead, he radically changed the Soviet foreign policy outlook, embracing common security and reasonable sufficiency for military means. Moreover, he matched words with deeds by embarking on unilateral initiatives in the nuclear and conventional arms fields that seemed to come right out of the textbooks for “strategies of reassurance.” He accepted the zero option for intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF) together with intrusive on-site inspections, unilateral troop withdrawals, and asymmetrical cuts in Soviet conventional forces. These moves took place even before the Soviet leadership decided to let Eastern Europe go. In sum, Gorbachev went far beyond what one can reasonably expect from a “prudent” realist perspective. Even sophisticated realism does not tell us which of the possible choices was to be expected by the Soviet Union.

Realist bargaining theory, however, might be used to make an additional point. Some argue that Ronald Reagan’s coercive strategy toward the Soviet Union and his massive arms buildup during the early 1980s finally drove Moscow’s leadership over the edge. Cornered by the West and faced with an economic crisis at home, Gorbachev had virtually no choice but to cut losses in military and foreign policy, since striking back at the United States was precluded by the nuclear deterrence system. In short, the combination of structural international and domestic conditions with Western “peace through strength” led to the turnaround in Soviet foreign policy.

There is some evidence that the Western reaction to Brezhnev’s foreign policy was perceived by the “new thinkers” as a further incentive to change Soviet foreign policy. But to argue that peace through strength together with the structural conditions left no choice to the Soviet Union seems to miss the mark. First, the initial Soviet response to the Western buildup was arms racing as usual. Under Andropov and Chernenko, who faced similarly gloomy economic conditions as Gorbachev, Moscow not only left the negotiating table in 1983 but also accelerated the production and deployment of new nuclear


weapons. Second, some “new thinkers” argue that Reagan’s buildup made it harder rather than easier for them to push for changes in the Soviet security outlook. The transformation of Moscow’s foreign policy was contested all along; conservatives in the military and other institutions drew the opposite conclusion from the Reagan buildup than the Gorbachev coalition. That the latter prevailed must be explained by the dynamics of Soviet domestic politics rather than assumed away theoretically.

As to the Western response to the Gorbachev revolution, the American caution may be roughly accounted for by a sophisticated realist argument. It is the German “Gorbimania” that should pose a puzzle to realists. As a divided frontline state on the East–West border, Germany had a lot to gain or lose by the success or failure of Gorbachev’s reforms. On the one hand, the rapidly decreasing Soviet threat could have induced the enthusiasm with which Bonn supported the new Soviet foreign policy. On the other hand, the risks involved in a premature and overly accommodative reaction to Gorbachev could just as well have led to a cautious policy similar to that of the United States. Realism does not predict which of the two lines of reasoning the West Germans would follow.

In sum, sophisticated realism can explain how structural conditions and Western policies created a window of opportunity and thus a demand for new ideas in foreign policy. The theory fails, however, to show why particular ideas were selected over others that were equally possible but that would have led to different foreign policies. Thus, the end of the cold war serves to confirm the indeterminate nature of the realist approach.


10. For evidence see Mendelson, “Internal Battles and External Wars,” p. 334.

11. I am referring to West German enthusiasm for Gorbachev in 1987 and 1988, that is, two years before the Soviet leadership consented to German reunification.


But a major competitor of realism in international relations theory, liberal
teach, does not score much better in explaining the momentous changes in
world politics.\textsuperscript{14} Liberal accounts take the role of ideas in foreign policy
seriously and emphasize that perceptions, knowledge, and values shape the
response of state actors to changing material conditions in the domestic and
international environments. Several liberal "second image reversed" argu-
ments have been made to explain the end of the cold war. Daniel Deudney and
G. John Ikenberry suggested, for example, that the Soviet Union was faced with
an international environment in which liberal ideas about democracy, human
rights, and market economy not only dominated but also proved successful in
serving human needs.\textsuperscript{15} As a result, Moscow found itself more and more
isolated and, finally, was unable to cut off the country from these long-term
liberal trends. In short, Soviet-type communism lost the competition over the
organization of political, social, and economic life.\textsuperscript{16}

There are three problems with this analysis. First, even large-scale failure
does not necessarily result in the adoption of the competitor's approach to the
problem. Again, the Chinese attempt to embark on economic reforms while
maintaining the repressive political system is a case in point.

Second, the analysis cannot explain the timing of the Soviet foreign policy
change. Why did the Soviet leadership acknowledge the victory of liberalism in
the mid-1980s and not, say, ten or twenty years earlier?

Third, the argument that the Soviet leadership essentially adopted Western
ideas about domestic and foreign policies ignores that Moscow was confronted
with more than one Western "liberal" concept. In the foreign policy area, for
example, one approach that dominated U.S. foreign policy during Reagan's
first term (peace through strength) was alien to a liberal conceptualization of
world politics. It was rooted in a Hobbesian understanding of international
relations and in realist bargaining theory. A second approach—deterrence plus
détente—was adopted by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's Harrem
report in 1967 and dominated the foreign policies of most Western European
countries during the 1970s and early 1980s. It combined liberal and realist

\textsuperscript{14} For examples of efforts at systematizing liberal thinking in international relations, see
Ernst-Otto Czempiel, \textit{Friedensstrategien} (Strategies for peace) (Paderborn, Germany: Schöningh,
1986); Robert Keohane, "International Liberalism Reconsidered," in John Dunn, ed., \textit{The
Andrew Moravcsik, "Liberalism and International Relations Theory," working paper no. 92–6,
Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., 1992; and Bruce Russett,

\textsuperscript{15} Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry, "The International Sources of Soviet Change,"
Ikenberry, "Soviet Reform and the End of the Cold War: Explaining Large-scale Historical
Change," \textit{Review of International Studies} 17 (Summer 1991), pp. 225–50. For a critique of the
argument, see Mendelson, "Internal Wars and External Battles," pp. 330–31.

\textsuperscript{16} For an extreme version of this argument see Francis Fukuyama, \textit{The End of History and the
ideas and claimed that limited “cooperation under anarchy” was possible across the East–West divide. Finally, there was a genuine liberal institutionalist or—by European standards—Social Democratic vision of common security. It held that a “security partnership” (in the words of Helmut Schmidt) through multilateral institutions could transform the East–West conflict and the nuclear deterrence system and that far-reaching peace and cooperative arrangements were possible among opponents.

How is it to be explained that the new Soviet leadership under Gorbachev subscribed to this third concept while discarding the other two? A liberal account emphasizing the international sources of the Soviet change cannot answer that question.

