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# UNDERSTANDING SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY

THE TRADITION OF CHANGE IN  
SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY

By John Van Oudenaren

TWO SCHOOLS OF SOVIET DIPLOMACY

By Francis Conte

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THE INSTITUTE FOR NATIONAL STRATEGIC STUDIES

*A popular Government, without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a Prologue to a Farce or a Tragedy, or, perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance; And a people who mean to be their own Governors, must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives.*

James Madison to W. T. Barry  
August 4, 1822

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**THE TRADITION OF CHANGE IN  
SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY**

# THE TRADITION OF CHANGE IN SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY

By JOHN Van OUDENAREN



**I**N FOUR YEARS AS LEADER OF THE SOVIET Union, Mikhail Gorbachev has introduced radical changes in the theory and practice of Soviet foreign policy. In his self-proclaimed “new political thinking,” he has downplayed the importance of class struggle in international relations, emphasized “mutual security” and the role of politics in resolving disputes, and stressed the interdependent nature of the contemporary world. He has called for common efforts to solve such problems as debt, hunger, pollution and above all disarmament. The Soviets have also invoked new political thinking to explain a series of surprising policy moves, including the withdrawal of forces from Afghanistan, the acceptance of on-site inspection in the 1986 Conference on Disarmament in Europe (CDE) and the 1987 Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) agreements, and the payment of UN dues long in arrears.

Gorbachev is without question an innovator, but throughout Soviet history other leaders have also been responsible for sweeping changes in foreign policy doctrine and practice. Such changes occurred at the time of the revolution itself, in 1924, in 1953-1955, and, to a lesser extent, in the first few years after Brezhnev’s rise to preeminence in 1970. In all these periods, change was imposed from the top down by drawing upon different strands in the body of Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy and borrowing ideas and slogans from the outside world. To understand current Soviet policy it is necessary to examine the tradition of change in Soviet foreign policy, as well as the specific antecedents to Gorbachev’s “new political thinking” and the policy changes associated with it.

### **Change Before Gorbachev**

The Bolsheviks took power convinced that it was neither possible nor necessary for revolutionary Russia to have much of a foreign policy toward the existing capitalist order. This attitude was summed up by Trotsky, the first peoples commissar for foreign affairs, when he predicted that he would issue a few revolutionary proclamations and then close up shop.<sup>1</sup> They believed revolutions to be imminent in the West, and thus saw little need to concern themselves with policy toward governments and leaders whose days were numbered.

To promote world revolution, the Communist International (Comintern) was founded in March 1919, with headquarters in Moscow. In its New Year's proclamation to the Soviet people in 1920, it declared "we shall establish workers' and soldiers' councils in Berlin and Warsaw, in Paris and London, and the might of the Soviets will one day extend throughout the whole world."<sup>2</sup> In this period of early post-revolutionary ferment, the Bolsheviks were not averse to using the resources of the Soviet state to speed up the world revolutionary process. In addition to providing arms, agents, propaganda, and indoctrinating German and Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war, the Soviets unsuccessfully attempted the export of revolution in the Russian-Polish war of 1920.

As the revolution in the West failed to materialize, however, and as some of the new regime's class enemies proved less hostile than Lenin had predicted, the Bolsheviks began to formulate and to practice a diplomacy of "coexistence." They established trade ties and secured *de jure* political recognition from a growing list of countries, beginning with immediate neighbors such as Turkey, Afghanistan, Persia and the Baltic states, followed by Germany in the Rapallo treaty, and then by the major powers of the Versailles system, including Britain, France, and Italy. They still conceived of diplomacy, however, as a very temporary expedient. Bolshevik hopes still centered on proletarian revolution, and the new regime was unwilling, despite solemn pledges to the contrary, to eschew subversion in order to cultivate correct relations with "bourgeois" regimes.

As late as October 1923 the Comintern backed an abortive uprising in Germany.

The failure of these attempts at revolution, changing conditions in the Soviet Union, and Lenin's death in January 1924 brought the first phase of Soviet foreign policy to an end and set the stage for a major doctrinal shift. In December 1924 Stalin published an article entitled "The October Revolution and the Tactics of the Russian Communists," in which he proclaimed the doctrine of "socialism in one country."<sup>3</sup> The new doctrine argued that the world revolution had been temporarily postponed because capitalism, which still was ultimately doomed, had managed temporarily to stabilize itself. Under these conditions, the correct course was to abandon efforts to promote revolution abroad and to concentrate on building the economic and military might of the USSR. This would create a bastion for communism which could survive a prolonged period of international reaction.

By explaining that capitalism had managed to stabilize itself and that worldwide revolution had been deferred, Stalin extricated the party from the embarrassing role of being the herald of uprisings which never happened or which, if they did, were quickly crushed. At the same time, he gave the party a new, and to his own taste more congenial, role by proclaiming the necessity for rapid industrialization at home. Thus Stalin's reformation bridged a widening gap between reality and ideology, and in so doing helped to preserve the ultimate credibility of the ideology.

While proclaiming the possibility of socialism in one country, Stalin retained Lenin's doctrine of the inevitability of wars. Lenin originally propounded this doctrine in his *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism* which appeared in 1916 and which drew upon Marx and early 20th century Marxist authors to argue that private property and the existence of social classes were the causes of war. World War I, the greatest conflict in history, was the result of the increasing concentration of capital and the fierce rivalry for markets and profits. After he established Bolshevism in Russia, Lenin continued to stress the possibility of wars between the capitalist powers, but also modified his doctrine to account for revolutionary war between

the new workers' state and the capitalists. He also stressed that under certain circumstances the capitalists would compose their differences and launch a concerted effort to annihilate the Bolshevik regime.

Until his death in 1953, Stalin continued to proclaim the inevitability of war, even though victory in World War II necessitated certain modifications of the doctrine. The Soviets' establishment of Communist rule in Eastern Europe meant that there was no longer socialism in one country, but in a wider "camp" which was surrounded by a hostile but internally-divided capitalist "camp." After 1947, Stalin and Zhdanov downplayed the inevitability of imperialist attack on the USSR. They reverted to the more purely Leninist—in the sense of being consistent with the classic analysis in imperialism—emphasis on "intra-imperialist contradictions" and wars between the capitalist powers.<sup>4</sup>

This body of doctrine was well suited to Stalin as he undertook postwar reconstruction and resumed the industrialization program of the 1930s. It also embodied at least a theoretical explanation of how the long-postponed worldwide Communist revolution would come about. Japan, Germany and other imperialist powers would recover much of their previous strength. This would lead to another cycle of intra-imperialist war, which in turn could lead to revolutions in the imperialist camp leading to the triumph of Communism.

While Stalin's doctrines had a certain intellectual coherence and served his domestic purposes, by the early 1950s they were seriously out of touch with reality. The notion of a new capitalist war involving powers which were united by alliance and overwhelmingly dominated by the economic and political power of the United States was simply not credible—even leaving aside the radical implications of the atomic bomb. This gap between ideology and reality threatened to undermine the credibility of Marxism-Leninism. It also hampered the Soviet regime as it sought to fashion flexible policies which preserved the essence of the Communist myth while taking account of conditions which orthodox Marxism-Leninism had not predicted and could not account for. Dogmas like capitalist encirclement and the fatal inevitability of wars severely limited

the ability of the Soviet Union to appeal to the newly independent states of Asia, who were already beginning to distance themselves from the NATO countries in their views of international issues. These dogmas also limited the potential Soviet appeal to non-Communists in Western Europe and the United States who were critical of their establishment's approach to the cold war.

Thus shortly after his death, Stalin's successors initiated sweeping changes in Soviet foreign policy doctrine and practice. Reinterpreting certain statements and policies of Lenin in the early 1920s, Malenkov and later Khrushchev began to argue that there could be a protracted period of coexistence between the two systems. They argue, furthermore, that the period of coexistence would not be one of passive waiting for improved revolutionary prospects to occur. Rather, it would be a time in which the Soviet Union and its allies would undertake active policies, short of global war, to weaken and undermine the capitalist system. These policies included support for wars of national liberation in the third world, the exploitation of "contradictions" within the Western world, and efforts to outstrip the West in economics and technology.

Khrushchev gave these changes definitive expression in his report to the February 1956 20th party congress, in which he declared that capitalist encirclement was over and that wars no longer were inevitable. In explaining why wars could be averted, Khrushchev declared that "as long as capitalism survives in the world, the reactionary forces may try to unleash war. But war is not fatalistically inevitable. Today there are mighty social and political forces possessing means to prevent the imperialists from waging war."<sup>5</sup>

Khrushchev did not attribute this change in outlook to the development of the atomic bomb, at least not directly. He referred to the fact that a collection of loyal allies had now joined the Soviet camp, and that the isolation of the interwar period was past. He also spoke of the growth of "progressive" and "peaceloving" forces in the West. But Khrushchev was clearly aware that the Soviet Union's increasing nuclear capabilities would help to forestall the "unleashing" of war. As he told the 21st Communist Party of the Soviet Union



(CPSU) Congress in January 1959, "The new correlation of forces will be so obvious that even the most obdurate imperialists will clearly recognize the hopelessness of any attempt to launch a war against the socialist camp."

