

Preface

This book is largely an extension of my doctoral thesis submitted to obtain the degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Leeds. It examines Soviet policy towards the GDR, principally in the 1980s.

The dramatic events of the late 1980s, including the political turmoil within the Soviet Union's leadership and the crisis in the Eastern European community, call for a conscientious focus on the hierarchical relationships of sub-political structures with the main structure, their longevity and their durability.

The Soviet policy towards the GDR can be seen from the perspective of shifting Soviet perceptions of the long-standing problem of the GDR within Soviet policy. Soviet external political behaviour towards the GDR perpetuated the perspective of sustaining objective national interests, immutable to a peaceful adjustment to the international security system. The structural hierarchical relationship between the Soviet Union and the GDR resembled those of the Cold War structural restrictions which started to change in the 1980s, so the new policy provoked enormous challenges. The shifting course of Soviet political perceptions had a significant impact on the economic, political and military relationship with the GDR.

The balance of power perspective in the international system, due to the rivalry between the USSR and the USA, was becoming the central focus of the Soviet exercise of power with regard to the German question. While this power was strong during the period of GDR sovereignty, when Soviet power started to wane, there was a significant impact on sub-level state structural actors. Ultimately, the GDR's internal political and economic disposition governed its international strategy. The Soviet shifting political inspirations determined what the GDR's real capabilities and intentions were and their effects on its international position.

The book describes the political process leading to the paradoxical policy whereby the Soviets still defended 'a socialist GDR' in their rhetoric, while Soviet reforms were already eroding the GDR's sovereignty. It offers an understanding of when and how the hierarchical relationship between the GDR and the USSR, which had constituted an 'informal society', altered the domestic influence of political leaders and the influence of the international system.

Analytically, the book focuses on Soviet policy towards East Germany and explores the complex interaction of domestic and international developments at the level of state and sub-state actors. The aim is to address a perceived academic vacuum arising from the lack of an analytical and systematic evaluation of the politics of structural realism and to bridge International Relations (IR), comparative politics and the sub-fields of Soviet and German studies.

Many people have provided help and assistance, from the very beginning in conceiving the idea, to its materialisation as a project, until the time of writing the first draft of the book. First of all, Professor Christoph Bluth and Dr Christine Margerum Harlen, who encouraged me to carry out the project. They spent many hours reading early versions and offering helpful criticism. Dr Neil Melvin, Dr Jason Ralph and Professor Mark Duffield motivated me to reflect critically on my topic.

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Achilleas Megas



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Megas, A.

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