One might argue, though, that Gorbachev could safely embark upon liberal internationalist foreign policies because he knew that the Western democracies would not exploit the Soviet pullback. Democracies not only rarely fight each other, it is claimed, but also tend to exert moderation in their foreign policies toward nondemocracies. Once the Soviet Union embraced détente and arms control, it could count on an equally accommodative Western response. This argument not only asserts that the Soviet leadership believed in liberal theory but also offers an explanation for the Western reaction to the change in Soviet foreign policy.

Unfortunately, the claim is based on a misreading of the “democratic peace” argument. While it is conceptually and empirically well-established that democracies rarely fight each other, there is not much evidence that liberal democracies pursue moderate foreign policies toward nondemocracies or even political systems in transition to democracy.


19. For this argument see Snyder, “Myths, Modernization, and the Post-Gorbachev World.”


21. For the most recent data on the democratic peace see Russett, Grasping the Democratic Peace. See also the special issues of the Journal of Conflict Resolution 35 (June 1991) and of International Interactions 18 (February 1993); and Zeve Maoz and Bruce Russett, “Alliances, Contiguity, Wealth, and Political Stability: Is the Lack of Conflict Among Democracies a Statistical Artefact?” International Interactions 17 (1992), pp. 245–67.
that democracies are peaceful in general. Rather, they are engaged in as many militarized disputes and wars with autocracies or partially authoritarian states (such as the former Soviet Union under Gorbachev) as the latter are among themselves. This is not to suggest that the West could have waged war against a Soviet Union in retreat. But liberal theory is indeterminate with regard to a democratic state’s reaction to a retreating authoritarian state; Reagan’s earlier peace through strength, Bush’s caution, and Genscher’s enthusiasm are all compatible with the approach.

To understand the revolution in Soviet foreign policy and the various Western responses to it which together brought the cold war to an end, one cannot ignore domestic politics and leadership beliefs. Thus, Matthew Evangelista and Sarah Mendelson emphasize that Gorbachev had to first consolidate his domestic power base in the Politburo and the Central Committee before the turnaround in foreign policy was possible. Richard Lebow argues that leaders committed to broad economic and political reforms tend to be motivationally biased toward accommodative foreign policies under certain conditions. Janice Stein maintains that Gorbachev was predisposed toward “new thinking” in foreign policy and embarked on “learning by doing.”

Domestic politics accounts and learning theories offer significant insights into why particular ideas carry the day in specific policy choices while others fail. However, they do not tell us much about the origins of those ideas. Three possibilities come to mind as regards the case under discussion here. First, Gorbachev himself might have developed the new foreign policy beliefs during earlier periods of time and then put them into practice once he had assumed power. There is not much evidence, though, that Gorbachev held firm foreign policy convictions prior to his entering office, particularly in comparison to the clarity of his domestic reform ideas. His few foreign policy speeches during the early 1980s do not reveal much more than a general open-mindedness toward East–West cooperation. Even the first major attempt to outline the new foreign policy concept, Gorbachev’s report to the Twenty-seventh Communist Party Congress in early 1986, represents a strange mix of “old” and “new thinking.”


Eduard Shevardnadze also suggested that Gorbachev knew all along that he was opposed to Brezhnev's foreign policies but did not have a consistent framework and a coherent concept of international politics before he entered office.\footnote{25} It is clear, though, that he learned extremely quickly.

Second, the ideas and foreign policy concepts might have originated in domestic intellectual communities\footnote{26} that then gained access to the leadership. Jeff Checkel has convincingly shown that "institutchiks" at the Institute of the World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO) were able to convince Gorbachev through advisers such as Aleksandr Yakovlev and Yevgeniy Primakov that world politics had to be analyzed in nonclass categories such as "interdependence" and that his enemy image of American capitalism had to be changed.\footnote{27} Of course, these analysts might have read the book by Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye,\footnote{28} but there is not much evidence that transnational contacts were important to them (with the possible exception of Yakovlev's time as the Soviet ambassador to Canada). Mendelson has equally demonstrated that the decision to withdraw from Afghanistan was influenced by a domestic epistemic community.\footnote{29}

Analyzing world politics in non-Marxist–Leninist categories (a change in worldviews according to Judith Goldstein and Robert Keohane's categories) was certainly a precondition for the foreign policy revolution.\footnote{30} But it is unlikely that worldviews determine a transformation of specific policies. Rather, these basic assumptions about the world open up an intellectual space for changes in principled or causal beliefs which—in the words of Goldstein and Keohane—"provide road maps that increase actors' clarity about goals or ends–means relationships" and thus affect policies.\footnote{31} Strategic prescriptions such as common security and reasonable sufficiency or nonoffensive defense combine

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\item \footnote{25} Shevardnadze is quoted in Checkel, "Ideas, Institutions, and the Gorbachev Foreign Policy Revolution," p. 294 (particularly footnote 78).
\item \footnote{26} I hesitate to use the term "epistemic communities," since Peter Haas's definition emphasizes policy-relevant knowledge and shared causal beliefs as their primary source of authority. While the intellectual community in the former Soviet Union shared certain knowledge claims about international politics, their internal consensus derived mostly from shared principled beliefs or values. To put it differently, their "knowledge claims" made sense only if one shared their values. Moreover, their "expertise and competence in a particular domain" was only "recognized" (another part of Haas's definition) when Gorbachev came into power and increasingly relied on their ideas. Finally, their competence remained contested in the Soviet domestic debate. On the definition of epistemic communities, see Peter Haas, "Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination," in P. Haas, Knowledge, Power, and International Policy Coordination, pp. 1-35 and especially p. 3. For a discussion, see Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, "International Issue Networks in the Environment and Human Rights," paper prepared for the seventeenth International Congress of the Latin American Studies Association, 24-27 September 1992, Los Angeles.
\item \footnote{27} Checkel, "Ideas, Institutions, and the Gorbachev Foreign Policy Revolution."
\item \footnote{28} Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, Power and Interdependence (Boston: Little, Brown, 1977).
\item \footnote{29} Mendelson, "Internal Battles and External Wars."
\item \footnote{30} See Judith Goldstein and Robert Keohane, "Ideas and Foreign Policy: An Analytical Framework," in Goldstein and Keohane, Ideas and Foreign Policy, pp. 3–30.
\item \footnote{31} The quotation is from ibid., p. 3.
\end{itemize}
principled and causal beliefs—values and knowledge—and are then operationalized into specific policies.\textsuperscript{32}