The Soviets subsequently enshrined these views in the 1961 Party program, which stated that the growing might of socialism "will make it actually possible to banish world war from the life of society even before the complete victory of socialism on earth, with capitalism surviving in part of the world."<sup>6</sup> This was a near inversion of the earlier view that war would lead to the victory of socialism. After 1956 they justified the expansion and strengthening of socialism on the grounds that only socialism could prevent the unleashing of war: "To abolish war and establish everlasting peace on earth is a historic mission of communism."<sup>7</sup>

Like "socialism in one country" in 1924, "peaceful coexistence" served multiple purposes. It gave a new leadership new flexibility in domestic and foreign policy, and narrowed the widening gap between doctrine and reality. At the same time, peaceful coexistence represented yet another long step away from the doctrine of imminent revolution, still in many ways the core of Marxism-Leninism and the ostensible *raison d'être* for an international Communist movement. No doubt sensing this problem but also motivated by his own personal optimism, in the late 1950s Khrushchev developed the line that the final victory of Communism would come about through—or at least be greatly facilitated by—economic and technological competition.<sup>8</sup>

According to Khrushchev, the Soviet Union was rapidly outpacing the United States and other Western countries in industrial might and soon would be able to provide a better standard of living for its people. It was winning the space and technological race, as could be seen in the launching of the first Sputnik in the fall of 1957. Meanwhile, Soviet advances in strategic rocketry and the sheer power of the hydrogen bomb were neutralizing the military potential of the West, making it likely that only a "madman" would contemplate another attempt to reverse the course of history by overthrowing socialism in the USSR or Eastern Europe.

Peaceful coexistence technically remains the fundamental basis for Soviet foreign policy, and Kosygin and Brezhnev did not attempt a sweeping doctrinal revision comparable to that effected by Stalin in 1924 or by his successors in 1953-1956. Nonetheless, there were significant modifications in the interpretation of peaceful coexistence under Kosygin and Brezhnev.

When these men took power in late 1964 it was already clear that many of the optimistic assumptions upon which Khrushchev based his doctrine of peaceful coexistence were open to question, or at least serious qualification. It was no longer self-evident that the Soviet Union was rapidly outdistancing the United States in the economic and technological competition. After 1960, Soviet growth rates decelerated, while those of the United States increased. The United States began to challenge the Soviet lead in the space race, which was always somewhat exaggerated in any case. Even in basic industries such as chemicals and machinery, Khrushchev and younger leaders such as Kosygin began to express concern about a Soviet lag.

Many of Khrushchev's assumptions about the durability of peace with the West also proved to be wrong. The U-2 overflights of 1956-1960 had revealed that Khrushchev's claims regarding Soviet military might were widely exaggerated. Soviet weakness was further exposed in the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. After the brief detente which followed President Kennedy's American University speech and the conclusion of the 1963 Limited Test Ban treaty, in the mid-1960s the United States once again entered, in the eyes of the Soviet leadership, a more "aggressive" period. It became heavily involved in Vietnam, sent marines to the Dominican Republic, and backed Israel when it inflicted a crippling defeat on the Soviet Union's Arab allies.

The image of a more dangerous Western adversary contributed to a shift in Soviet priorities during Khrushchev's last years, as the Soviets deferred further cutbacks in non-strategic forces and launched major new strategic programs. The Soviet military buildup continued and gathered speed under Kosygin and Brezhnev. At the same time, they altered the emphasis in Soviet doctrinal and propaganda pronouncements. The new

leaders downplayed Khrushchev's inflated claims about overtaking the United States economically and talked more openly about the danger of war and the West's aggressive tendencies. They stressed the importance of political and military as opposed to purely economic factors in determining the course of history.

By the late 1960s, the new leaders had restored a degree of balance between Soviet policy and rhetoric. The Soviet Union had both improved its military capabilities and scaled back its claims regarding what military power could accomplish. On the domestic front, the regime still claimed that it was making progress toward overtaking the West and that the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon) was, economically, "the most dynamic" region of the world. At the same time, however, the regime abandoned the practice of giving specific dates for the overtaking of the West or the establishment of full Communism in the USSR. The latter, in fact, they pushed off to the indefinite future, as Soviet ideologies elaborated the concept of "developed socialism"—a stage which could last for decades or even longer.

The course of East-West relations in the 1970s no doubt would have been smoother and less confrontational if Brezhnev had remained content with rectifying Khrushchev's imbalances and excesses. However, by the early 1970s, after he assumed a dominant position in the Soviet leadership, Brezhnev began to commit excesses of his own. While Brezhnev and his advisers ridiculed those in the West who talked of a Soviet threat, they did in fact boast of their power to foreign leaders. They also began to develop a militarized foreign policy doctrine which tied political and social change in the world to the growth of Soviet might. In his report to the 25th party congress in early 1976, Brezhnev declared that "the passage from cold war and from the explosive confrontation of the two worlds to detente was largely connected with changes in the world correlation of forces."<sup>9</sup> The "correlation of forces" was not strictly a military concept, but under Brezhnev it had a strong military connotation.

The Brezhnev regime further developed the concept of a "restructuring [perestroika] of international relations" which

was to occur as a result of the shift in the correlation of forces.<sup>10</sup> The growing economic and military might of the East not only assured, as Khrushchev had claimed, that socialist gains were “irreversible,” but also helped to foster “progressive” changes in the West and especially in the developing world. The Soviet Union had ceased to provide a model to the Western and even developing worlds, and no longer was outstripping its rivals in economic and technological performance. But Brezhnev’s “militarization” of peaceful coexistence represented a subtle doctrinal shift that, as in the case of previous shifts, helped to preserve the ultimate credibility of Marxism-Leninism. Even though events seemed to push the prospects for revolutionary change still further into the distant future, Brezhnev was able to claim that long-term trends were favorable to the Soviet Union and that the final crisis of capitalism was continuing.

Although Brezhnev’s approach to international affairs for a time appeared to score major successes—as was seen both in the alarm occasioned in the West and the boasting in the Soviet Union—in the end it proved to be based on unrealistic premises. After 1979, the gap between doctrine and reality once again appeared to widen. Far from allowing the Soviet Union to shift the military aspects of the correlation in its favor, in the late 1970s and early 1980s the West adopted a number of countermeasures, the most notable of which were the NATO INF dual-track decision and the Reagan defense buildup. At the same time, the East suffered a series of setbacks with the turmoil in Poland, the dragging on of the war in Afghanistan, the slowdown in the Soviet economy, and the debilitation of the Soviet leadership itself, at first under Brezhnev but then under his two short-lived successors. The stage thus was set for a new leader who not only would revitalize Soviet policy, but would also formulate new slogans and doctrines which once again would restore a balance between Soviet rhetorical claims and reality.

### **The Antecedents To Gorbachev**

Gorbachev took power in March 1985, a time of poor but slightly improving East-West relations. After the Soviet walkout from the arms control talks in late 1983 and Andropov's harsh polemics against the United States and its allies, the Chernenko regime had managed in 1984 to get the US-Soviet arms control negotiations back on track. Based on an understanding worked out between Shultz and Gromyko in January, they scheduled a new set of talks to begin in Geneva in March. The talks were to cover INF and strategic nuclear missiles, as well as a new topic, strategic defenses.

In his early approach to foreign policy problems, Gorbachev took a fairly traditional, Brezhnevian line, but at the same time revealed an acute awareness of the strategic dilemmas that in time were to impel him to radicalize Soviet foreign policy under the slogan of "new political thinking." Blaming the West for deliberately sabotaging the positive trends of the 1970s, Gorbachev followed Chernenko in calling for an early return to detente. At the same time, however, Gorbachev sensed that a mere return to detente, without a reversal of the INF deployments, a repudiation in the United States of SDI, or some other radical change would have represented a foreign policy defeat for the Soviet Union.

By 1985, it was the Western leaders who were pressing for summits and a return to business as usual. Having "won" the INF battle, the NATO countries were anxious to demonstrate that East-West relations had not suffered, that the economic and cultural ties valued by Western publics were continuing, and that there was no substance to the alarmist scenarios put out by the peace movement and the political left. The Reagan administration had the added incentive of trying to legitimize, both domestically and internationally, SDI by engaging the Soviet Union in a "cooperative transition" to a "defense dominant" world.

