

on the world stage today. Remember during the Gulf crisis, the Germans finally agreed that Saddam had to be stopped—they just opposed their own involvement in Operation Desert Storm. Now as the cancerous conflict in former Yugoslavia threatens to spread in Europe's belly, the Germans have already said, if it comes to intervention, history and constitutional prohibition prevents them from sharing physical risk.

But there's far more to the story. Forty-two percent of Germans say their country has no need for a national defense. Only ten percent say they'd be willing to take up arms if their own country were attacked. This is not Germany learning the lessons of the past. This is still Willy Brandt's country, wanting to love and be loved, in a make-believe world where negotiations and freshly cut checks will make any problem go away. □

## THE SYSTEM: AN INSIDER'S LIFE IN SOVIET POLITICS

Georgi Arbatov

Times Books / 380 pages / \$25

reviewed by ARCH PUDDINGTON

Georgi Arbatov is bothered by his reputation as chief propagandist for Soviet global policies during the era of Brezhnevite decline. Though it flies in the face of the self-righteous excoriations he directed at Ronald Reagan's policies in the early 1980s, he much prefers the dual image of advocate for world peace and director of a prestigious think tank, something akin to Cyrus Vance as head of the American Enterprise Institute.

Like Vladimir Pozner, Arbatov used to appear frequently on American television, a symbol of Moscow's embrace of modern public relations. He spoke English well and displayed a certain grasp of the American political psychology. While maintaining the Soviet tradition of never admitting mistakes, he was a more reassuring presence than, say, Andrei Gromyko, the dour foreign minister whose unsmiling visage summoned up memories of Stalin, Molotov, and Vishinsky (and whom Arbatov now disparages as a coward and a toady).

Furthermore, Arbatov bore the credentials of director of the Institute for the Study of the USA and Canada, and thus

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qualified as the Soviet Union's leading expert on the United States. In *The System*, Arbatov writes with pride of his institute's role in educating the insular and "semi-educated" Kremlin leadership about realities of life and politics in America and elsewhere. He can barely conceal his disdain for Brezhnev and associates.

What he doesn't admit is that he rose to prominence by doing the bidding of this crude and narrow-minded group, and there is no reason to believe that he ever put forward anything less than full effort on the regime's behalf. He was not just a propagandist, but an architect of a strategy to appeal over the heads of Western governments, and especially the Reagan Administration, to sway potentially sympathetic constituencies: the peace movement, European social democrats, and journalists and academics of a détenteist inclination. When Ted Turner or John Kenneth Galbraith would return from Moscow whining about how Reagan hawks were undermining the doves in the Kremlin, it was safe to assume that the source for this "insight" was Arbatov or a subordinate at his institute.

Arbatov is the consummate cynic, a man who privately gave out hints that he shared Western democratic values while publicly advancing the cause of a thor-

oughly loathsome system. Arbatov, however, pleads guilty only to what he calls "conformism," which seems to mean having to say certain things as a "condition of survival" in the treacherous world of Soviet politics. His culpability, he adds, is mitigated by the lies higher-ups told him about such issues as the Kremlin's crash civil defense program (which Arbatov implausibly claims to have known nothing about), and by a personal code of honor that would not allow him to denounce associates fallen from grace or to defend the Soviet Union's more obviously criminal acts.

Yet even today Arbatov can't come entirely clean. He asserts, for instance, that he refused to defend Soviet aggression in Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan, a claim directly contradicted by Arbatov's previous writings. Not only did Arbatov defend both actions, his arguments were indistinguishable from those advanced by Brezhnev, Sušlov, Chernenko, and the rest of the Politburo's primitives. In a volume written by Arbatov entitled *The War of Ideas in Contemporary International Relations*, published in the early 1970s, he crowed that the "imperial bourgeoisie" had been thwarted in its attempt to "wrest Czechoslovakia away from the socialist camp," and he trumpeted the "fraternal internationalist assistance" that the Warsaw Pact troops had rendered in 1968. Designed as a guide to those engaged in ideological work, the volume reminded the *aktiv* that détente, then in full bloom, did not signal the end of the international class struggle. The book was replete with the rankest kind of Commie-speak, phrases like "the expansionist aspirations of the leading imperialist powers," "rule of the monopoly bourgeoisie," and "imperialist vultures." It even advanced the notion that "imperialism" encouraged drug use to divert people's attention from the ideological struggle and claimed that nuclear war "remains an intrinsic component of imperialist foreign policy."