But since strategic prescriptions centering around common security were new to the Soviet security debate, their intellectual origins must be found outside the country and its foreign policy institutes.\textsuperscript{33} Indeed, Checkel argues that the epistemic community at IMEMO was less influential regarding the new approach to military security than, for example, natural scientists at the Academy of Sciences technical divisions (such as Yevgeny Velikhov and Roald Sagdeev) and institutchiks at the United States of America and Canada Institute (ISKAN) who regularly participated in exchanges and meetings with Western security analysts and scholars.\textsuperscript{34} Complementing his analysis, I argue below that *transnational networks* between those in the West who supported common security and nonoffensive defense on the one hand and natural scientists and institutchiks at ISKAN on the other were crucial in promoting the new Soviet approach to security. The foreign policy ideas of these transnational exchanges translated a somewhat diffuse "new thinking" about foreign policy into a coherent security policy. Moreover, when Gorbachev not only embraced these concepts but also matched his words with deeds, he could count on the support of the very groups in the West that had provided the ideas in the first place. It is no coincidence that Gorbachev's new foreign policy met the most immediate and most positive response in Germany where common security had gradually become ingrained in the foreign policy consensus of the society. It is also not surprising that a positive response to Gorbachev's overtures took longest in the United States, where liberal internationalist and Social Democratic ideas about foreign policy were not part of mainstream thinking. Thus, the emphasis on transnational networks not only sheds additional light on the origins of the "new thinking" in Soviet foreign policy but, in conjunction with the dynamics of domestic politics, also helps to explain the variation in Western responses to the Gorbachev revolution.

**Transnational relations and the end of the cold war**

In the following section I first identify the actors who developed the new strategic prescriptions about security and the transnational networks through

\textsuperscript{32} On the term "strategic prescription," see Checkel, "Ideas, Institutions, and the Gorbachev Foreign Policy Revolution," p. 281. Strategic prescriptions contain both values (such as peace and security) and assumptions about causal relationships between ends and means. Thus, they do not fall neatly in one of the two categories of principled or causal beliefs identified by Goldstein and Keohane.


\textsuperscript{34} Checkel, "Ideas, Institutions, and the Gorbachev Foreign Policy Revolution," pp. 291–94.
which these concepts were promoted. I then look at the differential impact of these ideas on the security policies of the three countries discussed here: the Gorbachev revolution in foreign policy and the American and German responses to it.

**Transnational actors and their ideas: the liberal internationalist community**

Four intellectual communities can be identified that together form a “liberal internationalist community” sharing political values and policy concepts. First, the liberal arms control community in the United States has to be mentioned. Its origins date back to the late 1950s when it was among the first to promote the idea of arms control to stabilize the deterrence system.\(^{35}\) This community comprises an alliance of (1) natural scientists organized in such groups as the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) and the Federation of American Scientists (FAS); (2) policy analysts at various think tanks such as the Brookings Institution; (3) scholars at academic institutions; (4) public interest groups such as the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC); and (5) policymakers in the U.S. Congress, mostly liberal Democrats.

The contribution of this group to the broader liberal internationalist agenda during the late 1970s and early 1980s consisted primarily of specific proposals in the nuclear arms control area. The main focus during that time was to oppose the Reagan administration’s efforts to do away with nuclear arms control. In particular, the community concentrated on promoting a comprehensive nuclear test ban and on preserving the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty threatened by Reagan’s Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI).\(^{36}\)

The second subgroup of the liberal internationalist community consisted of mostly Western European peace researchers based at various institutes such as the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, the Peace Research Institute in Oslo, the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy in Hamburg, the Peace Research Institute in Frankfurt, and various universities.

The third group includes European policymakers in Social Democratic and Labour parties and their transnational organization, the Socialist Interna-

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tional. Security specialists in the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) as well as the British and Dutch Labour parties were particularly important for the liberal internationalist debate during the period under consideration.37

The two European components of the liberal internationalist community shared the concerns of their U.S. counterparts about the future of arms control. But their main contribution to the transnational liberal agenda consisted of developing the concepts of common security and nonoffensive defense (or, to use the German misnomer, strukturelle Angriffsunfähigkeit, that is, "structural inability for offensive operations").

Common security transformed the original arms control idea of stabilizing strategic deterrence through cooperative measures into a concept transcending the notion of national security. The notion claimed that the security dilemma in international relations could be overcome through stable cooperative arrangements and peace orders. Common security emphasized that security in the nuclear age could no longer be achieved through unilateral measures and that there is no security for anybody in the East–West relationship unless everybody feels secure. As Egon Bahr, the leading German SPD promoter of the idea, put it:

[Security partnership] starts with the insight that war can no longer be won and that destruction cannot be restricted to one side. . . . The consequence of this insight is that there is no reliable security against an opponent, but only with an opponent. There is only common security and everybody is partner in it; not despite potential enmity, but because of this enmity.38

Common security was widely discussed among peace researchers as well as mainstream and center-left parties in the Benelux countries, Great Britain, Scandinavia, and West Germany during the late 1970s and early 1980s. In West Germany, for example, then Chancellor Helmut Schmidt introduced the idea of a security partnership between East and West in 1978 but conceptualized it mainly as complementing nuclear deterrence. In 1979 the SPD adopted the concept and eventually transformed it into the notion of common security to gradually overcome deterrence.39 By the time Gorbachev came into power, common security was one of the mainstream foreign policy concepts in Europe.


The European peace research community also developed proposals to restructure the Western conventional force posture in such a way that offensive operations would become virtually impossible—nonoffensive defense—and, thus, to overcome the security dilemma by reconciling peaceful intentions with purely defensive capabilities. By the mid-1980s, various European Social Democratic and Labour parties had adopted nonoffensive defense in their policy platforms.

The fourth component of the transnational community provided the link with the former Soviet Union. It consists of natural scientists and policy analysts in various institutes, primarily at the Academy of Science (for example, the Kurchatov Institute of Atomic Energy headed by Velikhov, the Space Research Institute headed by Sagdeev, and the foreign policy institutes IMEMO and ISKAN). The Soviet “new thinkers” were mainly on the receiving end of ideas promoted by their European and American counterparts.

These four groups not only shared values and policy concepts but also exchanged frequently their views. Since the connections between the U.S. and the European arms control communities are well-documented, I concentrate on the East–West exchanges.