Gorbachev thus had good reasons for wanting a return to detente, but also to be wary of being seen as knuckling under to Western pressures and accepting a post-INF, post-SDI detente on Western terms. He therefore began to speak of the need to go "beyond detente." As he noted in an important

speech marking the 40th anniversary of the victory over Germany,

We believe that the process of detente should be revived. This does not mean, however, a simple return to what was achieved in the 1970s. It is necessary to strive for something much greater. From our point of view, detente is not an end goal of politics. It is needed, but only as a transitional stage from a world cluttered with arms to a reliable and comprehensive system of international security.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, in his report to the 27th party congress the following year, he stated that it "is important, while preserving the capital that has been built up, to move forward from the initial phase of detente to a more stable, mature detente; then to the creation of reliable security on the basis of the Helsinki process and radical cuts in nuclear and conventional arms."<sup>12</sup>

Gorbachev expressed his proclaimed interest in a new political order "beyond detente" in radical form in his 15 January 1986 statement proposing the complete elimination of nuclear weapons by the year 2000. In this statement, he claimed that "mankind is at a crucial state in the new space era. It is time to abandon stone age ways of thinking, when the main preoccupation was to provide oneself with a bigger club or a heavier rock."<sup>13</sup> In explaining his sweeping plan for disarmament, the Soviet leader argued, "It is inadmissible to submit to the elemental forces of a nuclear race. This would mean acting contrary to the voice of reason and to the human sense of self-preservation. New, bold approaches, new political thinking, and a sharpened responsibility for the destiny of the peoples are what is required."<sup>14</sup> A month later, in his report to the party congress, Gorbachev elaborated the concept of "new thinking" by calling for the establishment of a new "comprehensive system of international security."<sup>15</sup> This system, Gorbachev argued, could come into being as a result of actions in four fields: political, military, economic and "humanitarian."

In the following months, the Soviet leadership and foreign policy establishment filled out the details of the

“comprehensive system” and the new thinking. Three main themes emerged:

1. Security in the nuclear age must be “mutual.” There can no longer be such a thing as individual or national security.
2. Security is inversely related to the level of nuclear and conventional weaponry. The most secure world would be a world without weapons. Conversely, every new weapons program, no matter what its purpose and who its initiator, increases insecurity.
3. The world is interdependent. Global problems are a common challenge to all countries, not only in their own right, but because they can aggravate the danger of nuclear war and diminish the prospects for decreasing world levels of weaponry.

On the surface at least, each of these themes ran counter to traditional Soviet practice and to Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy. Marxism-Leninism always had taught that the Soviet Union had to provide unilaterally for its own security, and not rely on mutual arrangements with the implacable class enemy. It followed from this assumption that weapons as such were neither good nor bad. While war would be abolished after the final victory of socialism, for now the key questions were which side had what weapons and for what purpose they were likely to be used. More and better weaponry in the hands of socialism would contribute to peace and social progress, while weapons in the hands of imperialism would do the reverse. As for global problems, traditional Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy taught that their sole cause was capitalist exploitation. The socialist countries were not responsible for solving or mitigating these problems which, like war, would eventually disappear with the complete victory of socialism.

Upon closer inspection, however, it can be seen that many of the themes addressed in the “new political thinking” have antecedents in Soviet doctrine and policy. Already in the 1950s, the USSR had acknowledged mutual deterrence as the actual—if not the ideal—state of affairs. It had engaged in multilateral and bilateral arms control negotiations since the 1950s, and had increasingly talked, at least in some settings, as if weapons

were an evil in themselves. And since the 1970s, Soviet authors had acknowledged that certain global problems cut across class lines and affected both East and West.

That these antecedents coalesced under Gorbachev to produce a “new thinking” is probably the result of three factors:

1. The tactical requirements of Soviet foreign policy,
2. The contributions of certain Soviet intellectuals, and
3. The personal proclivities and interests of Mikhail Gorbachev.

The modification of Soviet doctrinal pronouncements for tactical purposes had begun in the late 1970s, in what Soviet writers have since come to call the “era of stagnation.” By 1976, the Soviets had come to realize the negative effect their own academic and political writings had on Western assessments of Soviet policy. Soviet military and political writings came under increasing scrutiny from Western analysts, who were able to argue, using quotations from authoritative Soviet sources, that the USSR was committed to achieving strategic superiority and possibly even planning to “fight and win” a nuclear war. Western analysts tended to focus on two factors which could contribute to a successful war-fighting strategy: first, a usable military superiority, particularly in “first strike” weapons capable of preemptively destroying the other side’s deterrent forces; and second, a willingness to strike first in a conflict.

In early 1977, Brezhnev moved to address both of these concerns. In a major speech in the Soviet city of Tula that he delivered one day before the inauguration of President Jimmy Carter, Brezhnev declared that the USSR had ruled out any quest for superiority.<sup>16</sup> Following adoption of the “Tula line,” Soviet journals for the most part dropped references to the need to achieve a decisive war-fighting superiority.

Brezhnev also moved to disavow any “first strike” intentions. The Soviets had already proposed, in private channels, the conclusion of a bilateral or multilateral no-first use agreement.<sup>17</sup> In November 1976, they went public and proposed, through the Warsaw Pact Political Consultative Committee, that all CSCE participants agree to rule out the first use of nuclear weapons against each other.<sup>18</sup> When the West



rejected any such agreement, Brezhnev eventually adopted a unilateral no-first use pledge in a June 1982 message to the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Disarmament.<sup>19</sup>

To what extent these changes had real effects on Soviet procurement or research and development priorities or on Soviet planning for war has been the subject of debate in the West. Without question, however, they paved the way for Gorbachev's "new political thinking," by enabling him to promote a new line on nuclear war without having to make any sharp and possibly dangerous (in domestic political terms) break with the past.

The tactical requirements of the anti-INF struggle also contributed to doctrinal change. NATO's December 1979 decision to deploy (in the absence of an arms control agreement that removed the Soviet SS-20 threat) 572 intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Western Europe galvanized the entire Soviet establishment, from the General Secretary down to the working levels of the MFA, the foreign policy research institutes, the military, and the media. Largely in response to the NATO decision, in June 1980 the biannual plenum of the Central Committee adopted a resolution entitled "On the International Situation and the Foreign Policy of the Soviet Union" in which it stated that "the adventurist actions of the United States and its accomplices have increased the danger of nuclear war."<sup>20</sup> This pronouncement was a sharp reversal of the previous line, which since the early 1970s had held that detente and the favorable trends in the world "correlation of forces" had "pushed back" the danger of war. Using the theme of increased war danger to create the basis for common action, the Soviet leadership reached out to Western opponents of the INF deployments. Mid-level Soviet officials gave numerous interviews to the Western media. The Soviets gave sympathetic Social Democrats and the Disarmament Commission of the Socialist International (SIDAC) unprecedented access to the Kremlin. A Soviet Central Committee member (Georgi Arbatov) joined the Palme Commission, and the Soviet government tentatively endorsed the Commission's proposal for a nuclear-free corridor in Central Europe.

This intense interaction proved to be a valuable learning experience for the Soviet elite. Through it officials and writers such as Arbatov, Georgi Shakhnazarov and Vadim Zagladin learned to master the concepts and vocabulary of the American and West European arms control communities. It was via the anti-INF struggle that the concept of "mutual security" entered the realm of Soviet discourse. The concept was initially developed by Egon Bahr, and other West German Social Democrats, who were looking for arguments to derail the INF deployments and to assert the primacy of East-West and intra-German detente over NATO's self-defined deterrence ("coupling") requirements.<sup>21</sup> The West German Social Democrats endorsed the concept of an East-West "security partnership" that would gradually supersede deterrence and the nuclear stand-off.

The concept of a security partnership was similar, at least formally, to traditional Soviet concepts of "collective security," and it was not long before the Soviets began to play back the "mutual security" and "security partnership" rhetoric to the West Germans and other Europeans sympathetic to the idea. In the article cited above and in many others like it, writers such as Shakhnazarov undertook the task of grafting the new Social Democratic concept onto orthodox Soviet views of "collective security" under conditions of "peaceful coexistence." In the early 1980s, this "grafting on" was a purely tactical device used by Soviet propagandist to undercut Western support for the INF deployments. After 1985, however, Gorbachev was to elevate this tactical device to the general political line of the Soviet Union.

Gorbachev's decision to elevate "mutual security" to a much more prominent political and doctrinal status was probably the result of several factors. After taking power, the new Soviet leader immediately stepped up Soviet efforts to woo the Western Socialists and Social Democrats. Willy Brandt, Olaf Palme, Bettino Craxi, and a delegation from SIDAC were among his first Kremlin guests. It was only natural that he emphasized rhetoric that would appeal to this target group.

But the main reason for Gorbachev's heightened interest in mutual security probably had less to do with European

issues, narrowly defined, than with the Soviet campaign against SDI, which by early 1985, and Gorbachev's accession to power, had become the main Soviet arms control priority. "Mutual security" was in fact better suited to an anti-SDI campaign than it was to the struggle against intermediate range nuclear forces. The cornerstone of the Soviet campaign against INF was always "equal" rather than "mutual" security. The Soviet Union focused on the alleged inequity (and danger) of any security arrangement that allowed the United States to target the USSR from third countries, but that denied the USSR the ability or the right to take similar action against the United States (as it had tried to do in Cuba in 1962). This argument was effective with large elements of the European left (and with some American arms controllers), but it ultimately backfired. "Equal security" for the Soviet Union vis-a-vis the United States implied an unequal level of security for Western Europe vis-a-vis the Soviet Union. There was thus a tension, if not an outright contradiction, between "mutual security" and the focus of the Soviet anti-INF campaign.<sup>22</sup>

But in the campaign against SDI, it was easier to claim that it was the United States which was demanding a special status for itself at the expense of third countries. It alone, the Soviets could argue, had the technological hubris to believe it could make itself invulnerable to nuclear weapons. "We Europeans," the Soviets could argue, know that such an approach is unrealistic, and together we must search for political solutions based on the principle of "mutual security," or what the Soviets sometimes call "equal security for all."