Arbatov defended the Afghanistan war in another book, *The Soviet Viewpoint*, published in the West in the early 1980s. For some reason, he remains extravagantly proud of this work, calling it "exceptional for its great frankness and self-criticism," and for its "higher-than-usual level of skill, professionalism, and argumentation." Yet his defense of

Soviet policies hardly differed in its essentials from the Brezhnev line. Moscow had sent a "military contingent" to its neighbor "to help the government formed after the revolution . . . ward off aggression from the outside," acted only "after repeated requests by the Kabul government," and did nothing in violation of international law.

Some might think it unsporting to torment self-professed closet reformers like Arbatov by reminding the world of what they said in the bad old days before glasnost. After all, it's widely understood that a measure of dishonesty could not be avoided in the Soviet system, and even a stalwart supporter of perestroika like Alexander Yakovlev found it expedient to write things that today he would gratefully consign to the incinerator.

But where does expediency end and career advancement take over? Arbatov claims that behind the scenes he worked for peace, mutual understanding, and common sense. Yet this champion of détente was also perfectly willing to call America the most malign power on earth, or justify the persecution of dissidents, or defend the arming of Third World thugs, or blame the West for encouraging the movement for Jewish emigration.

Although describing himself as a partisan of democratic socialism, Arbatov no longer has much good to say about the old domestic order (unlike Mikhail Gorbachev and other prominent "reform Communists"). He provides some useful insights about the functioning of the system and especially about such shadowy Kremlin figures as Yuri Andropov, the late KGB chief and party secretary. To be sure, Arbatov speaks with respect of the man who brought him into the apparatus's higher ranks by naming him to the Central Committee staff during the regime of Nikita Khrushchev. And while he describes Andropov as incorruptible, this portrait does not correspond to the "godfather of perestroika" image that gained widespread circulation in the West. Arbatov laments Andropov's leading the KGB during the era of re-Stalinization (unfortunately, without providing details), and is particularly critical of Andropov's prominent role in several of the Soviet Union's major foreign policy blunders. Andropov was an enthusiastic supporter of the deployment of the SS-20 missiles in Eastern Europe, a measure that had the unforeseen effect of cementing the

Atlantic Alliance at a time when dividing Europe from America was a principal goal of Soviet policy. Arbatov also blames Andropov, along with Defense Minister Dmitri Ustinov, as principally responsible for the invasion of Afghanistan.

There are also worthwhile descriptions of the operation of the propaganda-censorship apparatus. For instance, the memoirs of Marshal Zhukov, the World War II hero, were rewritten to delete any reference to Stalin's purge of the Red Army High Command. Arbatov chillingly recounts how he himself was humiliated by the Red Army brass for voicing mild criticisms of some of the more blatant falsifications in a history of the Great Patriotic War. Would that there had been more material of this sort and less typically overblown Soviet rhetoric about peace and the fate of mankind and Arbatov's service on the Palme Commission on nuclear disarmament.

One also wishes he had elaborated on his views of America. Clearly, his grasp of the realities of American politics was distorted not simply by the limitations imposed by the Soviet political environment, but also by Arbatov's self-image as a

man of the international left. His recourse to phrases like "extreme right" and "military-industrial complex" seem out of place in the post-Cold War era, and suggest a genuine lack of understanding of the popular basis of anti-Communism. He is not, of course, alone in this failure; much the same charge could be leveled against the Western politicians and businessmen who served as Arbatov's informants about life in the real world. Arbatov's description of West German neutralist Egon Bahr as "one of the most outstanding political minds of our time" suggests that one reason the Soviets never understood America is that much of their information about America was provided by Westerners harboring strongly anti-American views.

*The System* has been awarded generally favorable reviews, not surprising given Arbatov's friendship with some of the reviewers. Few have seen fit to puzzle out the breathtaking flexibility Arbatov has exhibited while serving under such diverse leaders as Leonid Brezhnev, Mikhail Gorbachev, and Boris Yeltsin. They prefer to see Arbatov as an honest man doing his part in a dishonest system. Which is precisely as Arbatov would want it. □

## AMERICAN ENERGIES: ESSAYS ON FICTION

Sven Birkerts

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reviewed by M. D. CARNEGIE

In 1919, roughly a decade past the month she affixed as the moment the human character changed, Virginia Woolf published her essay "Modern Fiction," in which she averred that fiction writers, long hemmed in by the trivial stuff of the material, now stood before a horizon of limitless possibility: the human mind. She had been reading *Ulysses*, which was then appearing in installments in the *Little Review*. She

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found it wanting, and wondered rhetorically if it were not so that "in any effort of such originality it is much easier, for contemporaries especially, to feel what it lacks than to name what it gives." Nevertheless she marked what she had seen of it as cause to wax sanguine about the future of the novel, which now had the potential to be a total document of consciousness—to unwind the scroll of memory, to catch the sounds of time's pass. "Record the atoms as they fall upon the mind," Woolf exhorted her colleagues: