NEW POLITICAL THINKING AND SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY

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Little more than a decade ago Soviet leaders and analysts were enthusiastically optimistic about the direction and pace of international developments and about Soviet prospects for the future. They wrote and spoke incessantly of the "changing international correlation of forces," by which they meant the global shift in relative military, economic and political strength in favor of the Soviet Union, its allies and the "forces of peace" and against the forces of Western imperialism. Developments of the prior decade, or so, tended to support this viewpoint.

In the area of strategic nuclear capabilities the Soviet Union had closed the gap with the United States and achieved strategic parity. Soviet strategic equality -- and by extension Soviet equality as a global power -- was recognized in a series of agreements negotiated at Vladivostok, Moscow and Helsinki.

Soviet conventional forces in both Europe and Asia, as well as their expanded ability to project military power beyond their immediate borders, had been enhanced by the modernization of Warsaw Pact forces, the creation of a "blue water" navy and long-distance air transport capability, and the extension and modernization of forces in Asia.

The West's acceptance at Helsinki of the postwar status quo in Europe, the defeat of the United States in Vietnam, as well as the coming to power of self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninist "national liberation" movements throughout the Third World, gave further evidence of the enhanced role of the Soviet Union in world affairs. In the international economic realm the Soviets envisaged the establishment of a socialist international division of labor that would first counter and eventually replace the dominant capitalist world market.

Domestically economic growth rates, though they had slowed since the immediate postwar period, still enabled the Soviet leadership to fulfill its promises to meet growing domestic consumer demand and simultaneously to maintain the expanding military and economic commitments necessitated by the new role as a global power.
On the other hand, in the wake of the defeat in Vietnam and of the Watergate scandal, the U.S. leadership seemed incapable of responding to Soviet initiatives. The détente relationship of the 1970s was, from the Soviet perspective, but tacit recognition on the part of the United States that it could no longer ignore Soviet interests and was forced by the new realities of world affairs to accept and recognize as legitimate the interests of the USSR and of those progressive forces and movements which it supported.

Despite this Soviet optimism of the 1970s and the apparent reality that underlay it, by the beginning of the present decade the Soviets found themselves increasingly on the defensive. The détente with the West (especially the United States) had collapsed into a new cold war complete with economic embargo, revitalized U.S. military spending, and a new U.S. assertiveness in foreign policy. Despite Soviet blustering, West European NATO states had agreed to the deployment of intermediate-range nuclear weapons, and the Reagan Administration had committed itself to the development of the Strategic Defense Initiative. In Asia Japan was expanding its military capabilities and reaffirming its security ties with the United States, while China had entered upon its four modernizations' campaign that included a refurbishing of military capabilities and closer association with Japan and the West.

In the Third World the USSR had been effectively frozen out of participation in key developments in the Middle East and several of its new allies/clients had failed to create stable political-economic systems and were increasingly challenged by domestic insurgencies supported by the United States and others. The result was a growing demand for Soviet military and economic support, including the direct takeover by Soviet troops of responsibility for the security of the Marxist-Leninist regime in Afghanistan. Along with this came criticism of Soviet intervention by a wide range of developing countries themselves.

In yet another area the Soviets found that the political attractiveness of
The unity of the Soviet-led World Communist Movement had long since shattered. In Western Europe communist parties had either lost domestic support or asserted their independence from Moscow — or both. Throughout the Third World a growing number of Marxist regimes were in the process of reexamining their commitment to socialism and reestablishing or strengthening economic and political ties with the West.

These problems arose at the very time when the weaknesses of the Soviet economy were becoming most apparent. By the beginning of the 1980s economic growth rates had, in the words of General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev, "fallen to a level close to economic stagnation." The technological gap between the Soviet economy and the economies of its major competitors, including a number of developing countries, was expanding. After decades devoted to "catching up" with the West in a wide range of fields and establishing themselves as a global power, the Soviets faced the prospect of stagnation and decline.

Briefly, the situation inherited by Brezhnev's successors was one filled with contradictions. Although the Soviet Union had emerged as a global superpower with wide-ranging interests and capabilities, its position was based primarily on military power. The nuclear stalemate with the United States, the renewed activism of U.S. policy, and the expanding role of other countries in global affairs, however, precluded turning this enhanced military position into effective political gains. Nowhere was this clearer than in Asia, where the growth of Soviet military power threatened to drive China into an alliance with the United States and the military relationship with Vietnam enhanced the security concerns of the ASEAN states. The weaknesses of the Soviet economy raised questions about possible over-extension of Soviet international commitments and limited the relevance of the USSR for many of the most pressing of international problems — economic development, trade, and debts.

Since he assumed the leadership of the CPSU in spring 1985, Mikhail
Gorbachev has spoken repeatedly of the domestic and foreign policy problems facing the USSR. He has committed himself to a major reform of the entire Soviet system as a means of resolving these problems. The basic argument that he has presented to support this reform can be summarized briefly as follows:

First, the economic problems of the USSR and the technology gap between the Soviet Union and the West are expanding and bode ill for the ability of the USSR to ensure its military security and its global standing in the twenty-first century. Second, economic reform, within the framework of socialism, perestroika, is essential in order to overcome the economic problems and technological weaknesses of the USSR that threaten to undermine its international status, required, as well, as a precondition for economic reform, is a reform of the political process which will make officials more responsive to the needs of economic rationality.

Third, to overcome entrenched bureaucratic forces within the Soviet Union which will resist change, a more open, but still controlled, political system that encourages criticism and rationality in support of reform is required — "glasnost'" and demokratizatsiia." Finally, policies are needed which will enable the Soviets to benefit more fully from advances in the international economy and to accomplish, by means other than primarily military, major Soviet foreign policy objectives.