First, specific nuclear arms control proposals were the subject of increasingly institutionalized contacts between the U.S. arms control community, particularly natural scientists working for the UCS, the FAS, and the NRDC, and Soviet experts such as Velikhov and Sagdeev. Evangelista has documented these exchanges and shown in detail how these interactions influenced Soviet arms control decisions. His analysis provides further empirical evidence for the argument developed in this article.

Second, the concept of common security was introduced to Soviet institut-chiks and foreign policy experts through the Palme commission (the Independent Commission for Disarmament and Security, named after former Swedish Prime Minister and Social Democrat Olof Palme). It was founded in September 1980 and brought together mostly elder statesmen and women from around the world to study East–West security issues. Academician


42. See Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues, Common Security.
Georgii Arbatov, the head of ISKAN, served as the Soviet member, while retired General Mikhail Milstein of the same institute was one of the principal advisers. Common security was introduced into the commission’s deliberations by the German Social Democrat Bahr, who had also been one of the architects of German Ostpolitik. In 1982 the Palme commission issued a report (Common Security) that defined the principles of a cooperative East–West security regime and spelled them out with regard to arms control, confidence-building measures, and economic cooperation.

Third, there were regular exchanges between various West European Social Democratic and Labour parties—particularly the German SPD—and Communist parties in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. These relations had been established during the détente period of the 1970s and were continued throughout the 1980s. The SPD, for example, conducted regular meetings on security policy issues with the East German, Polish, Soviet, and other Communist parties. Agreements were worked out on principles of common security, on nuclear and chemical weapon free zones in Central Europe, and on nonoffensive defense. The Social Democrats tried to build on the consensus achieved in the Palme commission and to gain the support of its recommendations by the Eastern Europeans and Soviets. Given the reality of East–West relations in the pre-Gorbachev era, Western participants in these contacts had to walk a thin line. On the one hand, the contacts legitimized official Eastern European and Soviet policy proposals by promoting nuclear weapon free zones and the like. On the other hand, they served to make the concept of common security acceptable in the East as well as notions that later became known as military glasnost (on-site inspections, for example).

Fourth, the concept of nonoffensive defense reached the Soviet institute of primarily through transnational exchanges with Western European peace researchers and military experts. Some of these contacts were initiated through well-known frameworks such as the Pugwash conferences. In 1984, for example, Pugwash established a working group on conventional forces that became a major East–West forum on these issues; it included most of the European peace researchers, such as Anders Boserup, Horst Afheldt, and Albrecht von Müller, specializing in “alternative defense” models. Andrei Kokoshin, deputy director of ISKAN and one of the most prominent “new thinkers” in Soviet foreign policy, participated regularly. He became a leading

proponent of a defensive restructuring of the Soviet armed forces. Moreover, the annual Pugwash conferences regularly dealt with issues of defensive restructuring, particularly the 1988 meeting in the Soviet Union. Western experts of the nonoffensive defense community were frequently consulted by the institutichiks and even Soviet military academies. 46 This is all the more significant since nonoffensive defense was alien to traditional Soviet military thinking. In fact, the initial reaction of even civilian experts in the Soviet Union to the alternative defense debate in Western Europe had been quite hostile and turned more sympathetic in their publications only after Gorbachev had come into power. 47 Thus, glasnost opened up space to discuss new ideas in public.

In sum, liberal internationalist ideas about common security and nonoffensive defense reached “new thinkers” in several Soviet institutes through a variety of transnational exchanges with like-minded groups in the West. But what are the indications that these transnational exchanges were politically consequential, that is, had an impact on the Gorbachev revolution in Soviet foreign policy? 48

*Transnational exchanges and the turnaround in Soviet security policy*

In February 1986 Gorbachev made the following remarks about his vision of security:

Security cannot be built endlessly on fear of retaliation, in other words, on the doctrines of “containment” or “deterrence.” . . . In the context of the relations between the USSR and the USA, security can only be mutual, and if we take international relations as a whole it can only be universal. The highest wisdom is not in caring exclusively for oneself, especially to the detriment of the other side. It is vital that all should feel equally secure. . . .


48. Tracing the policy impact of transnational coalitions requires extensive data on decision-making processes in order to allow for causal inferences. Compared with these requirements, the evidence presented below is not satisfactory. For further and more detailed studies see Evangelista, *Taming the Bear*; Evangelista, “Transnational Relations, Domestic Structures, and Security Policy in the U.S.S.R. and Russia”; and Herman, *Soviet New Thinking.*
the military sphere we intend to act in such a way as to give nobody grounds for fear, even imagined ones, about their security.49

These remarks excerpted from Gorbachev’s report to the Twenty-seventh Party Congress closely resemble the Palme commission’s report on common security as well as the above-quoted statements by Bahr.50 They represent the first instance in which the Soviet leader identified himself with a new concept of security alien to traditional Soviet thinking. But was there also a causal link beyond a mere correlation? There are various indications that ideas about common security developed by European peace researchers and Social Democrats indeed influenced Gorbachev’s thinking.

First, the Soviet leader himself acknowledged that his views about international security and disarmament were “close or identical” to those of European Social Democrats such as Willy Brandt, Bahr, and the Palme commission.51 In a meeting with Brandt, he argued that the “new thinking” combined traditions going back to Lenin with insights from “our socialist friends” and “proposals reflected in such documents as reports by the commissions of Palme, Brandt, and Brundtland.”52 Gorbachev made a deliberate effort to develop closer contacts with the Socialist International and its chairman, Brandt. At the same time, European Social Democrats were, of course, eager to promote their security policy ideas directly to the Soviet leader.

One could argue, of course, that these references to Western thinking by Gorbachev were self-serving and meant to legitimize his own views. Even if true, the similarities between his arguments and those of European analysts and policymakers are still striking; and the Soviet leader knew about these affinities. Moreover, as mentioned above, Gorbachev did not hold firm convictions on foreign policy before he entered office. Finally, he matched words with deeds; his policy proposals and actions on nuclear and conventional weapons in Europe directly followed from the newly developed strategic prescriptions on enhancing international security.