"Mutuality" was especially useful in handling the question of mutual deterrence and its relationship to Soviet and American doctrine and policy. In proposing to use technology to render ballistic missiles "impotent and obsolete," Reagan clearly threw the Soviets off balance. They had always been the ones to argue that deterrence was immoral and unstable and had to be replaced by a new security order. Now the US president had adopted the same line, and was using it to launch a new program that at a minimum might threaten whatever marginal war-fighting advantage Soviet planners hoped to achieve with their heavy missiles. It could also conceivably blunt

the "second strike" deterrent capability of the Soviet missile force.

To counter this threat, the Soviet leadership could have embraced nuclear deterrence based on mutual assured destruction and strategic stability. This would have placed the USSR squarely on the side of the Western arms controllers, who launched a major campaign of their own against SDI on the grounds that it would destabilize deterrence. But the Soviets did not take that approach, even though it is one that probably would have maximized the short-run political pressures on the Administration and the SDI program. Instead, they re-emphasized the theme that deterrence was unacceptable and that it had to be overcome, but by political rather than technological means. This theme had of course been well developed and for the most part assimilated into Soviet writings (propagandistic and analytical) in the course of the anti-INF struggle.

Soviet borrowing of Western concepts was not purely tactical, however, and seems to have made a more profound effect on some Soviet writers and academics. These writers, who include Aleksandr Bovin, Ivan Frolov, Zagladin, Shakhnazarov, Aleksandr Yakovlev, and others, began to develop more comprehensive explanations of international developments. Their explanations lent tactical support to the policies of Brezhnev, Andropov and Chernenko, and presaged Gorbachev's new political thinking. After 1985, many of these individuals won promotions, gained greater prominence in the Soviet press, and became known as personal confidants and advisers of the Soviet leaders. Many of Gorbachev's standard phrases and stock examples in fact can be found in a handful of articles and books by these authors that appeared in the early 1980s.

One of the more notable works to presage Gorbachev's new political thinking was Shakhnazarov's "The Logic of Political Thinking in the Nuclear Age," which appeared in 1984.<sup>23</sup> In this article, Shakhnazarov argued that because of the development of nuclear weapons, traditional concepts of national security were obsolete, hence the need to think in a new way. "In a world over which the threat of extermination hangs, certain concepts, which served as more or less reliable

instruments for guidance, begin at times to play a directly opposite role.”<sup>24</sup> One implication of this new thinking was the need, according to Shakhnazarov, to recognize that security could no longer be individual or national, but had to be strictly “mutual”:

Under conditions in which the most active (and practically the only) factor restraining the unleashing of a nuclear war is the threat of a retaliatory blow. . . .the concept of “individual security” loses meaning. The potential participants in the conflict are forced to consider the security of the opposing side as well as their own. This formal interdependence requires an awareness and a recognition of the fact that in the nuclear age only collective security is possible.<sup>25</sup>

In January 1986, Gorbachev was to adopt almost the identical wording in his official pronouncements.<sup>26</sup>

Another intellectual trend that contributed to Gorbachev’s “new political thinking” was the development in the early 1970s of the field of “globalistics.”<sup>27</sup> Led by such writers as Zagladin, Frolov, and N. N. Inozemtsev, the globalists addressed such “all human” problems as environmental pollution, hunger, illiteracy, underdevelopment, and disease. The globalists did not openly challenge the long held Soviet view that capitalism caused all such problems, and that therefore the USSR could not be expected to contribute to their solution.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, the more dogmatic Soviet authors even seemed to imply a “the worse the better” attitude toward these problems. They would hasten the downfall of capitalism, and only after capitalism’s demise could any real solutions be envisaged. As Frolov and Zagladin concluded in a book published in 1981, “By and large we are convinced. . . that a final solution of global problems, or the reconciliation of man with nature and with himself, is possible only under the conditions of the global victory of socialism.”<sup>29</sup>

But the globalists did try to relate these problems in a fairly sophisticated manner to the traditional Marxist-Leninist framework. In this framework, they saw all social and political problems in terms of “contradictions,” and traced those back to the fundamental contradiction between capital and labor.

To explain the causes and importance of global problems under contemporary political and economic conditions, the Soviet globalists posited the existence of a new type of contradiction involving humanity as a whole. In a 1973 article entitled "The nature of contradictions today," Inozemtsev wrote:

The lessons of the 20th century, for which mankind has paid so dearly, indicate that at certain stages in history problems affecting all classes and social strata, all states and nations may come to the fore—problems deriving, broadly speaking, from contradictions in the development of the human race as a whole.<sup>30</sup>

The globalists then tried to relate these "contradictions in the development of the human race as a whole" to the classical Marxist-Leninist contradiction between "capitalism" and the "working class," "imperialism" and "socialism." According to Zagladin, for example, all global problems had two common sources of origin: "first, mankind's uncontrolled or insufficiently thought out assimilation of natural resources, that is, material production in the course of which certain contradictions develop." Second, "society's development which, in the stages of antagonistic formations preceding socialism, was characterized by the supremacy of exploitative social relations and their destructive attitudes toward both nature and man."<sup>31</sup> Man's "uncontrolled" relationship with nature would not have developed if not for the role of "exploitative social relations." Hence he traces all "global problems" back to class antagonism and certain "capitalist" practices.

By the early 1980s, writers such as Shakhnazarov took these arguments a stage further. While continuing to blame capitalism for the persistence of "all human" problems, these writers argued that the USSR had to work to mitigate these problems as part of its own declared policy of doing everything possible to avoid a nuclear war. War itself was a "global problem"—in fact the gravest of all such problems—the probability of which was increased by unresolved tensions growing out of other global problems.

Hundreds of millions of hungry, poor, and illiterate people constitute a potential source of social upheavals, which in the conditions of the nuclear age can lead to the most tragic consequences. Thus, both a feeling of compassion for humanity and direct material interest dictate the necessity of abolishing these conditions through the collective efforts of the world community.<sup>32</sup>

Gorbachev has since adopted this line and made it part of his "new political thinking." Soviet spokesmen also have argued that solving the main global problem—nuclear war—is a prerequisite for solving all other global problems. In addressing the UN Conference on Disarmament, for example, Shevardnadze argued that the kinds of "miseries and threats" which are dealt with by the UN's special agencies "cannot be eliminated unless a solution is found to the main problem of destroying the material base for war."<sup>33</sup>

Associating war with other global problems comes dangerously close to abandoning a true "class analysis" of war and its causes. Traditional Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy would argue that environmental pollution, illiteracy, and even Third World poverty are by-products of capitalist "plunder" and exploitation. War, in contrast, can never be just an unintended byproduct of the capitalist system. The capitalists are actively plotting to "unleash" a war to destroy socialism and only Soviet might and socialist solidarity can turn aside this threat. There is thus a certain tension between Gorbachev's tendency to place war on a par with illiteracy and other far lesser calamities and his own use of war-scare rhetoric to mobilize Western opinion.

By 1985 the groundwork for the new political thinking was well prepared by these writers and by foreign policy practitioners who saw a need for new ways to attack the SDI and INF problems. A real breakthrough could not occur, however, the appearance of a dynamic new leader who could package the disparate strands in a new form, impose it as the new orthodoxy, and begin selling it to foreign audiences. This of course occurred with the election of Gorbachev, his gradual

consolidation of power in the Soviet Union, and his self-education in the field of foreign and defense policy.

Traditionally, CPSU General Secretaries have had wide latitude to shape the overall direction of Soviet foreign policy, and Gorbachev has been no exception to this rule. Brezhnev established a tradition that the Party leader unveils a sweeping new foreign policy program at the quinquennial party congress. At the 24th (1971), and the 25th (1976), and the 26th (1981) Party Congresses, Brezhnev put forward successive versions of his "peace program" in which he hailed past achievements and set forth the party's future tasks. In 1986, Gorbachev probably felt the need to come up with a comprehensive foreign policy statement of his own.

As noted, the tactical political requirements of the day influenced the character of this statement but also reflected Gorbachev's own training and personality. Gorbachev appears to be an exceptionally intelligent man who thinks quickly and can easily dominate in personal and group settings. Although Western Sovietologists made much of the fact that he had graduated from law school, studied agriculture, and was married to a trained sociologist, it is doubtful that he has a broad philosophical education.<sup>34</sup> Whereas some of Gorbachev's predecessors were rather simple men who in fact were more "cultured" than they sometimes led others to believe,<sup>35</sup> Gorbachev is probably the opposite: he is a bit of a pseudo-intellectual who tends to inflate his own learning.