In sum, one of the primary objectives of Gorbachev's campaign of perestroika and glasnost — though by no means the sole one — is based on his recognition that the position of the USSR in the world is dependent upon a dramatic improvement in the functioning of the Soviet economy. In his report to the 27th Party Congress in early 1986 he expressed this point most forcefully:

In a word, comrades, acceleration of the country's economic development is the key to all our problems, immediate and long term, economic and social, political and ideological, domestic and foreign. "Perestroika" is his call for major reform with the goal of revitalizing the economy, closing the technology gap,
and turning the USSR into a fully competitive global superpower — not the incomplete superpower of today that lacks virtually all but military power as an instrument to influence world developments.

Moreover, as Gorbachev has also noted, a period of stability and calm in Soviet foreign policy is essential to the overall success of his reform policies. Without a reduction in the tensions that have characterized U.S.-Soviet relations during much of the present decade, and those with China for almost thirty years, the Soviet leadership will be unable to devote either the attention or the resources required to implement domestic reform. Thus, the domestic and foreign policies of the USSR are intertwined in two distinct, but overlapping ways. Maintaining and improving the global role of the USSR is a prime determinant of the domestic politics of reform, while simultaneously a shift in foreign policy aimed at reducing tensions and, in particular, the economic and political costs of a renewed arms race and at expanding political and economic relationships with the outside world are a necessary condition for the successful implementation of reform.

**Gorbachev’s "New Political Thinking" in Foreign Policy**

At the 27th CPSU Congress in February 1986 Gorbachev opened his political report by asserting that problems had been building up more rapidly than "the inertness and fossilization of the forms and methods of administration could handle.

With these words he began an extended litany of problems in Soviet society and the call for the new thinking and openness that have come to characterize his tenure as leader of the Party. Turning to the international arena, Gorbachev continued with the demand for rethinking the policies of the past.

A turning point has been reached not only in internal but also in external affairs. The changes in the present world are so deep and significant that they require a reappraisal and comprehensive analysis of all factors. The situation created by the nuclear confrontation calls for new approaches, methods and forms of relations between the different social systems, states and regions.


In numerous public statements since the Party Congress Gorbachev and other Soviet leaders and analysts have argued that the agenda for reform in the Soviet Union encompasses not only domestic but foreign policy as well. Obviously, the essential question, from the perspective of the analyst, concerns the degree to which the reevaluation of Soviet foreign policy is more than mere rhetorical updating of Soviet policy and, thus, likely to influence actual Soviet behavior. Although it is not possible to provide a conclusive answer to this question, a growing body of evidence indicates that Gorbachev's call for new thinking in the foreign and security policy area is more than mere rhetoric meant for propaganda purposes.

In his report to the 27th Party Congress Gorbachev gave some indication of the content of the "new political thinking" when he raised issues seldom, if ever, discussed publicly by Soviet political leaders in the past. The major points that he mentioned include 1) a recognition of the existence of "global problems, affecting all humanity" the resolution of which requires "cooperation on a worldwide scale, close and constructive joint action by the majority of countries", 2) explicit stress on the interdependence of states, 3) the argument that "it is no longer possible to win an arms race, or nuclear war for that matter, and that the striving for military superiority can, objectively speaking, bring no political dividends to anybody", and 4) strong criticism of the "infallibility complex" and the inertness and conservatism that characterized previous Soviet policy.

In referring to global problems and the growing interdependence among states, Gorbachev introduced concepts that differ measurably from those that characterized the statements of his predecessors. Most significant is the stress that he placed on interdependence and the need for international cooperation. This is most evident in the security sphere where, he argue, the character of present-day weaponry leaves no country with any hope of safeguarding itself solely with military and technical means. To ensure
security is increasingly seen as a political problem, and it can only be resolved by political means. The security of the Soviet Union and the United States can be maintained only if it is mutual, moreover, although the U.S. military-industrial complex is still the "locomotive of militarism," it is important to recognize that its interests are not identical with the actual national interests of that great country. Finally, the world is dynamic and "it is not within anybody's power to maintain a perpetual status quo in it. It consists of scores of countries, each having its own perfectly legitimate interests."

Since the Congress the call for "new thinking" has been a dominant theme in the Party press. The most authoritative expansions on Gorbachev's description of the elements of the "new thinking" can be found in articles by Politburo Member Aleksandr Iakovlev, by Anatoliy Dobrynin, the former secretary of the Central Committee who headed the International Department, by Evgenyi Primakov, successor to Iakovlev as Director of the Institute of World Economics and International Relations and by Vadim Medvedev, the new ideological chief of the Party.

Gorbachev's views draw heavily on those of academic analysts who began discussing a number of years ago most of the issues that have now been placed on the agenda of the top political leadership. For example, since the mid-1970s a number of academic writers as well as some party officials had developed the arguments concerning growing interdependence in the contemporary world, especially in the area of security, and the importance of "global problems, the solution of which requires increased cooperation." In fact, class conflict, which has been the cornerstone of all Marxist social theory, seemingly takes a back seat to the need to preserve the human race.

Also relevant to understanding the background of Gorbachev's new political thinking has been what William Odom has called the third revolution in Soviet military affairs. This "revolution" has involved a
major reassessment of the relevance of nuclear weapons in maintaining security or accomplishing policy objectives. Chief among those who have pointed to the catastrophic consequences of nuclear war and, therefore, the need to overcome the inertia of thought and a stubborn, mechanical, unthinking attachment to the old ways¹⁶ has been Marshal N.V. Ogarkov, former Chief of the Soviet General Staff. Ogarkov and others have presented this argument in order to buttress their call for the resources needed to take advantage of recent technological developments to modernize the conventional military capabilities of the USSR. However, their depiction of the limited military and political utility of nuclear weapons is directly relevant to aspects of the new political thinking advocated by Gorbachev, who has argued that an arms race cannot be 'won' and will likely increase mutual threats to the point that nuclear parity will no longer guarantee deterrence.

New thinking also characterizes Soviet assessments of policy in the Third World. While the 1961 Party Program had spoken with great optimism about prospects for liberation and the role of the USSR in supporting the liberation struggle, the new program emphasizes the revitalized role of neo-colonialism and imperialism in the Third World and notes only that the "CPSU supports the just struggle waged by the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America against imperialism" and that the Soviet Union is on the side of the states and peoples repulsing the attacks of the aggressive forces of imperialism and upholding their freedom, independence and national dignity. Progressive states are informed that the tasks of building a new society are primarily their own responsibility, although the "Soviet Union has been doing and will continue to do all it can to render the peoples following that [socialist-oriented] road assistance in economic and cultural development, in training national personnel, in strengthening their defences and in other fields."¹⁷

The three major concerns that appear in Soviet writing and statements on
current developments in the Third World relate to the escalating costs borne by the Soviet Union in supporting its clients, the poor record of these clients after independence in creating stable political systems and functioning economies, and the negative impact that involvement in the Third World has had on other Soviet foreign policy concerns -- in particular relations with the United States.

This brief review of recent Soviet interpretations of the "new political thinking" in foreign policy demonstrates that the political leadership in Moscow, at least General Secretary and his key supporters, is committed to a new approach to foreign policy. This new approach is based on a more complex view of the international system and appears to take into account the fact that in the contemporary world no country, including the USSR, is able to impose its view of world order on the international system. At least at the rhetorical level the Soviet leadership appears to understand the realities of the international system in which it is operating.

By no means does this mean that Gorbachev faces no opposition nor that his views on foreign policy -- or domestic policy, for that matter -- will necessarily win out in the long run. However, assuming Gorbachev's basic success in implementing his own policy preferences, the crucial question that remains to be answered concerns the impact that his "new thinking" has had, or is likely to have, on actual Soviet foreign policy behavior.

**Implementation of the "New Political Thinking"**

For Gorbachev and other key foreign policy decision makers and advisors in Moscow the shift in foreign policy has been necessitated by the demands of the domestic economic and political reform that is essential to the long-term viability of the USSR as a global power, as well as by the mixed record of success and failure in Soviet foreign policy. In his attempts to implement this new approach to foreign policy Gorbachev has reorganized the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defense, the Central Committee International...
Department, and the foreign trade sector, the International Information Department of the Central Committee has been disbanded and its international propaganda activities brought under the control of Politburo member Iakovlev. By June 1987 well over half of all Soviet ambassadors had been replaced (74 of 120), and only one deputy minister of foreign affairs remained from the Brezhnev era. The foreign minister, his two first deputy ministers and seven deputy ministers have been replaced by Gorbachev. Moreover, a new directorate was created within the Ministry to centralize oversight of all arms control and disarmament considerations. Personnel changes in the Central Committee's International Department also facilitate the introduction of new thinking into the foreign policy process. The seasoned diplomat Anatoliy Dobrynin, a major advocate of restructuring, took over as head of the International Department and reoriented its outlook and activities. Six of the nine deputy chiefs of the Department have been appointed under Gorbachev. Of the other three, Karen Brutents is among those whose reassessment of Soviet policy in the Third World fits closely with Gorbachev's views. Moreover, a new section for arms control has been established within the Department. Finally, Aleksandr Iakovlev, a close associate of Gorbachev and one of the most forceful proponents of the new thinking, has been elevated to full membership in the Politburo and given top authority in the foreign policy area in fall 1988 when he replaced Dobrynin.

Although these and other administrative and personnel changes introduced during since 1985 do not guarantee changes in actual Soviet policy, they represent a first step toward streamlining the policy-making process and, thus, facilitating a more flexible approach to policy making.

Opposition to Gorbachev's stated policy objectives in the international arena has been muted and is not nearly so evident as that concerning domestic economic and political reform. Those within the Soviet political elite likely to have questioned openly "new political thinking" have, for the most
part been retired or, as in the case of Ligachev, moved into less sensitive positions. The major area of opposition to Gorbachev's proposals appears in the military area. First of all, implementation of his domestic investment policies will have adverse budgetary implications for the military. Moreover, the ongoing discussion of "reasonable sufficiency" in the security realm, with proposals for possible unilateral reductions and asymmetrical reductions in the conventional area demonstrates quite different perspectives, especially between civilian and military analysts.

What is evident from recent personnel changes is the fact that Gorbachev is staffing key positions within the state and party foreign policy apparatus with individuals who support his views and who, in some cases, advocated them before they were incorporated in Gorbachev's own thinking. Although this by no means assures that policies based on the concepts of "global problems and interdependence" will be implemented in Soviet policy, it does mean that Gorbachev will find advice and support if he attempts to introduce such policies.

The concept of national security has undergone modification, as well, in the recent pronouncements of the Party leadership. Soviet security, as conceived of by Gorbachev, depends increasingly on political and economic, as well as on military factors, and cannot be guaranteed unilaterally by a mere increase in Soviet military capabilities. Recent shifts in the Soviet position on arms control negotiations -- especially concerning intrusive on-site verification -- and the creation of sections responsible for arms control within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the International Department seem to indicate a new commitment to negotiation that coincides with this broadened view of security. It is possible that, in line with his plans for revitalizing the economy, Gorbachev will begin to transfer resources from the military to the civilian sector. To date the only evidence to support such an assertion is circumstantial and based on remarks made by Gorbachev that
indicate that he is not about to increase military spending, so that he can accomplish political and economic gains which, over the long run, would enhance Soviet security. Most important is the need to rebuild and modernize the economic base of the Soviet Union.