50. See, for example, Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues, Common Security, pp. 6–11.

51. Compare Gorbachev, Perestroika, pp. 206–7; see also p. 196 regarding the Brandt commission on North–South issues.

52. Pravda, 6 April 1988, as quoted in Kux, “Western Peace Research and Soviet Military Thought,” p. 13. See also Evangelista, “Transnational Alliances and Soviet Demilitarization,” pp. 29–31. As Georgii Arbatov put it: “We do not claim to have invented all the ideas of the new thinking. Some of them originated outside the Soviet Union with people such as Albert Einstein, Bertrand Russell, and Olof Palme. We are developing them, along with our own ideas, into a full program for international conduct.” See Stephen F. Cohen and Katrina Vanden Heuvel, eds., Voices of Glasnost (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989), p. 315.
Second, the transnational links mentioned above between European institutes and policymakers on the one hand and institutchiks at ISKAN and other Soviet institutes on the other became increasingly important for the reconceptualization of the Soviet approach to security. ISKAN’s head, Arbatov—a member of the Palme commission—while certainly not among the most radical “new thinkers,” belonged to the inner circle of Gorbachev’s foreign policy advisers during the early years of perestroika. Arbatov was extremely impressed by Bahr—“one of the outstanding political minds of our time”—and considered him a friend.\(^53\) Arbatov’s son Alexei headed the new Department of Disarmament and International Security at IMEMO and was far more radical than was his father. The Palme report and its international clout became a major tool for liberal institutchiks to influence both Foreign Minister Shevardnadze and Gorbachev. According to the senior Arbatov, the Palme commission was significant in changing the political thinking in the Soviet Union and introduced the concept of common security to officials. The publication of the Palme report in Moscow also confronted the Soviets with Western estimates of the conventional (im)balance in Europe.\(^54\)

It is thus quite plausible to assume that European ideas about common security reached Gorbachev both directly, through European Social Democrats, and indirectly, through ISKAN and other institutchiks, as well as through his closest advisers such as Yakovlev or Shevardnadze.

Proposals to restructure the Soviet conventional posture toward nonoffensive defense seem to have influenced the leadership in a similar way. The above-cited report to the Twenty-seventh Party Congress already mentioned the defensive orientation of the Soviet military doctrine and the concept of reasonable sufficiency without being specific. One year later, Gorbachev referred to doctrines of defense “connected with such new or comparatively new notions as the reasonable sufficiency of armaments, non-aggressive defense, elimination of disbalance and asymmetries in various types of armed forces, separation of the offensive forces of the two blocs, and so on and so forth.”\(^55\)

An intensive debate about the implications for the conventional force posture followed among civilian and military analysts in the Soviet Union. The military in particular claimed that “defensive defense” referred to the overall goals of Soviet military doctrine rather than its implementation. The institut-

\(^{53}\) Arbatov, *The System*, p. 171.


\(^{55}\) Gorbachev, *Perestroika*, pp. 142–43. See also his “Report to the Twenty-seventh Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union,” p. 74.
chiks argued that reasonable sufficiency should lead to a restructuring of Soviet military forces in such a way as to preclude the ability to conduct (counter-) offensive operations. ISKAN analysts such as Vitalii Zhurkin, Sergei Karaganov, and Andrei Kortunov as well as its deputy head Kokoshin became leading advocates of the concept. The latter embraced Western ideas of nonoffensive defense and translated them into the Soviet context. He published various articles on the subject, together with Major General Valentin Larionov of the General Staff Academy. As mentioned above, Kokoshin was involved in transnational exchanges at Pugwash and had frequent contacts with European peace researchers such as Boserup and Lutz Unterseher, who were also in touch with the junior Arbatov, Karaganov, and the bureaucracy of the Soviet foreign ministry.

In December 1988 Gorbachev showed that he sided with the instiutchiks and the “new thinkers” in Shevardnadze’s Foreign Ministry when he announced large-scale unilateral troop reductions. Shortly afterward, the Soviet Union accepted the core of Western proposals at the Conventional Forces in Europe negotiations to establish conventional parity in Central Europe. Two years later, the Soviet Defense Ministry published a draft statement on military doctrine that explicitly defined sufficiency as the inability “for conducting large-scale offensive operations.” “New thinking” had reached the defense bureaucracy.

These are just two examples suggesting that important parts of the reorientation of Soviet security policy were indeed influenced by strategic prescriptions transmitted to the leadership through transnational interactions. Once the foreign policy experts and their transnational contacts had


58. For details of these exchanges, see Evangelista, “Transnational Alliances and Soviet Demilitarization,” pp. 31–37.


60. Other examples include arms control proposals on test ban negotiations and the ABM treaty (as indicated by Evangelista, “Transnational Relations, Domestic Structures, and Security Policy in the U.S.S.R. and Russia”) and ideas about the “common European home” and the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe. See Gorbachev, *Perestroika*, pp. 194–98. I thank one of the anonymous reviewers for alerting me to this.
aligned with the domestic reform coalition in the Soviet Union, the transnational exchanges influenced the very content of the new Soviet security policy and, thus, the scope of the change. The new leadership needed independent expertise outside the military, which opened a window of opportunity for civilians. As a result, the institutchiks influenced the attitudes of policymakers such as Gorbachev and Shevardnadze. The new ideas about common security and reasonable sufficiency transformed a general uneasiness with the state of Soviet international affairs into a coherent foreign policy concept. The institutchiks and their transnational networks persuaded the Gorbachev coalition of necessary and bold steps to change Soviet foreign policy toward the West. At the same time, their ideas also rationalized and legitimized the need for a turnaround in foreign policy. It is impossible to separate both aspects of how ideas influence policy decisions.

The contribution of the institutchiks and their transnational contacts to the change in Soviet foreign policy was not trivial. By helping Gorbachev match words and deeds, they were crucial in targeting his message to a receptive Western audience, particularly in Europe. Transforming Western attitudes toward the Soviet Union, however, was itself critical not only to end the cold war but also to create the benign international environment that Gorbachev needed to pursue perestroika and glasnost domestically.

Liberal internationalists and the Western responses to Gorbachev: the U.S. and German cases

As mentioned above, the same transnational coalitions that provided the Gorbachev coalition with new ideas about common security, nonoffensive defense, and military glasnost also targeted the West. In fact, most peace researchers and liberal arms controllers in Western Europe and the United States were primarily concerned about Western policies and did not expect the Soviet Union to be receptive to their proposals. Nevertheless their impact varied from country to country. I illustrate this in the following sections by the examples of the United States and West Germany.

The United States: preservation of arms control and cautious response to Gorbachev. In the U.S. case, the liberal arms control community pursued three main objectives during the 1980s: (1) to bring the Reagan administration back on the arms control track and to preserve the nuclear arms control agreements of the 1970s such as the ABM treaty; (2) to convince the administration of the necessity to launch rigorous arms control efforts in the

areas of test ban negotiations and nuclear reductions; and (3) to ensure a positive American response to the Gorbachev revolution in foreign policy.

