

CPSU 27th Party Congress and Renewal of the Soviet Foreign Policy

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ABSTRACT

With the advent of Gorbachev to power in 1985, the trend towards de-ideologisation and pragmatism gradually became more important resulting over time in curtailment of the traditional relationship between the Soviet Union and the developing countries including India. In fact, this trend had emerged during the last days of Brezhnev towards the end of the 1970s and early 1980s and could see a new orientation in the Soviet writings, a new look towards the World War was in the offing.. This paper analyses the Soviet foreign policy during Gorbachev era which was governed to a great extent by the course of Perestroika.

1. Introduction

Gorbachev, in his report to the 27th Party Congress, described the "struggle against the nuclear threat, against the arms race, for the preservation and strengthening of universal peace" as the main direction of the Party's line on international affairs.¹

While analysing the world situation, he used the traditional Marxist-Leninist theory of contradictions and pointed out the emergence of a new set of contradictions in addition to the old ones. These were described as being 'between transnational corporations and the nation-state form of society's political organisation',² '...between imperialism, on the one hand, and the developing countries and peoples, on the other'³ and contradictions on "global scale, affecting the very foundations of the existence of civilisation".⁴ The last group of contradictions referred to 'global problems' like impending ecological disasters etc.

Keeping with tradition, there was the usual condemnation of imperialism and the characterisation of the 'USA, its military-industrial machine' as 'the locomotive of militarism'.⁵

Thus, as for Gorbachev the world situation, with the severe contradictions and ongoing presence of US militarism remained bleak. What was, however, new was Gorbachev's suggestions regarding the escape from this scenario not through conflict but through collaboration which could be made long-lasting only by abandoning the class approach to international relations. The 'new political thinking' was conceived to provide the philosophical underpinnings to the de-ideologization of international relations. This was the most significant ideological change in the ideology determining the USSR international policy.

At the 27th Party Congress Gorbachev outlined the framework of the Soviet foreign policy as consisting of the following components: the security, the European direction, the Asia-pacific direction, the relations with the socialist world, relations with the international communist movements and the

social-democratic movement. At the 28th CPSU Congress, Gorbachev further denigrated the developing nations and the International Communist Movement. (Gorbachev 1986)

2. Security

Security issues stemmed from the foundations of USSR relations with the US and also in Europe. The concept of universal, comprehensive security was kept in the 27th party congress. The fresh ideas presented in this area were:

3. Parity and Comprehensive Security

There was a rejection of the idea that military superiority could bring any political gains. Although the concept of military-parity, which underlined the Brezhnevian detente, had not been altogether dropped, it nevertheless mentioned that if the arms race continued, "even parity will cease to be a factor of military-political deterrence". Proceeding from this premise, it is being stressed that "equal genuine security is guaranteed not by the highest possible, but by the lowest possible level of strategic parity, from which nuclear and other types of weapons of mass destruction must be totally excluded." (Gorbachev 1986)

It is also asserted that a comprehensive system of security should not just consider the military and political factors alone but also the economic condition and human factors as well. Just the dependence on military-political components is no assurance of security.

Another characteristic of the comprehensive security concept is that security must be universal, and in the case of the USA and USSR, reciprocal. The comprehensive, universal security, which incorporates the ideas of 'collective security', is considered to be a new and higher philosophy of world politics which gives primacy to universal values.⁶

4. Theory of 'Reasonable Sufficiency'

A direct outcome of the comprehensive security aspect is that of defensive military doctrine and the principle of

¹Documents and Resolutions of the 27th CPSU Congress, 1986: 82

²Documents and Resolutions of the 27th CPSU Congress, 1986: 19

³Documents and Resolutions of the 27th CPSU Congress, 1986: 20

⁴Documents and Resolutions of the 27th CPSU Congress, 1986: 23

⁵Documents and Resolutions of the 27th CPSU Congress, 1986: 83

⁶Vladimirsky Comprehensive Security Equal For All *International Affairs*, Vol. 10:1987: 12