Although none of these developments yet provides conclusive evidence that the Soviets are about to restructure their foreign and security policies, they indicate an understanding of the failures of past policy and the need for change, if the USSR is to establish a more effective policy in the future. During the past three-and-a-half years a growing body of evidence suggests that actual Soviet behavior has been undergoing change as well — and change of a sort consistent with the new political thinking. In virtually all areas of their relations with the outside world the Soviets have attempted to revitalize their role, and that revitallization has not merely been based on pursuing the standard policies of the late Brezhnev era.

The importance of Gorbachev's new thinking about Soviet foreign and security policy results partially from the recognition that the US position in the world is not based exclusively on military capabilities, as important as they are for the US role as a superpower. If the Soviet Union is to become a full-fledged global power, it must be able to compete with the United States economically and diplomatically, as well as in the military sphere. However, only by very basic, long-term changes can it keep up in the scientific and technological race and thereby retain the hope of becoming an economic superpower. Thus, the major efforts to restructure the Soviet domestic economic (and political) system are meant, in part, to strengthen the economic base from which the USSR can operate in the future. The strategy of interdependence is meant to move the Soviet economy toward joining the world market for the dual purposes of gaining greater benefits for the USSR itself and of expanding Soviet influence in international economic affairs. Moreover, unless the Soviets are able to keep pace with technological
developments in the West, the military capabilities of the USSR will likely fall behind those of the United States by the end of the century.

The success of Gorbachev's efforts to restructure the Soviet economy and to close the existing (and growing) technological gap requires a relaxation in the arms race and a reduction in policies likely to result in confrontation and tension with the West 27

**New Political Thinking** and Recent Soviet International Behavior

One of the most visible characteristics of Soviet international behavior since Gorbachev assumed the leadership of the CPSU has, in fact, been its renewed activism. In virtually all areas of importance to the Soviet Union—from relations with the United States and China to developments in the Middle East—the new Soviet leadership has demonstrated, in the words of Dimitri Simes, "a new sense of purpose, a new realism and a new creativity." 28 Gorbachev's primary objective has been to reverse the decline in both the effectiveness and the credibility of Soviet policy that had set in during the final years of the Brezhnev leadership and to regain the initiative in international affairs.

Of primary concern has been the state of Soviet-U.S. relations which had deteriorated dramatically since the mid-1970s. More important, however, than the mere fact of the increased hostility in relations with the United States was the renewed vigor with which the United States was pursuing its international interests. In the military realm the Reagan Administration had initiated a major program aimed at modernizing and expanding U.S. military capabilities. In the Third World it had, in effect, virtually declared war on a number of Soviet clients and made clear that the Soviets would not be permitted to make additional gains comparable to those of the mid-1970s. In other words, despite strategic parity in the military area, the Soviets were not accepted by the United States as an equal in the international political system. Moreover, the revitalized U.S. arms buildup, symbolized most
dramatically in the Strategic Defense Initiative, threatened to vitiate past
Soviet efforts to gain strategic parity with the United States

Under Gorbachev the Soviets have made dramatic overtures in the attempt to
facilitate nuclear arms control negotiations with the United States --
including their willingness to discuss the European theater separately from
overall strategic issues that has resulted in the INF agreement, their
proposals to cut strategic weapons by fifty percent and to place a complete
moratorium on testing, their agreement to on-site inspection as part of the
verification process for the INF agreement and indications of a willingness to
submit to further on-site verification should additional agreements be reached,
and an offer to negotiate major reductions -- even non-symmetrical ones -- in
conventional weapons and manpower in Central Europe. 29 Although one of the
Soviet objectives is no doubt to project the image of having a stronger
commitment to arms control than that of the United States for propaganda
purposes, a broader purpose appears to be based on the realization that a
renewed arms race with the United States would undermine the attempts to commit
resources to the revitalization of the domestic economy. Moreover, and
probably of greatest importance, are in the words of Seweryn Bialer and Joan
Afferica, Soviet security concerns. These include the widening American
technological preponderance, the accelerating American offensive nuclear arms
program, and the tension and danger inherent in a new arms race. Even more
important than fear of the known is fear of the unknown, the terrible
uncertainties concealed in America’s grandiose Strategic Defense
Initiative. 30

In their relations with the major European allies of the United States the
Soviets appear to be motivated strongly by the desire to convince these
countries of their good intentions and to get them to put pressure on the
United States to negotiate with the USSR, as well as by the desire to normalize
relations with the key Western European states. 31 The case that they have been
trying to make also includes the argument that, despite continuing problems in U.S.-Soviet relations, the mutual benefits derived from the detente of the 1970s can and should continue and be built upon.

Another example of recent shifts in Soviet policy can be seen in efforts to expand trade relations and to play a more active role in the international economic system. With this objective in mind, the Soviets have applied for observer status at the GATT, shown a willingness to deal more fully with the European Economic Community, and reorganized significantly their foreign trade institutions and initiated efforts to attract Western investment capital in joint enterprises. As already noted, essential to the success of the economic reform program is a closing of the technological gap which requires a more intensive interaction with the world economy than has existed in the past.

When we turn to an examination of recent Soviet policy in the Third World, the evidence indicates, as well, revitalized efforts, including a number of innovative initiatives, to reestablish or consolidate their role as a major world actor. Since Gorbachev took over as head of the CPSU in early 1985, the Soviets have attempted to reestablish their position in the Middle East—the Third World region of primary importance for their long-term security interests. For example, in line with prior policy, they have made new commitments of military aid to both Syria and Libya and have continued to support Iraq in its war against Iran, while simultaneously working to normalize relations with the latter. However, they have also expanded their efforts to reach out to more moderate Arab states—such as Egypt, Jordan and Kuwait—and even to open up discussions with Israel. Since 1986, for example, they have mediated a reconciliation of competing factions of the Palestine Liberation Organization, initiated talks with Egypt concerning a possible Middle East peace conference, responded to Kuwaiti requests for protection of their oil tankers against Iran by leasing three Soviet tankers that now carry
Kuwaiti oil, held various informal discussions with Israel, and signed economic agreements with Iran.