Liberal arms controllers succeeded on the first goal, failed on the second, and achieved mixed results on the third. It is not clear in the successful cases, though, that the members of the arms control community were the most important actors to achieve the outcome.62

First, when the Reagan administration brought hard-liners into power, the U.S. arms control community was removed from policy influence. It was the American peace movement and what became known as the “freeze campaign” that revived the arms control process together with pressure from the European allies.63 Empowered by social movement pressure, the intellectual expert community reentered the policymaking process, particularly in Congress. The main impact was to shift the bureaucratic balance of power from conservative hard-liners such as Caspar Weinberger and Richard Perle to moderate conservatives such as George Shultz and Paul Nitze. The policy impact of this shift first became visible in early 1984 when Reagan gave several moderate foreign policy speeches that later led to the Shultz–Gromyko agreement to resume arms control talks in January 1985, that is, even before Gorbachev came into office.

Second, the single most important success of the liberal arms control community in the United States was probably to preserve the ABM treaty despite Reagan’s SDI.64 In this case, a powerful coalition emerged including liberal internationalists, Congress (particularly Senator Nunn who became chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee in 1986), and the European allies.

But third, the arms control community was less successful in the absence of such a domestic winning coalition. In 1986–87, for example, a transnational coalition between the U.S. NRDC and the Soviet Academy of Science tried to influence U.S. testing policy. In a trial of “private diplomacy,” they established seismic verification stations close to the two principal nuclear testing sites in the United States and the Soviet Union. The stations demonstrated publicly that a comprehensive test ban was verifiable and thus discredited a major U.S. objection to a test stop.65 The transnational alliance quickly gained access to

62. What follows is rather sketchy. However, there are enough empirical analyses available to support the argument. For example, see the literature quoted above in footnote 36. See also Bernd W. Kubbig, Die militärische Eroberung des Weltraums (The military conquering of space), vol. 1 (Frankfurt M.: Campus, 1990). The best narratives of arms control under the Reagan and Bush administrations are Strobe Talbott, Deadly Gambits (New York: Knopf, 1984); Strobe Talbott, The Master of the Game (New York: Knopf, 1988); and Strobe Talbott and Michael Beschloss, At the Highest Levels (Boston: Little, Brown, 1993). See also George Shultz’s memoirs, Turmoil and Triumph (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1993).

63. The best analysis of the freeze campaign is Meyer, A Winter of Discontent.


65. For details on this case see Michèle Flournoy, “The NRDC/SAS Test Ban Verification
Congress. In the autumn of 1986, the House of Representatives passed an amendment to the defense budget bill calling for a one-year moratorium on nuclear tests, but a countercoalition including the Reagan administration, Republicans in Congress, and leading Democrats such as Senator Nunn defeated the House resolution.

Fourth, the efforts of the liberal internationalist community did not have a long-term impact on attitudes toward the Soviet Union and the cold war in general. The liberal arms controllers failed to build a stable policy consensus around their strategic prescriptions. Common security, for example, remained a minority position in the United States. As a result, the Reagan administration reacted rather cautiously to the changes in Moscow, even though Reagan developed a friendly personal relationship with Gorbachev. As late as early 1989, half a year before the Berlin Wall came down, the new Bush administration advocated “status quo plus” as its response to the Gorbachev revolution.66

Germany: “security partnership” and “Gorbimania.” The reluctant U.S. response to the revolution in Soviet foreign policy contrasts with the West German answer.67 As mentioned above, ideas about common security and nonoffensive defense originated in the European peace research community as well as in Social Democratic and Labour parties during the late 1970s. The German SPD was crucial in promoting these ideas domestically and in Europe. By the mid-1980s, before Gorbachev assumed power, a stable German public and elite consensus on common security emerged ranging from the center-left to the center-right and comprising both the SPD and the two governing parties, the Christian Democrats and the Free Democrats. However, ideas about a defensive restructuring of the German armed forces were still contested. The attitude of the Bonn government under Chancellor Kohl toward nonoffensive defense changed to some extent only after the Soviet Union had embraced the concept.

The liberal internationalist community of peace researchers and Social Democrats did not somehow manipulate the German public into believing these ideas, as some have suggested.68 Similar to the dynamic interaction

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66. The cautious and reactive U.S. approach to the revolutionary changes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe is well-documented in Beschloss and Talbott, At the Highest Levels.


between the freeze campaign and the arms control community in the United States, the German peace movement opened a window of opportunity for common security to gain widespread acceptance. The peace movement emerged in reaction to the confrontational U.S.–Soviet relationship of the early 1980s and to the planned deployment of new medium-range missiles (INF) on German soil; their majority advocated unilateral disarmament and, thus, more radical ideas than common security. But in response to social movement pressure, German societal organizations such as churches and trade unions quickly supported the ideas promoted by peace researchers and the SPD. By about 1982–83, there was strong support for common security, as can be documented in public opinion polls.69

Shortly afterward, Christian Democrat leaders such as Chancellor Kohl and Richard von Weizsäcker, the Federal President, increasingly used common security language in their speeches. They refrained from the Social Democratic slogan “security partnership” calling it instead “community of responsibility” (Verantwortungsgemeinschaft). Thus, the conservative Christian Democrats showed support for the ideas in order to preserve their constituency. Common security became the center of a new German security policy consensus in the mid-1980s; this occurred after the peace movements had vanished but before Gorbachev initiated his foreign policy change.

German enthusiasm for Gorbachev and the revolution in Soviet foreign policy is easy to explain, given these domestic developments. Gorbachev’s overtures tapped into the German domestic consensus on security policy and, consequently, fell almost immediately on fertile ground in Bonn. Gorbachev’s acceptance of the INF zero option in 1986 became the defining moment for the Germans to embrace his policies. One has to bear in mind in this context the divisiveness of the German INF debate in the early 1980s as well as the fact that the German SPD and then Chancellor Schmidt had promoted the zero option which later became Reagan’s INF negotiating position back in 1979.70 Thus, popular support for the Soviet leader skyrocketed, and the center-right Kohl government, in particular Free Democrat Foreign Minister Genscher, became the first in the West to appreciate the changes in Soviet foreign policies. From about mid-1986 on, while most of its allies were still skeptical, the German government promoted a positive Western response to the new Soviet foreign policy (“Genscherism”). Germany became the first and only Western state to commit substantial amounts of financial assistance to the Soviet economic reform process. In sum, the cold war was over for the Germans before it was over in reality, that is, about two years before the Berlin Wall came down.