'reasonable sufficiency'. As mentioned in the 27th Party Congress report, the military security, in the changed world situation, should be based on the recognition that nuclear war was unwinnable and should not be fought, preventing arms race in outer space, ending all testing of nuclear weapons and fully eliminating them by the end of the century, banning and destroying chemical weapons, the dissolution of military alliances and, as a step to it, the renunciation of their extension and of the formation of new ones, a proportional and commensurate reduction of military budgets and lowering of the military capabilities of countries to reduce them to the level of "reasonable efficiency." These are the elements on which the WTO military doctrine brought out in May 1987 was based. This doctrine was evolved by "the Marxist-Leninist teaching (that)... it is possible to avert war and save humanity from nuclear catastrophe. This is the historic mission of socialism..."⁷

The principle of 'reasonable sufficiency' led to a fundamental restructuring of the Soviet armed force, unilateral defence cut and the beginning of cardinal military reforms in the country- This was a break from the past when expansion in armaments and numerical parity at a high level were the norms.

The even more important consequence of the new understanding of concepts like parity at a low level and 'reasonable sufficiency' was to extricate USSR from a crippling arms race in the unfavourable economic situation at home. The calculation of "reasonable sufficiency in armaments has proved to be a highly complex task as it related to the concept of 'parity'. Soviet Union's priority task was to remain in "reliable deterrence to probable nuclear aggression through maintenance of strategic equilibrium"⁸, till the Nuclear Weapons were eliminated from the world. Thus the actual implementation of the concept of 'reasonable sufficiency' despite unilateral defence cuts depended to a large extent upon its acceptance by other parties too. The USSR by unilaterally cutting down its armaments in East Europe, Asia had taken initial steps towards the 'reasonable sufficiency' goal.

5. Policy towards Third World

Before the end of the cold war and the revamping of Soviet policies and outlook, the importance of the third world countries for the Soviet Union lay in their stance against the imperialistic forces, and were seen as natural allies. However, with the new political thinking, the USSR's outlook towards the third world nations turned towards the principles of 'freedom of choice', the poverty in the third world nations as a global problem and it was to be resolved jointly by all countries, irrespective of their political affiliations and differences. Gorbachev identified the crisis of the international debt that the third world countries were reeling under (1988). It made consistent attempts with interested countries like France to assuage the problem.

As far as regional conflicts are concerned, there was understanding in Moscow that these conflicts should be settled quickly as they hinder East-West normalisation. Their resolution also accelerated the normalisation of the Soviet Union's relations with some leading western countries, ASEAN

and China etc. At the 28th CPSU Congress, Gorbachev called for a restructuring of USSR's relations with the Third world.

The Asia-Pacific direction of the Soviet foreign policy received a great deal of attention from Gorbachev. Some new initiatives had been taken to normalise relations with the countries of this region to utilise the potential of their region for the achievement of the Soviet-foreign policy aims. (Gorbachev 1986)

Conceptually, Gorbachev had stressed that USSR was an Asian power just as it was a European power. At Vladivostok in July 1986, he stressed the "balance of interests" in the context of Asia-Pacific region and declared that USSR did not claim "privileges and special positions" and was against the concept of security which strengthened some nations (e.g. USSR) at the expense of others. (Gorbachev 1986) He also recommended a Helsinki kind of process of detente for the Asia-Pacific. It was the concept of Asia-Pacific security, which was an integral component of the comprehensive international security that Gorbachev propounded. The critical components of this plan were identified by Gorbachev as settlement of Afghanistan and Kampuchean problems, stopping further proliferation of nuclear weapons in the area (this included declaration of the southern part of the Pacific as well as Korean peninsula as 'nuclear-free zones.', turning the Indian ocean into a peace zone, reduction of armed forces and conventional armaments in Asia to levels of 'reasonable sufficiency', confidence-building measures and misuse of force in the region etc. (Gorbachev 1986)

At Krasnoyarsk, Gorbachev called for negotiations among the USA, USSR and China (leaving out India) on Asian security. In Washington (1990), he proposed discussion with India, Indonesia, China and Japan on Asia-pacific (Wireless file Washington Summit Special June 4th, 1990). It should be noted that it was Brezhnev in 1982, who begun work to improve Soviet- Chinese relations; however, it was Gorbachev who took the bold steps of withdrawing troops from Mongolia, flexibility on the Kampuchean issue, concessions on the Chinese border issue and normalisation of relations with several countries. While many of Gorbachev's steps were new, the Asian- Pacific security programme was a mix of old and new strategies.