In Afghanistan after attempts to pacify the country by conquest and to exert greater pressure on Pakistan to accept the new "status quo" in the region, by early 1988 the Soviets signed a formal agreement to cut their losses and withdraw their troops from Afghanistan. By fall 1988 the withdrawal was on schedule, although the Soviets announced a temporary halt because of the upsurge in attacks on both Afghan government and Soviet installations. The motivation for the withdrawal results from the Soviet recognition of the low likelihood of successfully implementing their objectives in Afghanistan and from their desire to reduce the military/economic and political costs to the Soviet Union in relations with the United States and with China.

Relations with India, the single most important non-communist developing country for the USSR, have been reinvigorated by mutual visits of Rajiv Gandhi and Mikhail Gorbachev and by new Soviet credits for military and civilian purchases. The Soviets are well aware of the fact that, unless they can continue to remain relevant for the primary Indian concerns -- security against Pakistan (and China) and economic development -- relations are likely to stagnate.

In Africa, although the Soviets initially expanded support for their embattled clients in Angola and Ethiopia, more recently they have backed efforts to reach a negotiated settlement of the civil war in Angola that would result in the pull-out of Cuban troops. Finally, Foreign Minister Shevardnadze's official visits to Latin America in early fall 1987 gave evidence of the Soviets' desire to expand diplomatic relations with major Latin American countries. Economic concerns and a wide range of other international issues were on the agenda during the discussions with leaders in Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay. Most important, however, was Shavardnadze's effort to project the image of a Soviet Union concerned about the problems of the region.
and willing to assist in resolving them 39

Thus, Soviet policy in the Third World has been undergoing some change, with the most dramatic developments occurring in Afghanistan. What is most evident is a greater degree of flexibility in Soviet initiatives, as in the Middle East, but not an abandonment of past commitments. There is an enhanced interest in the larger and regionally more significant states, even though they are capitalist. Moreover, the Soviets appear to be attempting to reduce involvement in regional conflicts that they view as hopeless and to decrease the overall financial costs of their foreign policy.

In East Asia the Gorbachev leadership has engaged in a wide range of activities aimed at increasing the political and economic role of the USSR in an area where, despite greatly enhanced military capabilities, the Soviet Union remains largely a marginal actor. Gorbachev’s speech on Asian affairs made in Vladivostok in late July 1986 was the most comprehensive statement concerning Asia ever presented by a Soviet leader and set the tone for a new Soviet approach to relations with the region. In fact, more than a year earlier he had broached some of the issues when he referred to the possibility of an all-Asian forum which would bring together all Asian countries, including China, in order to improve relations and deal with issues of common concern. 40

The purpose of Gorbachev’s Vladivostok speech was to emphasize the fact that the USSR is indeed an Asian power and to apply specifically to the Asian-Pacific region the elements of new thinking in Soviet policy. At least half of the General Secretary’s remarks were devoted to domestic economic concerns and bluntly describe the gravity of the problems in Soviet Asia and the need for dramatic reform. The remainder discussed foreign policy considerations, with special attention to the objective of normalization of relations with China, as well as with other countries in the region, and the possibilities for economic cooperation.

The gist of Gorbachev’s remarks provide some recognition of the fact that
past Soviet policy in East Asia, which has relied heavily on the expansion of its military capabilities, has failed in its efforts to accomplish most Soviet objectives. Despite the almost exponential growth in military capabilities, the Soviets have not been able to turn those capabilities into political gains.

When Gorbachev assumed the leadership of the Soviet state, the Soviet Union had emerged as the dominant military power in East Asia. However, its political ties and economic relations were extremely limited. The growth of military power had, in effect, exacerbated the tensions that underlie Soviet relations with most of the other countries of the region, as Vladimir Ivanov, the head of the Pacific Department of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations, has admitted.41

The major focus of Gorbachev's efforts to revitalize Soviet policy in Asia has occurred in policy toward China, and for good reason. The military-oriented, hard-line policies of the past had proven to be counterproductive. In fact, they had gone far toward driving China into a de facto alliance with the United States, Japan, and Western Europe. The Soviet leadership has introduced major initiatives in an attempt to normalize relations with China — initiatives that promise to reduce Soviet military pressure on China and assist China in its economic modernization program. Bilateral trade turnover has expanded significantly in the past few years to reach more than 1.8 billion rubles in 1986, compared with less than 500 million three years earlier.42 The polemics that earlier dominated Sino-Soviet relations have been toned down dramatically. The Soviets no longer denounce the domestic reforms introduced by Deng Xiaoping, and the Chinese have largely stopped calling for a united front against hegemonism.43

Important, as well, has been progress on all of the "three obstacles to normalization of relations referred to by the Chinese — the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia, and the huge numbers of
Soviet troops massed along the Sino-Soviet border. In 1988 the Soviets have committed themselves to the full withdrawal of their forces from Afghanistan by February 1989. They have also indicated their willingness to negotiate a mutual draw-down of forces along the Sino-Soviet border, and have encouraged the Vietnamese in their decision to withdraw their troops from Cambodia by 1990. Moreover, the INF agreement reached with the United States calls for the dismantling of Soviet intermediate-range missiles in Asia, as well as in Europe.

Yet, even though the three obstacles have not yet been eliminated, relations between the Soviet Union and China have moved toward normalization in all but name. Moreover, high-level talks are scheduled for early 1989, which may well result in the establishment of full markedly improved relations between the two countries. As Thomas Hart has argued, "the spectacular improvement already made in Sino-Soviet relations bears witness to another fact that simply cannot be ignored -- namely that considerable progress can be made despite the differences remaining on a wide range of fundamental questions." From Moscow's perspective, the primary objective is to reduce tensions in Asia by eliminating a prime cause for China's allying itself with the West. As we have seen, the reduction of tension as a prerequisite for successful economic restructuring is a core element of Gorbachev's program.