Whatever the case, Gorbachev clearly likes the trappings of intellectual life. He likes to fraternize with artists and intellectuals, and in his speeches and conversation enjoys dropping stock but profound sounding phrases (for example, Einstein's platitudinous "the unleashed power of the atom has changed everything save our modes of thinking"), quoting famous lines ("To be or not to be" and "winter of our discontent"),<sup>36</sup> and mentioning books with catchy-sounding titles (for example, *Future Shock*, by Alvin Toffler,<sup>37</sup> or Tagore's *The Home and the World*.<sup>38</sup>)

Since 1985, Gorbachev appears to have given Soviet speechwriters instructions to try to impress foreign audiences with this kind of namedropping. Thus one sees Ryzhkov



quoting Erasmus of Rotterdam when welcoming the Dutch prime minister to Moscow, Shevardnadze quoting Jean-Jacques Rousseau when addressing an arms control forum in Geneva, and many others.<sup>39</sup>

However superficial and pretentious this all is, it impresses some in the West, and suggests a desire on Gorbachev's part to be taken seriously as a thinker, not only on technical economic and political issues, but on broader human concerns as well. Gorbachev's desire to pose as a major theoretician of global problems no doubt made a significant if hard to define contribution to the "new political thinking." It encouraged him to systematize and codify his "philosophy" and to present it to audiences at home and abroad as something new and profound.<sup>40</sup> It also led him to openly extol the writings of those Soviet authors who laid the groundwork for the "new political thinking" and who provided arguments and examples that Gorbachev was able to adopt "off-the-shelf" in formulating his own views.

Thus three factors—the tactical requirements of Soviet foreign policy, a certain degree of intellectual ferment in the 1970s and 1980s, and Gorbachev's own intellect and personality—contributed to the "new political thinking." While the content of this thinking is new (at least in the Soviet context), its proclamation in the mid-1980s was consistent with earlier doctrinal shifts in Soviet history. Sensing a gap between ideology and reality, Soviet leaders often have tried to narrow this gap by jettisoning elements in Marxist-Leninist dogma which have become ideological and political liabilities. In so doing, they usually have pushed the triumph of Communism into the more remote future and further outside the realm of day-to-day foreign policy. But at the same time they preserved the ultimate credibility of Marxist-Leninism and the *raison d'être* of the party by renewing the claim of the Soviet Union and the CPSU to a special relationship to the forces of history. Gorbachev fits in this pattern. While he has downplayed elements in classical Marxist-Leninism, notably the role of class conflict in interstate relations, he has reasserted the centrality of the Soviet Union, its ruling party, and the party's general secretary to the major issues of the day.

## Conclusions

Gorbachev has not modified the fundamental Marxist-Leninist tenet that imperialism is the sole potential source of war. As he stated in his report to the party congress: "Imperialism is prompted by its intrinsic mainsprings and very socioeconomic essence to translate the competition of the two systems into the language of military confrontation. By dint of its social nature, imperialism ceaselessly generates aggressive, adventurist policy."<sup>41</sup> Moreover, this assessment appears to be a matter of personal conviction with Gorbachev and not just a perfunctory nod in the direction of Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy. In his speeches, in extemporaneous remarks and in private conversations with foreigners, Gorbachev has exhibited a strong belief that the "military-industrial complex" plays a dominant role in determining US foreign policy. In *Perestroika*, he implicitly endorsed a Brezhnevian view of East-West relations, even as he criticized Brezhnev's domestic policies. "The weakening of the economic positions of socialism which we allowed in the late seventies and early eighties" made the Soviet Union unable to play "the decisive role in subduing the enemies of detente. . . . Whenever socialism lets up, militarism, power politics and imperial ambitions surge."<sup>42</sup>

Gorbachev's apparent fidelity to the fundamental Marxist-Leninist tenet that "socialism" by its very nature is peace-loving while "imperialism" by its nature is inherently warlike puts all his statements about war, its causes and its consequences in a rather special light. Since the USSR is by definition incapable of causing war, he directs all generalizations about war at the West, and implies they have little if any policy relevance to the Soviet Union.

Gorbachev also continues to reject the Western concept of stable mutual deterrence. Here again, Gorbachev's views are not a mere nod in the direction of orthodoxy and tradition, but a matter of firm conviction. During his 1987 meetings with British Prime Minister Thatcher, the two leaders argued at length on this subject.

Finally, like his predecessors, Gorbachev has continued to use the danger of war as a mobilizational tool. He had adopted an ambiguous position that allows the Soviet Union great tactical flexibility: the danger of war is great, but it can be pushed back by active "struggle" (that is, support for Soviet foreign policy). This posture is designed to insure that the "forces of peace" in the West avoid the extremes of complacency and despair.

Against the backdrop of these elements of continuity, Gorbachev has made a potentially important change in Soviet teaching about the nature of East-West coexistence. In contrast to his predecessors, Gorbachev has proclaimed the possibility—indeed the necessity—of creating a "non-violent and non-nuclear world" even before the victory of "socialism" on a global scale. In raising this possibility and making it a key theme in the "new political thinking," Gorbachev is building upon Khrushchev's claim that it would be possible to "exclude world war from the life of society even before the complete triumph of socialism, even with capitalism existing in part of the world." But Gorbachev goes far beyond Khrushchev. Khrushchev was referring only to "world" (i.e., global nuclear) war, and not to all wars and all international "violence." Moreover, Khrushchev strongly implied that the "banishing" of world war would result from growing Soviet and general socialist superiority over the West: they would impose, by peace, superior Soviet might. In contrast, Gorbachev talks of reaching a "non-violent, non-nuclear world" by starting from the existing state of parity and preserving this parity at ever-lower levels of force on both sides.

Gorbachev's downplaying of the element of class conflict in international politics may well be controversial at home. Signs of a submerged polemic on the issues of war and peace were apparent in a May 1986 speech to Soviet scientists by CPSU Secretary Dobrynin. He stressed that "the new political thinking certainly does not mean abandoning the class analysis of the problems of war and peace," but predicted "fierce clashes, sharp discussion, and painful differences" in shaping and affirming the new political thinking.<sup>43</sup> In a January 1989 speech to Soviet scientists and cultural figures

that was notable for its defensive tone, Gorbachev made similar points, arguing that "the new political thinking presupposes taking the ideology out of interstate relations." But Gorbachev continued "this does not mean, as some people want to interpret it, taking the ideology out of international relations."<sup>44</sup>

A final aspect of Soviet doctrine that has not changed concerns style rather than substance. While Soviet propaganda and diplomacy have become more flexible, open, and attractive, the style with which they have presented the "new political thinking" to the world shows a number of familiar traits. The Soviet Union continues to be almost unbearably self-righteous in its pronouncements on international affairs. According to the Gorbachev team, the USSR is already acting in consonance with the dictates of the "new thinking." Now everyone else must follow suit.

Perhaps worse than this self-righteousness is Gorbachev's effort to vastly inflate the historical significance of the "new political thinking" and thus, by implication, the importance of his own appearance on the world historical stage. He and Shevardnadze repeatedly have compared the Soviet plan to move from the nuclear to the post-nuclear age to such earlier historical transitions as the change from the stone to the bronze age, or the transition from the Middle Age to the Renaissance and Enlightenment.<sup>45</sup>

Although there are gaps and inconsistencies in the Soviet new thinking, from the Soviet perspective it already has had an overwhelmingly positive influence on the USSR's standing in the world. As a masterful politician, Gorbachev senses that new slogans, new mandates are essential if the USSR is to regain the initiative in world politics that it lost in the early 1980s. He believes that the "new political thinking" will help him seize and retain this initiative. Under this rubric, the Soviet leader is calling for joint efforts to create a "non-nuclear, non-violent world." In its own way, the new rhetoric is nearly as utopian as earlier Soviet rhetoric about fighting and winning a nuclear war, and just as combative in its relationship to world "imperialism." Thus the "new political thinking" will mean a more active and diplomatically flexible Soviet leadership,

but it is unlikely to end the adversarial relationship between the Soviet Union and the outside world that has prevailed since 1917.

### Notes

1. E. H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923*, London, Pelican Books, 1966, vol. 3, p. 28.
2. Quoted in Georg von Rauch, *A History of Soviet Russia*, New York, Praeger, 1957, p. 149.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 168.
4. Frederic S. Burin, "The Communist Doctrine of the Inevitability of War," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1963), pp. 334-354.
5. *Pravda*, 15 February 1956.
6. The text of the party program is reprinted in Jan F. Triska, *Soviet Communism: Programs and Rules*, San Francisco, Chandler Publishing, 1962, p. 65.
7. *Ibid.*
8. See Khrushchev's "On Peaceful Coexistence," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (1959).
9. *Pravda*, 25 February 1976.
10. See R. Judson Mitchell, "A New Brezhnev Doctrine: The Restructuring of International Relations," *World Politics*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (1978).
11. *Pravda*, 9 May 1985.
12. M. S. Gorbachev, *Politicheskii doklad tsentral'nogo komiteta KPSS XXVII s'ezdu kommunisticheskoi partii sovetskogo soiuza*, Moscow, Politizdat, 1986, p. 89.
13. *Izvestiia*, 16 January 1986.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Politicheskii doklad*, p. 95.
16. *Pravda*, 20 January 1977.
17. See Gerard Smith, *Doubletalk: The Story of the First Strategic Arms Limitation Talks*, Doubleday, New York, 1980, pp. 190-191; and Henry A. Kissinger, *White House Years*, Little Brown, Boston, 1979, p. 1208.
18. *Pravda*, 27 November 1976.
19. *Pravda*, 16 June 1982.
20. *Pravda*, 24 June 1980. See also Vladimir E. Shlapentokh, "Moscow's War Propaganda and Soviet Public Opinion," *Problems of Communism*, Vol. 33, No. 4.