6. Policy towards Socialist Countries

Gorbachev's 'new political thinking', particularly the concept of "freedom of choice" which in turn meant non-interference in other countries affairs led to a breakdown of Brezhnev doctrine and the collapse of that part of the Soviet foreign policy ideology which treated world socialist system as a distinct form of international system with its specific laws.

Further, it may be stated that Gorbachev's statements on relations with the Socialist countries during mid-1985 to 1989 gave the impression that Gorbachev was focussing on the radical overhaul of the USSR-East European relations, including the restructuring of WTO (World Trade Organisation) and CMEA (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance), with the framework of socialism. However, as Brezhnev doctrine disappeared and opposition to communist regimes began to emerge, the Soviet policy towards East Europe also evolved. This change coincided with the ideologisation of USSR's internal policies, which in turn encouraged anti-socialist forces in East Europe to challenge the established communist regimes.

⁷Yazov Warshaw Treaty Military Doctrine-For Defence of Peace and Socialism *International Affairs* 1987: 5

⁸Arbatov 1988: 82

The collapse of established regimes in East Europe at once exerted a positive influence on USSR's relations with US and East European countries. An end to the cold war was signalled. For the USSR, a historic opportunity arose to gain from cooperation with the technologically and economically superior West.

With the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the problem of reshaping Europe had risen. The Soviet endeavour was to safeguard its interests -security, political, economic, cultural etc. - in new Europe. The normalisation of USSR's relations with China in May 1989 was a historic event. However, its importance was overshadowed by the Tiananmen Square incidents in June 1989 and the shift of focus to Europe after the collapse of the Berlin wall in November 1989. The Chinese were not enthusiastic about the rapid de-ideologisation in USSR as they feared instability in China on account of Perestroika in USSR. However, the normalisation with China was attributed to the new political thinking'. The Soviet concessions to China on the border and territorial dispute, military withdrawal from Mongolia and Afghanistan, flexibility on Cambodian issue have facilitated the normalisation (Gorbachev 1989: 20-41).

7. Policy towards the World Communist Movement

With Gorbachev's address at the 27th Party Congress, there were signs of the weakening of the global international communist movement; he failed to address the struggle against the imperialist forces as a goal or as a unifier, which had till Brezhnev's report in the 27th Party Congress been an indispensable part. This had acted as a grand unifying principle with the world communist movement.⁹ For Brezhnev, the differences in the movement were permissible provided they do not smack of 'reformism'. Gorbachev, on the other hand, declared "Unity has nothing in common with uniformity." Gorbachev suggested that the world communist movement should take "a bold, creative approach to the new realities based on the immortal theory of Marx, Engels and Lenin." This was a signal for the reinterpretation of the 'theory' of the world communist movement actions. Gorbachev further highlighted the importance of "non-communist movements and organisations, including religious organisations" that were against the war. Gorbachev, unlike Brezhnev, omitted to mention the 'political vanguard' role of the communist and workers parties. Gorbachev was signalling a new approach on the part of the communist movement to the question of war and peace, on the issues of cooperation with the communist movements, on the matters about tactics. The underlying philosophy of this approach was to be the 'new political thinking' and the consequent "de-ideologisation" of international relations.

Gorbachev's treatment on the social democratic movement has also been more conciliatory to that of Brezhnev's. While Brezhnev accused some of the social democratic parties of having been affected with "the virus of anti-communism", Gorbachev favoured "an unbiased look" at the differences between the Social democratic movements on the one hand and the CPSU on the other so that "the struggle for peace and international security" could be strengthened. Over the year the relations between the CPSU and the social-

democratic movements have improved considerably, while uncertainties have arisen in the minds of some of the communist parties as in CPI(M) in India over the policies of the CPSU. The downgrading of the world communist movement was significant in Gorbachev's report to the 28th CPSU Congress, where the movement was not mentioned at all. (Gorbachev 1990: 1-20)

8.8. Critical Evaluation of Past and Major Shift in USSR International Policy

An essential characteristic of the Perestroika had been the critical examination of the past. The USSR foreign policy was also decayed due to exclusion from self-criticism. The reason for the revelation of past mistakes and calculations was to legitimise and develop new approaches as done in the USSR Foreign Ministry in 1988 after the 19th Party Conference. E. Shevardnadze's speech at the foreign ministry conference is regarded as a seminal document in this regard.