The tone of Soviet relations with Japan has improved, as well, though there is little evidence that the Soviets are yet willing to consider the essential problem in bilateral relations, the territorial dispute concerning the Southern Kuriles occupied by the USSR since World War II. Soviet policies of the Brezhnev years, which included the dramatic expansion of military capabilities in the Asian-Pacific region and the deployment of Soviet forces on the Kuriles, raised the level of Japanese concern about its military security. The result was a substantial increase in Japanese military capabilities, a strengthening of the alliance with the United States, and the expansion of
In attempting to improve relations with Japan the Soviets find themselves in a very difficult position. Though access to Japanese capital and technological know-how are important for the Soviet economy, there is little that the Soviets have to offer the Japanese -- short of returning the Kurile Islands. As Hiroshi Kimura has argued, "the Soviet Union needs Japan technologically, economically, and hence diplomatically, but Japan can get along without the Soviet Union as long as its security is assured."  

In Southeast Asia the Soviets have mounted increasing efforts to expand both diplomatic and economic contacts with the members of ASEAN -- largely without success to date. Yet, their close ties to Vietnam, which most ASEAN members see as a potential security threat to the region, and their basic irrelevance to the economies of the region make prospects for any dramatic breakthrough in relations most unlikely in the foreseeable future. For example, total Soviet trade with ASEAN in 1986 was valued at $487 million, compared with ASEAN trade with Japan of $29 billion and with the United States of $24 billion. Soviet support for Vietnam's withdrawal from Cambodia should buttress other efforts to extend relations with the ASEAN states.

The Soviets have also been active in establishing relations with the new micro-states of the South Pacific that give them access to fishing rights and port facilities. These activities have raised concerns in the United States and Japan about the possible long-term political-military objectives of the Soviet Union in the region. One result has been the decision of Japan, at U.S. urging, to commit expanded economic assistance to these countries.

While Soviet policy throughout the region in the recent past has emphasized the need to reduce tension and establish improved relations and cooperation, until quite recently its policy toward North Korea has followed an apparently quite different tact. The transfer of substantial amounts of modern military equipment to Korea in the mid-1980s increased concerns about the...
possibility of a new outbreak of fighting on the Korean Peninsula. More recently, however, the Soviets have praised North Korea's cautious approach to relations with the South and have also expanded dealings with South Korea (in part, related to Soviet participation in the Seoul Olympics). 

In September 1988 General Secretary Gorbachev made another key speech in Krasnoyarsk, a city in the Soviet Far East associated with a disputed Soviet radar facility. He spoke at length of recent improvements in relations with China, noted the inadequacy of relations with Japan and spoke of cautious optimism about relations with the ASEAN countries. The major focus of the speech, however, was on improving the security climate of East Asia as a prelude to expanded economic relations. Gorbachev made a number of proposals for the furtherance of security in the region. Several of these proposals, such as the mutual U.S.-Soviet dismantling of military bases in the Philippines and Vietnam, are clearly meant for propaganda purposes. Others -- such as calls for a security conference to be held no later than 1990, for Soviet and U.S. commitments not to increase the number of nuclear weapons in the region, and for expanded communications to ensure naval and air security in the region -- may well attract interest in the region.

Gorbachev's new policy in Asia, as in his policies in Europe and elsewhere in the Third World, is based on a recognition that the policies of the past have largely failed. The expansion of Soviet military power in the region did not bring with it comparable political gains and, in fact, was an important element in pushing the Chinese toward Japan and the United States, in strengthening the security ties between Japan and the United States, and in preventing a meaningful expansion of relations with the countries of ASEAN. The new approach, which combines efforts at an expanded economic relationship with indications of some movement in the military area (e.g., the commitment to withdraw SS-20s from Asia as well as Europe and the indication of a willingness to reduce military manpower along the Chinese border), coincides with the "new
thinking in Moscow

**Future Soviet Policy and U.S. Interests**

We return now to the questions posed earlier concerning the meaning and implications of the debate on New Political Thinking for the future of Soviet foreign policy. Does the debate portend a substantive shift in Soviet policy, or does it merely concern the tactics to be employed to pursue more effectively policies long in place?

In responding to this question it is important, first, to outline what in fact are the guidelines for Soviet policy that emerge from the discussions in Moscow. The first essential point is Gorbachev’s recognition that significant improvement in the Soviet economy is the indispensable basis for future Soviet power in the world. He and his associates recognize that the positive assessment [from a Soviet perspective] of the "international correlation of forces" that dominated Soviet thinking in the 1970s was premature, at best. It overestimated the role of military power in the ability of the Soviet Union to accomplish its foreign policy objectives and greatly underestimated the ability of the United States effectively to renew its military, political, and economic challenge to the USSR. What is required, if the Soviet Union is to become a full-fledged superpower in the twenty-first century, is a vital and vibrant Soviet society with an economic base from which to challenge continued U.S. predominance. Thus, for the foreseeable future the Soviets will give priority to domestic economic reform and to the political and social "restructuring necessary to accomplish this goal.

To accomplish these objectives, however, the Soviets require a period of respite from the global conflict and confrontation that have characterized much of the past decade. An upsurge in international tension and an increase in military expenditures would exacerbate the difficulties of economic reform and dim the prospects for significant improvement in Soviet economic performance. Thus, for the foreseeable future the Soviets will pursue policies aimed at
reducing international crisis and improving relations with the West, Japan and China -- in other words, a policy of retrenchment that will permit them to devote their resources and attention to domestic concerns.