21. See the analysis in Juergen Maruhn, ed., *Wohin treibt die SPD?* Much, Olzog, 1984.

22. For this concept, see Nathaniel Davis, "Equality and Equal Security" in *Soviet Foreign Policy*, The Keck Center for International Strategic Studies, No. 5, 1986.

23. Shakhnazarov, *Voprosy filosofii*, No. 5, 1984, English translation in *Soviet Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (1986).

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*

26. A more distant antecedent to the "new thinking" was the Russell-Einstein manifesto, to which Soviet members of the Pugwash movement ascribed in 1957, but which has been assigned new importance under Gorbachev. See the special supplement on Pugwash, *New Times*, 1988.

27. The importance of the globalists is stressed in William F. Brazier and Joel S. Hellman, "Textual Analysis of General Secretary Gorbachev's Speech to the Forum 'For a Nuclear Free World, For the Survival of Mankind,' " unpublished paper inserted by Senator Alan Cranston in the *Congressional Record*, Vol. 133, No. 91, 5 June 1987.

28. See Robbin Laird and Erik P. Hoffman, "The Scientific-Technological Revolution," "Developed Socialism," and "Soviet International Behavior," in Hoffman and Frederic J. Fleron, *The Conduct of Soviet Foreign Policy*, New York, Aldine, 1980, for early 1970s assessment of global problems.

29. "Dialogue" between Frolov and Zagladin, in *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 14 October 1981.

30. N. N. Inozemtsev, "The nature of contradictions today," *World Marxist Review*, September 1973.

31. Vadim V. Zagladin, "The CPSU's Program Goals and Global Problems," *Voprosy filosofii*, No. 2, February 1986.

32. Shakhnazarov, *Voprosy filosofii*.

33. *Pravda*, 7 August 1987.

34. Archie Brown, "Gorbachev: The New Man in the Kremlin," *Problems of Communism*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (1985), pp. 1-23.

35. As a young seminarian, Stalin is reported to have devoured the works of Victor Hugo, the Russian classics, and the works of other writers. Isaac Deutscher, *Stalin: A Political Biography*, New York, Oxford, 1967, p. 18. Although a coalminer by training, Khrushchev had a profound knowledge of Russian folk wisdom, and is reported to have been able to quote long passages from *War and Peace*, which he tried to reread once each year. See Frank K. Roberts

(former British ambassador in Moscow), "Encounters with Khrushchev," in Martin McCauley, ed, *Khrushchev and Krushchevism*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1988, pp. 221-222; and *Krushchev Remembers: The Last Testament*, Boston, Little Brown, 1970.

36. "In these conditions—Hamlet's famous question—'To be or not to be'—is being posed not to a single individual but to all mankind." Speech to the French National Assembly and the Senate, *Pravda*, 4 October 1985.

37. Heidi and Alvin Toffler, "A conversation with Mikhail Gorbachev: Survival requires 'new thinking' on every subject," *Christian Science Monitor*, 5 January 1987.

38. "Peace in Europe and peace in Asia are of equal significance in our policy. In this context the title of Rabindrinath Tagore's remarkable *The Home and the World* conveys an apt image to describe our actions." Speech to the Indian parliament, TASS, 27 November 1986.

39. For Ryzhkov on "the land of Rembrandt, Spinoza and Desiderius Erasmus," see *Pravda*, 22 November 1986. For Shevardnadze on Rousseau, see *Pravda*, 7 August 1987.

40. Gorbachev spoke at length about his own education in his interview in *L'Unita*, 20 May 1987, in which he boasted that his reading in "philosophical questions" is currently helping him "to theoretically interpret the state of development of Soviet society we are currently in, the problems of the modern world, and its interconnections."

41. *Pravda*, 26 February 1986.

42. Gorbachev, *Perestroika*, New York, Harper & Row, 1986, pp. 193-194.

43. The speech is reprinted in *Kommunist*, No. 9, June 1986.

44. *Pravda*, 7 January 1989.

45. *Pravda*, 7 August 1987.

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## TWO SCHOOLS OF SOVIET DIPLOMACY



# TWO SCHOOLS OF SOVIET DIPLOMACY

By FRANCIS CONTE



**L**BELIEVE THERE ARE TWO SCHOOLS OF Soviet diplomacy; from the Stalinist and neo-Stalinist diplomacy which the USSR has followed until recent years, we can see the growth of a new diplomacy being followed by the new Soviet leadership. A new concept of foreign policy has arisen, based on a vision of the world in full evolution—a vision being laid out by Mikhail Gorbachev and his team with lucidity, imagination, and subtlety. To examine this change we will use an anthropological approach, which allows us to detect the “archaic deposits” from which Stalin drew so much and which Gorbachev seems in the process of surveying, the better to challenge them.

The main aim of Gorbachev and the Soviet leadership is to make sure that the USSR confronts the twenty-first century as a great power. If the present decline continues, the USSR will slip into a kind of Third World status. Gorbachev knows this and makes it known. An “enlightened” patriot, he is, above all, courageous. To save the system, he comes dangerously close to heresy, inviting the wrath of the wariest among the party machinery, the army, and the KGB. These pillars of the regime well understand the need for reform, but they want it to proceed at their pace, under their control, on their say-so. In this power struggle which he is waging on several fronts, Gorbachev has chosen to transform the practice of one particular war game—that of East-West relations.

The Kremlin boss prefers “da” to “nyet,” transparency (*glasnost*) to secrecy. He replaces closure with opening, immobility with activism, rigidity with spontaneity, and even a smile. He turns the USSR from ideological absolutism to enlightened realism. As Alexander Yakovlev, the most direct of his lieutenants says, “Are we the only ones to know the

eternal truth?"<sup>1</sup> After the East-West freeze, reimposed so recently in 1983-84, we are in the beginnings of a thaw. Can this be tenable for the West, which has "see it all before"? Has it really come in from the cold, this "evil empire" that haunts the West?

If the well known author of the "evil empire" epithet, Ronald Reagan, ended up by signing the now famous "agreements," the Soviets induced him to do so by a change in their position, by a reversal of certain basic precepts. Is this not what Mikhail Gorbachev calls "novoe mychlenie" (the "new thinking"), the new outlook on East-West relations which is to be the external reflection of the internal perestroika? Are we really facing a revolution, as is claimed, over there? To better appreciate the reality of the process, we can take the anthropological detour which I mentioned earlier; because of its distance from the established canons, the new Soviet behavior entices us to do so.

At first sight, the dissidence is twofold. We would expect Gorbachev to be simply a product of the Soviet system, the one which formed him, to which he has dedicated his whole career. In the baggage of this neo-Stalinism which he himself carries, the new leader must have found the dichotomous vision of international relations which we have described. The other striking aspect in Gorbachev's conspicuous rejection of certain parts of the system is his wish to bring it back to life.

From the inviolable rule of refusing all concessions, as in the Stalinist model of foreign policy, Gorbachev is moving to the use of the gift; this is what it is important to note. He makes the classic enemy a partner, and he touches public opinion in a way unknown in this tense relationship. He holds to general human values and creates a new and original situation, which seduces the public.

Once the seduction has taken place, he acts. For this the leader chooses the time, the place, the words and the symbols, and he does it skillfully. Rituals have their virtue, and Gorbachev makes the most of them.

### **Confrontation, Exchange, the Gift**

In opposition to the logic of confrontation stands that of exchange, which aims at setting up communication. The exchange is successful when the outlay and the response are balanced, so symbolizing equality between the partners. When a gift is involved, the relationship becomes more rich, more subtle and at once more disturbing.

Let us take an example for each case. In Geneva in 1983 the Soviet delegation slammed the door on the disarmament conference. They halted all dialogue, and all bargaining. But once in power in 1985, Gorbachev showed a real desire to restart the dialogue on a basis of mutual exchange, or "you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours." Three years later, on 7 December 1988, he gave a speech at the United Nations that was a radical departure from the usual Soviet "hard line."

Even if, little by little, he had prepared the ground, he caught off guard quite a few Western specialists usually skeptical of the possibility of the USSR opening itself up and translating its words into actions. However, in the eyes of the Soviet leadership, the benefits of the speech are greater than they hoped for. In the West, some start to talk of the end of the Cold War and of a particular Soviet vision of the world.