Shevardnadze's proposition was that each departure from the 'Leninist principles' in the domestic policy had an alarming and negative affect on the country's foreign policy. Thus, the subjugation of the late 1930s reduced the efficacy of the USSR foreign policy stands and initiatives and "blackened the image of the Soviet state and our foreign policy with it." The problem was further compounded by the "distortion of the principles of internationalism." Similarly, there was "incorrect appraisal of the roles and possibilities of world progressives" (i.e. the 'world progressives' were overestimated). The erroneous evaluation of European Social Democracy as a collaborator of Hitler undermined the anti-Hitler front.

In the post-war period, the USSR suffered both internally and externally due to administrative commands methods, due to "disregard of special, professional knowledge, and an undemocratic secretive willful style of taking decisions ... the priority of military over political means of countering imperialism, and the inability to see through the manoeuvring to draw us into an arms race fraught with economic attrition for the USSR." As a consequence, this resulted in a wrong vision of world realities and of interstate relations. There was also the tendency to disregard professional advice concerning the nation's security interests. The USSR's "image of the enemy" emerged largely as a result of these mistakes.

The foreign policy also suffered because the decision making was concentrated in the hands of a few. There was no legal, constitutional mechanism to supervise the decision-making process and enforce accountability.

Shevardnadze felt that in the name of the country's security and prestige, the past decisions regarding building up of the stockpiles of chemical weapons cost the country dearly in political and economic terms. He denounced the past approach of decision making, which did not pay heed to the costs at which the country's security was being built. The burden of Shevardnadze's argument was that the country's security would have been better protected by political means instead of military means. Inherent in Shevardnadze's assessment was the thought that there were double standards in the Soviet foreign policy- on the one hand, it advanced initiatives for disarmament etc., on the other it continued to build stockpiles of weapons under the mistaken belief that this could strengthen country's security.

⁹Documents and Resolutions of the 27th Party Congress: 74

As the specific directions for the foreign policy and diplomacy in future, Shevardnadze prescribed an undogmatic, open foreign policy and diplomacy imbibing the latest scientific and technical discoveries. He called for setting up of a scientific coordinating centre to coordinate with scientific institutions in the country and abroad in fields like ecology, energy, interspace etc. and maintaining ties with science on a contractual basis.

His other proposals were: building an interrelationship between international and domestic legislation, forming an effective link between culture and democracy, a well-considered cultural policy as a component of Soviet foreign policy efforts to enhance the role of UN in world affairs, and to create a mechanism linking public opinion with the formulation and conduct of foreign policy and the deepening of the USSR's involvement in international organisations.

9. Conclusion

This short detailing of the new directions of the Soviet diplomacy and foreign policy shows that the impact of the 'New Political Thinking' on the Soviet diplomacy was intended to be

to make it more cooperative, thoroughly rooted and also more autonomous in terms of decision making. Shevardnadze laid a particularly strong emphasis on the image-building of USSR in the west. There was also an indication of acknowledgement of responsibility for developments like cold war and need of progress on disarmament.

Gorbachev attempted to turn socialism-capitalism contradictions into cooperation between the two. The events of the Gorbachev years had clearly demonstrated the strong link between the Marxist-Leninist ideology and the Soviet foreign policy conducted right up to 1985. A whole theory of de-ideologisation, which was sought to be justified in the name of 'humane' and democratic facets of Marxism-Leninism, was being built to undo the ideology- foreign policy link built in past decades. The 'new political thinking' provided the philosophical undertakings of this immense de-ideologisation effort in USSR. The initial consequence of this effort had been that the former adversaries formally declared the end of the cold war and the heralding of the post-cold war phase in international relations.

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