Yet this retrenchment will not result in renewed isolationism or in a withdrawal from the international gains of the past. Rather, competition with the United States and China will continue, as we have witnessed since Gorbachev's appointment as General Secretary, but with different emphases. One of the major objectives of what can only be viewed as a reinvigorated Soviet diplomacy is to refurbish the image and credibility of the Soviet Union as a global power and, concomitantly, to undermine those of the United States. Soviet initiatives in the arms control area have already tended to force the United States on the defensive, as have the broadened Soviet diplomatic initiatives in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf region. Essential to current Soviet policy, as well, is a "normalization" of U.S.-Soviet relations which would bring with it numerous benefits for the Soviet leadership. Most important would be the reduction of external pressure on the Soviet leaders at a time when they are concerned primarily with overcoming the long-neglected problems that challenge their domestic social and economic system. In addition, although Gorbachev has made quite clear that he will not pursue foreign economic policies that would result in dependence on the West, he does expect that the Soviet economy will benefit from increased trade, investment in the form of joint ventures, and technical know-how from the West. In Asia, continued improvements in relations with China and the expansion of economic ties with Japan would bring appreciable gains, as well.

A policy of retrenchment does not mean either abandonment of gains already made in the Third World or of the use of force when threats arise to valued clients or national interests. The Soviets will attempt to retain the gains of the past when the political costs are not exhorbitant and the probabilities of success are good, even if this involves new commitments of support. Pressures
on the West can also be maintained through indirect means, principally by
taking advantage of conflicts between the industrial states and the developing
world. Expansion of political and diplomatic contacts with key non-communist
developing states might bring far greater long-term benefits for the Soviets
than their past emphasis on radical Marxist-Leninist regimes, such as those in
Angola and South Yemen. A restructured Soviet policy of this type implies the
creation of alignment structures tilted against the United States and its key
allies that would incorporate a growing range of developing countries, while
direct military competition with Washington essentially marks time. These
alignments could build on the cleavages within the Western alliance and on the
inherent anti-Americanism widespread in the developing world, including that in
countries currently closely tied to the United States, and would aim at
shifting the burden of "containing" the United States to Soviet clients and to
states opposed to U.S. policies, even though they might be capitalist and
firmly within the Western sphere of influence. A Soviet Union which saw itself
as an integral part of the existing international system -- rather than as the
besieged center of a competing alternate system -- would likely be even more
pragmatic in its search for allies and friends and in the policies that it
pursued than the USSR has been to date. Moreover, it would probably be more
successful in establishing the type of global role that to date has eluded the
Soviet leadership.

The lines of future Soviet policy that emerge from the recent Soviet
discussions of "new thinking," as well as from Soviet behavior, appear to go
beyond mere tactical modifications in past policy. Agreement on a reduction of
the Soviet nuclear arsenal, expanded efforts to establish contacts with
non-Marxist regimes in the Third World that are not based primarily on security
relations, including especially the economically dynamic countries of the
Pacific Rim -- such moves are more than mere tactical modifications of past
policy. However, even if these changes are meant only as modifications of
existing strategy, they can have longer term implications for the evolution of Soviet policy. Given that the motivation for the new thinking in Moscow is based on the desire to rebuild Soviet economic capabilities and to refurbish the USSR's international image and claims to superpower status, this process is likely to be an extended one, as Gorbachev himself has admitted. Yet, a long-term policy of the type outlined above may bring with it the seeds of more fundamental change in Soviet domestic and foreign policy. One result might be over time the lessening of the overt military threat posed by the Soviet Union and the emergence of Soviet international behavior more in line with that of a traditional Great Power.

By no means does this imply that U.S.-Soviet competition or that between the USSR and China will cease or that the Soviets will no longer challenge U.S. and Chinese interests. In fact, a revitalized Soviet Union armed with economic and political capabilities to match its military strength would in many ways be a more formidable competitor than it has been to date. It would be more capable of benefiting from the conflicts among Western states and those between the West and the developing world were it not viewed as a potential security threat by the leaders of so many countries and were it able to provide economic alternatives to the West.

The Soviets would present a more variegated and more complex challenge -- one that continued, though on a reduced basis, to employ its military might to accomplish important goals, but also could count on stable alignments with non-Marxist governments. Yet that challenge would be less fraught with the dangers of military confrontation between the two superpowers. Moreover, "new thinking" is likely to survive only if produces success in terms of the Soviet ability to accomplish its international objectives more effectively than have the policies of the past. It will require that the domestic reform programs currently being put in place succeed to the point that they enable the USSR to play a more effective international economic role. Its continuation
will also depend on the U.S. response to Soviet initiatives. Were the U.S. to continue to pursue a policy based on maximizing military capabilities, "new thinking would likely disappear quite rapidly."

The requirements of the policy discussed here also imply profound dilemmas. There is the longstanding issue of choosing between ideological clients and bourgeois elements whose revolutionary credentials are intrinsically flawed. Support for the latter may arrest or defeat promising movements (as in South Africa) and undermine what has been achieved (e.g. in Nicaragua). The choice is more complex than simply choosing between interparty and state-to-state priorities. The choice confronting the Soviets is whether to remain isolated within their own socialist system or to draw on the greater resources and stimulus of the nonsocialist world to spur internal techno-economic growth. The latter requires accommodating themselves to a world in which the Soviet model of socialism is less attractive and also reconciling central party control with the demands of a more competitive market.

In the process of accommodation and adaptation, the Soviet Union runs the risk of losing its revolutionary soul and the confidence of its allies in the developing world. Worse, it may set adrift the European provinces of its empire, the anchor of its external power. As Gorbachev's visit to Romania in summer 1987 revealed, Moscow may be in competition with its own clients for favor from the West. For different reasons, its own internal reforms may also incite greater destabilizing forces within the Eastern bloc. A conservative counterreaction to reform in Eastern Europe and heightened worker dissatisfaction, arising from expectations of harder work with no immediate prospect for material gain or greater freedom, may produce a coalition of the Right and the Left in Eastern Europe, with adverse repercussions on the stability of the Gorbachev regime itself. Though the logic of perestroika and new political thinking* is strong and, no doubt attractive, resistance to it remains strong as well.
NOTES


4In an important recent article two Soviet analysts develop precisely this argument. See Alexei Izyumov and Andrei Kortunov, "The USSR in the Changing World," International Affairs, no 8 (1988), pp 46-56.