69. Details about this support can be found in Risse-Kappen, Die Krise der Sicherheitspolitik, pp. 43–89.
70. See Thomas Risse-Kappen, The Zero Option: INF, West Germany, and Arms Control (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1988); and Talbott, Deadly Gambits.
The limits of transnationalism: domestic structures as intervening variables

I have tried to document above that a liberal internationalist and transnational community of scholars, policy analysts, and center-left political parties promoted new strategic prescriptions such as common security, nonoffensive defense, and far-reaching arms control agreements during the late 1970s and early 1980s. “New thinkers” in the Soviet Union picked up these ideas and influenced the views of the Soviet leadership. The particular content of Gorbachev’s foreign policy revolution cannot be understood without the input of this transnational community. The transnational community also influenced Western policies in response to Gorbachev, albeit to different degrees. It was less successful in the United States but very effective in West Germany by contributing to create a new foreign policy consensus around common security. In sum, I suggest that the end of the cold war—both in the East and the West—cannot be adequately understood without taking the role of these transnationally transmitted ideas into account.

But the argument has limits. There is considerable variation in the impact of these ideas. Only the Soviet Union under Gorbachev reconceptualized its security policy toward both common security and nonoffensive defense. The German polity achieved a domestic consensus on the former but remained reluctant on the latter, while the American public and elite opinion failed to agree on either of the two concepts. Moreover, the interval between the initial promotion of these ideas in the target countries and their acceptance by the political leaderships varies considerably. If we take the Palme commission report as the first instance in which Soviet institutchiks became exposed to common security, it took less than four years for the ideas to have a policy impact. It took about ten years in Germany to accomplish the same result—from the mid-1970s, when peace researchers and Social Democrats started promoting the strategic prescriptions, to the mid-1980s. In Washington, common security never became as relevant politically as in Moscow and Bonn.

How is this considerable variation in policy impact to be explained? To influence policies, transnational actors need, first, channels into the political system of the target state and, second, domestic partners with the ability to form winning coalitions. Ideas promoted by transnational alliances or epistemic communities do not matter much unless those two conditions are met. In other words, we have to look at intervening variables between transnational alliances and policy change. I suggest that it is differences in domestic structures among the three countries that account for a large extent of the variation in policy impact of the transnationally circulated ideas.

Originally developed in the field of comparative foreign economic policy, domestic structure approaches have generated empirical research across issue-areas to explain variation in state responses to international pressures,
constraints, and opportunities. The concept refers to the structure of the political system, society, and the policy networks linking the two. Domestic structures encompass the organizational apparatus of political and societal institutions, their routines, the decision-making rules and procedures as incorporated in law and custom, as well as the values and norms prescribing appropriate behavior embedded in the political culture.

This last point marks a departure from earlier conceptualizations of domestic structures, which emphasized organizational characteristics of state and society but neglected the political culture and thus insights from the “new institutionalism,” particularly the focus on communicative action, duties, social obligations, and norms. Political culture, then, refers to those worldviews and principled ideas—values and norms—that are stable over long periods of time and are taken for granted by the vast majority of the population. Thus, the political culture as part of the domestic structure contains only those ideas that do not change often and about which there is societal consensus.

Until about 1988–89, the former Soviet Union represented an extremely state-controlled domestic structure with a highly centralized decision-making apparatus. Such structures lead to top-down policy-making processes, leaving less room for policy innovations unless they are promoted by the top leader-


73. It is thus important to distinguish between consensual ideas that are stable over time and those that are altered frequently and are promoted by specific groups. The strategic prescriptions discussed in this article are examples of the latter type of ideas. I thank John Odell and an anonymous reviewer for alerting me to this point.

ship. It follows that leadership beliefs are expected to matter more than attitudes of the wider population.75

Centralized and state-dominated domestic structures provide transnational coalitions with comparatively few access points into the political system. They have to reach the top echelon of the decision-making structure directly rather than building winning coalitions in civil society. Prior to Gorbachev’s gaining power, the transnational exchanges between Western liberal internationalists and Soviet institutichiks had almost no impact on Soviet foreign policy. Since the top leadership in the former Soviet Union controlled to which voices it wanted to listen, a reform-oriented leadership had to gain power first. It needed to be open-minded, and its worldviews needed to be predisposed toward the strategic prescriptions promoted by the transnational actors. The negligible policy impact of the transnational coalition during the Brezhnev period as compared with the Gorbachev era can thus be explained.

Beyond a general proclivity toward foreign policy change, there also seems to be a more specific reason why Gorbachev was attracted to common security.76 His domestic reform ideas closely resembled policy concepts promoted by democratic socialism and the Socialist International, which emphasized political democracy and a market economy with a heavy dose of state interventionism. Common security, however, formed the core of the foreign policy beliefs of the European Social Democratic and Labour parties. Gorbachev—who made a strong and, needless to say, successful effort to gain the support of the European Social Democrats—might have been attracted to their foreign policy ideas because they were promoted by groups that also held similar beliefs with regard to domestic politics.

In sum, the combination of a centralized decision-making structure with a reform-oriented leadership explains why the strategic prescriptions promoted by the transnational coalition had such a strong impact on Gorbachev’s foreign policy revolution in a comparatively short period of time. Once a channel into the top decision-making circle was open, the transnational coalition profoundly influenced policies. Given the absence of a strong civil society backing the ideas, the impact depended almost entirely on the leadership’s willingness to listen.

In contrast to the Soviet Union, the United States represents, of course, a comparatively society-dominated domestic structure with a strong organization of interest groups in which societal demands can be mobilized rather easily. At the same time, it lacks effective intermediate organizations such as a strong party system; and its political system is comparatively fragmented and decentral-


76. I owe the following argument to Steve Ropp.
ized without a powerful center (Congress versus Executive, Pentagon versus State Department, etc.). Moreover and throughout the cold war, the American national security culture incorporated rather strong and consensual enemy images of the Soviet Union and defined national security mainly in military terms.

Society-dominated structures are expected to mediate the impact of transnational coalitions in almost the opposite way as state-controlled structures. Transnational actors should have few problems in finding access into the decentralized political system. While this initial hurdle is comparatively low, the task of building a winning coalition is expected to be more complex than in state-dominated systems. Since society-dominated structures are characterized by frequently shifting coalitions, transnational alliances may successfully influence policies in the short run, but their long-term impact is probably rather limited.