How can one briefly sum up this vision of the world adopted by the diplomats of the Stalinist school, and who were those? At the end of the 1930s, during the purges, Stalin gathered around him, one might even say at his feet, a whole generation of young militants who owed their rapid accession to him. They abruptly replaced Lenin's Marxist intelligentsia, and viewed life through the prism of a correlation of forces: "kto kogo"—who will prevail over whom, the Stalinist circle or its adversaries?

Mistrust of the enemy, internal or external, was the golden rule. It becomes clear in the bellicose language of the time: "Be vigilant!" "Stay at your battle station," "Hide nothing from the party," "Follow the example of the budding militants who have the courage to denounce their parents, like Pavlik Marozov." As we have heard from Alexander Yakovlev, member of the Politburo, General Committee of Foreign

Affairs Commission: "Socialism as a world phenomenon is just in the process of saying goodbye to its youth. We were formed in a cruel and difficult school. However, today we are sufficiently experienced to see the inherent disappointments of youth . . . its penchant for simplistic answers and ideas."<sup>2</sup>

This "hard line" school formed all the Soviets whose task was to affront the outside world—Andre Gromyko and all his generation, with Molotov as their model. Their conditioning was appropriate to the times of "implacable struggle" between two opposing camps—capitalism and socialism, and between two groups—imperialists and communists. For the latter, war was inevitable and just. The class enemy, insatiable by nature, aggressive in essence, imposed it. Their credo was a sentence from Marx, which was at once necessary and sufficient to set them against the enemy: "Spurred by the constant need for new markets, the bourgeoisie takes over the whole world. He has to establish himself everywhere, exploit everywhere, set up relations everywhere. . . ."<sup>3</sup>

Taking his lead from this idea, Lenin elaborated on it in 1916 in his book, *Imperialism, the Highest State of Capitalism*, before perfecting the strategy of the Soviet system in international relations. More than simply a policy of momentary accords designed to give some respite to the young Soviet state, it was a long-term effort to pull the rug out from under the feet of this invading imperialism.<sup>4</sup>

The rules for contact with the outside world were on the scale of the conflict between the two blocs. For more than forty years, the behavior of the Soviet representatives who had to brave the outside world was unbending. The essential thing was never to "play the enemy's game," never to give credit. The directives were clear; they were reduced to a simple balance of power and a "tunnel psychology":

—Make no unilateral concessions; they are signs of weakness.

—Use tough bargaining and always seek the advantage.

—If you choose to make a concession, make it only at the highest possible price.

—Jealously guard all bargaining power.

—Maintain any breakthrough at all costs, even if ceding it may placate the opponent.

—Capitalize on any gains in the present negotiations, without regard to any future negotiations where the balance of power may be different.

—If the adversary backs down, take this victory and consider it capital gained.

—Never feel obliged or indebted to the class enemy.

—Never recognize an error.

—Maintain absolute secrecy on the whole of the negotiations outside the group.

—Within the delegation, know how to compartmentalize the information according to the hierarchy.

—Strictly respect this internal hierarchy; from the outside demand all marks of respect commensurate with each rank.

—“This is the only way we can ensure success, and the security of the country.”<sup>5</sup>

In its extreme version, this ideology of confrontation leads to a complete lack of dialogue. This is detente with its finger on the trigger—the finger used to shoot down the errant South Korean 747 airliner without hesitation, an action the Soviets deemed to be justified. The plane from the other camp crossed the sacred line marking the boundary between two worlds; we must therefore shoot it down. The same went for the East Germans up against the Berlin Wall or the Romanians tricked by a false frontier; we must eliminate them without warning. We must take the notion of no-man’s-land literally.

Generally, the diplomacy of force only respects power or those who hold it. Paradoxically, the enemy is included in this case: his strength, his subtlety, and his dynamism command respect. Inversely, any weakness on his part invites only derision and “profit taking.” The sense of one’s own power comes from this vision of the world and of history, which assures the Stalinist or neo-Stalinist negotiator of the just nature of the aims he pursues. Hence the feeling of dignity and superiority which he often transforms into rigidity.

In these circumstances, the Soviet representative is a slave to his directives; he has no freedom of action, no initiative

at his disposal. He gives the impression of being a puppet manipulated from Moscow: by the diplomats for current affairs, by the military for security matters, by the highest level politicians when questions of global strategy arise.

We thus have before us the model of "nyet" diplomacy, which Gorbachev is challenging today, in its entirety and without compromise. He cites its errors, its vain pretensions and the critical impasse to which it has led. For the barter system based on the brutal rule of "I'll only scratch your back if you scratch mine," for the systematic upgrading of the military factor in international relations, the new leader seems to be substituting a wholly new approach. This fundamental reversal of options no doubt largely explains his impact in the West, particularly on public opinion. It is worthwhile taking a closer look at this "da" diplomacy to shed some light on its workings.

What, today, is Gorbachev doing, in what conditions and why? First of all, let us recall that the Soviet leader did not present, as one normally does, a series of propositions at the UN on 7 December 1988, but a decision which had the effect of a "bomb."<sup>6</sup> This "bomb" consisted of a significant reduction in the Soviet Union's conventional forces facing western Europe, and, above all, of *unilateral concessions*. Moscow committed itself to withdrawing 500,000 soldiers based in Eastern Europe and European Russia. The Soviets will also remove 10,000 tanks, 8,500 artillery pieces, and 800 fighter aircraft before 1991. This does not include the measures they will take in Eastern Russia. Gorbachev thus wishes to demonstrate on a practical level, through actions rather than simply words, a declared readiness to reduce the offensive capacity of his country.

What can explain this gesture, unprecedented since the beginning of the Cold War, and what are the consequences, in the West and inside the Soviet Union? Are we dealing with a new form of brainwashing, a revised and updated "psychological war"? Need we be afraid of seeing public opinion swing over to a generalized state of pacifism leading to ill-considered reductions in defense budgets? Of course, we're far from the German slogan of the 1970s: "Lieber rot

als tot" (Better red than dead). However, some claim to detect in the current situation a far greater danger. Did not Gorbachev, the man of the year, outdistance even the American president in the polls? To explain this situation, literally unprecedented, should we be talking of the naivety of the electorate, of its fickleness, of its ignorance of the international balance of power? The explanation seems rather too neat.

To get a better picture of the policy followed by Gorbachev and the reasons for its impact, we have to investigate more closely the hidden mechanism of this policy. We must try to see what makes it work and gives it its efficiency. If we trace the starting point to the 7 December speech, it is because it represents a parting of the waters, a clarification of the difference between the gift and the exchange.<sup>7</sup> This discrete signal could be one of the keys to an explanation of such a clear shift in public opinion.

In order to reverse the negative image of the USSR, a difficult task when faced with Europeans alerted to the Soviet "menace," Gorbachev proceeds in a way hitherto unseen in a Soviet leader, or in those Stalinist diplomats we have described. Rejecting both the bartering and the head-to-head of old, he brings to the West a policy of voluntary restrictions, and he is first to set an example. To the haggling of the carpet peddler, the con-trick, he has the subtlety to prefer the gift.

In human relations, there are three types of actions transmitting a material or spiritual value: exchange, favor, and gift. The difference between the three is their effects on the relationship of the parties involved. As we have seen, exchange creates communication on a level of equality between partners.

On the other hand, a favor places an abyss between the giver and the recipient; the very act of asking places the latter in a position of inferiority. "He favored me with a smile," we say ironically, and we resent our indebtedness to him. We feel that he has offended us by assuming an attitude of superiority.

A gift complicates the relationship because of the intrinsic quality of the gesture and what it signifies. The generosity appears completely on the side of the giver, or rather the donator; the language well marks the distinction. The act is even more remarkable since it seems to demand nothing in

return. We are supposed to take it as a kindly act, since, if we take it any other way, we lower it to the level of exchange or barter. It is an offense to question the gift overtly.

The donator appears not to demand any counter gift. In fact, the etiquette of human relations implies that one who receives recognizes a debt. This debt is all the greater since no one asked for it, or even mentioned it. If he did, the spell would be broken. If we did not respect this tacit rule, the dialogue would be interrupted or seriously affected. Only with humor could we allow this, since it would be an offense. Failure to respect the unspoken rule on a serious level would result in an immediate collapse in the quality of the exchange. If the gift has strings attached, no one must say so, on pain of ruining its effect and turning it into an offense.

It is the respect of just this code which renders our behavior and our morale more problematic. If we pass from the level of individuals to that of relations between states, the rule is similar. The gift and the affront simply take on a whole different dimension since the rule of seriousness always applies.

Gorbachev's personality is perfect for this diplomatic game. Diplomats called Andre Gromyko "old sad face," but Gorbachev smiles, gets angry, or laughs. He creates a new climate. He seems to show concern for everything which makes up man. He is thinking of the future, and is thus counting on "all that unites, not all that separates."