7Gorbachev, Politicheskii doklad," p 6 The present discussion of the meaning and importance of Gorbachev's political report has benefited greatly from Charles Glickham (pseudonym for Jeffrey Checkel), "New Directions for Soviet Foreign Policy," Radio Liberty Research Bulletin [hereafter, RLRR], Supplement 2/86, September 6, 1985, pp 1-26, and from Gerhard Wettig's "Das 'neue Denken' in der UdSSR..."
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8Gorbachev, "Politicheskii doklad," p 6
9Ibid., pp 18-19, 55, 64
10Ibid., p 54, 55

¹¹For a listing of some of these articles see Glickham, New Directions," pp 19-20 See, also, Jeffrey Checkel, Gorbachev's 'New Political Thinking' and the Formation of Soviet Foreign Policy," RLRB, RL 429/88, 23 September 1988


¹³See, for example, Anatoli Gromyko and Vladimir Lomeiko, Novoe myshlenie v iadernyi vek (Moscow Mezhdunarodnye otnoshenia, 1984) See, also, Gromyko and Lomeiko, "New Way of Thinking, New Globalism, International Affairs, no 5 (1986), pp 15-27, G Kh Shakhnazarov, "Logika politicheskogo myshleniiia v iadernuiu eru," Voprosy filosofii, no 5 (1984), pp 63-74, G L Smirnov, "Za reshitel'nyi povorot filosofskikh issledovanii k sotsial'noi praktike," Voprosy filosofii, no 9 (1983), pp 3-19, M Maksimova, "Vsemirno khoziaistvo, nauchno-tekhnicheskaiia revoliutsiia i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia (chast vtoraiia), Mirovaiia ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia (hereafter MEiMO), no 5 (1979), pp 21-33, S M Men shikov, "Global nye problemy i budushchee mirovoi ekonomiki," Voprosy filosofii, no 4 (1983), pp 102-115 It is important to point out that these writings of the early 1980s concerning global problems and interdependence represented a minority, but expanding, view among Soviet analysts The dominant position remained that of virtually total hostility and conflict between the USSR and the United States For a discussion of the early Soviet debate on these issues see Walter C Clemens, Jr,


20See Alexander Bahr, The Apparatus of the Central Committee of the CPSU, RLRB, RL 136/87, 10 April 1987

21Russell Watson et al, "Gorbachev's Power Play," Newsweek, 10 October 1988, pp 48-52

22On critics of economic and political reform see, for example, Elizabeth Teague, "How Widespread is


25 On verification see Gorbachev, Politicheskii doklad, p. 56, on military spending, ibid., p. 52, where he states that "Today we can declare with all responsibility that the defense capability of the USSR is maintained on a level that reliably protects the peaceful life and labors of the Soviet people." Compare this with comments by former General Secretary Brezhnev, made shortly before his death:


27 However, virtually no Western analyst believes that, even with the best of luck, the Soviets will be able to accomplish the stated goal of closing the technology gap with the West by the end of the century. The policies being advocated by Gorbachev are based on a strategy that includes mobilizing production reserves in the labor pool through greater discipline and efficiency, modernization of the capital stock of the Soviet economy, and reform and restructuring of the economy in order to facilitate the implementation of the first two aspects of the strategy. Essential to the success of the entire program is an increase in the amount of investment funds available. Given already high levels of investment in


31. Although recent Soviet policy has not emphasized efforts to split the U.S. from its allies, the Soviets have not abandoned the view that contradictions between the United States and its allies are
growing and can be exploited by the USSR. See, for example, A. Iakovlev, 'Mezhimperialistiche protivorechiiia -- sovremennyi kontekst,' Kommunist, no. 17 (1986), pp. 3-17, also, Gorbachev, Politicheskii doklad,' p. 13. Moreover, current Soviet policy toward Western Europe can well serve the dual function of putting pressure on the United States while also exacerbating differences between the United States and its major European allies. For excellent reviews of recent Soviet policy in Western Europe see Heinz Timmermann, "Die sowjetische Westeuropapolitik unter Gorbatschow," BBOIS, no. 15 (1987), and Vojtech Mastny, "Europe in US-USSR Relations: A Topical Legacy," Problems of Communism, vol. 37, no. 1 (1988), pp. 16-29.


For two perceptive articles on Soviet-Indian relations see Jyotirmoy Banerjee, Moscow's Indian Alliance, and Dilip Mukerjee, Indo-Soviet Economic Ties, Problems of Communism, vol 36, no 1 (1987), pp 1-12 and 13-25 respectively.


SSSR, Ministerstvo Vneshnei Torgovli, Vneshniaia Torgovlia SSSR Statisticheskii Sbornik (Moscow: Finansy i Statistika, for the appropriate years).

See Dieter Heinz, "Sowjetische Azien- und Pazifikpolitik unter Gorbatschow: Dynamik in Richtung Osten, *BBOIS*, no 26 (1987). An example of the changed tone of Soviet writing about China can be found...


See Manning, Moscow's Pacific Future, p 68.

See Segal, The USSR and Asia, pp 3-4.


For a provocative discussion of the possibility change and learning in Soviet ideology as the framework within which Soviet policy is formulated, including both the stimuli and the impediments to change, see George W. Breslauer's review article, "Ideology and Learning in Soviet Third World Policy, World Politics, vol 39, no 3 (1987), pp 429-448.