Indeed, the liberal arms control community had virtually no problems finding channels into the political system but failed to form stable winning coalitions with a lasting policy impact. The group was successful only to the extent that its demands were compatible with either a public opinion consensus—as in the case of Reagan’s return to the arms control table—or the views of powerful players in Congress—as in the case of the preservation of the ABM treaty. The more far-reaching goals of the community, however, required a change in basic attitudes toward the Soviet Union and a mellowing of the U.S. cold war consensus as a precondition of forming a domestic winning coalition. This was possible only after the cold war was over.

Germany represents a third type of domestic structure, the democratic corporatist model. It is characterized by comparatively centralized societal organizations, strong and effective political parties, and a federal government that normally depends on a coalition between at least two parties. As a result and supported by cultural norms emphasizing social partnership between ideological and class opponents, the system is geared toward compromise-oriented consensus-building in its policy networks.

Democratic corporatist structures tend to provide societal and transnational forces with fewer access points to political institutions than do society-dominated systems. Their policy impact should also be more incremental because of the slow and compromise-oriented nature of the decision-making process.

77. Of course, U.S. autonomy is greater in national security affairs than in other issue-areas. But compared with the former Soviet state, the difference is still striking.


processes. But any impact made is expected to last longer because corporatist structures are geared toward institutionalizing consensus on policies.

As argued above, ideas about common security were gradually picked up, first, by the SPD as one of the two leading mass integration parties and, second, by societal organizations; they thereby reached the constituency of the conservative Christian Democrats. In the end, the polarized debate about détente during the 1970s and about nuclear weapons during the early 1980s evolved into a new consensus centered around common security, which explains the German enthusiasm for the Gorbachev revolution. The structure of German political institutions and policy networks explains why it took much longer for the new ideas to influence policies than in the Soviet case. The German political culture was geared toward class and ideological compromise, and past experiences with Ostpolitik explain why common security or security partnership became a consensual belief as the foreign policy equivalent of the domestic social partnership.

In sum, a domestic structure approach that incorporates political culture can account for the differential foreign policy impact of ideas promoted by transnational communities. The channels by which these ideas enter the policymaking process and become incorporated into national foreign policies seem to be determined by the nature of the political institutions. At the same time, the strategic prescriptions need to be compatible with the worldviews embedded in the political culture or held by those powerful enough to build winning coalitions. In the case of the former Soviet Union and its centralized decision-making structure, the transnational coalition’s policy ideas required both incorporation into Gorbachev’s basic beliefs and his determination to implement reforms in order to have an impact. In the German case, a political culture geared toward compromise and consensus represented a functional equivalent in that it enabled elite and public opinion to accept the strategic prescription of common security.

Conclusions

This article has made three points. First, the prevailing realist and liberal theories of international relations account for underlying structural changes opening a window of opportunity for the end of the cold war. But if we want to understand its immediate causes, we need to explain the specific content of Gorbachev’s foreign policy revolution as well as the Western responses to it. Structural explanations are insufficient for this task. Rather, an account is required which integrates international and domestic politics.

Second, the content of the Soviet foreign policy change and the Western reactions which together brought the cold war to an end were informed by specific principled and causal beliefs—values and strategic prescriptions. Some of these ideas originated independently of each other in various domestic
intellectual communities. Others, particularly those informing the reconceptualization of Soviet security interests, emanated from a transnational liberal internationalist community comprising the U.S. arms control community, Western European scholars and center-left policymakers, as well as Soviet intellectuals. These ideas were causally consequential for the end of the cold war.

Third, however, the ideas had a differential impact in the former Soviet Union, the United States, and Germany. The difference can be explained by a revised domestic structure approach that incorporates political culture. The differences between the Soviet, U.S., and German domestic structures explain to a large degree the variation in policy impact of the transnational networks and their strategic prescriptions.

I conclude, therefore, that structural theories of international relations need to be complemented by approaches that integrate domestic politics, transnational relations, and the role of ideas if we want to understand the recent sea change in world politics. The approach presented here does not pretend to offer a general theory of international relations. It is more limited and focuses instead on comparative foreign policy—a neglected and undertheorized field. As a result, the main competitors are neither realism nor liberalism, but behavioral decision-making analysis as well as rational choice and state-as-unitary actor assumptions. Bureaucratic politics and cognitive psychological accounts offer complementary rather than alternative explanations.

The approach presented here promises insights with regard to two questions in the study of comparative foreign policy. First, the argument developed in this article could prove helpful in analyzing the policy impact of transnational actors and coalitions. Reviving this subject is long overdue to move beyond the earlier sterile debate between society-dominated versus state-centered approaches to world politics. The focus on domestic structures as intervening variables between transnational coalitions and the foreign policy of states appears to offer a way of theorizing systematically about the interactions between states and transnational relations.80

Second, this article attempts to contribute to the study of how ideas matter in foreign policy. Many scholars recently have drawn attention to the institutional conditions under which new values and policy strategies become politically relevant.81 A modified domestic structure approach incorporating long-held worldviews embedded in the political culture appears to account for the

80. For a further evaluation of this approach see the chapters in Risse-Kappen, Bringing Transnational Relations Back In. See also Kathryn Sikkink, “Human Rights, Principled Issue-Networks, and Sovereignty in Latin America,” International Organization 47 (Summer 1993), pp. 411–41.
81. See, for example, Checkel, “Ideas, Institutions, and the Gorbachev Foreign Policy Revolution”; Goldstein, “Ideas, Institutions, and American Trade Policy”; Goldstein and Keohane, Ideas and Foreign Policy; Odell, U.S. International Monetary Policy; and Sikkink, Ideas and Institutions.
variation in impact of transnationally diffused principled and causal beliefs across different countries.

But the argument developed in this article differs in one important aspect from the approach adopted by Goldstein and Keohane, who argue that “the materialistically egocentric maximizer of modern economic theory” allows us to “formulate the null hypothesis” against which the role and impact of ideas can be measured.82 The problem is that both the reconceptualization of Soviet security interests and the German enthusiasm for Gorbachev are perfectly consistent with such a null hypothesis—after the event. I have tried to argue above that the issue is not whether the end of the cold war can be explained on the basis of power relationships. Rather, a power-based analysis using the model of egoistic utility maximizers is underdetermining in the sense that it leaves various options as to how actors may define their interests in response to underlying structural conditions. The role and impact of ideas must then be conceptualized as intervening variables between structural conditions and the definition of actors’ interests and preferences. Studying ideas does not offer alternative accounts to structural explanations, but the latter are notoriously insufficient if we want to understand the way actors define and interpret their interests.