When he gives something, Gorbachev does it "comme il faut," in line with the laws of custom. He does it with modesty, without showing off his gift. We note the 256 words of his speech concerning Soviet disengagement from Europe. To give extra weight to his ideas, he carefully selects two vital elements—the time and the place. He chooses the symbolic setting of the UN, temple of peace among nations; he chooses the day before the announcement of NATO's own propositions.

His panache and the scope of the gesture further reinforce the Soviet leader's ascension and his *auctoritas*. It vastly adds to the feeling of confidence which, since 1985, he has managed to instill in public opinion. In making good his words with actions, he seems to be rejecting dogma in favor of a more



open, more fraternal society. Confidence is succeeded by divine surprise.

In fact, over and above its apparent spontaneity, the gift is not a simple act. As the one who took the initiative, the donator places the recipient in a situation of dependence: he is committed, he is bound. The one who accepts the gift feels indebted thereafter; he cannot let things drop. He may, of course, refuse the gift. He may refuse the ties with which the donator tries to bind him. He may contest the game or try to dodge it. If he does, if he refuses to "join in the dance," the relationship between the two returns to the starting line, or becomes even worse, since a gift refused is a rare insult.

Is this not the situation in which the governments of the NATO states find themselves, confronted by Gorbachev? Do not some even see this as a typical "poisoned present"—the gift as a threat? Hence their divisions, their reticence, their suspicions, while the public is full of enthusiasm for the gift and the giver.

### **Internal Reservations and Complimentary Pledges**

With the arrival in the Kremlin of Mikhail Gorbachev, which the Army and the KGB facilitated, the Army saw the utility of a greater de-Stalinization of the Soviet system. This was purely "functional:" their intention was to unblock the system, to give it a new dynamism, to reinforce socialism as we know it—the one system anchored in the tradition of that country. Today the upper ranks of the Soviet Army seem to disapprove of certain major aspects of the "Gorbachev line," particularly the policy of unilateral concessions to the West, which they regard as demoralizing and dangerous. Evidently these military chiefs only take into account the appearance of the gift and what it seems to cost. They seem incapable of seeing the long-term advantage, a political and even a military advantage, if the West is pushed by the pressure of public opinion towards disarmament. They do not seem to be convinced or even touched by any of that.

The resignation of the Chief of Staff, Marshal Akhromeev, followed by that of the chief of the Warsaw Pact forces, Marshal Koulikov, prove the point. Moreover, there is a marked divorce between the "new style" of Mikhail Gorbachev and that of the Soviet defense minister, General Yazov, whose tone seems to have become decidedly harder.

The dispute between Gorbachev and his generals seems to be growing by the day. If we read the discrete signals, it becomes clear that the status of the high command has fallen significantly. Yazov's article in *Pravda* is indicative; the text doesn't appear until page four. For the first time, the Minister of Defense is a simple general with little more than a courtesy seat on the Politburo. This slump in influence seems to indicate that the military hierarchy is no longer capable of putting a brake on the reforms or directions of whose rhythm, scale, and aims it disapproves.

Those in charge of the maintenance of internal order fear the worst when they note the extent of the national movements and their undermining of the existing Stalinist model. How can one allow the negation of the most sacred rules of socialism by the public denunciation of "errors," socialist "pluralism," the refusal to use force while there is still time? On this level, the conservative wing of the regime has the total support of a Soviet right which slips easily towards the extreme right, in Russia as elsewhere.

Today, this extreme right is no longer afraid of stepping into the limelight.<sup>8</sup> It is to be seen quite openly, with slogans and banners "against rootless cosmopolitanism," "for national patriotism," and it proclaims out loud: "to denigrate Stalin is to darken our consciences."<sup>9</sup> On the contrary, the denigration of Stalin under Gorbachev is an effort to enlighten peoples' consciences.

As if spurred on by the criticism from his iron guard, both civil and military, Gorbachev seems to "pile it on" as if at his pleasure. He increases the cascade of gifts—those in which anthropologists see "complimentary pledges," those which finally win over the adversary. To diffuse Western skepticism, Gorbachev pulls the troops out of Afghanistan, not on time, but ahead of schedule. He demands from his Cuban allies a

retreat from Angola, and from his Vietnamese friends a pull-out from Kampuchea. Through the army he demands the publication of the defense budget, which he has not yet obtained.

He adds these gifts or pledges to the promised withdrawals from Europe, of a size and on a time scale with which we are now familiar, and above all the promise of a public retreat. As the confidence of the mass of the Western public grows in proportion, the suspicions of the Russian traditionalists similarly rise.

### **Perspectives**

From this point of view, it is clear that the logic of the Soviet military is not that of Gorbachev, neither within the USSR, nor in the empire, nor beyond it. It is also just as clear that the logic of Gorbachev cannot be ours, and that the West must stop hearing only what it wants to hear. The Soviet leader has said it time and again: what he wants for the Soviet Union is more socialism, and not less socialism.

Certainly, the image of this socialism and its practice are vastly different from that we have known. The internal democratization of the USSR must be reflected in its conduct on the international stage. Similarly, the series of decisions they made regarding disengagements from Europe and the series of "supplementary pledges" are actually impressive. However, a significant part of the traditional ideology is still in place. Two examples may illustrate this.

While Gorbachev may have modified quite substantially the articles of the Soviet constitution concerning the spheres of politics and economics, he has not touched chapter one, article eight, which declares without ambiguity: "The foreign policy of the USSR aims at . . . strengthening the position of socialism in the world, to support peoples in their struggles for national liberty and social progress." Is this an "omission"? One of his recent speeches touches on this problem.

On 6 January 1989, before the representatives of science and culture gathered at the Kremlin, the President/Secretary-General well illustrated the limits of his current evolution. Soviet ideology may adapt, he declared, but it must remain faithful to certain basic principles:

I am far from estimating that our new vision of the world is determined, defined today as it will be forever. We are, in fact, constantly enriching our political ideas. . . . A next step in this direction has been accomplished through the considerations and the propositions laid out at the UN recently. I think it would serve no purpose to develop the argument on which our new political thinking is based, but there are some questions on which I would like to draw your attention.

We feel, now in particular, that we have fallen behind on the dialectical reflection on the correlation between universal human values and class interests. There, our specialists have a lot to do. This lag leads to a certain incomprehension; let us say it frankly, it leads to stupid accusations that we are abandoning socialist positions, rejecting the class approach, and not taking into account the interests of the national liberation movements. That would be to ignore fundamental elements of the new thinking such as the right of peoples to self-determination, and the noninterference in the internal affairs of states. And that is not all. The new political thinking, as we know, proposes the removal of ideology from interstate relations. But that does not at all mean, as some people claim, that it removes the ideological element from the relations between peoples. No! That would be to refute the reality of the situation—the existence of social systems based on different forms of ownership and on different ideologies. We see the scale of the differences between these two social systems, but that is no reason to maintain a stance of opposition, of confrontation based on force. . . . <sup>10</sup>

Faced with people who accuse him of selling off the gains of Soviet and international socialism, Gorbachev gives the

impression of feeling threatened. When one is General Secretary of the most important communist party in the world, that is a delicate situation. As a great reader of Lenin, Gorbachev must have from time to time focused on one of the last articles of his mentor: "One step forward, two steps back."

No one can deny that Gorbachev has set in motion a process essential for East-West relations, and thus for the whole world, in trying to avoid playing on our old impulses. In conspicuously rejecting the use of force, he has, first of all, shown that we can try to diminish the weight of arms in the inevitable conflicts between states, both large and small, on the international scene. What is more is that he has done it against the will of the military establishment and of public opinion.<sup>11</sup> Secondly, and if the internal democratization manages to progress, it may be possible to make the Soviet Union "more of a country than a cause."<sup>12</sup> When this wish of George Kennan's comes true, the horizon will begin to look really rosey for the world.

### Notes

1. *Actualites Sovietiques*, number 832, 11 January 1989, p. 1.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
3. *Communist Manifesto*, ed. 10/18 Paris, 1963, p. 24.
4. See J. W. Roberts, "Lenin's Theory of Imperialism in Soviet Usage," *Soviet Studies*, vol. XXIX, number 3, July 1977, pp. 353-72.
5. See *Soviet Diplomacy and Negotiating Behavior 1979-88*, Library of Congress, August 1988, pp. 390-391.
6. See *Le Figaro*, 12 August 1988.
7. For a fundamental analysis, see M. Mauss, *Sociology and Anthropology*, Paris, PUF ed. 1985, pp. 145-284.
8. On this point see, in particular: J. Dunlop, *The Faces of Contemporary Russian Nationalism*, Princeton, 1983; A. Yanov, *The Russian Challenge and the Year 2000*, Oxford, 1987; and "Russian Nationalism Today" in *Russian Liberty Research Bulletin*, Special Edition, 19 December 1988.

9. See E. Evtouchenko, "A False Alarm," *Moscow News*, p. 15.
10. *Pravda*, 1 August 1989, p. 2, column 8.
11. See *Soviet Area Audience and Opinion Research*, SBN 1-89, January 1989, p. 7.
12. See "Do the Kolkhos Need Tanks?" *Komsomolskaia Pravda*, 2 December 1989, p. 7.

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